

The struggle to achieve dominance over others frequently occurs in fiction. Choose a novel in which such a struggle for dominance occurs and write an essay showing for what purposes the author uses the struggle.

Dominance harbors inside everyone, it may be a tiny spark or it may be a wild fire. Manipulating and shaming others is one way to appear supreme over them, and Ken Kesey uses these strategies repeatedly as the characters he creates battle for ascendance in his novel "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest".

The struggles of men and women in this novel are apparent. Stricken down by society, patients in a mental institution are mistreated and tormented at the approval of Nurse Ratched. During the time in which the book is written, men are undoubtedly dominant in nearly all scenarios. Kesey making a woman dominate a psych ward speaks for itself, anyone is capable of acquiring this ruling position. The patients cower in her presence because of the brainwashing the staff had inflicted upon them. Gratified by the ability her assertion had, she continued to manipulate them. On a larger level this symbolizes society, which is always around telling it's prisoner's their definition of right and wrong. When this dictatorship is disturbed by a new patient, McMurphy, problems arise.

McMurphy represents a revolution as he refuses to listen to the staff most of the time. His desire for dominance radiates throughout the novel, constantly persuading the other patients to agree with his ideas and growing angry when they don't. This battle is included in the novel because it reveals how far people are willing to go to be in charge, as far as they can without losing. Since McMurphy couldn't control the entire establishment, he decided to control the ward he was placed in, indicating the desire to assert dominance in any part of his life. Kesey is portraying the longing they have to be able to hold on to something and do with it what they please, which is a very real desire for many people today.

In one scene, McMurphy wishes to watch a baseball game but because of the time the game comes on, the nurse tells him no. Angered by her response he retreats to his roommates and tries to convince them to vote against the nurse, at first the patients are shy and not willingly. They have conformed to the daily routine that the nurse has set out for them and the fear she has instilled in them is still alive. Although McMurphy can't control the television, he can control how he reacts, and he chooses to sit in front of the blank screen and pretends to be watching the game. His friends slowly join him, representing the impact he has had on their lives, he gave them the ability to be defiant. They've always been capable but his influence them to act on it. A reader could perceive this as a line between good dominance and poor dominance, the nurse representing the animosity society had towards mentally ill people and "abnormal" appearances of sexuality during the time period, and wanting to suppress it. McMurphy represents the underdogs and how they are capable of ruling just like anyone else.

It is simple to be in control when everyone is willing to abide by the rules, and Kesey shows his readers that when one flaw arises everything can fall apart. Wanting to be in control isn't always a bad thing, but Kesey tests, through his characters, how far people are willing to go for it.

[Rubric](#)