

Selections from literature can enliven reading materials and generate student interest in introductory sociology courses, but are often difficult to present to the class. Jones (1975) discusses some of the difficulties associated with three strategies for incorporating literature into sociology courses, including: mimeographical copies of literary selections, literary readers purchased by the student, and a number of complete novels. Another alternative mode of presenting literature involves the selection of one complete novel which has relevance for many of the topics covered in the first sociology course. The advantage of this strategy is that the benefits of literature can be retained while obviating some of the problems associated with the use of brief selections. One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey is offered as a particularly useful novel because of the wide range of sociological issues and concepts it addresses which are typically covered in introductory sociology.

An Introduction to Sociology Through Fiction Using Kesey's

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

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Using selections from literature to teach introductory sociology is not only a practice of long standing (Porterfield, 1947; Coser, 1963; Blauner, 1964; Somerville, 1964), but one which continues to generate interest (Dabaghian, 1970; Ofshe, 1970; Greenberg et al., 1975; Jones, 1975; Somerville, 1975; Clowers and Mori, 1977). This technique is valued particularly for the potential it holds for enlivening materials and generating student interest. Such an approach, however, is not without its controversies.

Jones (1975) suggests that there are certain problems which must be overcome if the use of literature is to achieve its full

Authors' Note: *We would like to acknowledge the helpful comments of two anonymous referees who do not share the authors' responsibility for errors of omission or commission.*

potential as a didactic technique. Chief among these difficulties is the manner in which the literary materials are presented to students. Jones (1975: 188-189) presents three alternatives and discusses the advantages and limitations of each: (1) mimeographed copies of literary selections distributed directly to the student, (2) literary "readers" purchased by the student, and (3) whole novels purchased by the student.

The first alternative is largely dismissed for a number of practical reasons. The second alternative leaves the instructor at the mercy of the editor's choice of appropriate literary materials and, perhaps more importantly, runs the risk of exposing the student to selections that are too short, taken out of context, do an injustice to the integrity of the literary piece, and, as a cumulative result, may not clarify the sociologically relevant point as intended.

This is not to suggest that literary readers are without value, but that some of these problems may be avoided—and the interest-generating capacities of the literature salvaged—by recourse to the third alternative: "using the complete works themselves" (Jones, 1975: 189). Jones goes on to note, however, that "most introductory courses cover a wide range of sociological topics...; to have the student read a piece of literature directly relevant to each of these would involve considerable expense... and a dedication to reading uncommon among introductory students."

A practical solution to these problems which was overlooked by Jones is to have students read a novel which is broad enough to encompass most, if not all, topics usually covered in introductory sociology courses. Appropriate selections include fiction especially written for sociology (Babbie, 1977) as well as "classic" novels such as *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1946) or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell, 1949). We have found one novel to be ideally suited for introductory courses: Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962). The following discussion is intended to illustrate the potential of this novel. Although the presentation will draw on our own classroom experience, it is meant to be more suggestive than programmatic.

INTEGRATION OF NOVEL INTO COURSE

The major advantage of *Cuckoo's Nest* is that it lends insight into a remarkably wide range of both macroscopic and microscopic concepts and issues. We must emphasize that the novel cannot, and we believe should not, be used to illustrate all the topics typically covered in an introductory course. *Cuckoo's Nest* is attractive for its versatility, but it is not an introductory textbook either in its scope or because of its susceptibility to various interpretations. In addition, we will only suggest one possible way the novel may be integrated into principles courses (see Figure 1).

We have found that it is best to have students read the book in its entirety as soon after the course begins as possible. Our students have not found this particularly burdensome since they are either already familiar with the book (movie, play) or because the book represents a welcome relief from introductory chapters of textbooks in their other courses. We feel that this will help to generate the sort of immediate interest and enthusiasm we are hoping for. Additionally, the early use of the novel fits nicely with the introduction of those social-psychological topics which are frequently discussed in the context of the "sociological imagination" which often initiates students to the study of society.

We have found one particularly good starting point to be a discussion of the phenomenon of power. Following a brief lecture on the distinctions among force, dominance, charisma, and authority, one can proceed to a discussion of such questions as the types of power wielded by the protagonist—McMurphy—and Big Nurse, and which type of power is more successful and why. In the process, we learn that there is no single, simple answer to these questions, and we gain some insight into the changing and amorphous nature of power.

At any rate, after discovering the "efficacy" of legitimate authority, we proceed to ask why McMurphy continued to fight the Big Nurse despite the realization that he simply could not win. Here we have the opportunity to illustrate "the reality of the

COURSE OUTLINE	APPLICATION
A. Introduction to course	Literature in sociology, background on Kesey's book and subsequent productions (plays, movie).
B. Reality of the social: social facts; sociological imagination; history of social thought	Individuals in social groups, "constraining" and "liberating" aspects of society generally, and mental institutions in particular, McMurphy is controlled by the group.
C. Patterns of integration: social control, problem of order; culture and subculture; deviance, mental illness	Power, authority, etc. as they relate to characters in the novel, McMurphy's charisma vs. Big Nurse's authority; development of informal norms and groups on wards, argot, formal and informal status attainment; labeling process and development of social identities in context of labeling, general discussion of meaning of sanity and mental illness with respect to various patients and staff, voluntary and involuntary hospitalization, examples of patients' modes of adjustment -- situational withdrawal, rebellion, colonization, conversion.
D. Personal organization: definition of situation; socialization; social action and social roles	Impression management, learning the ropes, fishing expedition, watching World Series on blank T.V., women on ward; primary and re-socialization on ward; selective disclosure, secondary adjustment.
E. Social organization: norms and groups; formal and complex organizations; total institutions	Development of informal norms and groups; informal vs. formal goals, staff-patient relations; illustrations from combine, institutionalization.
F. Patterns of differentiation: stratification; minority-majority relations	Conflict and consensus theories, differential systems of material and symbolic rewards, consequences of stratification; interaction between patients and staff, among patients, with society, now and in future.
G. Social/cultural change: social conflict, coalition formation; collective behavior; social movements	Activities of McMurphy and shifting alliances of patients; group's influence on individuals' behavior; the Therapeutic Community and developments in field of mental health and illness.
H. Societal institutions: family, economy, education, polity, health	Various illustrations of the relationships between total institutions and environment.
I. Conclusions	

Figure 1: Course Outline and Applications from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

social," leadership roles in small groups, and informal processes which often thwart organizational goals. At this point in the narrative, McMurphy had achieved a clearly defined position in the group. He was the "bull-goose looney," the leader. As such, he had a role with rights and obligations defined by group expectations within the patient subculture. He was worthy of status within the group for exemplifying the informal norm which was inscribed on a plaque given by the patients: "CONGRATULATIONS FOR GETTING ALONG WITH THE SMALLEST NUMBER OF PERSONNEL OF ANY WARD

IN THE HOSPITAL” (p. 22). Kesey (1962: 266-267; emphasis added) describes the reality of the social in this situation exceptionally well:

[Billy had just committed suicide. Big Nurse had blamed McMurphy, and McMurphy was about to react. Chief Bromden is narrating.]

First I had a quick thought to try to stop him ... but another, bigger thought wiped the first thought away completely. I suddenly realized with a crystal certainty that neither I nor any of the half-score of us could stop him ... We couldn't stop him because *we were the ones' making him do it*. It wasn't the nurse that was forcing him, it was *our need*.... [He was] obeying orders beamed at him from forty masters. It was us that had been making him go on for weeks.... We made him....

McMurphy was clearly acting as part of a group rather than as an autonomous element. His leadership role in the group can be nicely illustrated throughout the novel in terms of his relationship to other patients. His ability to persuade reluctant fellow patients to go on a fishing trip, to invite “girls” into the ward, and to “watch” the World Series on a blank T.V. screen make for interesting reading and spirited sociological debate. These events also raise questions relevant to definitions of the situation and impression management.

This discussion leads quite naturally to a consideration of who really has power in such situations—the leader or the group. Our original conceptualization of power is reformulated in terms of two-way flows, and the problem of order can be introduced. As Wrong (1960: 183-187) put it, we are discussing the Hobbesian problem as a “social-psychological question”: What, exactly, is the relationship between society and the individual?

Of course, we have already discussed power as one form of social control. We may now proceed to discuss socialization in this context as well. This may be accomplished by drawing an admittedly hyperbolic but quite instructive analogy between resocialization in the total institution (Goffman, 1969: 312-320) and the “normal” process of socialization in the wider society. We

move from a discussion of Goffman's typology of total institutions to a consideration of the mortification process. These phenomena can be clarified with examples drawn from "Cuckoo's Nest" as well as the students' and instructor's experiences. For instance, the process of defining total institutions often leads to a debate over the resemblance between the residential college or university and total institutions. This frequently raises such problems as the "corruption" of bureaucratic goals and the "tension" between the needs of the individual and the needs of society. These issues may then be recast in terms of the entire "consensus versus conflict" debate, and after a simple outline of "the debate over functionalism" we have found that it is quite instructive to ask whether Kesey could best be described as a consensus theorist or a conflict theorist.

The ensuing discussion focuses on two points: the antiauthoritarian propensities of McMurphy (and, presumably, of Kesey as well), and the mechanistic imagery of Chief Bromden's paranoid reflections on the workings of the world around him. We note that mechanistic (and organismic) analogies are characteristic of early functionalist theory, but that the entire "tone" of Kesey's novel is a rather "humanistic" reaction to the conservative view that sees the individual as a small component in a highly mechanical society.

The discussion of social control processes, then, provides a foundation from which a host of related issues may be raised. For example, socialization into the total institution inevitably leads to a consideration of informal and formal processes in complex organizations generally, and in total institutions in particular. The components and processes of social organization that are nicely illustrated in Kesey's book include the formation of groups and group norms, the development of a subculture including argot ("shock shop," the "combine," "Big Nurse"), coalition formation, and a differential system of informally recognized symbolic and material rewards. The class can then discuss stratification within the institution between staff and patients as well as among patients (acutes and chronics), and differentiation among and between minority and majority groups.

DISCUSSION

It should be obvious by now that *Cuckoo's Nest* can be employed in various ways and is relevant to a host of sociological topics. The book raises questions about the potential value of institutionalization and the "therapeutic community"—"The ward" is a factory for the Combine. It's for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches, the hospital is" (p. 40). In this context the class can explore definitions of mental illness, custodial versus therapeutic functions of mental institutions, and the interface between mental institutions and society. The book, then is obviously relevant to the whole general area of labeling and deviance. This is one indication of *Cuckoo's Nest's* potential in courses with a social problems orientation. Insights are readily provided into such topics as subordinate-superordinate relationships, political/economic critiques of institutional arrangements, the nature and consequences of mental illness, and so on.

A further cataloguing of specific sociological topics illuminated by a reading of *Cuckoo's Nest* is hardly necessary. The point has been made that the range of topics is wide, even without considering in any detail some of the more obvious possibilities. There are some problems, however, with the use of this novel in introductory sociology. First of all, many of the students in our courses have seen the movie, and the differences between the book and the movie create some ambiguity. For instance, the narrative of the book is in first-person, since Chief Bromden is the speaker, while this is not true in the movie. Since the dialogue and accounts of events in the book are the Chief's, we have the intriguing possibility here that he misperceives or otherwise alters actual events. The movie cannot depict Bromden's continual struggle with "the fog" and with reality. Also, in our opinion, the role of Nurse Ratched is portrayed differently in the book and in the movie.

Another difficulty, alluded to earlier, is that there are obvious gaps in coverage of topics customarily discussed in introductory sociology. However, we know of no textbook or reader which cannot be faulted for the same reason.

One final point does, however, seem worthy of note. The early reading of a novel such as this can encourage a high degree of creative thinking on the part of students throughout the term. The most obvious examples involve the students' linking of our late-semester discussion of colonialism with our early-semester reading of *Cuckoo's Nest*. In one case, a student made a connection between "destroying the culture" of the colonized (Blauner, 1969) and the mortification/resocialization process. Both, of course, are techniques used by authority-holders to maintain control over the behavior of subordinates (in a sense, replacing old ideas with new ones). In a similar vein, another student suggested that destroying the culture of the colonized is "like taking the brain out of a man and making him into a puppet." Shades of lobotomy in *Cuckoo's Nest*!

Frequent parallels are drawn, too, between the institution's "struggle for the minds and the hearts of the men" and the use of propaganda during wartime. Indeed, similarities between the mental institution and the military in general are often a subject of spontaneous discussion, and this helps lend insight into the nature of total institutions in particular, and bureaucracy in general.

While we are not suggesting that students are unable to draw such parallels from reading more traditional sociological texts, we would like to think that bringing the subject-matter to life by the use of the novel might help to generate the sort of interest that facilitates learning.

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