The story is told in the first person through the eyes of an Indian whose health is gradually restored to him and to others through interaction with the robust new inmate McMurphy. The character of McMurphy comes from a literary style called picaresque. The Picaresque is an episodic style of fiction dealing with the adventures of a rough and dishonest but appealing hero misadventures. Kesey attempts to transform McMurphy into a tragic hero. For a tragic hero to be truly tragic in the Aristotelian sense, he must represent values of his/her culture and attempt to fight a dragon. The Monstrous dragon for McMurphy is Big Nurse. (Allusion to Scylla)

ASSERTION: Big nurse is vicious, domineering and emasculating.

OBSERVE WHAT IS LEFT OUT OF FILM AND EMPHASIZED IN TEXT. What key passages in the opening/first “session” inform this assertion? (Observations) What patterns do we see in the text? What conclusions can we draw?

QPA
Now with a partner write a QPA -- Quick Passage Analysis (THIS IS YOUR SUPPORTING PARAGRAPH) A QPA contains:
- Topic sentence that examines an author’s use of some DEVICE for a meaning and explain HOW that device deepens our understanding of some idea. PURPOSE of device and EFFECT.
- Specific contextualized evidence of that device integrated into the student’s own sentences.
- Analysis of how that evidence creates meaning – how the device works and reaches an idea (football metaphor) in the text.
- Extension of the idea to larger ideas in the book – what emerges…
- EXTENSION of the idea in the book to a larger universal theme.

Below are some critical interpretations of major themes and points of the book. For each make observations of the key pieces of texts relevant to the point – arrange those in a bulleted list under the point. Then search for patterns and draw conclusions. Be ready to present your analysis.

Big Nurse speaks properly but does unspeakable things. McMurphy’s speech is outrageous; he fights the profane with the super
profane.

Kesey seems to suggest that we must look beyond appearances to judge reality.

Fools and madmen have wisdom. World is so screwed up that it can only be seen from a perspective so different that it cuts through illusion to truth. When the bumbling fool exposes the truth, he can be made into someone of dignity.

Ken Kesey shows us the need for authority to establish itself through reasonable not arbitrary action.

McMurphy’s attack on the nurse is the ultimate conquest of individual freedom over authority.

McMurphy’s attack on the nurse is a portrayal of a misogynistic view which would deny women any function other than as a sexual trophy?

Assertion: Big nurse is vicious, domineering andemasculating.

From the beginning, Chief Bromden uses sharp, mechanized imagery to portray Big Nurse’s frightening monstrosity. She “slides through the door with a gust of cold” before unleashing her ‘hideous real self’ – a self that is “smooth, calculated, and precision-made.” This is not a woman with maternal instinct. This is not a woman that is soft and serene in her femininity. Instead, in the chief’s hallucinations, Big Nurse is the perfect “robot” for the Combine, disguised as a woman in order to control the men. Safely behind her glass window, she works to create a world of “precision efficiency” and predictable routine. She keeps things humming in the ward like a well-oiled cog in the machine by dehumanizing and humiliating her patients. McMurphy’s observations about the Nurse’s further develop her as a mechanized villain. At the end of the first group session, McMurphy has gotten the lay of the land. He knows the Big Nurse is not there to merely run the ward – nor is she there to cure the men. In his opinion, she is a “ball-cutter” who is trying to make
the men “weak” so she can get them to “toe the line.” McMurphy forces the other men to acknowledge her as the strong “wolf” to their “sly and frightened rabbits”. By portraying her as a predator, he reinforces the idea that her cuts at Mr. Harding and Billy especially are targeted at their weakness – their sexuality. Her cuts are designed to remove the essence of who they are as men. She makes them see themselves as actually “not man enough” to live in the world. And that attack on masculinity – an attack from the monstrous femininity of Big Nurse – is something McMurphy can’t resist combating as he tries to manipulate her and “beat her at her own game.” Though the nurse is vicious, domineering, and emasculating, McMurphy believes she cannot win because she is still just a woman. And he has never seen a woman who is “a better man than [him].”