



## Girl, Interrupted...from the Cuckoo's Nest

so•ci•o•path n.

One who is affected with a personality disorder marked by aggressive, antisocial behavior.

Lisa Rowe's character, played by Angelina Jolie in *Girl, Interrupted*, gets a diagnosis: she's a sociopath. We're not ever told what, if anything, is wrong with R.P. McMurphy (Jack Nicholson) in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. He might just be faking mental illness to get out of prison. He might be the hero who knows just what these men need to make them better. On the other hand, if we look at him objectively, he's not necessarily so different from Lisa.

### Topic 1: Is Lisa a female McMurphy?

**Compare and contrast** Lisa with McMurphy, using lots of rich examples from the two films. (**Clips strongly encouraged.**) Here are some points to cover. You can surely add some of your own:

- their behavior and its relation to the diagnosis of "sociopath"
- their influences on other patients
- their "truth-telling" about what's wrong with people
- their clashes with authority figures
- the extent to which the film asks us to look at them as heroic models and/or messed-up misfits

### Topic 2. Mental hospital: friend or foe?

As a film with a decided 60's influence, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was clearly anti-institutional: the mental hospital was the enemy of free spirit and the only truly sane course would be to smash it and escape. But *Girl, Interrupted* is more ambiguous and nuanced than that.

Write about the mental institutions as portrayed in both films. To what extent is the hospital shown as providing care and cure for patients? To what extent is the hospital shown as constituting a kind of prison? Make sure your answer refers to specific scenes from the film, (**clips strongly encouraged**) and that it contrasts the attitude the two films have toward the mental illness profession. There are LOTS of parallels you can find. Using clips can really highlight them.

### Topic 3. From book to film

Read Susanna Kaysen's memoir, *Girl, Interrupted* -- which by its style and form does not transfer easily into film. Write a paper comparing and contrasting the book with the movie, one that highlights the difficulties in the "translation" and discusses the choices the film makes in bringing the book onto film and for a wider audience.

OR, do the same with Ken Kesey's novel (not the play) *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which also presents problems in "translation," since the novel is much more centered on (and narrated by) Chief Broom.

