

# **The Electric Kool-aid Acid Test Study Guide**

**The Electric Kool-aid Acid Test by Tom Wolfe**

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## Plot Summary

Tom Wolfe writes about Ken Kesey, a promising young writer, during Kesey's experimentations with LSD from about 1961 to 1964. Kesey leaves his home in Oregon to do post-graduate work on a creative writing fellowship at Stanford University. There he encounters LSD and other psychoactive drugs while volunteering as a research subject. The effects of LSD on Kesey's perceptions draw him and others into the regular use of LSD, marijuana and amphetamines. A small version of the drug culture that is to follow develops.

The property where Kesey lives near Stanford is sold to land developers, so he moves to family property near La Honda, California. Others move with him, people who come to be known as the Merry Pranksters. Kesey and the Merry Pranksters continue taking drugs, install elaborate sound equipment on the property, and decide to take a road trip East with the eventual destination of New York City. The Pranksters buy an old school bus, paint it in Day-Glo colors and name it Furthur. They take a southern route through Texas, the South and Florida. Along the way, a young woman that Wolfe names Beautiful Witch loses her mind while on LSD. The Pranksters think that this was inevitable for her particular psyche and not a fault of the drug.

Kesey and the Pranksters take movies of the trip with the intention of editing the clips into a documentary, but a very different type of documentary without form or point. They find New York City to be uninteresting and seek out Timothy Leary, an early proponent of LSD, farther north. The associates of Leary act coldly toward the clownish Pranksters, and Kesey never meets Leary. Kesey and the Pranksters take the northern route back to California. Young people join the Pranksters along the way.

While back at the La Honda property, Kesey and the Pranksters invent The Acid Test, a party where LSD and other drugs are freely taken and the Pranksters put on a multimedia show. More Acid Tests are given in San Francisco and Los Angeles. The Tests prove to be money-makers and become a new music venue known as psychedelic. Jerry Garcia forms the Grateful Dead and performs at Acid Tests. The music starts a new music genre known as acid rock or rock jazz.

Kesey is busted three times for marijuana possession and runs to Mexico to avoid prosecution and jail. Other Pranksters follow, and when his location becomes known to the California press, many others also go to Mexico. Kesey has a vision during an electrical storm, where he realizes that everyone must move on past the drugs. He returns to the States with this message.

The American authorities do prosecute, but Kesey's lawyers keep him away from significant jail time. While out on bail, Kesey and the Pranksters put on a final Acid Test called the Graduation. Then Kesey and the Pranksters try to play a music venue, but they cannot capture their old energy. The crowd leaves, and the whole purpose that Kesey was trying to accomplish seems meaningless. Kesey returns to his hometown in

Oregon, and the Pranksters scatter. One Prankster, Cassidy, dies from a drug overdose.



# Chapter I Black Shiny FBI Shoes

## Chapter I Black Shiny FBI Shoes Summary and Analysis

Tom Wolfe writes about Ken Kesey, a promising young writer, during Kesey's experimentations with LSD from about 1961 to 1964. Kesey leaves his home in Oregon to do post-graduate work on a creative writing fellowship at Stanford University. There he encounters LSD and other psychoactive drugs while volunteering as a research subject. The effects of LSD on Kesey's perceptions draw him and others into the regular use of LSD, marijuana and amphetamines. A small version of the drug culture that is to follow develops.

In the late 1960s, Tom Wolfe seeks out Ken Kesey, drug-culture icon, for an interview. Kesey is to be let out of jail on a bond that his friends have raised by putting up three houses for collateral. Kesey has been charged with two counts of marijuana possession. The FBI caught him when he returned to San Francisco in order to bring the drug culture past LSD and into some kind of higher situation. At least this is what Kesey tells Wolfe in their scratchy 10-minute interview over prison phones separated by thick security glass.

The author describes the hippie scene in San Francisco by using literary techniques, a style known as New Journalism. He reports what is happening but also gives color and texture to the scenes. The characters who surround him do quirky things, and he reports that. The drug-culture that Kesey hangs around with is full of inside jokes, and thus the name given: Merry Pranksters. They paint their vehicles in day-glow colors and wild designs. They wear coveralls that have pieces of American flags sewn to them. They gather together and try to confuse the minds of straight culture types, especially the police, with behavior that goes directly against expectations. They give the police flowers and act overly polite while keeping a deep contempt for the straight culture, many of whom wear shiny black shoes. The FBI agents wear such footwear, spit-polished in the military style.

The drug culture that developed in the 1960s from the earlier beatnik culture is undergoing an unraveling. What used to be important is now ignored, such as civil rights. Black people no longer garner immediate attention and sympathy. The whole point of being drug-culture, if ever there was one, is lost. Kesey promises the police that once let go, he plans to stick around in order to tell the drug-culture what the next level is, and thus bring order to what is rapidly becoming brainless chaos. When Wolfe meets Neal Cassady, a famous hippie from Jack Kerouac's book, *On the Road*, the famous hippie talks on and on about anything and everything while interspersing the monologues with "the unlikely expression, 'you understand—'" (p. 15). No, Wolfe does not understand, and neither does anyone else.



Kesey says that New York City is two years behind San Francisco. Wolfe describes the degeneration of the famous San Francisco hippie neighborhoods, the skid row part of town that has turned from drug-culture to sleazy sex shop districts that tourists drive through to spot a hippie. While the hippies look at the straights as having marshmallow heads, the straights look back at the hippies like visitors to a zoo containing exotic animals. Wolfe uses quite a bit of simile in his impressions, but not to an annoying extent. The drug-culture can only be like something familiar because it is so "far out," as the saying from that period goes.

The author uses the literary technique of foreshadowing as well. He mentions a banner in the warehouse that reads, "ACID TEST GRADUATION." The slogan on Mountain Girl's button reads "Can't Bust 'Em!" She breast-feeds her four-month-old child, a piece of normal reality among the drug-induced illusions that surround Wolfe in a comical yet threatening hysteria, and thus one of the labels given to his style of writing this book, Hysterical Realism.



# Chapter II The Bladder Totem

## Chapter II The Bladder Totem Summary and Analysis

Wolfe waits for Kesey in a garage the author calls the Warehouse. The Merry Pranksters live in the Warehouse, but it has no plumbing. The only clean place to use the toilet is a nearby Shell gas station. The station attendant does not like the hippies who use the bathroom regularly but never buy gas. Wolfe names this attitude "the rotten look" when he takes the toilet key, attached by a chain to an empty oil can. The empty oil can is the bladder totem, uniting all the Merry Pranksters into a single, gypsy-like family unit due to their common need to urinate.

The Merry Pranksters look strange in their costumes but not as strange as some of the straight fraternity parties that Wolfe has been to. The way the Merry Pranksters think strikes Wolfe as being extremely odd. They talk about the universe and its meaning, how Cassady's handling of a sledge hammer, by repeatedly flipping it into the air and catching it, somehow reflects something about the meaning. They refer to Kesey as Chief.

Wolfe relates another incident to this idea of the universe and vibrations when a young man tried to open a desk, and the desk resisted. The young man thought the universe was working against him. "Everyone is picking up on the most minute incidents as if they are metaphors for life itself" (p. 19). Another attitude of the Merry Pranksters is that everyone living the straight life is involved in games and not conscious of them. A young man named Hassler talks to Wolfe about the games, and Wolfe finds the plastic toothbrush case that Hassler always carries in a shirt pocket to be distracting from his message. Caught up in the habit of seeing everything in metaphors, Wolfe detects the toothbrush case to be a vestige from Hassler's past straight life.

Ken Babbs, a Vietnam veteran who had flown helicopters in the war, shows Wolfe a novel that he has written about the war. Babb's face is painted, and he wears a blue and orange mime outfit. Wolfe estimates the novel length at 400 to 500 loose pages. Wolfe comments on the length of the story, and Babbs laughs incongruently. For days, the author notices the novel in the middle of the Warehouse floor, setting there in a box as if waiting for something.

The author meets other strange people. Paul Foster is a computer whiz; and Doris Delay is a woman who strongly resembles the blonde actress Doris Day. There's a Hell's Angel named Freewheeling Frank. Just after meeting Freewheeling Frank, Ken Kesey comes into the Warehouse.

Wolfe captures in an eight-page chapter the essence of the Merry Pranksters. The Warehouse seems chaotic, but there is something that keeps the people together beyond the common illusions that are possibly related to drug use. Looking strange is a common practice, as is being critical of the straight life while depending on it for at least



the bladder totem at the Shell station. A stronger commonality pulls them together in that Ken Kesey is their Chief.



# Chapter III The Electric Suit

## Chapter III The Electric Suit Summary and Analysis

When Kesey arrives, nobody makes a fuss about it. Unnoticed until now, Faye, Kesey's wife, and their three children come out from somewhere in the Warehouse. Wolfe is impressed with Faye's beauty and Kesey's muscular build. He tells a story about Kesey's false tooth that has the flag of the Merry Pranksters enameled on it that leads into how Kesey describes prison.

At this point, Wolfe understands more about what is going on. Kesey's thoughts become his own thoughts, and he is sure of the thoughts of everyone else in the room. The understanding grows when Kesey talks to a hippie journalist with an English accent. The journalist pleads with Kesey to stop telling people not to take LSD or other psychedelic drugs. Kesey argues that once the door is open, it serves no purpose to go out and come back through all the time. People have to move on through the door to someplace else. Kesey then tells a story about his experience in Mexico while on acid, where he seems to have been hit by lightning, although this is unlikely. A direct lightning hit causes a great deal of nervous system damage, if not death. He may have been close to being hit, or this might have been an illusion caused by the LSD. In any case, he felt as though he were wearing an electric suit during this incident in Mexico.

Kesey goes on about the need for faith, and the author fully understands. Kesey is a religious leader for a new religion. The hippie journalist wants the religion to make taking drugs part of the sacraments, but Kesey thinks this is a very bad idea. Meanwhile, the Merry Pranksters are like disciples and Kesey like other spiritual leaders who founded new religions. Wolfe finds this to be amazing, given the location in San Francisco and the time period of materialistic American consumerism.



# Chapter IV What Do You Think of My Buddha?

## Chapter IV What Do You Think of My Buddha? Summary and Analysis

Ken Kesey was born in La Junta, Colorado, grew up in Springfield, Oregon, and attends graduate school at Stanford University on a creative-writing fellowship. The author weaves the history of how Kesey went from middle-class, straight college student to one of the premiere leaders of the drug culture. The chapter title refers to a drawing of Buddha that a research subject creates on the wall while on LSD.

When Kesey arrives at Stanford, the 1950s-style bohemian culture of Perry Lane allows him in as a curiosity, an intelligent country bumpkin. Perry Lane is not very bohemian by the usual standards, more like an upper-middle class approximation of the lifestyle. Kesey works on a novel and fits into the society as per its expectations, but he decides to volunteer as a research subject. The research involves the effects of psychoactive drugs, including LSD, mescaline and IT-290, a strong amphetamine. The psychedelic experiences change Kesey dramatically. During a period that he works at a mental institution, he gets the central idea for his first published novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which is enthusiastically received.

Kesey's childhood and adolescence was that of a typical post-war American. His generation was the first wave of the baby-boomers who are now retiring. Kesey finds himself in a situation where he has opened his door to perception by the use of legal psychoactive drugs, but he cannot explain to the researchers what he has experienced. Moreover, this change of perception transforms Kesey from a straight-laced all-American boy into what will come to be known as a hippie, a drug-culture type who turns on others to drugs and has trouble with the law. This transformation is to become a common theme throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. By the time the 1980s roll around, a different kind of drug culture develops, one of hard-core crime and street gangs. But for this time period, the early 1960s, acid is legal, peyote is not but easily obtained, and Kesey is having a good time. Others join him in Perry Lane to get high by eating venison stew laced with LSD. This goes on until a developer buys the property.

Kesey and friends throw a party on the last day at Perry Lane. They destroy a piano and burn the wreckage, giggling and hooting all the while. The straight press has a difficult time understanding the antics of Kesey and his friends, but that does not matter. Leaving Perry Lane has no meaning to them. They are simply moving to a different place, La Honda, California, and they are taking their drugs, and thus their new level of perception, with them.

Wolfe attempts to convey what an LSD trip is like but cannot fully explain the experience, and he admits to this limitation. Nobody can fully understand unless having



been "experienced," a word destined to become part of the 1960s drug-culture slang. Somehow Kesey receives visions of Native Americans, one of whom becomes the viewpoint character of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Chief Broom. Wolfe refers to these visions sometimes as "eyelid movies," one of the experiences that can happen during an LSD trip. Another experience is seeing common objects as being very different, but not frighteningly so. The experience is, overall, a feeling that cannot be described to those who have never had, or cannot remember, this feeling. Wolfe suggests that very young children have this feeling and way of perceiving reality, and that through acculturation, lose both the feeling and perception.



# Chapter V The Rusky-Dusky Neon Dust

## Chapter V The Rusky-Dusky Neon Dust Summary and Analysis

The time frame is now early 1964. Kesey's house near La Honda resembles a Christmas card. Redwoods grow tall, the house is made of logs and resembles a lodge rather than a cabin. Kesey likes the house better than the forest, but he does arrange for things to do in the forest. The people who hang around with him follow his directions but become annoyed with his controlling manner. It interferes with their personal drug experiences.

Wolfe mentions that the combination of amphetamine (speed) and marijuana gives an effect that resembles the LSD experience, but without some of the jarring effects. The ingestion of morning glory seeds is especially uncomfortable, but Kesey and the people around him keep their experiences going in order to engage in what Wolfe calls intersubjectivity, a state of shared consciousness among Kesey and crew. The improvisations that come out of this shared consciousness are incomprehensible to those who are not experienced with the effects of LSD and other drugs.

The author accounts for how Cassady, Page Browning, Kenneth Babbs, Mike Hagen, Ron Bevirt and others gather together with Kesey. The idea of staging pranks develops, and the visits from the old Perry Lane crowd become less common. The behavior of Kesey and crew puts them off, because they have not been experienced. As explained in an earlier chapter, it is impossible to clearly express the experience to others and nearly impossible to express something like neon dust in the forest through words. However, Wolfe attempts this through poetry and inventions, such as the written expression "lime ::::: light :::::" (p. 59). Even something simple, such as deciding to take a road trip to the East, becomes an exercise in intersubjectivity, a communal improvised chant that eventually lands somewhere.



# Chapter VI The Bus

## Chapter VI The Bus Summary and Analysis

Wolfe describes Kesey and the crew's journey to New York for the 1964 World's Fair. Kesey buys a 1939 International Harvester school bus, which the Pranksters paint in gaudy designs and colors while flying high on LSD and just about every other drug imaginable for the period. They also add a great deal of audio-visual equipment for recording and broadcasting. The roof of the bus is redesigned to allow people to sit on top and play instruments, if their "thing" demands, including drums. Kesey and crew take the loud bus full of stoned hippies on a test run in California. A state trooper stops the bus but lets them off without a ticket due to the strange antics of the passengers.

The bus heads out toward New York with Kesey, Babbs, Page Browning, George Walker, Sandy, Jane Burton, Mike Hagen, Kesey's brother Chuck, his cousin Dale, Brother John, Steve Lambrecht, Paula Sundsten, Ron Bevirt, and a woman who resembles a good-looking witch that Hagen had picked up. Kesey explains to everyone that nobody is to get angry with anyone else, no matter what happens. He calls this "doing their things," and even if this means violence, that should be accepted as someone doing his or her thing.

The bus is equipped for long-distance travel with cots and a refrigerator. Orange juice laced with LSD is kept in the refrigerator for all to partake, and all do. Everybody is given nicknames as they travel: Steve Lambrecht is Zonker, Cassady is Speed Limit, Kesey is Swashbuckler, Babbs is Intrepid Traveler, Hagen is Mal Function, Ron Bevirt is Equipment Hassler (later just Hassler), George Walker is Hardly Visible, and Paula Sundsten is Gretchen Fetchin the Slime Queen, a name she earns after diving into a muddy lake and coming up with green slime in her hair. Wolfe refers to Hagen's girl as the Beauty Witch. Kesey and Hagen film many of the things everybody does while on the road trip.

As the road trip progresses toward Houston, the Beauty Witch behaves more strangely with every mile. She takes off all her clothes and wears only a black blanket, when she wears anything at all. While on the drugs she makes eerie sounds and never seems to use the toilet at gas stops. When the group finally reaches Houston, Beauty Witch has gone entirely insane, which leaves the Merry Pranksters silent. She has completed her trip, in their minds, and her destination is, and always had been, a psychiatric ward.



# Chapter VII Unauthorized Acid

## Chapter VII Unauthorized Acid Summary and Analysis

Wolfe explains more about the Pranksters' attitude toward those who fall into insanity after abusing drugs. This is to be expected, as the very act of taking massive amounts and wide varieties of psychedelic drugs while traveling is insane.

"The trip, in fact the whole deal, was a risk-all balls-out plunge into the unknown, and it was assumed merely that more and more of what was already inside a person would come out and expand, gloriously or otherwise" (p. 87).

The route to New York cuts through the South because Florida is a stop along the way. The July heat becomes lava-intense, and the drugs do little to make the situation better. In New Orleans, the Pranksters stop at a beach to cool off, not aware that the beach is segregated for Black people only. Zonker goes into the water and is soon surrounded by Black men with threatening demeanors. Zonker's drug smile breaks the tension, and he returns to the bus unharmed.

Rock and roll music plays on the bus's sound system. The Black people dance around the bus and crowd in closer. This looks like a very bad situation developing, but the police arrive and escort the bus away before anything happens.

The author explains how Kesey is in control of the common mind and how he keeps people doing their things by being up front about it. Sandy has not been sleeping at all, and this catches up with him. In an attempt to keep going, he takes Unauthorized Acid, a big gulp of the LSD-laced orange juice rather than the small paper cup measure. This leads him into a very bad trip, and Kesey discovers his condition. Kesey tells him that his only choice is to get through the hallucinations. By evening, Sandy's state of mind calms down.

Wolf uses more conventional prose to describe Sandy's bad trip, because the swings of focus and depth perception can easily be imagined. Colors change dramatically and small lights intensify. Illusions are strong enough in their straight descriptions to hold the effect of panic, unlike the odd way of being experienced when taking only the prescribed dosages that Kesey allows.

The whole point of being on drugs all the time comes out. Something very remarkable is supposed to happen, and this is why Kesey and others document the road trip on film.



# Chapter VIII Tootling the Multitudes

## Chapter VIII Tootling the Multitudes Summary and Analysis

The Merry Pranksters continue along toward New York City and develop new ways of doing their pranks. They paint one hand in Day-Glo colors and flash it as they pass by straight people. They play their instruments to go along with their impressions of straight people, their tootling of the multitudes. Cassady takes the bus over the Blue Ridge Mountains on a twisting, steep road and does not use the brakes. Kesey rides on top. Everybody is calm, because Cassady is at the wheel, and he's dependable.

They enter New York City and find it to be full of depressing straight people, whom they tootle and flash their painted hands toward. Chloe Scott of the Perry Lane crowd finds an apartment for the Merry Pranksters, and they throw a party. Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg show up. Cassady used to be Kerouac's main man on the road, and now he serves Kesey. Kesey is replacing Kerouac as the leader of a new beat generation. Kesey's second novel, *Sometimes a Great Notion*, comes out to mixed reviews. In all, New York City does not know what to make of Kesey and crew in the summer of 1964.





# Chapter IX The Crypt Trip

## Chapter IX The Crypt Trip Summary and Analysis

The Merry Pranksters leave New York City and head north toward Millbrook to visit Timothy Leary and his League for Spiritual Discovery. They receive a cool reception, which hurts Kesey. He had expected to be greeted with open arms and enthusiasm. The Merry Pranksters find the Millbrook estate to be frosty and stilted, and so leave. The Crypt Trip is how Babbs refers to the place as he leads an improvised tour that is full of sarcasm toward the place and its inhabitants. Kesey never meets Leary.

Timothy Leary is remembered as the man who tried to legitimize LSD as a way to higher consciousness in the Eastern religious sense, most notably Buddhist philosophy. His is serious work, or so those around him think, while Kesey is not serious. His band of Pranksters are clowns and childish when the whole idea ought to be about spiritual inquiry, and thus intellectually valid. Having fun does not count to these Millbrook people, but that is exactly what the drug culture is becoming. It's one big party with Ken Kesey in the lead.



# Chapter X Dream Wars

## Chapter X Dream Wars Summary and Analysis

The Merry Pranksters return to California by the northern route. Sandy had taken DMT, a very strong hallucinogen, while at the Millbrook estate, and the effects come back now and then. The flashback hallucinations are very disturbing.

While on the bus, people feel the intersubjectivity of having one mind. While off the bus psychically, the intersubjectivity is broken. Kesey tries to keep this from happening, and Sandy is having a very hard time keeping on the bus. Kesey sets up ways that the Merry Pranksters can keep Sandy psychically connected, but Sandy's paranoia thwarts the efforts. He engages in dream wars with Kesey, and finally Sandy loses his control, makes a scene, and the police cart him off to jail. Chris, Sandy's brother, comes from New York to take him back East for treatment.

Wolfe mentions that people, especially attractive young women, are welcomed onto the bus if they want to come along. The young women tend to wear little clothing once on the bus and paint their faces and bodies in Day-Glo. This has the effect of camouflaging against when the police stop the bus to look for missing children.

A major point is made over these past few chapters that the Merry Pranksters' behavior turns away those who are not in tune with the intersubjectivity that has developed. This is to be expected with straight people, but others who have experienced LSD also turn away. They are not on the bus and therefore cannot join in. Kesey has a special charismatic control over the group, one of the characteristics of a religious cult. Sandy's bad trip is partly due to his rebellion against Kesey's control, the dream wars.



# Chapter XI The Unspoken Thing

## Chapter XI The Unspoken Thing Summary and Analysis

Just what Kesey and crew experience from the trip on the bus and the ongoing use of drugs is the unspoken thing. Nobody wants to talk about it as that would destroy the experience. Instead, the Pranksters work on putting together a film from the bus trip footage, much of it out of focus or jumpy from being taken on the moving bus.

Wolfe attempts to bring the unspoken thing into focus by using Eastern religious ideas like Zen, the thoughts of great religious leaders and those of more contemporary writers, such as Max Weber and Herman Hesse. The author gives a long quote from Joachim Wach regarding the establishment of religions that speaks of charismatic leaders, followers and how a particular group breaks away from the rest of society. Kesey is the charismatic leader, the Pranksters are the followers, and they have broken away from society for the most part. Nevertheless, Kesey provides money from his literature royalties and others contribute money. The break is not total.

The lifestyle that Kesey guides the Pranksters into yields positive results for some. Mountain Girl slims down and becomes physically attractive. She also turns out to be possibly the smartest of the group. The Hermit finds a place where he is accepted, although depressing to be around. The Pranksters think that he serves a good purpose by taking on all the bad trips for others, a negative energy sponge.

An overall collective consciousness keeps on developing, and the drugs cause many changes of perception, such as hearing colors and tasting sounds. Kesey talks about how the idea is to experience all things in the present, but that this is impossible to do perfectly. Our senses have a time lag of at least one thirtieth of a second. No matter how a person tries, the time lag will always be there. Another point is that people tend to understand only themselves, and not very deeply. Meanwhile, we are all part of a greater whole that hardly anyone can understand. Some understand parts of the whole, such as Einstein and his theories about space and time. To understand the whole is to also have control of the whole, or so Kesey thinks, and that is what he is trying to accomplish.

Other features of the La Honda lifestyle include an extensive sound system, Day-Glo paint on just about everything, throwing the I Ching coins, communal meals and Friday night meetings, where Kesey and others bring up various subjects. Young people come and go for various reasons. The atmosphere is open yet closed at the same time. Almost anyone can come or go, but once in, the collective consciousness becomes the only consciousness.

This chapter exposes another similarity to a cult. Kesey has a desire for power over the whole of creation, a desire that might be near megalomania at this time. Yet he seems

to have a sense of democratic leadership rather than trying to be a dictatorial master. He wants to control how he perceives creation, not the creation itself.



# Chapter XII The Bust

## Chapter XII The Bust Summary and Analysis

A poem that parodies a legal warrant to search a property for illegal drugs opens the chapter. Kesey's place is about to be busted, and the Pranksters know about it. They put up large signs that mock the police and let them know that the Pranksters will be well prepared for what is about to happen.

The Pranksters see the police as people playing a cop game and do not take it seriously. Nothing terrible happens during the bust, but Kesey does hit an officer who grabs him from behind. The bust and ensuing court appearances draw national attention to Kesey and crew. Of all the crime accusations, only Kesey and Page Browning end up with one count each of marijuana possession. Meanwhile, the hip notoriety of the La Honda property expands greatly, an outcome that the police had not anticipated.

A man named Norman Hartweg attempts to edit the Prankster's ongoing movie project and write an article about them. Instead, he finds it impossible to see the whole idea behind the movie, mostly because there is none, nor is there a point to the movie. Wolfe describes how all the Pranksters are in their own movies, playing their own games, similar to how the cops play a game, but more personal and without any attempts at lending respectability to them. The personal movies exist and are supposed to be honest, and that is all there is to it. This situation becomes confusing, people lose their tempers, but somehow Kesey always shows up to smooth things over or to bring it all to the next step or level.

The author compares the strange society to a massive psychological encounter group, except everyone is young and flying high on all sorts of drugs. With youth comes an attitude of immunity. Nothing bad can happen and nobody can die or become permanently injured. Drug use brings with it a recklessness that delivers the Pranksters out to the extreme edges of mind and its relationship to reality. That outsiders find this incomprehensible and insane is a given. However, many outsiders want to come inside and join the group. Some accomplish this, although there is no set point where anyone can be sure of being inside or outside. However, almost everyone wants to be hip.



# Chapter XIII The Hell's Angels

## Chapter XIII The Hell's Angels Summary and Analysis

Upon the invitation of the Merry Pranksters, a group of forty Hells Angels come to party at Kesey's place, including Sonny Barger, the motorcycle club's president made famous by Hunter S. Thompson's book on the Hells Angels. Thompson had introduced Kesey to the Hells Angels. The outlaw bikers took immediately to Kesey due to the marijuana charge and ensuing publicity, and so came the invitation.

The Hells Angels are known for being intimidating and violent. This does not phase the Merry Pranksters, especially Kesey and Mountain Girl. Kesey has the immediate respect, which grows over time. Mountain Girl has a way of out-BSing the BSers. The Angels party as usual, and one gang bang ensues with a willing female participant. However, the Pranksters expose the Angels to LSD and the more powerful DMT. Some of the outlaw bikers are overwhelmed, outdone by hippies.

The two groups are very different yet have commonalities. The Angels hate phony people and so do the Pranksters. Both groups have left the straight world to find something else. Both live on the edge of mind and reality. Where the Angels have physical intimidation as a part of their world, the Pranksters intimidate at a psychological level, something that might be more powerful. In the end, the two-day party that frightens the town of La Honda and brings an army of police turns out to be relatively benign. The Angels like the Pranksters, the Pranksters like the Angels, and the whole hip intellectual world likes the joining of two seemingly opposite groups.



# Chapter XIV A Miracle in Seven Days

## Chapter XIV A Miracle in Seven Days Summary and Analysis

During the party with the Hells Angels as guests, three young Unitarian ministers, referred to as the Young Turks, observe the events. Of these three, Paul Sawyer decides to invite Kesey to the California Unitarian Church conference as a participant. When he arrives at the seven-day conference, set in a campground, the bus and Pranksters put off the older Unitarians. The teenage Unitarians crowd around the bus and join with the Pranksters, thus reflecting the rift, dubbed later as the Generation Gap, between the young and older people of the period.

The women in the conference find Kesey to be very attractive, and the men notice. Tension continues to build as Kesey describes on stage how he wants to work a miracle in seven days. Sawyer meets Mountain Girl and discovers that she had been a Unitarian and a member of the LRY (Liberal Religious Youth) part of the church. Kesey dramatically steps on the flag of the United States, then from Mountain Girl's bellowed suggesting, walks with the flag as if an honor guard. The crowd sings America the Beautiful, and this breaks the tension.

The conference has an official schedule that the Pranksters ignore. They do their things, and the Young Turks join with them. A delegation of conference officials asks Sawyer to get rid of Kesey and the Pranksters because of the disruptions. Sawyer successfully talks the delegation out of the idea due to the danger of splitting the entire church into two factions.

Kesey takes control of the conference by directing that the Pranksters dress in their unique ways, but always the same each day. The intention is to give each Prankster an identification that the other attendees will come to recognize. Kesey decides to stop talking about what all this means and just let it happen.

Two factions do develop with the Unitarian church. The Young Turks organize their own conference the next year while the older Unitarians meet at the usual place. One of the older female Unitarians writes a brochure for the usual conference in which she describes Kesey in traditional Christian language. Kesey rejects the language, but there is something religious about what he and the Pranksters are doing. Kesey and some of the others take the powerful drug DMT, after which Kesey has a feeling of being God. He attributes the feeling to the drug, but a strange wind did rise that night, and it was witnessed by another person.

Wolfe writes from materials he has gathered from Kesey and interviews with him and the Pranksters. The story about Kesey's brush with godlike feelings may be accurate, but the detail about the wind is likely coincidental or misperceived due to the drugs.

Whatever the case may be, Wolfe brings home the strong point that what Kesey is doing has many parallels with establishing a religion.



# Chapter XV Cloud

## Chapter XV Cloud Summary and Analysis

The Beatles are coming to San Francisco on September 2, 1965, and the Pranksters try to lure them into their movie by putting up a sign that reads, THE MERRY PRANKSTERS WELCOME THE BEATLES. A similar sign had been put up to welcome the Hells Angels, so the thought is that this might work too. It does not, but other things do happen.

High on acid and with tickets in hand, a group of 30 Pranksters and Kesey take in part of the Beatles concert at a converted slaughter house. An old sign above the building reads, CLOUD. The throngs of teenage girls disturb the Pranksters, and they decide to leave before things get out of control. The rumor that the Beatles are supposed to be at Kesey's after the concert has brought several hundred uninvited guests to the property. One of them, named Owsley, manufactures LSD and is famous for his high-quality drug. Owsley expects Kesey to understand who he is, but Kesey never heard of him as Kesey obtains his drugs from a much older man, the Mad Chemist.

Wolfe jumps ahead of the story and describes how the Beatles in 1967, three years off, do exactly the same thing that the Pranksters have been doing. They get on a bus and ride around the English countryside high on LSD, shoot film about the trip and make a movie. The movie becomes *Magical Mystery Tour* and is released in late 1967. The Beatles may not have visited the Pranksters, but the idea of the Pranksters' movie is visited upon the Beatles.



# Chapter XVI The Frozen Jug Band

## Chapter XVI The Frozen Jug Band Summary and Analysis

The Vietnam Day Committee plans an anti-war rally at the University of California, Berkeley campus. Somebody in the committee decides that inviting Kesey to speak is a good idea, but the trouble is that he sees little value in the rally. Kesey and the Pranksters consider war to be yet one more game that people play, and the rally is part of the same game. Therefore, anti-war rallies do nothing to stop or avoid war. Both sides of the game are about ego. The only way to fight against war is to turn away, ignore it and take the ego away from the game.

As one of the final speakers, Kesey explains his philosophy in the strange way of the Pranksters. He plays Home on the Range on a harmonica with some of the Pranksters backing him up on electric guitars and horns. They are all in Day-Glo costumes with a military theme, and so bizarre sights accompany the strange, discordant sounds. The crowd becomes confused, then deflated of all the energy built up by the previous speakers. Kesey compares one of the previous speaker's style as being the same as Mussolini, the Italian fascist leader during World War II.

The rally crowd of 15,000 people try to carry out the rest of their protest by marching into a phalanx of police and National Guard soldiers, but turn away instead. The discouraged crowd goes to a city park, where tear gas is released to disperse the people. A jug band playing in the park freezes when the tear gas comes, probably due to a combination of being on drugs and exposure to the gas.



# Chapter XVII Departures

## Chapter XVII Departures Summary and Analysis

Kesey prepares the Pranksters for a relocation to Mexico by posting messages on a bulletin board. Mountain Girl, now pregnant, decides to return to her home town of Poughkeepsie, New York. Sandy, who has rejoined the Pranksters after his psychotic episode on DMT and subsequent treatment, has again had a problem with the drug and reenters treatment.

This is a short chapter done entirely in free verse poetry. It stands apart from the rest of the book as a type of Greek chorus, an interlude and foreshadowing of an important turn in the story. The reader might imagine the poetry set to music and chanted in the rapping manner of the Pranksters with their group consciousness going strong under the influences of LSD, marijuana and speed.

The poetry consists of three parts: PREPARE FOR MEXICO, MOUNTAIN GIRL RETURNS TO POUGHKEEPSIE and SANDY RETURNS TO NEW YORK. The foreshadowing involves Kesey's run to Mexico to avoid prosecution and imprisonment, Mountain Girl's pregnancy and subsequent decisions regarding her baby, and Sandy's connection to New York City, a place to which he finally returns after another upcoming stint with the Pranksters. An expensive piece of recording equipment that Kesey denies him, the Ampex, is central to Sandy's return.



# Chapter XVIII Cosmo's Tasmanian Devilry

## Chapter XVIII Cosmo's Tasmanian Devilry Summary and Analysis

Kesey comes up with the idea to turn on the entire world to LSD through what he calls The Acid Test. This involves putting on open parties for the Pranksters, others who are on the bus and anyone else interested, where multimedia shows of movies, lights, music and sound fill the senses of those high on LSD. The slogan for this type of party becomes, Can You Pass The Acid Test?

The first try at The Acid Test party is held near Santa Cruz at a property that Babbs owns. Only the usual crowd shows up due to lack of advertising. A second attempt goes better and brings in Jerry Garcia and the band that is to become The Grateful Dead. This lends a more structured musical style to the usual noise that the Pranksters make.

The third attempt seems doomed to failure as the site changes at the last minute. However, people find The Acid Test regardless, possibly by word-of-mouth. The police do not. The site is Muir Beach and a spacious lodge with good electricity, unlike the first two attempts that were held at run-down houses. A strobe light is added to the effects, which Kesey controls. He can speed the whole thing up or slow it down with a single rheostat. This attempt seems to be a success, as many people, including the Hells Angels, show up for The Acid Test and apparently pass satisfactorily, although this is never defined. One exception is Owsley, the LSD manufacturer. His trip is a very bad experience. He crashes his car into a tree that, under the influences of acid, is not supposed to be there. Owsley cannot go with the flow and join the movie or get on the bus. The famous maker of LSD fails The Acid Test.

A religious parallel is the spreading of The Word in Christianity. Kesey has found a spiritual place through the use of LSD. He wants everyone to find the same or similar place through drugs, something he assumes is easy for all, because it is easy for him. Owsley proves otherwise.

# Chapter XIX The Trips Festival

## Chapter XIX The Trips Festival Summary and Analysis

Some people react very negatively toward Kesey and The Acid Tests. Owsley thinks that Kesey is dangerous and talks as if he is about to cut off the Pranksters' LSD supply. Richard Alpert, a man who had given up his career as an academic psychologist for the psychedelic movement, thinks that the antics of Kesey and the Pranksters seriously threaten the movement. Many others in the movement expect the Pranksters to suddenly do something so outrageous that the movement will be killed at any moment. The police watch closely, but because LSD is not yet illegal, they can take no actions against Kesey and crew.

Owsley decides to financially back the Grateful Dead. The band becomes well-equipped with sound gear, lighting and instruments. Acid rock emerges as a new music genre, sometimes referred to as rock jazz.

Stewart Brand and Ramon Sender dream up the idea of the Trips Festival, a super Acid Test that is advertised as a simulation of the LSD experience, but without the drug. The festival is set for January 21-23, 1966, at the Longshoremen's Hall in San Francisco. The big night is set to be Saturday the 22nd with Kesey and the Merry Pranksters as features. On the night of the 19th, Kesey is busted again for marijuana possession, a charge that carries with it an automatic five-year prison sentence. Kesey attends the Trips Festival as planned dressed in a spaceman's costume to avoid being recognized.

The Trips Festival has plenty of people on actual LSD. No simulation is needed, but the multimedia show is done to the extreme. The ticket receipts gross over twelve thousand dollars, a significant sum for the time, and a wave of dance clubs follow that have the psychedelic theme. The movement makes money, and to some people, this is enough justification to support the psychedelic movement.

Kesey's troubles with the law compel him and Mountain Girl to devise a fake suicide in preparation for a run across the Mexican border. They compose the suicide note and fill it with parody, lampoon and a good dose of drug-inspired sarcasm.



# Chapter XX The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test

## Chapter XX The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test Summary and Analysis

Kesey leaves for Mexico without the Merry Pranksters, and Babbs takes over leadership. With Kesey's unifying charisma gone, the Pranksters split into two factions, one satisfied with Babbs' leadership, the other dissatisfied. Babbs does not have charisma and runs the show as if it were the Army, or at least some Pranksters think so.

Babbs moves The Acid Test scene to Los Angeles, where the first Test is held at Paul Sawyer's Unitarian church. A young journalist, Clair Brush, gives the author an account of her first experience with The Acid Test, which Wolf includes verbatim. Her experience is from the second Test in a new location at the Watts section of Los Angeles, not long after the famous riots.

Brush describes a large warehouse and a garbage can filled with Kool-Aid spiked with LSD. Not knowing what was in the Kool-Aid, she drinks at least three cups and starts the experience. She seeks out someone she trusts while the hallucinations begin, and as she becomes accustomed to the effects of LSD, she reaches an understanding about the multimedia that only seems confusing at first, and then an instant where everything becomes clear. However, she cannot later remember this deep insight after coming down off the drug. Brush describes in detail about another woman having a horrible experience with LSD, a bad trip.

The anti-Babbs faction of the Pranksters think that giving out laced Kool-Aid without telling people what they were ingesting is unethical, also the treatment of the woman having a bad trip. Her screams were piped into the sound system for all to hear and recorded for later use. After a Life magazine photo shoot of all the Pranksters, Babbs and his followers take the bus and abandon the complaining Pranksters. The abandoned Pranksters go their own ways.



# Chapter XXI The Fugitive

## Chapter XXI The Fugitive Summary and Analysis

Kesey makes his way into Mexico with Boise and his van. Zonker and Jim Fish come along for the ride. The border is easy to pass and obtaining a visa presents no problem. Fish decides to return to the States, as does Boise after depositing Kesey, Zonker and a young woman, whom Kesey names Black Maria, in Puerto Vallarta. Here Kesey becomes engulfed in paranoia, a game where he imagines the police are about to capture him, and he runs into the jungle for a few days. Black Maria signals that the coast is clear for him to return by hanging one of Zonker's bright yellow shirts on the outside clothesline.

Wolfe's style attempts to bring the reader into Kesey's mind, zooming along on amphetamines and marijuana. The narrative often jumps about through incomplete concepts or cascades words in long passages that might resemble the rapping from Acid Tests. The use of movie narrative brings in the idea that life is like a movie, especially while on drugs.

Black Maria, a woman who seems Mexican but is actually a San Jose native named Carolyn Hannah, understands that Kesey's paranoia is largely illusionary and intensified by the drugs. Yes, the American authorities are looking for Kesey, but they are not about to enter the house at any minute, the workers outside the house are not actually police officers or FBI agents, and Kesey's hiding place on the roof of the house is woefully ineffective. She also knows that Kesey enjoys playing the fugitive game and plays along with him.

Kesey's and Mountain Girl's scheme to fake his suicide fails miserably. None of the anticipated setups work. The old truck is towed up a hill instead of smashing into a tree, the boots that were supposed to be thrown on the beach end up sinking in the ocean, and the suicide note is not convincing to anyone. The California papers soon find out about Kesey's whereabouts and publish articles on the subject.

The author extends his odd writing style to describe Mexico as a place of mostly squalor with a few tourist areas along the Western coast. The image of rats carries through from the impoverished Mexican towns to the Americanized tourist areas. A mention of pathetic old beatniks living in pathetic little Mexican villages as the beatniks have nowhere else to go intensifies the sense of poverty and hopelessness. Meanwhile, young hip heads (drug users) pour in from the States, one of them being Black Maria, a friend of Zonker's and a college student who uses the money her mother gave her for school to follow Zonker to Mexico and Ken Kesey. Wolfe implies that this is a common situation for the period as young college students drop out and try to become like the Merry Pranksters.



# Chapter XXII Diablo!

## Chapter XXII Diablo! Summary and Analysis

Babbs decides to take the bus to Mexico and meet up with Kesey. Mountain Girl is well along in her pregnancy and was let off lightly for her charge of marijuana possession. However, instead of doing what the court expects of her, she heads to Mexico with Babbs and the remaining Pranksters. Zonker makes arrangements to meet the bus at Mazatlan because he, Kesey and Black Maria have fled Puerto Vallarta. When the bus arrives at the rendezvous point, Mexicans gather around and exclaim, "Diablo!" Kesey and the others arrive late in an old car with no windows.

An invasion of American heads into the impoverished Mexico is taking place. Kesey has attracted many of them by making the country a kind of Mecca for the drug culture. This is the primary reason he leaves Puerto Vallarta as the California papers have told everyone where he is, and too many people crowd in to be near their heroic acid head, super-paranoid that the police are about to capture him at any moment.





# Chapter XXIII The Red Tide

## Chapter XXIII The Red Tide Summary and Analysis

A red tide, consisting of an explosion of plankton growth in the ocean that kills anything caught in it, comes to Manzanillo. Very hot weather combined with the stench of rotting fish makes life miserable. Kesey, Faye and the children, Mountain Girl, George Walker and Black Maria live in a house by the beach. Babbs, with his children, and Gretchen Fetchin live in an old Purina Chow factory fifty yards away. They live off of money telegraphed by Kesey's lawyer from the States. Hagan has broken a leg and has enough trouble with the cast that he must be brought back to the hospital. Mountain Girl marries George Walker in order to have Mexican benefits for her soon-to-be-born daughter, Sunshine.

Sandy Lehmann-Haupt and Bob Stone show up, Sandy on a motorcycle. Kesey and the Pranksters try to make the best of the Mexican situation by doing odd things while high on drugs. Kesey has his experience with the electric suit and comes up with the idea that the whole acid scene has to move beyond simply getting stoned and glimpsing what might be, rather than becoming what might be.



# Chapter XXIV The Mexican Bust

## Chapter XXIV The Mexican Bust Summary and Analysis

While Kesey rides in a van toward Guadalajara, the Mexican Federales stop him, Hagen and another Prankster named Ram Rod at a road block. The Federales find marijuana in the van and start to arrest Kesey and the others. Kesey runs for it and makes it to a moving train that he jumps and rides into Guadalajara.

A young Mexican named Mario lets Kesey sleep in his apartment. Kesey suspects that Mario is homosexual, but this turns out to be untrue, or at least Mario does not make any advances. Kesey goes to the American consulate and is given a few pesos. He buys a bus ticket back to Manzanillo, and the bus driver gives him a few more pesos, demonstrating the natural kindness of the poor Mexicans. Back in Manzanillo, Kesey feels that he will be captured and extradited to America soon, and more Pranksters arrive from America with the bus.



# Chapter XXV Secret Agent Number One

## Chapter XXV Secret Agent Number One Summary and Analysis

Page discovers a Mexican undercover officer watching the Pranksters. Babbs and Page confront the officer who tells a ridiculous story about being with Mexican Naval Intelligence. Cassady flips his sledge hammer, a habit he has developed, a short distance away. He suddenly pitches the sledge at a brick near to the undercover officer, and the officer leaves quickly.

Babbs spots the officer the next day walking on the beach and invites him to a Polynesian restaurant. Kesey is ready to run for it and drives to a bluff overlooking the ocean where he smokes marijuana with a Prankster named Stone. Kesey decides that running for it is of no use, but pulling the undercover officer into the Prankster movie might work. He draws a parallel with the movie *Casablanca* and how Rick, the main character played by Humphrey Bogart, handles himself around authority. Kesey and Stone join Babbs and the undercover officer in the bar of the Polynesian restaurant.

The undercover agent shows his badge, and Babbs calls him Secret Agent Number One. The agent tells stories of his exploits, mostly busting Americans for marijuana possession. Kesey invites him to a party the next evening, which turns out to be the first Mexican Acid Test.

After the low-key Acid Test at which the undercover agent never shows up, everyone gets on the bus and heads to Guadalajara, where they put on an Acid Test that lasts for two nights. The next stop is Aguascalientes up in the mountains. Here Sandy talks Hagen out of a large and expensive piece of recording equipment, the Ampex that Kesey had refused him the last time he returned to New York for treatment. Sandy takes the recorder to the city airport and decides to ship it by rail back to the States, then rides his motorcycle back to New York City.

The Pranksters and Kesey go to Mexico City and a few other locations before deciding to return to the States. Kesey picks Brownsville, Texas as the entry point. He rents a horse and rides up to the crossing guard, disguised as a drunken cowboy singer with a guitar prop and cowboy hat. The crossing guard lets him by, but not the horse.

A theme runs through the chapter: People are often not who they seem to be. The undercover officer is not fully honest about himself even after showing his badge. Sandy's betrayal of the Pranksters indicates that he never was fully on the bus, although he thinks he was. Kesey's border crossing also crosses the top of high satire, but the ruse works. Motivations differ, but the common tactic is to become something one is not, to play a role and thereby gain a desire.



Kesey's wish to control his universe seems to be coming true. He purposefully selects a border crossing ruse that is so outrageously false as to be credible, a fine job of acting and selecting an appropriate role. His selection of location is highly important as well. The remote Texas crossing allows the ruse to be credible, whereas it would never work on the California border guards. Kesey may not be able to change the universe, but he can change the scenes in his personal movie.



# Chapter XXVI The Cops and Robbers Game

## Chapter XXVI The Cops and Robbers Game Summary and Analysis

Kesey goes to Palo Alto, California, where he stays with an unnamed friend and partakes in a San Francisco State College Acid Test, where the use of LSD has become popular. The Hells Angels escort Kesey, and no police officer dares stop the Angels. Kesey raps over the PA system in a gymnasium where The Acid Test takes place.

The hippie scene confuses the police. There is nothing to compare it with, and an LSD user like Kesey seems too healthy to be on drugs. Others do not look so good, but everyone is getting along well enough in Haight-Ashbury and its carnival-like atmosphere. The Grateful Dead's popularity has risen. Black people have moved away from the acid heads, because LSD destroys coolness, and a kind of cool-square White status develops. Almost everyone is on probation from drug busts, and Wolfe coins it the Probation Generation.

The Merry Pranksters return to San Francisco and take up residence in the Warehouse, the setting of Chapter I. Kesey and Owsley debate the LSD scene in an apartment, Owsley maintaining that drugs are necessary and Kesey that they are not, in reference to being in the alternative reality. A young man unwittingly insults Terry the Tramp, a Hells Angel. Terry humiliates the young man and nearly does violence to him, but some Pranksters talk him out of it. The author explains how the Hells Angels scare the hip acid heads as they still think within middle class values, while the Angels are fully outlaws on the edge.

Kesey pops up here and there, and even appears on television. He plays a fugitive game that Wolfe compares to The Scarlet Pimpernel, a hero from classical literature. This comes to a halt on October 20th when the police capture Kesey.



# Chapter XXVII The Graduation

## Chapter XXVII The Graduation Summary and Analysis

Kesey appears in court and his lawyers successfully convince the judge to let him post bail. He is up for other charges in San Francisco, but the lawyers are successful there, too. Kesey is back on the street after only five days in the criminal justice system. His status of the dominant leader in the LSD world suffers, because people think he has abandoned principles to stay out of jail.

Many of the old Pranksters who drifted away once Babbs took over return to San Francisco to partake in the Graduation. Plans for the Graduation fall apart, but it is held in the Warehouse anyway on Halloween. The ensuing party is covered by the press and visited by the police, and reaches climax with a faux graduation ceremony involving diplomas.

The Pranksters try to do a musical performance and fail. The old energy is not there. People in the venue leave, because they do not understand what is going on, and in fact the Pranksters are doing nothing. They leave Babbs and Kesey on stage, and the last two Pranksters rap to each other through headphones and strum guitars.

This melodramatic ending fits with the heroic structure of the book. Kesey tried to bring something about and failed. There is nothing more to do with the bus, the Merry Pranksters, the rest of the world or the universe. LSD has turned out to be a farce, only a key to the door but not a visa to stay on the other side. Kesey and Babbs might be on the other side, but few others have the ability to follow. Somehow the visa must be earned, not forged. And there are no shortcuts.



# Epilogue

## Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Kesey, his family and a Prankster named Ram Rod take the bus to his home town, Springfield, Oregon. The other Pranksters scatter around the country and to Mexico. Kesey gets off easy on a third felony count by pleading no contest to a lesser charge, this after the prosecution finds it impossible to secure a trial-by-jury conviction. He serves only five months on a work farm. Cassidy's body is found and cremated. The cause of death is unknown, although drugs played a role. Kesey takes up writing again, and a few of the Pranksters come by from time to time.



# Characters

## Ken Kesey (Chief)

Ken Kesey is a gifted writer who earns his way into Stanford University. An athletic man, he comes from an Oregon upbringing after having been born in La Junta, Colorado, an upbringing that is solidly all-American in the 1940s and 50s. His future looks bright as a man of letters, but something happens at Stanford to change everything. Kesey volunteers as a subject in psychoactive drug studies and encounters LSD.

At first the LSD, a legal drug at the time, causes strange and interesting changes in perception. Kesey has a difficult time explaining his experiences to the researchers, as the English language does not encompass even a small part of what Kesey has seen, felt and heard while on LSD. He later drops acid while working for a mental institution and starts writing his first successful novel.

Due to land development, Kesey takes his acid-dropping friends away from Stanford to his family's property near La Honda, California. Here Kesey develops the idea of the bus and a bus trip, the movie about the Pranksters' trip and other antics, and The Acid Test. An entire movement develops, where young people drop out of regular life to enjoy the drug culture of the 1960s. Kesey becomes the charismatic leader of a cult-like group based on drugs, not religion, although religious ideas become a part of the whole.

The police want to bust Kesey, and the only illegal drug they catch him with is marijuana. A second arrest threatens long-term prison for Kesey, so he runs to Mexico. There he comes to a realization that drugs can open the door, but everyone must take the next step. He returns to the United States to bring this message.

Kesey's trouble with the law subsides through the clever legal maneuvers of his lawyers. However, in the end, his idea of taking the next step fails.

## Faye Kesey

Faye is Ken's wife. Of all the characters, she is the most stable and reliable, a good wife and mother. Usually in the background, her importance is understated in the book. Without Faye, the Pranksters would not have eaten as well as they did. Ken would not have had the time to concentrate on his projects, and their children would have been criminally neglected.

Faye's short appearance at the Warehouse significantly impacts Wolfe, who is there in person. She is strikingly beautiful and carries with her a strong air of small-town family values, not the political hype that this term has absorbed over the ensuing years. Her focus is truly on the family without any hidden agendas. Wolfe does not document her





involvement in the drug culture, if there is any. An assumption can be made that she finds little interest in alternative realities or dangerous activity. She has children to tend.

When Ken departs for Mexico, he leaves everything to Faye. She is still the most important woman in his life, more important than his quest for a higher level of consciousness through drugs but not so important that he is willing to do jail time in the States. When he returns to face the legal music, Faye is in the Warehouse waiting for him, along with the other Pranksters. Her quiet loyalty to Ken Kesey is unflappable.

## **Kenneth Babbs (Babbs)**

Babbs can be considered Kesey's best friend. The two lead the Pranksters in their merry pranks, and when Kesey leaves the States for Mexico, Babbs naturally takes over the role of Prankster leadership. He is the only war veteran in the bunch, so he leads with a military-inspired style, not the organic and psychic style of Kesey. The Pranksters split up, some staying with Babbs, and the others wandering off. Eventually most come back together for the Graduation, but shortly after the entire group disbands. Prankster leadership becomes unimportant.

Babbs also plays the role of stage manager when setting up The Acid Tests. He is a self-disciplined man who can take charge, even while under the influence of drugs. After Kesey goes to Mexico, Babbs shows up with the bus and other Pranksters. Fetchin Gretchin ends up living with Babbs in Mexico. At the very end of the book, Babbs plays with Kesey on stage, and they work back and forth on a theme in the rapping style that the Merry Pranksters have developed. The theme is that they blew it, and the mood is mixed between a sense of having failed and a Pranksterish way of looking at reality, where they simply accept what is and mock it. Earlier in the story, Babbs does the same thing at the estate where Timothy Leary stays.

Most heroes in fiction have their sidekicks. Babbs plays sidekick to Kesey in their fantasy journey to find something that turns out to be out of reach. Babbs starts the journey with the hero, fills in when the hero is in exile, and appropriately ends the journey alongside the hero.

## **Ron Bevrit (Hassler)**

Hassler has a way with the electronic equipment used for recording and broadcasting, and the bus. He is the technical wizard of the Pranksters. His Prankster name has two meanings, one is to be able to find solutions that take time and effort and another is to give authority a difficult time understanding what the Pranksters are doing. Ron hassles with the bus and hassles with the cops.

Usually the Hassler way works, but sometimes not. The Mexican authorities do not understand what these American youngsters on drugs are up to, and so attempts to confuse fail. The bedazzlement works much better on Americans, where playing with



logic either confuses thinking or knocks away an intent, such as chasing the Pranksters away from using the restroom at a gas station.

## **Neal Cassady (Speed Limit)**

Cassady takes large quantities of amphetamines seemingly without a break, and thus his Prankster name of Speed Limit. He takes speed to the limit. His movements are jerky and his speech very fast and disconnected. Cassady drives the bus in a manic fashion, somehow avoiding collisions while talking non-stop and looking everywhere but the road. His amphetamine use compresses his lifetime, and he dies rather young in his early 40s.

Jack Kerouak had based a character in his book *On The Road* using Neal Cassady as a model. Cassady has the unique characteristic of having been a hero in both the Beat Generation of the 1950s and the psychedelic movement of the 1960s. One of his more threatening habits is to flip a sledge hammer into the air and catch it, although sometimes he lets it drop as if to make a statement that things are not right. When a Mexican undercover police officer tries to interrogate the Pranksters, Cassady throws the sledge at a nearby brick and smashes it. The threat never follows all the way through with attacking someone, but hangs in the air.

## **Carolyn Hannah (Black Maria)**

Carolyn Hannah accompanies Zonker to Mexico in order to meet Kesey. Kesey names her Black Maria, possibly a reference to a figure in early American history whose nickname of Black Maria became the nickname for the paddy wagon. The name carries with it a certain amount of foreboding in any case. Black Maria is not an open person and so is naturally in conflict with the Pranksters' ideal of always being up front. She often stares out to sea, lost in her thinking. She is a lonesome person who does not seem to fit into the world, yet she causes no real problems.

## **Sandy Lehmann-Haupt (Dis-Mount)**

Sometimes Sandy is on the bus, sometimes not. Kesey understands this and talks Sandy back onto the bus, but eventually he moves away from the Pranksters. He takes an expensive piece of recording equipment that he had bought and had asked to pawn. Sandy becomes a sound engineer in New York City.

## **Page Browning (Zea-lot)**

Zea-lot is another typical Prankster with a high level of belief in Kesey's ideas. He tends to be nearby when Kesey is in trouble and works on setting up Acid Tests. Kesey's personality shadows Zea-lot's, as it does most other Pranksters.



## **Carolyn Adams (Mountain Girl)**

Mountain Girl is Kesey's confidant. He can talk for hours with her about all his ideas and what he understands to be true. She has a way of knocking people down a few notches, and the Hells Angels find it impossible to intimidate her. Mountain Girl has a daughter, Sunshine and moves on with the Grateful Dead after the Pranksters break up.

## **Beautiful Witch**

Beautiful Witch is the first casualty from drugs mentioned in the book. She takes acid and descends into psychosis, never to return. The Pranksters capture her breakdown on film.

## **Anthony Dean Wells (The Hermit)**

The Hermit is an odd fellow who keeps to himself in a cave near the La Honda property. His job is to watch the Pranksters' drug stash. The Pranksters consider him a bad trip sponge, the one who absorbs the others' bad drug experiences.

## **Paula Sundsten (Gretchen Fetchin)**

Paula changes personalities enough to take on the identity of Gretchen Fetchin, a Prankster. She personifies the transition from straight society to the drug culture.



# Objects/Places

## The Bus

The bus is an old school bus that the Pranksters paint in bright colors and take for a trip out East. The bus is a symbol for being in the drug culture that Kesey develops.

## La Honda

La Honda is a small town in Northern California near to Kesey's property. Most of Kesey's ideas develop here.

## San Francisco

The hippie scene of Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco is the center of the drug culture, and the place where Kesey's Acid Tests start developing.

## Los Angeles

The Acid Test experiments move to Los Angeles and come to a dramatic peak in Watts.

## Mexico

Kesey runs to Mexico to avoid capture for marijuana possession. He gets the idea that everyone needs to move beyond drugs here during an electrical storm.

## LSD

LSD is the primary psychoactive drug that turns Kesey and many others into Merry Pranksters.

## Amphetamine

Amphetamine is a stimulant that keeps many of the heads going and is the ruin of Cassady.



## **Marijuana**

Marijuana is ubiquitous in the drug culture. Every other trip involves smoking marijuana, and it is the illegal drug that the police catch Kesey possessing. An ironic situation for the time is that marijuana is illegal, while LSD is not.

## **Games**

Games are what straight people unwittingly play and the Pranksters try to avoid.

## **Movies**

Movies are larger than games. The Pranksters have their movie, and they try to draw people into it. A movie can be considered an entire lifestyle. The Pranksters record their abstract movie to physical film.



# Themes

## Alternative Reality

The discovery of the psychoactive drug LSD brings on what seems like serious academic investigation into its possible use to expand human consciousness. Timothy Leary and Alan Ginsberg are two icons of this attempt, but Ken Kesey represents the next generation of experimenters with a different take on the subject. Instead of entering the LSD alternative reality for serious research, Kesey wants to take people beyond the alternative reality illusion into something that is somehow permanent, a new level of being.

Kesey and the Pranksters see illusions in the straight world, too. People play their games and draw each other into movies, symbolized by shiny black shoes with laces. The Pranksters rebel against the straight world by being anything but straight. The Day-Glo bus is the strongest symbol of this rebellion, along with Prankster behavior while on the bus. The voice of the rebellion is Prankster music, which The Grateful Dead bring into mainstream music as acid rock, sometimes known as rock jazz.

The very nature of reality is illusion, as Kesey discovers. Nobody can experience reality through other than the senses, and there is always a split second delay from reality to when the brain detects it. The alternative reality is simply trading the normal form of illusion with an abnormal form, where psychoactive drugs distort the senses. The associated euphoria is a natural phenomenon in the brain that comes nearly on demand through drug use, possibly the strongest attractor to the drug culture of the period.

Another strong attractor is to leave a known home environment and become part of a hip crowd. The alternative reality does not necessarily involve drugs, although in this case drug use is part of being hip. The act of leaving home life can take other forms, such as joining the military, going off to college or leaving the hometown for work in another area. Kesey and his Pranksters do offer a destination for young people leaving the nest, and this destination is full of mystery, danger and certain promises to overcome hang-ups.

## Seeking

People have sought alternative realities throughout the ages. Sometimes drugs are used, sometimes the brain chemistry is altered through fasting or in some other manner stressing the body. Mystic associations usually follow, as they do with LSD experiences. Older mystical writers start to make sense, and the Pranksters refer to these people as having had been heads like themselves, seekers of another life, one that is supposedly superior to what is considered straight life.

The idea is to find new territory, something worthwhile. Kesey receives a sense of this during an electrical storm while in Mexico and tries to bring people to the next level.



Drug use has recreational value only to a certain extent. Then it becomes opening a door, walking through it for a period of time, returning to the outside and repeating the process. Kesey wants people to walk through the door and stay in the alternative reality, something that might be impossible without drug use. The question becomes if drugs are the door openers, can the door ever be opened without drugs? Some have opened similar doors through meditation, or so it seems, and the means to the end might be restrictive in that drugs require drugs and meditations require meditations to open the door and keep it open.

Another possibility is that a very tiny minority of human beings have the capacity to open the door, cross to the other side and remain there. If this is so, an explanation of the impossibility of Kesey's seeking can be constructed. First of all, Kesey is an exceptional human being with charisma, leadership, talent and insight. Not all people have these characteristics. Second, drug use is an artificial way of opening the door, a shortcut. As such the means to the end can never be permanent without being an exceptional human being. A third factor is desire. Most people do not desire to open the door and remain on the other side forever. A little recreational visit is sufficient, even terrifying. Remaining there leads to insanity and the inability to function, a kind of living death. The basic question here is whether what Kesey seeks is worthwhile or a form of suicide.

## Social Structures

The Pranksters like to think of themselves as being totally apart from human society, individuals completely honest with other Pranksters and themselves. Yet human society is more than our invented forms of government and our developed social protocols. The Pranksters demonstrate the inherent need for people to develop social structures, no matter the environment or state of mind.

Kesey is the charismatic leader. His absence causes the Pranksters to split up and lose direction. Faye is the mother. She cooks for all, watches out for her children, but does not partake in the rest of the social structure. The Pranksters have levels of importance in an undefined hierarchy that exists but is not acknowledged in an upfront manner, but Tom Wolfe sees it from a distance. Any non-member of the group can see the hierarchy if the Pranksters are studied enough.

A common element in any social structure is the idea of those who belong and those who do not. The Pranksters talk about being on the bus or off the bus, which means either being a Prankster or not. There is no partial membership to the group, although plenty of people hang around the peripherals. However, to the Pranksters, being a Prankster is a special thing, similar to the way members of other groups think of themselves. Examples include military personnel, college professors, accomplished musicians, members of religious groups, and any secret society like the Masons. This need to be somehow special is deep within the human psyche, and the Pranksters are no exception to the rule.

# Style

## Perspective

Tom Wolfe describes in the Author's Note how he researches the book. He has never taken LSD or any of the other drugs that his subjects use, but he has access to the films, recordings and writings that the Merry Pranksters have made. Combined with interviews, his research materials far outweigh the finished book. No single Prankster could have written as objectively, including Ken Kesey. They are all too much into their subjective experiences. By necessity, only an author looking in from the outside can maintain objectivity.

The author writes for both drug users and straight people. The drug users will see themselves in the text, while straight people might come to a deeper understanding of the 1960s drug culture. Value judgments are left to the reader. Wolfe describes what people do without trying to analyze why people behave the way they do. He does point out ironies, such as the hierarchy of power that develops regardless of the Pranksters' desire to avoid games with each other.

Wolfe is a master in the use of unconventional English to give impressions of the way drug users perceive reality. He is credited with being one of the first New Journalists to use the techniques of fiction in nonfiction, an appropriate and necessary approach to the subject. The Pranksters live in a world far different from normal experience. Normal writing cannot reflect the states of mind brought on through drug use, often extreme drug abuse.

## Tone

Tone moves from straight reporting of what was said and done to highly stylized flows that use invented words and punctuations. Wolfe directly quotes the subjects throughout, sometimes giving lengthy narratives that tell entire stories. He uses all the senses of sight, sound, smell/taste and touch to build mood, along with attitudes of the subjects. These attitudes might be levity in a party way, despair over impending failure, insanity from drug abuse, or danger from an aroused Hells Angel.

Wolfe keeps remarkably objective about drug use and abuse. His subjects might act foolishly, but he lets their actions speak for themselves. Their thoughts might be muddled or have the inane feature of being the obvious colored by drug influences, but he simply presents the thoughts without comment other than necessary expository passages. Ken Kesey might be a fool or an influential leader—Wolfe does not make that determination.

A subtle pathos arises from the stories, possibly not an intended effect but something inherent to the drug culture of the 1960s. Young people live in squalor; their costumes are ridiculous, yet have fashion rules (no shiny black shoes with laces); the music does





not appeal to ears not on drugs; the great things they think are happening are all drug-induced illusions. The Acid Tests were doomed to failure from the beginning, and graduating the Tests is meaningless tripe. Yet that whole culture has a tremendous appeal to the youth of the time and presents a serious threat to the preceding beat generation. The deep pathos is that, in the end, it all means nothing. Kesey blew it, but there was nothing to gain or lose all along.

## Structure

Kesey starts toward the end of the story and flashes back to the beginning, a technique taken directly from fiction. The reader expects certain things to happen, such as survival through life-threatening situations for the characters presented in the first chapter before the flashback. This is one of the weaknesses of the technique, because it reduces potential suspense. On the other hand, the full ending of the story can draw the reader forward, along with the satisfaction of discovering why certain things happened in the opening chapter.

Wolfe also plots the book. The story has its beginning, middle and end with a few subplots along the way, such as Mountain Girl's growth into a woman and mother. Cassady's self-destructive abuse of amphetamines leads to an early death, as mentioned in the Epilogue. The Pranksters experience a split after Kesey runs to Mexico. The main plot is all about Kesey otherwise, his rise to prominence, his fall from grace, and his failed attempt to resurrect. The drugs change the story significantly, but the plot is as old as literature. As such, it works.

Every protagonist needs an antagonist. With Kesey, his great enemy consists of the police who want to bust him on illegal drug use, while his next greatest enemy is himself. A talented writer, he abandons his promising career in favor of a drug-induced vision that leads nowhere. He enjoys a brief period of fame, if not fortune, that degenerates quickly. The joke is on him. Faye Kesey plays the role of supporting character, a mother figure among adults acting as children. Babbs is the sidekick, Cassady the crazed warrior, Mountain Girl the confidant. An ironic element comes in with the Pranksters' movie, their recording of a long, strange journey that inspires a commercial version done by the Beatles.

Allegory does not need to be used. The entire story involves allegory in the form of the Pranksters' pranks, The Acid Tests and the Graduation. They are allegories taken past the brink of lampoon and into tragedy. A religion began to bloom and withered away. It was bound to happen, as the basis is an illusion brought on by drugs. Ancient mystics might have been able to get away with it, but mystic credibility is a hard commodity to find in the modern world.

## Quotes

"The cops now know the whole scene, even the costumes, the jesuschrist strung-out hair, Indian beads, Indian headbands, donkey beads, temple bells, amulets, mandalas, god's-eyes, fluorescent vests, unicorn horns, Errol Flynn dueling shirts—but they still don't know about the shoes. The heads have a thing about shoes. The worst are shiny black shoes with shoelaces in them. The hierarchy ascends from there, although practically all lowcut shoes are unhip, from there on up to the boots the heads like, light, fanciful boots. English boots of the mod variety, if that is all they can get, but better something like hand-tooled Mexican boots with Caliente Dude Triple A toes on them. So see the FBI—black—shiny—laced up—FBI shoes—when the FBI finally grabbed Kesey —" (p. 3).

"But my mind is wandering. I am having a hard time listening because I am fascinated by a little plastic case with a toothbrush and toothpaste in it that Hassler has tucked under one thumb. It is shuddering around in front of my eyes as Hassler's hands opposition . . . What a curious bunch of bohos. This guy with the generals' stars on his jersey is giving a kind of vesper service lecture on the sins of man and—a toothbrush!—but of course!—he brushes after every meal!—he really does. He brushes after every meal despite the fact that they are living here in this garage, like gypsies, and there is no hot water, no toilet, no beds, except for a couple of mattresses in which the dirt, the dust, the damp, and the scuds are all one, melded, with the stuffing, and they stretch out on the scaffoldings, in the bus, in the back of a pickup truck, nostrils mildewing—" (pp. 19-20).

"—well, freaking gibberish to normal human ears, most likely. Or, to the receptive standard intellectual who has heard about the 1913 Armory Show and Erik Satie and Edgard Varese and John Cage it might sound . . . sort of avant-garde, you know. But in fact, like everything else here, it grows out of . . . the experience, with LSD. The whole other world that LSD opened your mind to existed only in the moment itself—Now—and any attempt to plan, compose, orchestrate, write a script, only locked you out of the moment, back in the world of conditioning and training where the brain was a reducing valve . . ." (p. 59)

"But meanwhile Hagen's Beauty Witch, in the contagion of the moment, has slipped to the refrigerator and taken some acid, and now she is outside of the bus on the desert sand wearing a black snakeskin blouse and a black mantle, with her long black hair coming down over it like in a pre-Raphaelite painting and a cosmic grin on her witch-white face, lying down on the desert, striking poses and declaiming in couplets" (p. 76).

"He goes down to the water where the Pranksters all are, a little inlet, and it is dark and placid and he gets in and wades out until the water laps almost even with his mouth, which makes it very secure and warm and calm and nice and he looks at the stars and then at a bridge in the distance. All he can see of the bridge is the lights on it, swooping strands of lights, rising, rising, rising—and just then Chuck Kesey comes gliding toward him through the water, smiling, like a great friendly fish. Chuck knows and it is very nice



—and the lights of the bridge keep rising, rising, until they merge with the stars, until there is a bridge leading right up into heaven" (p. 98).

"Then Kesey devised a game called 'Power.' He took a dartboard and covered it with Masonite and put a spinner in the middle and marked off spoke lines forming one section for each Prankster. Each person's Prankster name was written in his section, Intrepid Traveler for Babbs, Mal Function for Hagen, Speed Limit for Cassady, Hassler for Ron Bevrit, Gretchen Fetchin for Paula—in truth, her old name and persona were gone entirely and she was now a new person known as Gretchen Fetchin or Gretch. Sandy looked and in his section is said: "dis-MOUNT," with the heavy accent on Mount, even as he had explained it to Kesey in the backhouse. He was overwhelmed with relief and gratitude. Kesey knew! Kesey understood! He was back in the bus" (p. 115).

"Dusk! Huge stripes of Day-Glow green and orange ran up the soaring redwoods and gleamed out at dusk as if Nature had said at last, Aw freak it, and had freaked out. Up in the gully back of the house, up past the Hermit's Cave, were Day-Glo face masks and boxes and machines and things that glowed, winked, hummed, whistled, bellowed, and microphones that could pick up animals, hermits, anything, and broadcast them from the treetops, like the crazy gibbering rhesus background noises from the old Jungle Jim radio shows" (p. 138).

"The Pranksters got pretty close to several of the Angels as individuals. Particularly Gut and Freewheeling Frank and Terry the Tramp. Every now and then somebody would take one or another of the Angels up into the tree house and give them a real initiation into psychedelics. They had a huge supply of DMT. As somebody once put it, LSD is a long strange journey, DMT is like being shot out of a cannon. There in the tree house, amid the winking googaws, they would give the Angles DMT, and Mountain Girl saw one of them, like Freewheeling Frank, after they came down. They would walk around in no particular direction, listing slightly, the eyes bugged wide open, glazed. 'They were as naked as an Angel is ever gonna git,' she told Kesey" (pp. 180-181).

"Christ! how many movements before them had run into this selfsame problem. Every vision, every insight of the . . . original . . . circle always came out of the new experience . . . the kairos . . . and how to tell it! How to get across to the multitudes who have never had this experience themselves? You couldn't put it into words. You had to create conditions in which they would feel an approximation of that feeling, the sublime kairos. You had to put them into ecstasy . . . Buddhist monks immersing themselves in cosmic love through fasting and contemplation, Hindus zonked out in Bhaki, which is fervent love in the possession of God, ecstasies flooding themselves with Krishna through sexual orgies or plunging into the dinners of the Bacchanalia, Christians off in Edge City through Gnostic onanism or the Heart of Jesus or the Child Jesus with its running sore —or—  
The Acid Tests" (pp. 230-231).

"Finally, even at the Watts test they wear down, and those who are not into the pudding



begin to drift off, and the Prankster diehards and a few discoverers like Clair Brush are still there, and Norman can tell it is coming, the magic hour, and Hassler gets up in a blue pageboy costume and does a funny beautiful slow dance to the music that is just perfect . . . and Page is working behind him with the projectors, the film projectors and the slide projectors, and he sets up a really kind of gorgeous collage, moving projections on top of still projections . . . and the Pranksters sit amazed and delighted and he makes slow changes, abstract patterns and projections from the slides and . . . it all fits together . . . everything . . ." (p. 281).

"Three thousand years ago Mountain Girl walks down to the water, the backwater, every day to wash clothes, diapers and sundry other shit; every day walking through the heat waves under the salty sun through the scrub grass and dung sand, to wash clothes, by the waters of the . . . Nile and the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it . . . it is as if she is walking down to the river and she is watching herself, a maiden, 3,000 years ago, walking down to the river, at the same time, in . . . the Middle East; it is always the Middle East somehow, out of an old illustrated Bible; 110 degrees, bulrushes and the eternal laundry bummer; nothing to read here but The Nova Express by William Burroughs; the Nietzsche and Dostoevsky that Kesey has; and in the Bible; everybody goes through Nova Express in a couple of hours; but the Bible they can linger over . . . and gradually without anybody hardly saying anything about it, without getting high even, they are in another time dimension; biblical tribe, biblical tribeswoman washing in the water; living like the children of Isaac and Rebecca in the First Book; even taking biblical identities; they each choose, become a character in the Bible; in truth; it is 3,000 years ago, now stretching back infinitely to . . . the very Genesis; to Esau; Kesey is Esau; the hairy one; and Esau was a cunning hunter; a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents; 13" (pp. 314-315).

"About 4,500 feet away, Sandy rested in the shadow behind a big corrugated tin shed. Out in the open sun there—the runway of the Aguascalientes airport with brown Mexicans in coveralls lollygagging around. Sandy had been a man of his word, up to a given point, so to speak. He had gone a couple of blocks, like he said. Then he took a right and rode on over to the city airport and parked behind the shed . . . and waited . . . and was Kesey really so far into Now, such a master precognition, that he would shoot the Zen arrow . . . or let him draw it, rather, and come straight there and hassle him upside the bus again and in that moment let him know irrevocably who has the Power, the control over his mind forever . . . (p. 341).

"He says it with a tone you have to hear to fully comprehend. It is the patented Hell's Angels tone of soft grinning menace, kind of like the tone the second-story man uses on the watchdog, 'Come here fel-la . . . (SO I CAN SQUASH YOUR HEAD WITH THIS BRICK).' He says it soft, but it stops the whole room like High Noon" (p. 363).



## Topics for Discussion

What is Ken Kesey trying to accomplish?

How prevalent is illegal drug use today?

Why should people not trust a Prankster, including other Pranksters?

What are the rules of the primary game that you play?

Describe your movie.

Why do Kesey and Babbs think they blew it?

What positives and negatives developed from the drug culture of the 1960s?

What are the differences and similarities between The Acid Tests and a current rock concert?

What are the ethical implications of giving LSD-laced Kool-Aid to unsuspecting people?

Why are some drugs illegal while others are not?

Which hip terms of the 1960s are in use today? Have the meanings changed over time?

Describe current scientific thought regarding the impacts of chemicals on a normally functioning human brain.

What is the difference between illusion and reality?

Speculate why Mountain Girl decided to marry and give birth to her daughter, Sunshine.

Characterize Faye Kesey in relation to her husband and the Pranksters.

How are Kesey and his Pranksters like a religious cult?