



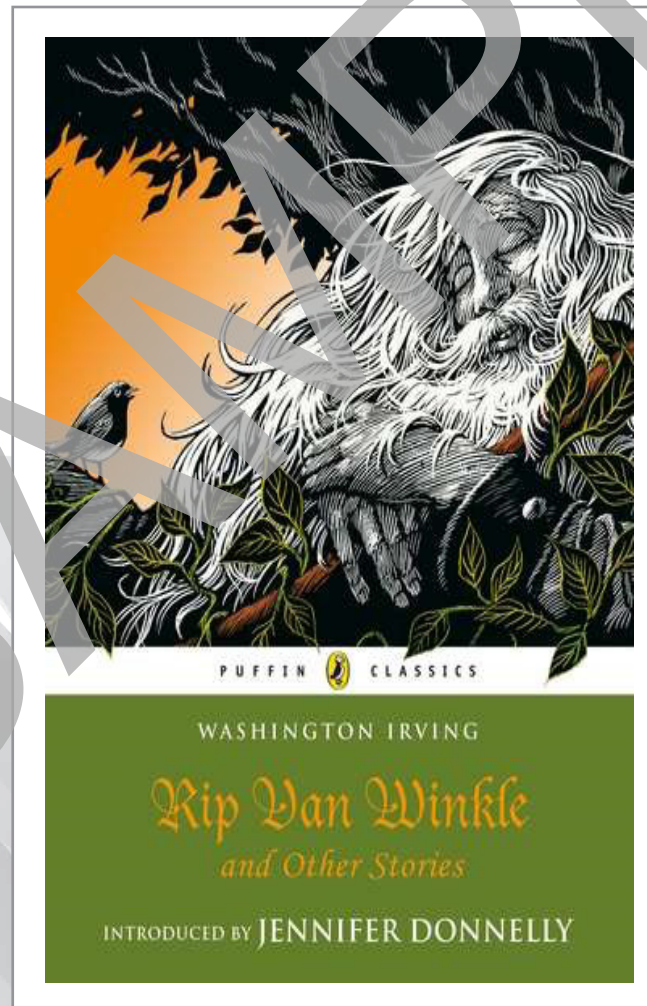
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **Rip Van Winkle and Other Stories**

Washington Irving



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Rip Van Winkle and Other Stories

Washington Irving

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Research, identifying attributes,  
compare/contrast, evaluation

### Vocabulary

Glossary, definitions, part of  
speech, synonym/antonym,  
context

### Listening/Speaking

Interview preparation,  
discussion, oral report

### Comprehension

Analysis, prediction,  
cause/effect, summarization

### Writing

Interview, newspaper article,  
eulogy, descriptive writing,  
ghost story, blog review, essay

### Literary Elements

Characterization, setting, theme,  
point of view, symbolism,  
figurative language, genre,  
conflict

### Across the Curriculum

Geography—Catskill Mountains;  
History—Revolutionary War, May  
Day, early-American politics;  
Art—sculpture, painting,  
caricature, cartoon, sketch

**Genre:** short story; tales range from fantasy to romance

**Setting:** varies; i.e., English countryside, Kaatsberg (Catskill) Mountains, Sleepy Hollow

**Point of View:** varies between first and third person

**Themes:** romance, death, education, pride, fear, family, freedom, justice, revolution

**Tone:** varies; mysterious, humorous, poetic, introspective

**Date of First Publication:** 1905 (this collection)

## About the Author

Washington Irving was born in New York City on April 3, 1783. He was the youngest of 11 children born to parents of Scottish-English heritage. He was named after George Washington, of whom his parents were supporters. Irving never married, though he was once engaged to a young girl named Matilda Hoffman, who died in 1809 at age 17. When he was in America, he shared a home, Sunnyside, with his brother and his brother's five children. Though known as an author, Irving was trained as a lawyer. He held honorary degrees from Oxford, Columbia, and Harvard. Irving was elected to the Spanish Real Academia de la Historia in 1828 and received a gold medal in history from the Royal Society of Literature in London in 1830. In 1842, President Tyler appointed Irving as the Minister to Spain. Irving wrote about the places he visited using his own name and pseudonyms, including Diedrich Knickerbocker. One of his favorite places was the lower Hudson Valley near Tarrytown, New York, which was the inspiration for the fictional Sleepy Hollow. It served as the setting for his famous short story by the same name. Irving died surrounded by family on November 28, 1859, just on the eve of the Civil War. He was buried in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Sleepy Hollow, New York. He is hailed as the "father of American literature" because he transformed the genre, making it popular, interesting, and reflective of the times in which he lived. He is also credited with writing the first American history book, *Life of Columbus*, which came out of his diplomatic career.

## Background Information

Use the following information to help students understand Irving's use of frame story, a narrative technique that sets up a story within a story. The frame story leads readers from the main story to a smaller one within it.

Washington Irving gained international fame with the publication of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, a collection of short stories and essays that included "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle." In the collection, Irving introduced his pseudonymous narrator, Geoffrey Crayon. He continued to use the pseudonym of Crayon throughout his literary career. The charming personality of Crayon appealed to readers and held Irving's tales together, thus organizing his set of short stories.

Prior to writing *The Sketch Book*, Irving had created a fictitious author for his first literary triumph, *Knickerbocker's History of New York*. Diedrich Knickerbocker was later mentioned in the original title of Irving's most famous work, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow: Found Among the Papers of the Late Diedrich Knickerbocker." Irving used the eccentric, crusty Dutch historian as a fictional narrator to garner public interest.

## “Rip Van Winkle,” pp. 1–29

### Vocabulary

primitive	scanty	lore	merit
scrupulous	imprint	barometers	meekness
universal	amiable	clambering	aversion
obliging	incessantly	torrent	tart
perpetual	vehemently	emit	placid
reciprocated	precipice	impending	fancy
yield	gully	perpendicular	melancholy
uncouth	reiterated	impenetrable	invariably
recurrence	altered	forlorn	jargon
corroborated	vigil	hereditary	fidelity
venerable			

### Challenge Words

deference	martial	malleable	termagant
impunity	pestilent	urchin	dinning
volley	adherent	crest	gallows
shad	rubicund	junto	approbation
virago	singularity	transient	surmounted
quaffed	gambol	cur	connubial
metamorphosed	disputatious	haranguing	austere
torpor	despotism	propitiated	

**Political Satire:** Historical allusions and symbolic characters mockingly compare colonial life under British rule to the democracy of the young United States.

Rip Van Winkle, beloved among the townspeople but henpecked by his wife, leaves a small colonial British town with his dog for a retreat from the nagging. He encounters a short man with a beard dressed in unusual, antiquated Dutch clothing. The stranger asks Rip to help him carry a heavy barrel and leads him to an amphitheatre where other men dressed in similar clothing are bowling ninepins. Rip repeatedly tastes some of their drink and falls into a deep sleep. He awakens about 20 years later—completely missing the Revolutionary War. He finds that his wife is dead. He is reacquainted with his now-grown children and continues his life in the peaceful freedom of the small village.

### Discussion Questions

1. Where is the story set? (*The story is set in a small village originally founded by the Dutch in New York’s Catskill Mountains, several years before the Revolutionary War. The story concludes after Americans win the war and establish the United States of America.*)
2. How does the author frame the story? Who is Diedrich Knickerbocker? (*The author frames the story as told by the historical author Diedrich Knickerbocker. This author is fictional, and Irving has used this name as a pen name. Note: Irving adapted the story from a German tale, changing the setting and origins of the characters to reflect colonial America.*)

3. Describe the character of Rip Van Winkle. *(Answers will vary. Rip is lazy and carefree. He lives with a nagging wife who always has work for him but never offers encouragement. As a result, Rip avoids his own home and land as much as possible. He cares little for money, so he avoids work that results in any material profit. He is not a disciplinarian to his children. He visits his neighbors and helps them with odd jobs, so while he is badgered at home, he finds solace in the community. Some critics consider Rip an anti-hero—someone who makes success of failure.)*
4. Describe Rip Van Winkle's wife. What are the effects of their relationship? *(She continually nags Rip to do various chores around the house. Everything he does results in a lecture. She is described as an overbearing wife and a shrew. While the author describes Rip's propensity to stay away from his home and household duties, Irving also employs sarcasm to discuss the "benefits" of a nagging wife. Namely, Rip is meek and malleable as a result of her tyranny. In a larger sense, Rip represents America. He is oppressed by Dame Van Winkle, or the tyrannical rule of the British.)*
5. What happens to Rip when he is out with his dog, Wolf? Whom does he meet, and what does he see and do? *(He originally is out in the highest parts of the mountains squirrel hunting when he hears someone calling his name. The stranger is a stout man with an unkempt beard dressed in old-fashioned Dutch clothes similar to those of early colonial settlers. The man asks Rip to help him with his load, and Rip obliges. They carry on in silence until entering an amphitheatre where other men, in similar attire to the stranger, are bowling ninepins, creating a loud, thundering sound. Rip helps himself to the men's strange drink, falls asleep, and awakens on the same grassy knoll where he had originally seen the old man.)*
6. What surprises Rip when he awakens? What clues does the author give as to what has occurred? *(His gun looks different, and he cannot find Wolf. He has a long beard. The gun is described as old, indicating it could be the same weapon, just one that has been worn with age. He sees a dog resembling Wolf in town, but this dog is hostile toward Rip. The larger clues come when Rip finds his house empty and at the Union Hotel he sees a picture of General Washington in place of King George's. It is only clear once Rip recognizes his own daughter, now grown, and sees his own son, who looks much like himself at that age, that Rip realizes decades have passed.)*
7. Describe the similarities and differences in the town Rip reenters 20 years after he left for his walk with Wolf. What do the people think of Rip? *(Rip's own house is there but is dilapidated and abandoned. The town is larger and more populous, with new houses unfamiliar to Rip. The residents are also unfamiliar and dress in a different fashion. It is situated the same—Rip can see the Hudson River and the mountains in the same places as before. No one recognizes Rip at first, and everyone is very concerned with his political affiliation, something that did not matter when all people were subjects of the King of England. When Rip professes his allegiance to King George, he is almost attacked for being a Tory. He is saved, however, after recognizing his grown daughter and older inhabitants of the community confirm his identity.)*
8. What does the term "petticoat government" mean? Has Rip changed as a result of his freedom from petticoat government? *(The town has transitioned from being a colony of the British Empire to an independent, democratic republic under the rule of the people. The petticoat reference is historical satire. "Petticoat" is a feminine term, and Dame Van Winkle represents the overbearing control of King George and the English rule of the colonies. Rip's actions show that he is relieved to be out from under his wife's [Britain's] harsh control, or petticoat government, yet Irving mocks the lack of important change in America. The post-Revolutionary Rip is still lazy and carefree, characterizing the young democracy as lacking values. Rip enjoys America's plentiful resources, but he himself produces nothing.)*

9. If Dame Van Winkle represents King George of England, what other elements in the story may have historical significance? *(Answers will vary. Students may see the strangers in the mountains as the Native Americans who lived there, had one leader, wore unique clothing, and seemed at peace in the natural environment. Also note that the character of Stuyvesant refers to an actual person. He was the harsh Dutch governor of New York when the English seized it. He receives satirical respect in the story, as in reality he was blamed for allowing the English to overtake the colony. Vedder could represent a colonial governor appointed by the crown; people listen to him, yet he is powerless before the story's royal figure—Dame Van Winkle.)*
10. What purpose do the endnotes of the story serve? *(The author returns to his fictional frame to prove the legend is true, based on Knickerbocker's personal meeting with Rip Van Winkle. To add to this satire, Irving further certifies authenticity by way of a judge's pronouncement. In other words, the story must be true if a judge says it is. By trying to present such concocted "facts" as the judge's pronouncement to readers, the supernatural tale is sealed as fiction. The postscript also summarizes Native American beliefs about the Catskill Mountains and the origin of a river or stream known as Kaaters-kill. It also mentions a trickster from Native American legend. The postscript thus shows how Irving borrows from myth and that early American narrative derives authority from Native American oral tradition.)*
11. Discuss the story's themes. What two major parts of Rip's life did he lose during his long nap? How are these two facets of the story linked, and for what purpose? *(Answers will vary. Themes include change, tyranny, liberty, and passivity. Rip loses both his nagging wife and his need to be loyal to King George while asleep. Both King George and his wife are tyrannical figures who demand Rip's loyalty and obedience. When he awakens, he is free from his wife's nagging, and he is also free to partake in the new democratic republic's political process. Even though Rip is free, however, he has not changed as a person. Rip continues to be passive, to sleep his life away. Rip is the typical colonist of the new democracy; his citizenship has changed, but he is still inactive and impotent. Irving did not share the hopeful vision of an independent America as Eden, or a land free of corrupt European traditions. He gives a political warning: voters need to pay attention. He satirizes political party leaders, the "tavern politicians," and communicates his theme of change by questioning whether society is as different as the townspeople perceive it to be.)*

### Supplementary Activities

1. **Figurative Language:** Begin a chart of similes, metaphors, and personification you find in the book. Add to the chart as you read the stories. Examples: **Simile**—"trooping like a colt at his mother's heels" (p. 6); **Metaphors**—"fiery furnace of domestic tribulation" (p. 4); "...a shad tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use" (p. 8)
2. **History:** The townspeople are curious about Rip's political affiliations. Research what it meant to be a Federalist and a Democrat in the United States of America in the late 1700s. Compare your findings using a T-chart or Venn diagram.

## Conflict

The **conflict** of a story is the struggle between two people or two forces. There are three main types of conflict: person vs. person, person vs. nature or society, and person vs. self.

**Directions:** Identify three person vs. person conflicts from among the five short stories. Each conflict must occur in a different story. Describe the conflict and its resolution in the boxes provided below.

Conflict	Resolution

Conflict	Resolution

Conflict	Resolution