



The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and Other Stories

Washington Irving





R A I N B O W S

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The legend of Sleepy Hollow and other stories

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The Author

Washington Irving



Washington Irving was born in New York City in 1783 to Scottish-English immigrant parents and was named after the hero of the American Revolution and first president of the United States, George Washington.

Irving's family belonged to the merchant class of the period. Many of his older brothers became successful merchants too and encouraged their younger brother's literary aspirations, supporting him financially as he followed his writing career.

In 1798 an epidemic of yellow fever¹ forced his parents to send him to a healthier² place, so Irving went to stay with family friends in Tarryton, New York, on the Hudson River. There, he became familiar with the nearby town of Sleepy Hollow, with its strange Dutch³ customs and local ghost stories. Later, he often went back to the region and fell in love with its mysterious and romantic landscape, so he decided to make it the background for some of his future stories.

At 19, he started writing letters to the *Morning Chronicle*, sending commentaries and observations on New York's social and theatrical scene. They were very successful and he was soon asked to write for a literary magazine in Philadelphia.

At 25, he became famous for his comic work, *A History of New York*, written under the name of "Diedrich Knickerboker". This became the nickname for Manhattan residents in general and is still used today. Irving also made popular the nickname "Gotham" for New York City, later used in Batman comics and movies.

In 1815 Irving went to England and wrote a collection of short stories and essays that became *The Sketch Book* (published under the

1. *yellow fever*: acute viral disease.
2. *healthier*: safer, with less risk of contracting diseases.

3. *Dutch*: referring to the Netherlands.

name of “Geoffrey Crayon”), which included *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

After some years in Germany, France, England and Spain, working in and for the US embassy, he retired for the rest of his life at his home near Tarryton, where he wrote many of his historical and biographical works. He died there in 1859 at the age of 76.

He is considered to be the first American ‘Man of Letters’, the first to have earned his life as a writer and the first to fight for stronger laws to protect writers’ rights. In 1851 his portrait appeared on some banknotes issued⁴ by the ‘Bank of New York Mellon Corporation’ making them more trustworthy⁵ in a period when there was not yet a federal currency and each bank produced its own banknotes. Also, many U.S. postage stamps bore⁶, and still bear, his portrait and lots of towns and cities are named after him or his characters.

Washington Irving was the first American writer to free short stories from moral elements and write his tales only for entertainment. His characters are always precise individuals and not general types, and many future writers learned from his delicate and elegant sense of humour, so that realistic details of country life in America could be turned into beautiful and memorable fictional works.

However, Irving wanted to make his stories seem true, so he sometimes added a short introduction to them which explained how the tale originated, thus adding to its credibility⁷. These frames are shaped around each other and create a continuous cross-reference⁸. For example: Irving is the author of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, but Diedrich Knickerbocker is the character who, according to the introduction, wrote it down after another old man had told him about it; moreover, the characters of *The Legend* tell stories that they have heard from other people, and Ichabod Crane, therefore, is a man who is frightened by a story within a story within a story within a story and who becomes a story to be told himself.

4. *issued*: produced.

5. *trustworthy*: reliable, safe.

6. *bore* (*bear-bore-bore*): had, showed.

7. *credibility*: the quality that something

has that makes people believe them.

8. *cross-reference*: something that tells a reader to look in another part of a book for further information.

BEFORE READING

1 Match each of the words below to its definition.

- a. short-story 1. a long written story about characters and events invented by the writer
- b. legend 2. a piece of prose fiction, usually under 10,000 words
- c. proverb 3. a tale or legend, especially one forming part of the oral tradition of the common people
- d. motto 4. a word, phrase or sentence used as a phrase of one's guiding values
- e. folk tale 5. a written description of another person's life
- f. biography 6. a composition in verse
- g. poem 7. a short popular saying that expresses some common truth or useful thought
- h. novel 8. an unproved story coming from earlier times and popularly accepted as historical

2 Choose one of the options to make predictions about the story.

- a. Where do you expect the story to be set? In a ...
 - cemetery haunted house
 - valley school dormitory
- b. When do you think the events take place?
 - In Pre-Columbian America Before the American Revolution
 - After the American Revolution In the 1900s
- c. Which natural elements do you expect to find?
 - Woods and rivers Mountains and hills
 - Deserts and seas Volcanoes and lakes
- d. The title of part I is a name. Do you think it refers to...?
 - an American man an Indian Chief
 - a horse a ghost

3 Write some words that you know, or that you find in a dictionary, related to ghosts and the supernatural. While reading the text, see if you can find some of them.

NOUNS	ADJECTIVES	VERBS

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow - Ichabod Crane

Story 1, Part 1

I have found this story among the papers of Diedrich Knickerbocker, now dead, who heard it at the Corporation Meeting of the ancient city of Manhattoes.

On the eastern shore of the river Hudson lies a small market town, Greensburg, also known as Tarry¹ Town. Some people say that it was given this name because of the tendency of some husbands to “tarry” about the village tavern on market days. However, near this town is a very quiet glen² named Sleepy Hollow³, well known for its ghosts and the particular atmosphere that make the imaginations of its inhabitants and visitors very creative.

The place is very quiet, dreamy and gloomy⁴ and it seems to influence both the land and its inhabitants. The minds of the people who live or spend some time there fall under some curious spell⁵: they are subject to visions and frequently see strange sights and hear music and voices in the air. That is why the whole neighbourhood is very rich in local tales, haunted⁶ places and superstitions.

Some people say that this town was bewitched⁷ when the first Dutch people set up their colony here, while others say that an old Indian chief, the prophet or wizard of his tribe, organized his meetings here before the country was discovered by Master Hudson.

Anyway, the most terrible spectre in the Hollow is the Headless Horseman. He is said to be the ghost of a German soldier who lost

1. *tarry*: to continue staying in a place when you should leave.
2. *glen*: little valley.
3. *Hollow*: Scottish term for little valley.
4. *gloomy*: dark.

5. *spell*: piece of magic that influences someone.
6. *haunted*: with the presence of ghosts.
7. *bewitched*: put under a spell.

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

his head because of a cannonball during a battle in the American Revolutionary War.

According to the legend, the soldier still haunts the scene of his last battle, riding at night in search of his missing head. They say he is always on his horse, in the dark, along a particular country road where the tall trees form a dark passage that leads to the little church where, the legend says, his body is buried⁸. Not far from the church there is a little river, and over this river there is a wooden bridge: this is the place where this lonely ghost prefers riding. Soon after sunset he is said to start hurrying along the road between the little church and his favourite bridge, a terrible vision of power and anger.

Ichabod Crane⁹, originally from Connecticut, was the schoolmaster of Sleepy Hollow. His surname matched his person perfectly. Ichabod was tall and very slim, with narrow shoulders and long legs and arms. His head was small, but he had big ears and a long nose. It was easy to mistake him for a scarecrow¹⁰ which had run away from a field, if you saw him walking down the village streets, with his large, poor clothes around his thin body.

His schoolhouse was quite shabby¹¹ too: it was a low building with one large room made of wood whose broken windows were partly closed with some pages from old books.

Ichabod was not too bad a schoolmaster. He acted following the proverb: ‘Spare¹² the stick and spoil¹³ the child’, and his pupils weren’t spoilt at all. However, he never gave a punishment unless extremely necessary.

“Matthew Connors, come here immediately!” shouted Ichabod.

“Oh master, it wasn’t me!” cried the little boy.

“You liar! I saw you pulling Beatrix’s hair! Do not disobey me! Come here immediately and show me your hands!”

“But it wasn’t my fault! Please master...”

8. *buried*: placed in a grave after death.

9. *crane*:



10. *scarecrow*:



11. *shabby*: in poor conditions.

12. *spare*: not to use a lot.

13. *spoil*: to give too much.



"... the most terrible spectre in the Hollow is the Headless Horseman."

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

Matthew went in front of the class and showed his hands to the schoolmaster, who hit him twice with the stick.

“You little devil! I’m simply doing what your parents would do. One day you will remember your old master and you will thank me for the rest of your life! I’m telling you for your own good!”

“This is justice!” said Beatrix in a low voice while Matthew was going back to his seat.

“Er... By the way, Matthew... Remind your father that I’m staying at your farm this week. I will arrive this evening after packing my things, let’s say at about 7 pm, in time for dinner, right? I can still remember your mother’s delicious meat pie...”

“Yes, master,” answered the little boy, massaging his painful hands gently.

In fact, Ichabod depended on the hospitality of his students’ families to give him room and food, each for a week at a time, since his salary as a teacher was very low.

Ichabod had a huge appetite, but he tried to help the families who invited him: he did his best to make himself useful around the farm, he took the horses to water, he repaired fences¹⁴ or he cut wood for the winter fire. He was also the singing master of Sleepy Hollow, for which he made some extra money, and everybody could hear his voice half a mile away when he sang in the church on Sunday mornings.

He loved spending the long winter nights with the families of his pupils, exchanging tales of ghosts and haunted places.

“... so that night all the witches were burnt in the main square of the village and nobody ever heard of the curse of the Black Witch again!” concluded Mrs Connors with a mysterious look. She was just finishing telling her favorite story when Ichabod said,

“Tonight I’m going to tell you a very frightening story that I read yesterday in my favorite book, *History of New England Witchcraft* by Cotton Mather. Do any of you know this wonderful book?”

“I have never heard of it! Is it famous in your country? What’s its name again, Connecticut?” asked Mrs Connors.

14. fences: structures of wood used to protect a piece of land.



“... so that night all the witches were burnt in the main square of the village...”

“Well, of course my dear, it is one of the most popular books about the supernatural!” exclaimed Ichabod.

“But, Mr Crane... do you really believe in the supernatural?”

“Of course I do! I spend most of my afternoons reading the legends contained in this book and I am now completely convinced that they are not legends at all, they are true stories! The supernatural interests all of us, it’s around us, every day, but especially... every night!”

Ichabod really enjoyed scaring the housewives with his terrifying stories. As town schoolmaster, being second in cultural matters only to the priest and easily superior to the other more rustic men in the neighbourhood, he had a lot of influence over the female circles of Sleepy Hollow. Moreover, his travelling lifestyle gave him great access to gossip and legends.

Sometimes, however, after spending the whole afternoon reading about haunted places, dangerous goblins and mysterious ghosts, he was so scared himself that he had to sing psalms¹⁵ while walking through the wood on his way home. This was the only solution every time the sound of his own steps on the icy ground

15. *psalms*: church songs.

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under his feet or the strange sound of some beasts made him lose the courage to look over his shoulder.

Ichabod was very interested in these terrifying mysteries, but he was also very interested in one of his singing students, Katrina Van Tassel, the only daughter of the richest farmer in town. She was beautiful, plump, with pink, healthy cheeks¹⁶. Every time he went to her large farmhouse, his heart was doubly happy: he was amazed not only at her beauty, but also at the wealth and abundance of her father's possessions.

These were his frequent thoughts,

'Oh, those immense fields! Fresh fruit and vegetables everywhere! All these pigs and ducks and pigeons and geese and turkeys... I can see them all cooked and turned into delicious hams and sausages and served on rich tables, ready to be eaten! Ichabod, have you ever seen anything like this before? My appetite is too strong to resist all these temptations... the beautiful Katrina must be mine at all costs!'

Obviously, Katrina had a lot of suitors¹⁷, thanks to her happy character and large fortune. One of her many rustic admirers was the town troublemaker¹⁸, Abraham Van Brunt. He was tall, with broad shoulders, always ready for either a fight or a party, so that his nickname was "Brom Bones". He was a very good rider and always went around the town with his gang of friends and his air of fun and arrogance.

But there was another obstacle: Katrina was very demanding¹⁹. Her many curious desires and impossible requests were very difficult to satisfy. She always wanted to be the center of attention and all the best compliments were never enough for her.

Because she was a real flirt, of course, she returned both Brom's and Ichabod's attentions, so that a silent fight developed between the two suitors. The bullying Brom obviously tried to challenge Ichabod physically, but the poor schoolmaster knew very well that accepting the challenge of his rival would be madness. Therefore, he made his

16. *cheeks*:



17. *suitor*: a man who wants to marry a particular woman.

18. *troublemaker*: a person who causes problems.

19. *demanding*: not easily satisfied.

WORKING ON THE TEXT

1 Answer the questions.

- a. Where is the story set?
- b. What was the atmosphere like there?
- c. Whose ghost was the Headless Horseman said to be?
- d. What did Ichabod Crane do for a living?
- e. Which book was he particularly fond of and kept reading?
- f. Did he believe in the supernatural?
- g. Why was he attracted to Katrina Van Tassel?
- h. Who else courted Katrina?
- i. What trick did he and his gang play on Ichabod to frighten him?
- j. How did Ichabod feel when he received an invitation for a banquet at Mr Van Tassel's house?
- k. What kind of horse did he borrow to reach Katrina's house?
- l. Did he look like a real knight when he rode it?

2 Find the sentences in the text confirming that...

- a. Ichabod
 - looked like a crane
 - was educated
- b. Katrina Van Tassel
 - was very beautiful
 - was a real flirt
- c. Abraham Van Brunt, alias "Brom Bones"
 - was well-built
 - was a trouble-maker

3 Now focus your attention on the characters and say...

- a. How many characters have appeared in the story so far
- b. Who the major characters are
- c. Who the minor characters are
- d. Which non-human characters are mentioned in the text
.....
- e. Which characters of the past are mentioned
- f. If you can consider Sleepy Hollow a character in itself and why
.....

WORKING ON VOCABULARY

4 Fill in the gaps with the right adjective to complete the similes with these animals.

*boring • timid • slow • brave • hungry •
foolish • fat • quick • silly • proud*

- a. as as a snail
- b. as as a duck
- c. as as a horse
- d. as as a pig
- e. as as a rabbit
- f. as as a goose
- g. as as a grasshopper
- h. as as a turkey
- i. as as a pigeon
- j. as as a lion

5 Circle the adjectives that best describe each character.

Ichabod:

hungry – clever – young – educated – superstitious – attractive
– ugly – old – silly – simple – credulous

Katrina van Tassel:

shy – pretty – sad – plump – slim – faithful – self-confident
– modest – young – flirtatious – healthy

Brom Bones:

boring – bullying – rustic – slow – weak – fat – well-built
– quick – proud – good-looking – tall

WORKING ON GRAMMAR

6 *Comparatives and superlatives.* Complete these sentences with the appropriate form of the adjective and any other necessary word.

Ex. → Tarry Town was (quiet) and (gloomy) other market towns in the area. → *Tarry Town was quieter and gloomier than other market towns in the area.*

- a. Tarry Town was one of (rich) places in local tales and superstitions.
- b. (dreadful) ghost in the Hollow was the Headless Horseman.
- c. Ichabod was much (slim) and (thin) than Brom Bones.
- d. Ichabod's clothes were (shabby) Brom Bones'.

- e. Brom Bones was (educated) Ichabod.
 f. Ichabod's behaviour in courting Katrina was (clever) Brom Bones'.
 g. Ichabod Crane was (credulous) the housewives of Sleepy Hollow.
 h. Katrina was considered (beautiful) and (flirtatious) girl the neighbourhood.

WORKING ON SKILLS

Listening



Listen to a few facts about Colonial school rules and circle the correct alternative in the text.

In Colonial schools there were many strict behavioural **a. rules/laws** to which **b. students/pupils** had to stick to if they did not want to be **c. punished/expelled**. Here are some of the most important:

- Show nothing to your friend which may **d. frighten him/make him laugh**.
- In the presence of others do not **e. sing/speak** to yourself with a **f. humming/whispering** noise, nor **g. beat/drum** with your **h. fingers/hands** or tap with your **i. feet/shoes**.
- If you cough, sneeze, sigh or yawn, do not do it **j. quietly/aloud** but **k. privately/aloud**.
- Do not **l. sleep/talk** when others speak, do not **m. sit/stand** when others **n. stand/sit**.
- Do not **o. shift/swing** yourself in the sight of others.
- Do not kill **p. lice/fleas** in the presence of others.
- Keep your nails **q. clean/dirty** and **r. long/short**.
- Do not **s. bite/cut** your nails.

Speaking

8 Imagine you are Matthew, one of Mr Ichabod's pupils, and a friend. Ask and answer questions about Mr Crane's school. follow the clues:

A: ask Matthew if Ichabod is a good teacher.

B: say he is quite strict, but does not use the stick often.

A: ask Matt which subjects are covered in class.

B: say spelling lessons are very important, but also singing, grammar, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and morals.

A: ask what "morals" are.



The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

Terrifying headless knights, likeable living ghosts and mysterious, silent people from the past both torment and enliven the lives of the remarkable protagonists of these stories. They are all set in a country going through great changes, starting with the American Revolution and the separation from the British monarchy, leaving behind old traditions and customs for new ones.

Irving succeeds in giving life to very singular characters who still belong to the American cultural background today; in particular, the lanky and impressionable Ichabod Crane in The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, and the lazy and carefree Rip Van Winkle in the story of the same name.

The Spectre Bridegroom completes this clear and vivid picture of an emerging late eighteenth-century America.

beginner

• **A1** (Breakthrough)

elementary

• **A2** (Waystage)



pre-intermediate

• **B1** (Threshold)

intermediate

• **B2** (Vantage)

post-intermediate

• **C1** (Effectiveness)

Levels of accredited examination boards:

Cambridge English: Preliminary (PET)

Trinity: Grade 5, 6 / ISE I

City & Guilds (Pitman): Intermediate

ESB: Intermediate 1, 2

Edexcel: Elementary



Teacher's Resources available on line:
Answer Key, Audioscripts, Summing-up Activities.