

# THE LEGEND OF Sleepy Hollow

by Washington Irving (United States, 1820)

**T**he Headless Horseman conjures up images of ghosts and zombies—always engaging topics for young students. But “Sleepy Hollow” is more than just a ghost story. Set during the post-Revolutionary War period, it’s the story of schoolmaster Ichabod Crane, one of the most interesting characters in American literature. Students will enjoy theorizing about the truth behind the Horseman. Did Irving intend for readers to believe the legend? Or are there other explanations for Ichabod’s disappearance? This play harkens back to the days of Old English and the Jolly Roger, so encourage your kids to try out their best pirate accent!



## CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Diedrich Knickerbocker:**

Our storyteller

**Stage Director:** Directs the action in the play

**Old Woman 1**

**Old Woman 2**

**Ichabod Crane:** The superstitious schoolmaster

**Katrina Van Tassel:**

The village beauty

**Brom Bones:** The village brute

**Baltus Van Tassel:**

Katrina’s father

**Van Ax:** Villager/party guest

**Van Ripper:** Villager/party guest

**Vanderblood:** Villager/party guest

**Brouwer:** Villager/party guest

**Nonspeaking parts:**

**Gunpowder:** Ichabod’s horse

**The Headless Horseman:**

Silent, but dreadful

### Vocabulary

entranced  
mischief

brooding  
shriek

tethered  
decrepit

hymn  
misshapen

pommel  
flimsy

## Scene 1: Sleepy Hollow

**KNICKERBOCKER:** I was never one for ghost stories, not till I happened upon a little village called Sleepy Hollow. Had I not seen it for myself, I would have dismissed it as a bit of superstition, but this . . . I shudder to think of it!

**STAGE DIRECTOR:** A lanky fellow enters, entranced by a book. As he walks, he absentmindedly whistles “Yankee Doodle.”

**KNICKERBOCKER:** My name is Diedrich Knickerbocker. The year was 1790, and as I wandered the drowsy shadows of the Hollow, I encountered a man named Ichabod Crane.

**OLD WOMAN 1:** Look here. It’s the new schoolmaster!

**OLD WOMAN 2:** Good afternoon, Schoolmaster.

**ICHABOD** (*startled*): Why, good afternoon, ladies.

**KNICKERBOCKER:** He was tall but lank with long arms and hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves. His head was small with huge ears and a long nose.

**OLD WOMAN 1:** Will you be attending the Van Tassels’ party tonight?

**ICHABOD:** That I will. I merely need to fetch my horse for the ride home.

**OLD WOMAN 2:** Well, you enjoy yourself, Schoolmaster. But be wary—there’s mischief in the air.

**STAGE DIRECTOR:** Ichabod bows, then returns to his reading and whistling.

**KNICKERBOCKER:** Wary, indeed! It’s said the Hollow is bewitched. The people are given to all kinds of marvelous superstitions . . . including the Legend of the Headless Horseman.

Think  
About  
It

The setting of a story is its time (or era) and place. How would you describe the setting of this story?

## Scene 2: The Van Tassel’s Estate

**KNICKERBOCKER:** Ichabod rode a broken-down plow horse. It was all skin and bones, and its tail was knotted with burrs. Still, it must have had some spark, for it went by the name of Gunpowder.

**STAGE DIRECTOR:** Ichabod dismounts in front of a huge estate.

**KNICKERBOCKER:** It was toward evening that Ichabod arrived at the Van Tassels'. He could not help but chuckle at the possibilities.

**ICHABOD:** Someday this may all be ours, Gunpowder! If only I can win the hand of Katrina Van Tassel!

**KNICKERBOCKER:** Katrina Van Tassel was as rosy-cheeked as one of her father's peaches. From the moment Ichabod laid eyes upon her, his only thought was how to gain her affections.

**KATRINA:** Good evening, Master Crane. Welcome to our home.

**ICHABOD**

*(clearing his throat):*

Why, thank you, Miss Katrina.

**KNICKERBOCKER:** But Ichabod wasn't the only one interested in Katrina. Another was a burly, roaring hero of the countryside known as Brom Bones. Whenever a prank or brawl happened, the simple folk of Sleepy Hollow always shook their heads and guessed Brom Bones was at the bottom of it.

**STAGE DIRECTOR:** Brom Bones enters, strutting and pumping his chest.

**BROM** *(loudly):* Here I am, Katrina! What say you we go take a ride on Daredevil?

**KATRINA** *(giggling):* Don't be silly! Put Daredevil in the barn and come in the house. And don't act like such a brute!

**BROM:** Say, is that the schoolmaster's horse? What's he doing here? Come to give you singin' lessons?

**KATRINA:** The schoolmaster is an honored guest. What fun it is to have such a gentleman in our midst.

**BROM:** I don't know what you see in him. He's got dinner plates where his ears should be and shovels for feet.

**KATRINA:** You're just jealous.

**BROM:** Of him? Why, he looks like a scarecrow that's escaped the cornfield!

**KNICKERBOCKER:** Poor Ichabod. He would have had a pleasant life, if only his path had not been crossed by young Katrina!

Think  
About  
It

What kind of person is Brom? How are he and Ichabod alike? How are they different?

Think  
About  
It

Knickerbocker's line gives a hint about the story's conflict. What do you think he means by it?

## Scene 3: The Party

- STAGE DIRECTOR:** The guests gather in the great parlor.
- VAN TASSEL:** Welcome! Welcome to the party, everyone! Let the music and dancing begin!
- ICHABOD:** Dear Katrina, may I have this dance?
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** Katrina glances slyly at Brom.
- KATRINA:** Why, certainly, Master Crane.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** Ichabod prided himself upon his dancing. Not a limb about his loosely hung body was still. But as he went clattering about the room with the beautiful Katrina, he was unaware that Brom Bones sat brooding in one corner.
- BROM:** I don't like this one bit.
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** The dance ends. Ichabod bows to Katrina then makes his way toward a group of older guests. They are sitting by the fire, telling marvelous tales of ghosts and goblins.
- VAN AX:** Many a ghost haunts the Hollow. There's the old Dutchman who walks the docks, shouting for a musket and a sword.
- VAN RIPPER:** And there's the woman in white, who haunts the dark glen at Raven Rock. To hear her shriek on a winter night before a storm is a bad omen.
- OLD WOMAN 1:** In these parts, Mr. Crane, you must take care to live a decent life. Those who don't run the risk of being carried away in the dead of night!
- KNICKERBOCKER:** All these tales, told in those drowsy whispers with which people talk in the dark, sank deep in the mind of Ichabod. This, in turn, caught the attention of Brom.
- VANDERBLOOD:** But, my friend, nothing we've told you rivals the Headless Horseman.
- ICHABOD:** The Headless Horseman?
- OLD WOMAN 2:** Yes, dear man. He is said to be the ghost of a soldier whose head had been carried away by a cannonball during the Revolutionary War. His ghost is often seen hurrying along in the darkness.
- VAN AX:** With the Horseman about, one doesn't dare to be caught upon the roadway during the witching hour.

Think  
About  
It

What does Katrina's glance suggest?

Think  
About  
It

What significance do the names of the characters hold?

- VANDERBLOOD:** His body is buried in the churchyard, and every night the ghost rides forth . . . in search of his head.
- VAN RIPPER:** He cannot rest until he finds it. The speed with which he rides is like a midnight blast. It's because he's in a hurry to get back to the churchyard before the light of day.
- VANDERBLOOD:** He's been seen several times of late, patrolling the hills. I myself have seen his horse tethered among the graves in the churchyard.
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** A decrepit old man interrupts the storytellers.
- BROUWER:** I didn't believe in the Horseman until one night last year. I met him in the road near the Old Tree. I suspect he was returning from his search, but I didn't know who he was. I called to him: "Show me your face, good man." He didn't answer, and when he turned there was nothing there—just the stump of a neck. Before I could react, he grabbed me by the shoulder and forced me to get up behind him.
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** The room is silent. The old man takes a bite out of his apple and chews it slowly.
- ICHABOD:** Wh-what happened next?
- BROUWER:** How we galloped! Over bush and brake, over hill and swamp . . . then we reached the bridge. That's when the Horseman suddenly turned into a skeleton, threw me into the brook, and sprang away over the treetops with a clap of thunder!
- ICHABOD:** Oh, my!
- BROUWER:** Oh, my, indeed! I will never forget it!
- BROM:** I'm not afraid of the Horseman. Ay, I too have seen him. I was returning one night from a neighboring village when he overtook me. Rather than give in to his terror, I offered to race him for a bowl of punch. That's right, a bowl of punch! And I would have won it too, but just as we came to the old church bridge, the Horseman vanished in a flash of fire.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** Ay, it was true. The old church bridge was surrounded by overhanging trees, which cast a gloom even in the daytime. It was the place the Headless Horseman was most frequently encountered, but it was also the place he could not pass.
- BROM:** If ever the Horseman comes after you, head for the bridge. If you can but reach that bridge, you are safe.
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** One by one, the guests depart, but hoping for a moment alone with Katrina, Ichabod is the last to leave.

Think About It

The villagers' tales provide a clue to one of the themes of this play. What themes can you identify?

Think About It

What do you think Ichabod wanted to talk to Katrina about? How do you think their conversation went?

## Scene 4: The Ride Home

- KNICKERBOCKER:** It was midnight when a disappointed Ichabod finally departed, and all those stories of ghosts and goblins now came crowding upon his thoughts.
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** Ichabod trots along, flinching at every sound and shape.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** He remembered all too clearly the warnings of the townspeople.
- VAN AX:** One doesn't dare to be caught upon the roadway during the witching hour.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** The wind's howl became the woman in white.
- VAN RIPPER:** *Ohhhwww*. . . To hear her shriek on a winter night before a storm is a bad omen.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** A bullfrog croaking became the ghost of the Old Dutchman.
- OLD WOMAN I:** *Crooaak!* Take care to live a decent life. Those who don't run the risk of being carried away in the dead of night!
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** Ichabod clutches tightly at Gunpowder's reins. To calm his nerves, he begins to whistle.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** His normally cheerful version of "Yankee Doodle" sounded like a funeral hymn. It was then he saw it: In the shadows on the edge of the road, something huge and misshapen towering above them.
- VANDERBLOOD:** Every night, the ghost rides forth in search of his head.
- ICHABOD:** *Gulp!* . . . What's to be done, Gunpowder?
- KNICKERBOCKER:** Every hair upon the schoolmaster's head stood on end.
- ICHABOD:** Wh-who-who . . . are you? I-I-I say there, wh-who are y-y-you?
- KNICKERBOCKER:** The shadowy creature put itself in motion and stood at once in the middle of the road.
- ICHABOD:** *Gulp!* I s-s-say, sir, wh-wh-what is it you w-w-want with me?
- KNICKERBOCKER:** When there came no reply, Ichabod rained a shower of kicks upon Gunpowder, but the stranger whirled his horse to give chase.
- ICHABOD:** R-r-run, Gunpowder!

Think  
About  
It

Where are these people? Are they with Ichabod?

Think  
About  
It

What's to be done? What would you do if you were Ichabod?

**KNICKERBOCKER**

*(growing in intensity):*

As poor Ichabod glanced over his shoulder, he was horror-struck, for the man behind him was headless, and the head, which should have rested on his shoulders, was hanging from the pommel of the saddle!

**ICHABOD:**

Fly, Gunpowder, fly!

**KNICKERBOCKER:**

Away they dashed, stones flying and sparks flashing. Ichabod's flimsy garments fluttered in the air as he stretched his long, lank body over his horse's head. And suddenly, he remembered what Brom Bones had said.

**BROM:**

If you can but reach that bridge, you are safe.

**KNICKERBOCKER:**

Thundering forward, he heard the black steed close behind him.

**ICHABOD:**

There it is, Gunpowder. The old church bridge!

**KNICKERBOCKER:**

He whipped wildly in the air, spurring his horse onward.

**ICHABOD:**

*Hyaw, hyaw!* Come on, Gunpowder!

**KNICKERBOCKER**

*(most intensely):*

Gunpowder's hooves pounded upon the planks of the bridge. Ichabod cast a look behind, expecting the goblin to vanish in a clap of thunder . . . but instead he saw it rise up and hurl its head . . . at him!

**ICHABOD:**

*Abhhhhhhhhhh!*

## Epilogue

**KNICKERBOCKER**

*(calmly now):*

The next morning, the old horse wandered home, but Ichabod never returned. A search led to the bridge. Along the bank of the brook, where the water ran dark and deep, Ichabod's hat was found and, close beside it, a shattered pumpkin. The brook was searched, but the body of the schoolmaster was nowhere to be found, leaving the good people to shake their heads and conclude that Ichabod Crane had been carried off . . . by the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow.

Think About It

Knickerbocker wants you to believe Ichabod was carried off, but how else can you explain his disappearance?



## Literary Elements/Story Discussion

- 1 **What is the title of the story?**
- 2 **Who is the author?**
- 3 **Setting:** When and where does the story happen?
- 4 **Main character:** Who is the story about?
- 5 **Conflict:** What is the main character's problem?
- 6 **Resolution:** How does the main character fix the problem?
- 7 **Theme:** What is the universal idea behind the story?
- 8 **Moral:** What lesson are we supposed to learn from the story?
- 9 **Realism:** Is the story realistic or unrealistic? What evidence is there?
- 10 **Plot:** Retell or summarize the main events of the story in just a few sentences.



# Play Performance Scoring Guide

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Play: \_\_\_\_\_ Part: \_\_\_\_\_

|                                       | <b>Fluency</b>   | <b>Delivery</b>  | <b>Stage Presence</b>   | <b>Comprehension</b>   |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Exceeds expectations</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Reads without error</li> <li>* Intonation and expression consistently appropriate to character</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Consistently appropriate volume</li> <li>* Pacing as if speaking naturally</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Projects toward audience</li> <li>* Memorizes lines</li> <li>* Acts and puts character in voice, speaks with accent, etc.</li> <li>* Recognizes cues without prompting</li> <li>* Demonstrates leadership when practicing/performing</li> <li>* May incorporate props where appropriate</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Able to identify and elaborate on literary elements and performance objections during discussion and assessment activities</li> </ul>             |
| <b>Meets expectations</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Reads with minimal errors</li> <li>* Some intonation and expressiveness</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Appropriately loud volume</li> <li>* Consistent pacing</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Consistently faces audience</li> <li>* Holds script away from face</li> <li>* Attempts to act with voice characterization, etc.</li> <li>* Follows along, recognizes cues</li> <li>* Demonstrates cooperation when practicing</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Able to identify most literary elements and performance objectives during assessment activities</li> <li>* Participates in discussions</li> </ul> |
| <b>Does not yet meet expectations</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Frequency or nature of errors suggests need for more practice</li> <li>* Frequent stumbles, flat intonation, or lack of expression</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Too quiet</li> <li>* Choppy or rushed pacing</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Tends to turn back to audience</li> <li>* Tends to speak into script</li> <li>* Does not add character—just reads lines</li> <li>* Loses place, misses cues</li> <li>* Tends to be unprepared or unfocused</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Does not participate in discussions</li> <li>* Unable to identify most literary elements or performance objectives</li> </ul>                     |

# Discussion Questions Answer Key

## **The Legend of Sleepy Hollow**

(page 7)

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### **Page 8**

The setting is in 1870, shortly after the American Revolution, in a small village called Sleepy Hollow.

### **Page 9 (top)**

Brom is big and loud, probably a bully. He and Ichabod are alike only in that they're both young, unmarried, and interested in Katrina. Ichabod is a gentleman and might be described as "book smart." Brom might be called "street smart," athletic, and unscrupulous, creating something of a brains vs. brawn theme.

### **Page 9 (bottom)**

The conflict centers around the pursuit of Katrina's hand in marriage. Ichabod's problem is that he is interested in Katrina despite Katrina's apparent relationship with Brom.

### **Page 10 (top)**

Katrina's glance could mean that she's using Ichabod to make Brom jealous.

### **Page 10 (bottom)**

Van Ripper, Van Ax, Vanderblood, etc. These characters are designed to create a ghostly mood.

### **Page 11 (top)**

Possible themes include superstition, courtship, jealousy, brains vs. brawn.

### **Page 11 (bottom)**

Ichabod probably asks for Katrina's hand in marriage, and she rejects him. Some believe she may have been unkind in her response, though there's no evidence presented within this play.

### **Page 12 (top)**

These people are in Ichabod's thoughts and memory. He's recalling their words as he travels down the dark road.

### **Page 12 (bottom)**

Answers will vary. "Head for the bridge" is one possible answer.

### **Page 13**

Ichabod may have been carried off or scared away by the Horseman. He may have been killed or scared away by Brom pretending to be the Horseman.