

# Rip Van Winkle

Teacher Guide  
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# Table of Contents

How to Use This Book and Other Supplementary Materials .....	4
Comprehension Questions .....	9
Answers to the Comprehension Questions .....	12
Comprehension Quiz .....	14
Answers to the Comprehension Quiz .....	16

# How to Use This Book

These stories are a part of the core curriculum in the 7th grade English class at Logos School. Each story is easily read as one assignment.

## Five Elements of Short Stories in *Rip Van Winkle*

Rip Van Winkle is the primary character in this story, but the supporting characters give a fuller picture of his character. Rip is kind-hearted to others, but he is lazy at home. His wife gives us a picture of the nagging wife (Prov. 19:13). His mystical encounter on the mountain comes from the legends of the time regarding Henry Hudson and his crew, playing nine-pins and drinking brew in the hills. Later in the story we meet his grown children, who have developed their own reputations for kindness and laziness.

The timing of this story adds to its wonder and enchantment. The fact that the story begins about five or six years before the War for Independence and ends twenty years later shows just how much the world had changed. The story takes place in the Catskill Mountains, a part of the northern Appalachian chain. This location is both picturesque and enchanting, perfect for story development.

In this short story our main character takes a walk up the mountain with his loyal dog Wolf. While on the mountain, he follows a mysterious man who is carrying a keg. He drinks the contents of the keg with the man and his crew, who are busy playing ninepins. Rip Van Winkle falls asleep after his hike and the mysterious drink. When he awakens from his slumber, his dog is missing, his gun is rusted, and he has grown a long beard. Once he returns to the village, he learns that his favorite tavern is no longer named for his sovereign but for a president he has never heard of! He meets his children and learns to readjust to life in the village.

The obvious external conflict in the story is between Rip and his nagging wife. Rip's neglect of his own family and farm irritate her constantly. She expresses her displeasure verbally and Rip responds with avoidance. Rip does experience a bit of soul-searching upon his return to the village when he discovers that his son has become just as lazy as he was.

Because the story itself is short, themes must be developed quickly. One of the most obvious is that although time moves on, some things cannot, should not, and do not change. When Rip returns from the mountain, he finds that his home is in ruins. His favorite tavern has become a hotel, and many of the people he knew are either dead or moved from

town.

However, some things have continued on. First of all, there is still a village there. Secondly, his name has continued on in the name of his son and grandson. Finally, he does still have a few friends in the town who are willing to vouch for him. For junior high students in the midst of school changes, this is a theme that should resonate for them. What is different this year? What is similar? Have new people joined the class? And how has the class demeanor changed to make newcomers feel welcome?

## Grading and Accountability

No matter your school situation, record keeping is an important part of keeping track of student progress. Schools require more active record keeping on the part of the teacher, while homeschools may use simpler methods of accountability to prove student accomplishment.

There are some basic tools included in this teacher's guide to help grade the students. The first option is the list of discussion questions. These will help keep track of the important elements of the story. They can also be used as comprehension questions requiring a written response. Answers can be structured as brief statements or as complete sentences. A second option for grading is the set of quizzes. These are grouped reasonably and easily scheduled. Once again, brief answers or complete sentences can be used to assess student understanding of the storyline and concepts. A final option is the book test to be administered when the student has completed the reading. Using a variety of testing techniques, students can demonstrate their knowledge of the storyline basics as well as the development of theme. Opinion questions are offered as a way of allowing the students to formulate and support an opinion in response to the reading. These tools may be adapted to best meet your situation.

Writing is another tool for assessing student knowledge and skill ability. Character sketches allow students to descriptively express an understanding of the relationships built within the storyline. Essays allow students to organize their thoughts based upon story events. Chapter summaries allow a student to keep track of complicated plot lines while incorporating new vocabulary and applying grammar concepts learned in English instruction. Creative writing, such as poetry, interviews, and comic illustrations, offers additional opportunities to put pen to paper. Writing assignments are also flexible enough to allow the teacher or parent to determine a proper grading standard.

## Author Biography

# Washington Irving

April 3, 1783 – November 28, 1859

Named for our first president, young Irving actually met George Washington in New York City at the age of six. The youngest of six children, he showed an aptitude for writing and storytelling at a young age. His brothers, prominent New York merchants, often supported him financially in the early days of his career. His travels throughout upstate New York provided wonderful material for his future books.

Irving created a successful pseudonym, Diedrich Knickerbocker, for the satirical *A History of New York in 1809*. While traveling in Europe, he made a life-long friendship with Sir Walter Scott, and later served as a minister to Spain under President John Tyler.

Irving was one of the first American writers of talent to be recognized in Europe during his lifetime. He was a master of the short story and preferred setting his tales in America, based on the Dutch folklore of northern New York.

## Setting

The setting of the story reveals the time and location of the events enjoyed by the reader. Rip Van Winkle begins before the American Revolution and ends twenty years later. The Catskill Mountains of eastern New York provide a scenic setting of streams, lakes, waterfalls, and gorges. The small village is as fictional as the story itself, but is very important to the story.

# Comprehension Questions