The Legend of Sleepy Hollow
Washington Irving’s creepy classic tale

Preview: Students will love this grimly amusing play, adapted from the classic story of the Headless Horseman. Like the original, the play concludes with a hint that the Horseman is a hoax. Even so, a mystery remains: What really happened to Ichabod Crane?

Learning Objective: to make inferences and to draw a conclusion about the fate of Ichabod Crane

Key Skills: mood, inference, foreshadowing, characterization, character motivation, literary devices, comparing texts

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan
Text Marking, Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1 Preparing to Read
• Write “What is a superstition?” on the board. (It is a belief resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, or trust in magic.) As a class, come up with a definition and share examples: Walking under a ladder brings bad luck, finding a penny brings good luck, etc.
• Distribute or project our Vocabulary Definitions for students to refer to as they read. Highlighted words: absorbed, brooding, flax, groggily, laden, lanky, musket, rapt, witching hour. Tell students to note, as they read, any other unfamiliar words. They will add these to their vocabulary lists. Assign the vocabulary activity as homework.

2 Reading the Texts
Read the essay. (10 minutes)
Turn to page 16 and read “If You Lived in Sleepy Hollow” to the class. Then have students read the essay on their own. Tell them to underline details that make life in the Hudson River Valley in 1790 sound appealing and circle details that make it sound unappealing. Then ask: Does life in the Hudson River Valley in 1790 sound appealing? Why or why not?

Read the play. (30 minutes, activity sheets online)
Now that students have an understanding of the play’s setting, they are ready to read the play.
• Read aloud the “As You Read” box on page 12.
• Choose students to read the image captions.
• Assign parts and read the play aloud as a class.
• Have students discuss the following in groups:

Close-Reading Questions
Describe the mood of Scene 1. Which details create that mood? (mood) Answers will vary. The mood is spooky, eerie, etc. Details that help create the mood include the rickety bridge, the silver sky and the rustling leaves, the phrase “hauntings and superstitions,” the title of Ichabod’s book, and the comments about the Wailing Widow.

At the end of Scene 1, why does Ichabod look up? How does this moment foreshadow what is to come? (inference, foreshadowing) Ida and Martha
have just told Ichabod that the Wailing Widow shrieks when a storm is coming. You can infer that Ichabod looks to see if a storm is indeed coming. It is: The sky is darkening. Ichabod shivers. This hints that something bad is going to happen to Ichabod.

Using details from the play, compare Ichabod’s and Brom’s appearances. What does the contrast in their appearances suggest about the differences in their personalities? (characterization) Ichabod is tall, thin, and awkward. In Scene 1, Knickerbocker describes him as “very tall, with long arms and hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves.” In Scene 5, as Ichabod dances, “his long limbs fly around the room like an octopus in a tornado,” which shows his awkwardness. Brom, on the other hand, is large and powerful. In Scene 3, Ichabod says of Brom, “His neck is the size of my waist.” In Scene 4, Brom is described as being “so broad-shouldered that he must turn sideways to fit through the door frame.” These descriptions suggest that Brom is confident and unshakable, while Ichabod is weak and can be easily manipulated.

In Scene 6, why does Brouwer tell the story about his encounter with the Headless Horseman? (inference, character motivation) Brouwer likely wants to scare Ichabod. He may also be laying the groundwork for the trick that Brom plans to play on Ichabod later.

Why are lines from Scene 6 repeated in Scene 7? (literary devices) Ichabod is hearing the offstage lines in his mind. He is remembering the ghost stories he heard at the party. The repetition of these lines adds drama to the scene, keeping these disturbing ideas fresh in the reader’s mind.

The essay portrays what life was like in 1790 in the Hudson River Valley. What information in the essay is reflected in the play? (comparing texts) Both texts show that people in this time and place were deeply affected by the Revolutionary War, that it was typical for teachers to visit students’ homes, and that telling ghost stories was a popular pastime.

Critical-Thinking Questions

Is Ichabod a sympathetic character? That is, do you care about him? Do you like him? Some students may find little sympathy for Ichabod. They may point to the suggestion in the text that Ichabod was after Katrina for her wealth and may see him as foolish for falling for Brom’s trick. Others may feel sorry for Ichabod and see him as the innocent victim of a bully (or of a ghost!).

What role does Katrina play in Ichabod’s fate? Students who infer that Brom scared Ichabod away might say that Katrina helped bring this about by encouraging the two men to compete for her attention.

Why might people in 1790 have been more superstitious or more likely to believe in ghosts than people are today? Use information in the play and the essay to help you answer. Answers will vary. Students may say that in 1790, people did not know as much about the natural world as they do today. People were left to draw their own conclusions about the way the world works. Also, as both texts mention, in 1790 the battles of the Revolutionary War were fresh in people’s minds. The dead were lingering in memories; perhaps it was not a big leap to imagine them lingering as ghosts. Both texts also state that storytelling was a common pastime. It stands to reason that some stories, repeated often enough, would eventually be believed.

3 Skill Building: Making Inferences

(15 minutes, activity sheet online) Have students complete the activity Making Inferences in groups. This activity will prepare them to respond to the writing prompt on page 16.
Differentiation

For Struggling Readers
Compare Ichabod Crane and Brom Bones. How are they similar? How are they different? Support your ideas with details from the play.

For Advanced Readers
Write a paragraph describing Ichabod’s final night in Sleepy Hollow from Brom’s point of view.

DON’T MISS THIS! To extend this lesson, visit Scope Online for a fabulous mini-research project.

Complexity Factors
See how these texts will challenge your students.

Levels of Meaning/Purpose: The play is a delightful take on a classic story about rivalry and superstition. The nonfiction essay provides background on the play’s setting by exploring what life would have been like for a kid at that time.

Structure: The play is chronological. The essay, written in second-person present tense, describes a typical day in 1790 Sleepy Hollow.

Language Convenationality and Clarity:
• Vocabulary: high academic words (laden, rapt, groggily)
• Figurative Language: hyperbole, metaphors, similes

Knowledge Demands: The play and essay take place during the late 18th century, which is likely to be unfamiliar to most students.

Lexile: 1130L (essay)

Literature Connections
Curricular texts that explore life in late 18th-century America
• Fever 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson
• My Brother Sam Is Dead by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier
• Rip Van Winkle by Washington Irving

ONLINE RESOURCES

ACTIVITIES TO PRINT OR PROJECT:
• Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions*
• Vocabulary*
• Literary Elements
• Quiz (two levels)
• Contest Entry Form
• Core Skill: Making Inferences
• Core Skill: Text Evidence (two levels)
*Supports the lesson plan

scope.scholastic.com