

CHATTERBOX AUDIO THEATER

www.chatterboxtheater.org



rip van winkle education guide

For use with the Chatterbox Audio Theater production available
for free streaming and download at www.chatterboxtheater.org
Written by Marques Brown, Education Director



about chatterbox

Chatterbox Audio Theater was created in 2007 by four friends with a lot of creativity and ambition but very little money. Based in Memphis, TN, Chatterbox creates fully soundscaped audio works for free streaming or download. With rare exceptions, Chatterbox shows are recorded live, with manual sound effects and as little post-production editing as possible.

Chatterbox is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. Every Chatterbox production is available for free streaming and download from iTunes or from the group's website, www.chatterboxtheater.org.

mission

Chatterbox Audio Theater is a non-profit web-based community theater that advances the exchange of ideas by channeling creativity and artistic collaboration into recorded audio works that enlighten, entertain, and inspire.

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Study guide designed with help from Heather Klein, www.heatherkleindesign.com

about audio theater



Karen Stachon

Once known as **radio drama**, audio theater is the production of dramatic performances written and performed specifically for audiences to hear. It had its greatest popularity on radio, before television was introduced, during the period known as the “Golden Age of Radio.”

The development of audio theater began as early as the 1880s, when theatrical performances could be listened to over the telephone! In the next ten years, phonograph recordings were all the rage, and music and comedy acts—like those of the vaudeville stage—were recorded and sold all over the country.

Eventually, the comical “sight gags” that were a part of the hilarious appeal of live vaudeville performances had to be adapted into “sound gags,” and “sound effects” for audiences at home listening to their radios or record players. By the 1920s, these techniques were improved upon—and the art form of audio theater was born.

As “radio drama,” it became the most popular form of mass entertainment from the 1920s through the 1940s, now referred to as the “Golden Age of Radio.” Classic shows such as *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, *The Shadow*, and *The Lone Ranger* kept people of all ages glued to their radios. Some of these shows ran for several decades.



about audio theater (continued)

Television sets began to pop up in American homes in the late 1930s and early 1940s. After WWII, the television started to replace the radio in most American homes as the main source of news and entertainment. By the 1960's, with a few special exceptions, radio networks began shutting down their radio drama productions altogether to make way for television shows, and instead focused on delivering news and popular music.

Since the days that television replaced the radio, audio theater has survived through the efforts of many individual theater groups like Chatterbox. Thanks to technological innovations such as computer software and the internet, audio theater is being resurrected online, and is proving a rapidly growing art form and source of entertainment.

Audio theater also is growing in another way as well. This sensory art form is gaining recognition in educational institutions around the world as an effective teaching method. Audio theater has been employed to teach subjects such as literature, theatre, and technology, but also unexpected fields such as history, social science, and ethics.

about rip van winkle

"Rip Van Winkle" is a short story by American writer Washington Irving. It is loosely based upon early German folk tales. "Rip Van Winkle" was first published in a collection of Irving's works called *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* (1819). The story begins about five years before the American Revolutionary War and ends twenty years later, after the war's conclusion. The setting is a village in eastern New York, near the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains.

summary

Rip Van Winkle, "a simple, good-natured fellow" and a descendant of Dutch settlers, lives in a colonial village in New York, at the foot of the Catskill Mountains. He spends much of his time in recreation, volunteering for odd jobs, and wasting time in the local public house (or "pub"). Rip's easy nature and apparent laziness cause his farm to fall into disrepair.

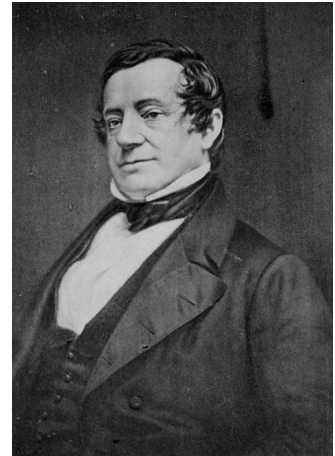
In order to avoid his wife's nagging, Rip wanders into the mountains with his dog, Wolf. While traveling leisurely on the mountain path, Rip hears distant, thunderous noises. He comes across a man dressed in antiquated Dutch clothing, carrying a keg up the mountain. Rip volunteers his help. The two men arrive at a hollow, where Rip discovers the source of the noises. A group of strangely dressed, bearded men are playing a game of nine-pins (a game much like bowling). Enjoying the company of the men, Rip decides to join in. He drinks some of their mysterious brew, after which he falls asleep.

When Rip awakes, he finds himself in unusual circumstances. His gun is practically rusted away, and his beard has grown quite long. Wolf is nowhere to be found. Upon wandering home, Rip discovers that he doesn't recognize anyone in the village. He learns that his wife has died and that his close friends have died in a war or left the area. Not understanding that the Revolutionary War has taken place while he slept, Rip proclaims himself a loyal subject of King George III, alarming the current residents of the village. Rip is told that another man in the village goes by the name of Rip Van Winkle. This man turns out to be Rip's own son, who has grown up in his father's absence.

Rip learns that the men he met in the mountains were the ghosts of Henry Hudson and his crew, who explored much of the area now known as New York. Rip is told that he has been away from his home for twenty years. Before long, Rip resumes his habitual idleness, and the other men of the village listen in wonder as he tells his story time and again.

about the author

Washington Irving (1783-1859)



Washington Irving was born in New York City on April 3, 1783, at the close of the Revolutionary War. His parents named him for General George Washington, whom they greatly admired. Though Irving had many interests—including architecture, traveling, law, and diplomacy—he is remembered as the first American to make his living solely as an author. During his career, Irving used several pen names, including "Diedrich Knickerbocker" and "Geoffrey Crayon."

It was under the pseudonym of Knickerbocker that Irving wrote *A History of New-York* (1809), which illustrated and satirized the lives of early Dutch settlers in Manhattan. The pen name caught on as a nickname for New Yorkers, and is the inspiration for the NBA basketball team the New York Knicks. Under the name of Crayon, Irving created the character of Rip Van Winkle in the short story of the same name. In the same publication, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* (1819), he also created Ichabod Crane and the Headless Horseman for his chilling short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

Irving enjoyed travel and spent much time in Europe. As he wrote about his experiences, he became a bestselling author in both America and across Europe, and was the recipient of many awards and honors. In 1828, Spain elected Irving to the Real Academia de la Historia. In 1830, he received a gold medal in history from the Royal Society of Literature in London, and also received honorary degrees from Oxford, Columbia, and Harvard. President Tyler appointed Irving the ambassador to Spain in 1842, and he traveled throughout Europe as a diplomatic representative of the United States.

In 1832 Irving returned from Europe to his home, known as Sunnyside, in Tarrytown, New York. For the next twenty-five years, the bachelor shared Sunnyside with his brother Ebenezer and his five nieces. Irving lived the life of a diplomat and a celebrity. He died in his home on November 28, 1859, on the eve of the Civil War. He is buried in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery at the Old Dutch Church in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.

cast & crew

Role	Performer
Rip Van Winkle	Greg Krosnes
Ensemble	Jenny Smith
Ensemble	Laurence Goodwin
Ensemble	Randal Cooper
Ensemble	Robert Arnold
Sound Effects	Jenny Smith
Sound Effects	Laurence Goodwin
Musician	Robert Arnold
Producer	Eric Sefton
Adaptation	Robert Arnold
Director	Robert Arnold
Announcer	Tom Badgett
Artist	Jim Palmer

characters

Rip Van Winkle

A meek, easygoing, ne'er-do-well resident of the village, and the hero of our story.

Dame Van Winkle

Rip's nagging wife.

Nicholas Vedder

The owner of a village inn where the men of the town congregate.

Derrick Van Bummel

The village schoolmaster.

Wolf

Rip's dog.

The Stranger

The spirit of Englishman Henry Hudson, explorer of the Hudson River.

Sailors

The spirit's of Henry Hudson's crewmen, who are engaged in an eternal game of nine-pins.

Townfolk

The denizens of the village, both past and future, make up the society that react to Rip's behavior in both time periods, and help to identify Rip when he returns to the village after his twenty-year slumber.

Rip Van Winkle II

Rip's ne'er-do-well son.

Judith

In the Chatterbox version, Judith is the wife of Rip Van Winkle's son.

themes, motifs, and symbols

Literary works often use **themes** (unifying or dominant ideas), **motifs** (recurring subjects, ideas, or other patterns), and **symbols** (an object or image used to represent a larger idea). Below are just a few examples and suggestions of these literary devices to explore in your classroom discussions.

THEME: Idleness

One of the defining characteristics of Rip Van Winkle is an idleness which may be construed as a defiant laziness, though it can also be viewed as a sort of “Zen” way of life, a decision on Rip’s part to “live simply.” Rip is, in fact, willing to help others in the community—even if he finds himself avoiding the demands of his own wife, which seem nagging and excessive. Rip’s personality is a contradiction: he is both charitable and lazy, kindhearted and inconsiderate. See below for an explanation of how these characteristics might symbolize colonial America as a whole.

THEME: Social tradition and change

Upon awakening from his long slumber, Rip finds that he no longer recognizes the village he left. This is true both in the faces of the people and in the state of fashion, architecture, and politics. Not only has his village been transformed, but even the country to which he pledged allegiance had changed completely, as America had gained its independence from England as a result of the Revolutionary War.

While Rip reels from these unexpected changes, he also notes that, when he looks beyond the social aspects of his life to the natural surroundings of the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains, many things haven’t changed at all. The more time Rip takes to get acquainted with his new surroundings, the more he encounters people who knew him before his incident in the mountains. In this realization, Irving’s primary theme becomes clear: Although drastic social changes are unavoidable, tradition must not (and indeed cannot) be eradicated entirely. Real, lasting change is a combination of the old and the new, with the latter building on the foundation of the former.

themes, motifs, and symbols (continued)

MOTIF: Magic, superstition, and the unexplained

In his collection of short stories *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon*, Irving used elements of fantasy, superstition, and dark magic to drive home points about personal and societal virtues. By introducing elements of the unexplained—including ghosts and mythical beings—Irving provides himself with a fanciful, gripping way to touch upon the concept of mortality as well as the causes and effects of human behavior.

In “Rip Van Winkle,” the mysterious men who play the game of nine-pins are later revealed to be the spirits of the deceased explorer Henry Hudson and his crew. When Rip, a mortal, imbibes a brew that is obviously intended for these immortal beings, it has unexpected consequences. In this way, Rip’s long sleep is a moral metaphor reminding us that, for better or worse, our personalities and actions may lead to consequences that we will be held responsible for.

SYMBOL: Colonialist liberty

As mentioned, the characters in “Rip Van Winkle” can be considered symbolic of the state of colonial America, which was still under British rule. As the protagonist of the story, Rip represents America itself. He embodies the country’s need for freedom from England, which is symbolized by the overbearing Dame Van Winkle. Rip’s easygoing nature, willingness to help those in the community, and tendency to resist or ignore the demands of his wife and farm suggest that America’s citizens were interested in virtue, honesty, and cooperation, but felt that the demands placed upon them by England were unnecessary, irrelevant, and oppressive.

themes, motifs, and symbols (continued)

SYMBOL: Nature as a character

At the beginning of the story, the narrator invests the Catskill Mountains with human qualities, a literary technique known as "personification." The narrator tells us that the mountains are a "branch of the great Appalachian family... lording over the surrounding countryside." They are also described as being active rather than passive. They react to the weather and seasons by changing their "magical hues and shapes." "When the weather is fair and settled, they are clothed in blue and purple[...]. But sometimes, when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a hood of gray vapors about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will glow and light up like a crown of glory." Giving the mountains a human-like agency enables readers and listeners to consider the relationship they share with the citizens of the area. It also renders them mysterious and unpredictable.

entry points for teachers

1. Washington Irving
2. Colonial America and the Revolutionary War
3. The Catskill Mountains
4. Social tradition vs. change
5. Character creation and description
6. Short story format
7. Audio theater
8. Narrative theater
9. Music in a story
10. Sound effects in a story

curriculum connections

English/Language Arts

1. Literary forms—fiction
2. Rhythmic nature of language found in the play
3. Recurring themes
4. Observation
5. Compare and contrast
6. Cause and effect
7. Outcomes, conclusions
8. Figurative Language
9. Make predictions about stories
10. Draw, dictate, or write stories that include settings, characters, problem/solution situations, a series of events, and a sense of sequence
11. Participate in group discussions
12. Express personal opinions about the play/story
13. After reading or hearing the play/story, identify the main idea, describe main characters, re-enact or map major plot elements, draw conclusions, and make inferences
14. Dramatize or re-enact story events
15. Describe the plot, characters, and setting in the play
16. Explain a speaker's message and purpose
17. Speak to express an opinion, persuade, or entertain

Social Studies

1. Show how societies change and stay the same over time
2. Show how social perceptions affect thoughts and behavior of individuals
3. Show how personalities are similar and different
4. Explain and respect the diversity of people and their experiences

Science

1. Discuss or report on the technical process of recording and reproducing sound
2. Examine the psychological connection between experience and behavior
3. Discuss or research the physiology of sleep

shorter activities

1. Write short, original narratives that include characters, settings, and a sequence of events.
2. Write about a real-life experience that can be fictionalized through exaggeration.
3. Compare/contrast “Rip Van Winkle” with other works by Irving.
4. Write about or discuss relationships between music, story, and literature.
5. Adapt a familiar story into play form.

longer activities

1. The students will write letters about the play to specific people, depending on the content of your class. Students may write letters to the characters within the stories discussing their choices and motivation, and/or making predictions about what may occur to them in the future. Students may write letters to the actors, discussing choices the actor made in bringing his/her character to life, or techniques used within the play. Other students will also write a letter to a newspaper as a play critic, describing the play he/she heard, the production elements (sound effects, voices, music, etc.) and what he/she thought was effective (or ineffective).

2. The students will write reactions to specific questions and/or prompts relating to the story. Some examples are: (a) If you fell asleep today and awakened 20 years from now, what questions would you ask the first person you saw? (b) Write a short essay in which you use personification to describe an aspect of the natural surroundings where you live. (c) Rip learns, after his return, that his wife has died, and that America has gained its independence from England. What do these two events have in common in regards to how Rip will live out the remainder of his days?

3. The students will write original short stories based upon the themes of social tradition and change.

4. Students, alone or in groups, will create their own time capsule. They will contribute items, original writings, pictures, or articles, and explain each item's significance to our current society. These explanations should be written as if addressing residents twenty years in the future.

5. The students will listen to samples of sound effects used in the audio theater piece. They will discuss the role of sound in audio theater, and in theater in general. Students will speculate on what objects or devices were used to create sound effects in the audio theater piece, and will create their own sound effects using everyday objects.

vocabulary

Bit. An amount equivalent to 12.5 U.S. cents. During the Colonial period, dollar coins were cut into eight pie-slice shaped pieces which were called "bits" (while the whole coin was known as a "piece of eight"). *"Now, we've only got a few bits left to our name, so you make sure you spend it on food, Rip!"* (02:40)

Cask. A barrel-like container for holding liquids. *"I can just see him there, coming up the mountain, hauling something on his back. Why—it's a cask!"* (09:41)

"Federal or Democrat." The first two political parties in America, the Federalist party (who advocated for strong federal control) and the Democratic-Republican Party (who favored state's rights and a strict interpretation of the Constitution). *"Yes, yes, you with the beard! Federal or Democrat, sir? Federal or Democrat?"* (16:47)

Flagon. A container for holding liquids, especially one with a handle, a spout, and usually a cover. *"Well, don't be shy, then, Rip Van Winkle! This flagon of mine won't fill itself!"* (11:24)

Flopper. In the game of nine-pins, a turn in which a player knocks down all nine pins with a single roll of the ball. *"A flopper, boys! A perfect flopper!"* (11:09)

Gable. The triangular upper part of a wall between the sloping ends of a pitched roof. *"They have latticed windows and gabled fronts, and are topped with weathervanes."* (01:50)

Game. Wild animals, including birds and fishes, such as are hunted for food or taken for sport or profit. *"There's bound to be plenty of game up in the Catskills this time of year!"* (07:28)

Lattice. A structure of crossed wooden or metal strips usually arranged to form a diagonal pattern of open spaces between the strips. *"They have latticed windows and gabled fronts, and are topped with weathervanes."* (01:50)

Nip. A small drink of alcoholic liquor; a sip. *"Much obliged, Rip Van Winkle! And don't forget to take a little nip for yourself!"* (11:43)

vocabulary (continued)

Parched. Extremely, excessively, or completely dry. *"Never mind that our throats were parched. Never mind that we nearly died of fatigue on our way to the market."* (06:28)

Province. A territory governed as a unit of a country or empire. *"...there lived many years ago, while the country was yet a province of Great Britain, a simple, good-natured fellow by the name of Rip Van Winkle."* (02:01)

Vigil. A devotional watching or wakefulness during the customary hours of sleep. *"It's said that Hudson's men hold a kind of vigil in the mountains every twenty years..."* (20:48)