

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow – A Reader’s Theater



Story adapted from *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820) by Washington Irving

Roles: Narrators (#1, #2, #3, #4); Cornelis Bakker (a farmer); Abigael Grevink (an unmarried woman); Anna Vink (a shopkeeper’s wife); Students (#1, #2); Ichabod Crane (a school teacher); Old Brouwer (an old man); Brom Von Brant (local hero)

Narrator #1: There once was a valley that was said to be the quietest place in the world, it was known as Sleepy Hollow. The “Hollow” was just off the eastern shore of the Hudson River in New York. A small brook murmured through it. One could hear the occasional whistle of a bird or the tapping of a woodpecker.

Narrator #2: It was quite an idyllic place, with one exception...

Narrator #3: The folks who lived in Sleepy Hollow believed that the valley was haunted. They often heard voices, saw strange things, and frequently heard music and voices floating through the air.

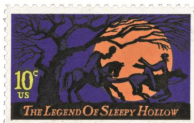
Narrator #4: The spirit that most often haunted the enchanted valley was a man riding on his horse. The spirit did not have a head, so residents called him the “Headless Horseman”.



Narrator #1: When residents of Sleepy Hollow would get together, one would often hear conversations about the ghost.

Cornelis Bakker: “He was a Hessian soldier who died during the Revolutionary War. I think he got his head knocked off by a cannon ball.”

Abigael Grevink:



“Every night the ghost rides his horse to the site of the battleground in hopes of finding his lost head.”

Anna Vink: “He was buried in the churchyard. Every night he races through the Hollow on his horse in order to get back to the churchyard before dawn.”



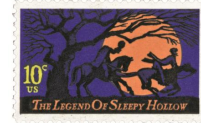
Narrator #2: Ichabod Crane was a tall, sweet-tempered teacher. He taught in a plain schoolhouse that stood in a lonely spot at the foot of a green hill in Sleepy Hollow.

Student #1: “Mr. Crane is really tall! His arms are so long, look how his hands dangle a mile outside of his sleeves! Sometimes he reminds me of a scarecrow, especially when his clothes flutter in the wind!”

Student #2: “It is his small head, huge ears, and long nose that really get me! He sort of looks like a bird, actually with his long, long neck, he looks like a crane.”

Narrator #3: Ichabod loved scary things, making Sleepy Hollow the perfect place for him. One of his favorite things to do was to stretch out next to the brook and read spooky stories.

Narrator #4: Ichabod often spent winter evenings with other Sleepy Hollow residents telling stories around the fireplace. Crane enjoyed listening to tales of ghosts and goblins, eerie bridges and haunted houses. He particularly loved to hear stories about the Headless Horseman.



Narrator #1: When Crane would walk home from these late night storytelling sessions, he would jump at every sound and gasp at every movement. To alleviate his fears he would sing at the top of his lungs or whistle as loud as he could all the way home.

Narrator #2: Ichabod did not make much money as a teacher. To help him with his expenses, he taught young people to sing. Among the young ladies that Ichabod taught was Katrina Van Tassel. She was the only daughter of a rich Dutch farmer and quite beautiful.

Narrator #3: The first time that Ichabod visited Katrina at the Van Tassel farm he thought to himself....

Ichabod Crane: “Wow!! Look at the fields of wheat, rye, buckwheat, and corn! It seems like there are miles of apple trees in the vast orchards. There must be hundreds of valuable farm animals. When I marry Katrina I will be master of the Van Tassel farm and fortune!”

Narrator #4: Ichabod was worried that Brom Von Brunt might hurt his chances with Katrina. Brom had muscular arms and broad shoulders. He made Ichabod look quite gangly in comparison. In fact, Von Brant was known throughout Sleepy Hollow for his considerable strength and his superior horsemanship skills.

Abigael Grevink: “Oh, Brom Von Brunt, he is so strong and brave! I could watch him ride all day long! He is my hero!” (sigh)

Ichabod Crane: “Katrina cannot possibly be interested in Brom. I will not give up on marrying her and her father’s fortune. I shall not lose to Brom Von Brant!”

Narrator #1: Ichabod went about trying to win the heart of the lovely Katrina, visiting her home and taking her for long walks in the moonlight. This made Brom very jealous.

Narrator #2: Brom began playing practical jokes on Ichabod in order to make him look silly in front of Katrina. One night, he even went into the old schoolhouse and turned everything topsy-turvy.

Narrator #3: One autumn afternoon, a messenger arrived at the Sleepy Hollow schoolhouse to give Ichabod an invitation.

Student #1: “What is the invitation for?”

Ichabod Crane: “Why, it is for a party tonight at the Van Tassels.”

Student #2: “Will you dance with Miss Katrina?”

Ichabod Crane: “Of course we will dance! She will forget all about Brom Von Brant!”

Narrator #4: The classroom was abuzz with excitement. Ichabod dismissed his students a full hour early, as he needed time to get ready for the party. After he put on his only suit and combed his hair, he studied his reflection in a mirror that hung in the schoolhouse.

Ichabod Crane: “Perfect!”

Narrator #1: Ichabod proudly mounted his horse like a knight in search of adventure. But he was far from being a brave knight. The horse he rode to the Van Tassels' was not even his own. It was an old plow horse named Gunpowder that he had borrowed from a farmer.

Narrator #2: When Ichabod arrived at the party he spied Brom Von Brant's favorite horse, Daredevil, a beautiful, black racehorse. When Ichabod walked into the party he saw his rival, Von Brant, in a corner talking with some people.

Narrator #3: Suddenly music floated throughout the manor house and the guests began to trickle into the ballroom. Ichabod prided himself on his dancing abilities.

Ichabod Crane: “May I have the honor of this dance?”

Narrator #4: Soon Ichabod and Katrina were whirling across the floor. Katrina smiled happily. Brom was anything but happy. He stood in the corner, jealously watching Ichabod.

Narrator #1: After the dancing was done, Ichabod joined a few people who were telling tales about ghosts and apparitions. Soon they were talking about the Headless Horseman. It seemed that he had been spotted several times lately.



Cornelis Bakker: “He has been seen at one of his favorite places -- the bridge that leads to the church.”

Anna Vink: “It is said that he tethers his horse nightly among the graves in the churchyard.”

Old Brouwer: “You know that I didn’t believe in ghosts until I met the Horseman returning from Sleepy Hollow to the churchyard. He galloped with me up and down the hills until we reached the church bridge. There the Horseman suddenly turned into a skeleton. I was so shocked that I fell into the brook. The Headless Horseman then sprang away over the treetops with a deafening rumble of thunder.”



Brom Von Brant: “One night I was coming back from a hunting trip and met up with the Headless Horseman. We raced each other to the church bridge and I would have won the race but right before the bridge, the Hessian bolted and vanished in a flash of fire!”



Narrator #2: It was almost midnight when Ichabod left the party. There was hardly a sound except for the chirp of the crickets. Even though Ichabod loved all things spooky, he began to feel nervous. His heart was beating loudly. He remembered all of the ghost stories he had heard at the party, especially the tales of the Headless Horseman.



Ichabod Crane: “I must be brave!” (his voice trembling)

Narrator #3: Ichabod had never felt so lonely and afraid. He began to whistle to keep his spirits up.

Ichabod Crane: (whistling)

Narrator #4: He thought he heard someone else whistling, but it was just the wind sweeping through the dry autumn branches.

Narrator #1: Suddenly, Ichabod sat up tall in his saddle. Straight ahead was something white hanging in the middle of a tree.

Ichabod Crane: “A ghost!” (he gasped)

Narrator #2: The nervous schoolteacher soon realized that it was not a ghost. The tree was only white where the moonlight was shining through the branches.

Narrator #3: Ichabod was almost to the very spot where the Headless Horseman was often sighted, according to the stories he had heard. He urged Gunpowder to hurry. The horse did not respond.



Narrator #4: Soon he began to hear a thumping noise. His body began to shake. Ichabod turned his head towards the noise. He saw a huge figure in the shadows. It was big and black and did not move. It seemed ready to spring into action, like a giant monster.

Ichabod Crane: “Wh-who are you?” (stuttering with fright)

Narrator #1: He received no reply.

Ichabod Crane: “Wh-who are you?” (trying to use a more commanding voice)

Narrator #2: Again, there was no reply.

Narrator #3: Ichabod turned his head to get a better look at his unwelcome guest. The figure was a large man riding a great black horse. Ichabod's teeth began to chatter.

Ichabod Crane: (teeth chattering)

Narrator #4:



Then he saw that the man was...headless! And the monster's head was sitting on the pommel of the saddle!!!

Ichabod Crane: (he gasps) “The Headless Horseman!!!”



Ichabod Crane: “Gunpowder, Faster, Faster!” (he screams)

Narrator #1:



The Headless Horseman chases Ichabod and Gunpowder as they dash across the valley of Sleepy Hollow, stones flying and sparks flashing. The old church bridge, where the Headless Horseman is said to stop his chasing and return to his burial place, appears closer and closer.

Ichabod Crane: “If I can reach that bridge first, I will be safe.”

Narrator #2: Just then, he heard the black steed panting and felt his hot breath on his neck.

Narrator #3: Gunpowder sprang upon the bridge; he thundered over the wooden planks. Upon reaching the other side, Ichabod looked behind him to see if the Headless Horseman had stopped. Ichabod watched as the man picked up his head.



Narrator #4: Ichabod screamed in horror.

Ichabod Crane: (Scream)

Narrator #1: The Headless Horseman was about to throw his head! Ichabod dodged, but it was too late, the head hit him and knocked him off of his horse.



Narrator #2:



Gunpowder, the black steed, and the Headless Horseman passed by like the wind and rode off into the night.

Narrator #3: The next morning, a search party found Ichabod's horse peacefully eating grass in a meadow. Nearby, they found Ichabod's hat and a shattered pumpkin.

Narrator #4: Ichabod was not to be found.

Cornelis Bakker: “I think that Ichabod Crane was carried off by the Galloping Hessian.”



Abigael Grevink: “I think that Ichabod left Sleepy Hollow because he had lost Katrina to Brom.” (sigh)

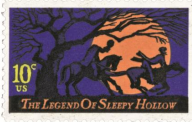
Narrator #1: Ichabod was never seen in Sleepy Hollow again.

Narrator #2: The Sleepy Hollow schoolhouse was no longer used and soon fell into decay. It is said to be haunted by the ghost of the unfortunate teacher.

Student #1: “I often hear Mr. Crane’s voice singing in the distance...”

Student #2: “I still miss him. He was a very good teacher. I often think I hear him reading scary stories by the brook.”

Narrator #3:



When the townspeople retell the story of Ichabod and the Headless Horseman, Brom Von Brant always seems to get a huge grin on his face.

Narrator #4: When anyone talks about the broken pumpkin found lying near Ichabod’s old dusty hat, Brom laughs out loud. Do you suppose he is merely amused by the story or might there be more to the events of that night that only Brom knows?

Narrator #1: Did Ichabod really see the Headless Horseman or was it just Brom throwing a pumpkin that fateful night? No one knows for sure.



Narrator #2:



To this day the Headless Horseman continues to roam the roads near Sleepy Hollow in search of his head.

Narrator #3: The disappearance of Ichabod Crane continues to be one of the many mysteries of Sleepy Hollow, the quietest place on earth.

On October 10, 1974, the United States Postal Service issued “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” stamp (Scott 1548) in North Tarrytown, New York. It depicts the fearsome Headless Horseman chasing the timid school master, Ichabod Crane, with both figures silhouetted against a full moon. The stamp was designed by Leonard Everett Fisher and was issued as the sixth stamp of the American Folklore Series.

