

# The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

*by Claudia Haas*

based on the tale by  
Washington Irving

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

The story is really a question of belief. Does one believe in the tale of a galloping Hessian who rides through the woods ever searching for his lost head? Will the world end when a comet streaks the sky or a meteor falls to Earth? And what is it about the town of Sleepy Hollow that its residents are “given to all sorts of marvelous beliefs, the people are subject to trances and frequently see strange sights and hear music...voices in the air.” Come visit this enchanted region of the Hudson River Valley and decide for yourself if this is a place of dreamers or the product of an overworked imagination. This time-honored tale includes the story of Ichabod Crane, the school and singing master of Sleepy Hollow; his nemesis, Brom Bones; and the lovely coquette they both court, Katrina Van Tassel. Let the play take you through the twists and turns of ghostly stories, autumn mischief, and the infamous ride of the headless horseman. Then later decide for yourself - who and what do you believe? Perfect for Halloween celebrations, this story will also play at any time of the year. About 70 minutes.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(15 characters 9f, 5m, 1 flexible)*

CHLOE: 20th century “modern” girl. Wants to excel but is also overburdened by the lack of time in her life due to so many activities. (14-17 yrs. old.)

EMILY: Chloe’s friend. Not as confident as Chloe and tends to obey all rules. Wants to be safe. (14-17.)

ELISE VAN DE LIS: Sleepy Hollow resident who befriends Chloe. Prone to visions. Wants to share her dream. (14-17.)

GITTEL VAN SMYTHE: Sleepy Hollow resident, who is the town’s “know-it-all” child and will likely grow up to be a very rude woman. Wants to be in the know. (12-17.)

MARGARET VAN SMYTHE: Gittel’s younger sister. Wise beyond her years. Wants to be a grown-up. (9-15.)

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HENRY VAN HUDSON: One of the Sleepy Hollow boys.  
Big, braggart and secretly terrified of his own shadow.  
Wants to be the Brom Bones of his generation. (13-15.)

PAUL VAN DE LIS: Worships Brom and tries to keep up with him. But doesn't want to get into trouble. (Could be PAULINA with few line changes. Just have "her" be a tomboy. 12-15.)

ICHABOD CRANE: A tall, lanky, "scarecrow" of a man. Has a great appetite for food in spite of his lanky looks. A people pleaser, for his livelihood depends on that trait. He is prone to superstition although he won't admit to it. He will deal with conflicts of a "brainy" type but steers away from anything physical. Wants to be Lord of the Manor, the respected man of the town with the pretty wife and worldly goods. (18-30.)

LIESL VAN DE LIS: Scattered, chatty woman. Mother of Elise, Paul and other young ones. Wants to preserve status quo. (30-50.)

MARIA VAN SMYTHE: Gittel's and Margaret's mother. Very agreeable because perhaps she doesn't have a mind of her own. Wants to please. (30-50.)

KATRINA VAN TASSEL: The catch of the town. Lovely and quite a mischievous coquette. Wants attention. (16-28.)

BALTUS VAN TASSEL: Warm hearted rich farmer. Indulgent father. Everyone's friend. (30-50.)  
Wants time to read his book.

MRS. VAN TASSEL: A busy woman who has a hard time keeping up with her farmstead of animals and food, much less find time to mother her daughter. Wants to keep everything running but is not up to the task. (30-50.)

BROM VON BRONT: Merry prankster, sometimes goes too far but means no malice. Just wants to get his own way. (18-30.)

WASHINGTON VAN IRVING: A cronie of Brom's. An observer. Wants to partake in adventure without ever leaving his couch. (18-30.)

OLD MAN RIPPER: Offstage voice - should double. (Old!)

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*Legend of Sleepy Hollow* is it premiered as the Junior Show for Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, WI. All parts were developed for and played by actors in Grades 7-9.

### **SET**

Representational. Benches could be used for outside the Van Tassel's home and for the after dinner discussion at Liesl's. But in general, all could be gnarled trees, shadows and areas that denote the different playing venues. (Those would be: outside school house, outside the church, outside Liesl's home, outside the Van Tassel's and finally in the woods on Halloween night.)

The horse "Gunpowder" should ideally be a puppet - a large stick figure. If available, set decoration could include haystacks, fallen leaves and/or corn stalks.

### **COSTUMES**

Chloe and Emily are dressed in the present. Hiking clothes would be appropriate. Chloe sports a fun streak of color in her hair. All other are "period." (Late 1700's ideally but certainly something suggesting a distant time.) Long skirts for women and dark trousers with plaid or white shirts for the men.

### **SOUND EFFECTS**

There are many sound effects in the play (nature sounds, wind sounds.) Ideally, they should be made by the cast. For the choir scene one COULD have the choir scene or if they cannot (ours couldn't.) - a recording of a royalty-free hymn or psalmody would do. Or as Ichabod starts up the choir - he can be constantly interrupted and they never do sing! One could also plan ahead that the choir is not very good. Director's choice.

**LIGHTS:** Shadowy effects encouraging the idea that things are not always what they seem.

### **PROPS**

#### OPENING

EMILY: Bag with many supplies including shovel and scissors

CHLOE: Book on plants that are found in the Hudson Valley

ELISE: Small canvas and paint palette

ICHABOD: Book on New England Witchcraft by Cotton Mather,  
quill

HENRY and PAUL: Sticks

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DINNER SCENE

ICHABOD: "Baby" in swaddling clothes

ELISE: Cup of coffee

ELISE: Painting

SCHOOL HOUSE TOPSY-TURVY SCENE

ALL CHILDREN: Books, quills, slates

1st VAN TASSEL SCENE:

KATRINA: Hairbrush, bows

MR. VAN TASSEL: Book

MRS. VAN TASSEL: Broomstick, pies for Halloween night, plates  
of fruits or vegetables, cheeses and breads

CHLOE and ELISE: Each has canvases and paints

HALLOWEEN FROLIC:

CHILDREN: Apples, gnarled sticks, possibly pumpkins - director's  
choice as to what Halloween activities they can be doing.

EPILOGUE: (Back to present.)

ON GROUND: bits of pumpkin, the book *The Legend of Sleepy  
Hollow* and nestled in the book - a picture of Chloe hanging on to  
a meteor.

**SCENE SYNOPSIS**

1st scene: The bluffs above the Hudson valley, in the present which  
segues into the past..

2nd scene: Singing by the church.

3rd scene: Inner at Liesl's.

4th scene: Outside the school house.

5th scene: The Van Tassel's.

6th scene: The Hudson Valley.

7th scene: Outside the Van Tassel's home during the Halloween  
frolic.

8th scene: The woods

9th scene: Back to the present on the bluffs of the Hudson Valley.

The play takes place (maybe.) over two days time. Or five  
minutes. It is a question of belief. What do you believe?

Note: This is an episodic play. Strictly speaking the play is  
divided by changes in playing areas rather than scenes. Scene  
changes can be made through the use of lights and sound.

## THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW

*(AT RISE we are in the Hudson Valley during late October. Autumn color on the trees should still be visible, although by the end of the play, the woods should be stark. The scale should be larger than life. A scrim should serve as a backdrop. The play takes place in the "Hollow" therefore there should be hills and banks rolling down into the main playing area. A bridge could be on one side. One side of the stage will function as the outside of the school house [perhaps obscured by a large elm tree.] In the middle will be the path that leads to the village and church where the choir will gather and the other side of the stage will function as the direction of the Van Tassel's. All should be representational. SOUNDS of the afternoon are heard. Whistle of quails, chirps of the song birds, squawking of the ravens, chattering of the squirrels should all be heard softly in the background. It is a perfect October day ripe with the possibility of anything happening. The sounds should build as CHLOE and EMILY appear. Chloe sports some fun streaks in her hair and carries a very old, small book. Emily has her flashlight, medical supplies, bug spray, bandana - equipped for all emergencies on an innocent nature hike. )*

EMILY: Chloe! We're too far from camp! What are you looking for way out here?

CHLOE: *(Showing a picture in her book.)* I'm trying to find this plant, Emily! I spotted it somewhere around here. Look at the soft colors!

EMILY: Where did you get that book? It's positively ancient. Probably has paper lice or something.

CHLOE: Emily! Stop looking at the dark side of everything! I picked it up at the second hand book store in that quaint little village we explored this morning. It shows all these plants that were used for natural dyes. And look at the delicate drawings of them! They're beautiful! I wonder if I could use that plant to dye my hair.

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