

Rip Van Winkle

Adapted from Washington Irving's short story

By
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STORY OF THE PLAY

No one will be caught napping as Washington Irving's supernatural tale comes to vibrant life in this action-packed comedy that combines faithfulness to the original text with slapstick humor, hilarious dialogue and fascinating characters. Young Rip Van Winkle escapes from an overly-critical wife, bowls with the ghostly Henry Hudson in the Catskill Mountains, then mysteriously awakens 20 years later to find life in his colonial village vastly changed. With minimal set requirements and maximum involvement by an extremely flexible onstage ensemble, this "storyteller's theatre" one-act comedy is ideal either by itself or as part of a full evening of fun, spooky entertainment. It's also perfect for touring or contests. Early American literature has never been so much fun! Runs about 45 minutes.

Washington Irving, 1783-1859, began writing when he realized he wasn't interested in a career as a lawyer. Irving gained an international reputation writing short stories during a time when most Americans read British authors. His best known works are "Rip Van Winkle," published in 1819, and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

SETTING

A Dutch-colonial village in the Catskill Mountains, overlooking the Hudson River, early 1800s. USR is the exterior of a tavern [a simple painted flat will do]. Hanging on the tavern is a sign with a portrait of George Washington, which reads: "George W. Slept Here." Downstage of the tavern are a wooden table, stools, and a bench. Up left is the exterior of a tidy, but humble cottage [this may also be a simple painted flat]. Extreme down left is a fallen tree, log, or rock. Optional: backdrop painted to represent forested mountains, perhaps with a shining, winding river in the distance.

NOTE: See end of script for Props and Sound Effects.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Approx. 4 m, 3 w, plus 5-23 flexible, extras, doubling possible.)

DEIDRE (or *DIETRICH*): Seeker after stories.

DOG/WOLF: Lazy hound.

RICKI: Tavern keeper.

OLD VILLAGER: Cranky old coot.

RIP VAN WINKLE: Pleasant fellow.

DAME VAN WINKLE: His wife, a nagging shrew.

RIP JR.: Chip off the old block.

JUDITH: Rip's young daughter and later as an adult.

HENRY HUDSON: Spirit of a 17th century explorer.

OLD RIP: Has a rude awakening.

VILLAGERS ONE through TEN: Villagers.

CHILD ONE through THREE: Village children.

EXTRAS: Additional villagers and children, as available.

TIME

Early 1800s, then early 1770s, and back again.

PLACE

A village and the woods in the Catskill Mountains, above the Hudson River.

A NOTE ON CASTING

The uniquely flexible casting of “Rip Van Winkle” presents several opportunities. Except for Deidre/Diedrich and Dog/Wolf, the rest of the cast comprises an ensemble. The ensemble can be any combination of men and women, boys and girls. The “principal” roles, including Ricki, Rip, Dame Van Winkle, Rip Jr., Judith, Hudson, Old Rip and Judith Gardenier can emerge from the crowd of villagers, or be stand-alone roles, with the villagers acting as a kind of chorus. For example, Child One can also play Rip Jr., Child Two can play Judith, Old Villager can become Old Rip, Villager One can become Dame Van Winkle, Villager Two can become Henry Hudson, etc.

The actual number of villagers is also extremely flexible. Feel free to distribute the lines of villagers and the three children throughout an ensemble of 15, 20 or more! Since none of the villagers (*except Old Villager*) are given specific characteristics, the director should work with the actors, helping them develop a “core” character: age, gender, occupation, manner of dress, personality type or attitude that carries through the show, even when they are playing Hudson’s crew. This will help create a sense of an actual village of real people, rather than a collection of narrators. Further, feel free to give the villagers Dutch names.

COSTUMES

Basic colonial clothing: tri-cornered hats, breeches, buckle shoes, Martha Washington caps for women, long skirts. For the scene in the forest, Villagers also play ghostly figures from the early 1600s, so gray and tattered accessories with a roughly Shakespearean look are appropriate: stocks, ruffs, Renaissance style caps, etc. The concept of the play is that people, who turn out to be Ghosts from the 1700s, are acting out the story of Rip Van Winkle, so accessories, props, etc. can be very simple. This also explains why Hudson’s crew can be comprised of both men and women. They are, after all, storytellers enacting a tale.

Costume for Dog may be as realistic as you would like to make it. Or, you could create a large dog puppet, with up to two puppeteers dressed in black manipulating it in full view of the audience, and providing the vocal responses.

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(AT RISE: DEIDRE enters through audience. She carries a small notebook and pencil.)

DEIDRE: Well, here it is. Kaaterskill Clove, New York. Off the beaten path, and then some. Just like the guide said. *(Looks around.)* Quaint. Very quaint indeed. No doubt there's a tale or two lurking under these gables that I can print in my journal. You can always count on these colonial-era villages to be rife with spine-tingling stories of adventure and the supernatural.

(DOG enters SL, meanders over to DEIDRE, sniffs her, then continues on to USR near table. Sighs, falls over and snores.)

DOG: Zzzzzz.

DEIDRE: Then again, maybe you can't. *(Looks around.)* The place is deserted. Not a soul in sight. *(Knocks on cottage, USL.)* Hello! Anyone home? *(Waits.)* No one. Looks like there's not a living thing here but me ... and that dog ...

DOG: *(Rolls over, scratches shoulder blades on the ground, snores.)* Mmmmm. Zzzzzz.

DEIDRE: *(Looks around again. Shivers.)* And the spirits of Dutch colonists who have long-since passed on, either to glory, or to ... eternal perdition.

(Shudders, moves DSL. RICKI enters USC from tavern, wiping her hands on a cloth.)

RICKI: Hey there! You called?

DEIDRE: *(Jumps.)* Oh! You startled me.

RICKI: Sorry. We don't get many visitors, up here in the Catskills. Most folk keep to the settlements down along the Hudson River Valley.

DEIDRE: I ... I'm Deidre Knickerbocker. I'm a writer.

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RICKI: You can call me Ricki. I keep the tavern hereabouts.
What brings you up into the hill country?

DEIDRE: Stories. I'm looking for a story.

RICKI: When did you lose it?

DEIDRE: Oh, no. I haven't lost a story. I want to find one!

RICKI: And you think you might do that in Kaaterskill Clove?

DOG: *(Snores.)* Zzzzz. *(Dreams.)* Woof!

DEIDRE: Are there any good legends here? Of the old days, I mean.

RICKI: Maybe yes, maybe no.

DEIDRE: Please, won't you tell me?

RICKI: Not by myself, I won't. But there's some here who might give me a hand.

DEIDRE: I'd be most grateful.

RICKI: You may not know it, but there are tales of mystery and mischief in this village, the likes of which you've never heard this side of ... *(Whispers.)* Sleepy Hollow.

DEIDRE: Sleepy Hollow? You mean *(Leafs through notebook.)* ... Ichabod Crane and ... and the *(Whispers.)* H-Headless Horseman?

RICKI: *(Confides.)* Our legend isn't quite so frightful as that, but here, in the Catskills above the Hudson River, we tell tale of

DEIDRE: *(Leans close to RICKI.)* Yes? *(Leans even closer, whispers.)* Yes?

RICKI: *(Shouts.)* Rip Van Winkle!

(With a burst of noisy activity and friendly greetings, VILLAGERS enter SR, pushing DEIDRE SL. Another group of villagers enters SL, pushing her CS. She turns to run upstage, only to encounter a third group of villagers. Along with RICKI and DOG, VILLAGERS form a semi-circle around her.)

DEIDRE: Hello, there. My, what a surprise! One might even say shock. *(Opens notebook, takes pencil.)* Mind if I take notes? *(Starts to write.)* What was that name again?

ALL: *(Shout.)* Rip Van Winkle!

DEIDRE: *(Startled, her hand leaps and her pencil goes flying.)*
I'll just remember it.

End of Freeview

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