

Rip Van Winkle

by Washington Irving



ABOUT THE READING The tale of “Rip Van Winkle” starts in the colony of New York shortly before the American Revolution. A farmer named Rip Van Winkle hikes into the Catskill Mountains to escape his nagging wife. After various adventures, Rip settles down under a tree and falls into a deep, enchanted sleep. He does not awaken for 20 years. Rip returns to his village, where everything has changed. The changes confuse Rip, which leads to humorous situations.



As you read the passage below, pay attention to the changes that Rip Van Winkle encounters after awakening.

[Rip Van Winkle] now hurried forth, and **hastened** to his old resort, the village inn—but it too was gone. A large rickety wooden building stood in its place, with great gaping windows, some of them broken and mended with old hats and petticoats, and over the door was painted, “The Union Hotel, by Jonathan Doolittle.” Instead of the great tree that used to shelter the quiet little Dutch inn of yore [times past], there now was reared a tall naked pole, with something on the top that looked like a red night-cap, and from it was fluttering a flag, on which was a singular **assemblage** of stars and stripes—all this was strange and **incomprehensible**. He recognized on the sign, however, the ruby face of King George . . . ; but even this was singularly **metamorphosed**. The red coat was changed for one of blue and buff, a sword was held in the hand instead of a scepter, the head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted in large characters, GENERAL WASHINGTON. . .

VOCABULARY

hastened hurried

assemblage collection

incomprehensible impossible to understand

metamorphosed changed

orator speaker

akimbo hands on the hips and elbows bent outward

Tory American who favored British rule

What has replaced the tree that used to stand next to the inn?

How does Irving show that the American Revolution has taken place while Rip slept?



*At the inn, Rip Van Winkle runs into several vil-
lage politicians.*

They crowded around him, eyeing him from head to foot, with great curiosity. The **orator** bustled up to him, and, drawing him partly aside, inquired “on which side he voted?” Rip stared in vacant stupidity. Another short but busy little fellow pulled him by the arm, and, rising on tiptoe, inquired in his ear, “Whether he was Federal or Democrat?” Rip was equally at a loss to comprehend the question; when a knowing, self-important old gentleman, in a sharp cocked hat, made his way through the crowd, putting them to the right and left with his elbows as he passed, and planting himself before Van Winkle, with one arm **akimbo**, the other resting on his cane, his keen eyes and sharp hat penetrating, as it were, into his very soul, demanded in an austere [harsh] tone, “what brought him to the election with a gun on his shoulder, and a mob at his heels, and whether he meant to breed a riot in the village?”—“Alas! gentlemen,” cried Rip, somewhat dismayed, “I am a poor quiet man, a native of the place, and a loyal subject of the king, God bless him!” Here a general shout burst from the bystanders—“A **Tory!** a Tory! a spy! . . . away with him!”

Circle the clues that Irving provides to indicate that an election is taking place.

To what does the question “Federal or Democrat” refer?

Predicting What do you think will happen to Rip Van Winkle next?

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. Main Idea What major event occurred while Rip Van Winkle was asleep?

2. Critical Thinking: Analyzing Information How does Washington Irving depict life in New York before the American Revolution? Provide examples from the text to support your answer.

3. Activity What if you went to sleep today and did not wake up for 20 years. On a separate piece of paper, write at least two paragraphs describing what changes you think you might find when you awaken.