

**THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN OF SLEEPY HOLLOW
LEARNING RESOURCE PACKET:
THEATRE ARTS**



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“The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” by Washington Irving
Themes, Adaptations, Storytelling, & Performance
By Stephanie Vickers

Washington Irving is known as the “first American man of letters” and was the first American author to set his stories in the newly formed United States. He championed the acceptance of author as a profession and argued for stricter copyright laws to protect original works. His most enduring legacies are as an essayist and short story author, penning such classics as “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (*The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, 1819-20). His first literary success was as a satirist for the *Salmagundi* magazine founded with his brother in 1807 and his first major book, *A History of New York...by Diedrich Knickerbocker*, was published in 1809.

Irving’s influence on American culture is such that New York city is still referred to as “Gotham”, a nickname he coined; “knickerbockers” became a name for the short breeches worn by the character in accompanying illustrations; and the NBA New York Knicks team name is a shortening of the word “knickerbocker”. “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” has many adaptations over time, such as the following: a segment in Walt Disney’s animated film *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1948); Tim Burton’s film *Sleepy Hollow* (1999); and in 2010, “The Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow”, written by Anthony Palermo as a radio play complete with audio special effects that enhance the listening experience and tone of the story. This version will be produced by the Tennessee Valley Arts Association and the Ritz Theatre at the end of October 2020.

Radio plays began their popularity in 1920, with the birth of commercial radio, the first electronic mass medium. Listening to the radio became the dominant cultural at-home entertainment until the rise of television in 1945. Dramatic and comedic scripted programs mixed with news bulletins, commercials, and music on the airwaves.

Themes in “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”:

- What genre is this short story? What is its purpose?
- What is the difference between “gothic” and “horror” genres?
- What are its major themes?
- Who are the main characters?

Storytelling:

- Identify specific word choices both authors use to create effect.
- How does the radio play format enhance the tone and purpose of the story?
- What role does imagination play in reading or listening to the two versions of the story?
- How does time and place further the major themes?

Adaptations:

- What are the similarities and differences between Irving's text and Palermo's script?
- Compare and contrast the radio play to a traditional stage play.
- Is one format "scarier" than the other?

Performance:

- What vocal techniques are necessary to perform a radio play? How can one actor play multiple characters?
- Identify places in the script where the actor makes the sounds as opposed to the SFX team (voice, hands, etc.).
- Explore the rhythm of the script and cue pick-ups. How long should a SFX be? When should the actor come in? Where should there be pauses, if any?

Project Proposals:

- Research a local ghost story and write a radio play script that moves action through dialogue, vocal performance, and audio special effect suggestions.
- Create a master props list for the SFX team. What objects need to be built, purchased, found, borrowed, etc.
- Make Sound Effects: The Paley Center for Media
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bh-wZ3Tx6gA>

Vocabulary Words:

Genre- A category of artistic composition with similarities in form, style, or subject matter.

Theme- The subject of a talk, a piece of writing, a person's thoughts, or an exhibition; a topic. An idea that recurs in or pervades a work of art or literature.

Gothic- Belonging to the Dark Ages; portentously gloomy or horrifying.

Horror- A literary or film genre concerned with arousing feelings of fear, shock, or disgust.

Tone- The general character or attitude of a place, piece of writing, situation, etc.

Imagination- The ability to form mental images of things that are not present to the senses or not considered to be real.

Rhythm- The patterned, recurring alternations of contrasting elements of sound or speech.

SFX- Abbreviation for “sound effects” [S(ound) F(eff) X (ects)].

Cue- a signal (such as a word, phrase, or bit of stage business) to a performer to begin a specific speech or action.

Cue Pick-ups- shortening the time between cues.

Props- Abbreviation for “theatrical property”; an object used on stage by actors during a performance.

RESOURCES:

UNA Collier Library Lib Guide
<https://libguides.una.edu/sleepy-hollow>

Radio
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/radio>

Anthony Palermo Website for SFX construction
<https://ruyasonic.com/>

Anthony Palermo sample script, “The Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow”
<https://www.ruyasonic.com/doc/SCRIPT-SAMPLE-RADIO-DRAMA--Headless-Horseman--TRUNCATED.pdf>