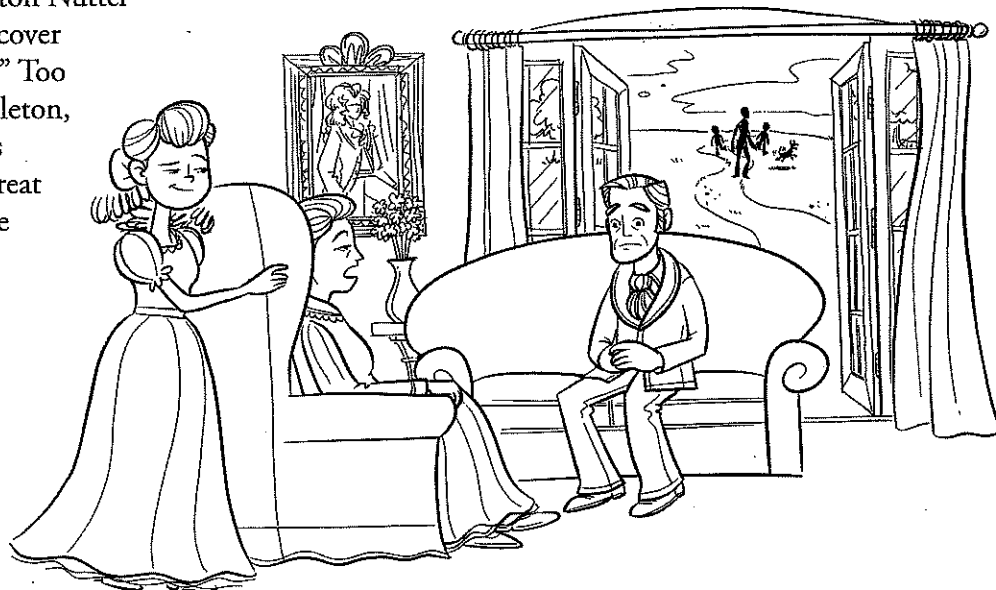


THE Open Window

by Saki (H. H. Munro) (England, 1914)

H.H. Munro, who went by the pen name Saki, liked to write stories that resembled practical jokes. In "The Open Window," a man named Framton Nuttel comes to the countryside to recover from "a bad case of the nerves." Too bad he meets young Vera Sappleton, a teenaged trickster, who sends Framton over the edge. It's a great story for young readers because of its brevity, the way Munro sets up the victim, and because the lead character is a youngster. Be sure to let your students know the "window" is actually a set of French doors.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Vera: A teenaged trickster

Framton Nuttel:

A nervous visitor from the city

Mrs. Sappleton: The lady of the house, Vera's aunt

Mr. Sappleton:

Mrs. Sappleton's husband

Chuck: Mrs. Sappleton's son

Dave: Mrs. Sappleton's other son

Bertie: The spaniel

Vocabulary

stammered

tragedy

treacherous

faltered

snipe

scheming

pheasant

bog

eerily

coincidence

Scene: An Estate in the English Countryside, Early 1900s

- NARRATOR 1:** Teenaged girls come in many different packages.
- NARRATOR 2:** Some are shy. Some are silly.
- NARRATOR 1:** And some are smart and sassy.
- NARRATOR 2:** Young Vera was just that sort of girl—full of tricks and mischief.
- VERA:** My aunt will be down shortly. In the meantime, you must put up with me.
- NARRATOR 1:** Framton Nuttel, on the other hand, suffered from a bad case of the nerves.
- FRAMTON NUTTEL**
(*nervously*): Umm. Very well. Umm.
- NARRATOR 2:** He very much wanted to say something to impress the girl, yet in his nervousness about meeting the aunt, he stammered and stuttered and managed to say just the wrong sort of thing.
- FRAMTON NUTTEL**
(*stuttering*): It's my sister who insisted I introduce myself.
- VERA:** Your sister?
- FRAMTON NUTTEL:** Why, yes. When I told her I was going to the countryside, she said I would bury myself down here and not speak to a soul.
- VERA:** And yet, here you are.
- FRAMTON NUTTEL:** Yes, yes. Umm . . . it's good for the nerves, at least that's what my sister says. Meeting people is part of the *nerve cure* I'm supposed to be undergoing.
- NARRATOR 1:** This brought a long, awkward pause in the conversation.
- NARRATOR 2**
(*after some silence*): Mr. Nuttel fidgeted and blew his nose . . .
- NARRATOR 1:** While a scheming Vera made a quick study of him.
- VERA:** Do you know many of the people around here?
- FRAMTON NUTTEL**
(*still stuttering*): Hardly a soul. My sister spent some time around here four years ago. She gave me letters introducing me to some of the local people.

NARRATOR 2: This he said in an unhappy tone.

VERA: So you don't know anything about my aunt?

FRAMTON NUTTEL: Only her name and address. My sister wrote it on this slip of paper here.

VERA: Then you know nothing about . . . about the *accident*.

FRAMTON NUTTEL: Accident?

VERA: Yes, her great tragedy happened just three years ago. That would be since your sister's time.

FRAMTON: In a restful country spot like this? Tragedies seem out of place.

NARRATOR 1: The girl pointed to a large set of French doors leading to the patio.

VERA: You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon.

NARRATOR 2: Mr. Nuttel nervously tugged at his starched collar and snugly fitting tie.

FRAMTON NUTTEL: It is rather warm for this time of year. But does that window have something to do with your aunt's tragedy?

VERA: It was out through that window three years ago to a day that my aunt's husband and her two young sons went off for their day's pheasant hunt. . . . They never came back.

NARRATOR 1: The girl whirled around and positioned herself so to direct Framton's attention out the window.

VERA: In crossing the field toward their favorite hunting ground, all three were swallowed up by a treacherous bog. It had been a most dreadfully wet summer. Places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning. The most dreadful part, though, was that their bodies were *never* recovered.

NARRATOR 2: Here the girl's voice lost its matter-of-fact tone, and she dramatically faltered.

VERA: Poor Auntie always thinks they'll come back someday, they and the little brown cocker spaniel that was lost with them. Yes, she seems to think they'll walk through those doors, through that open window—just as they used to do!

FRAMTON NUTTEL: That . . . that is why she keeps the window open?

Character
Analysis

How does Framton feel about his nerve cure, about meeting people?

Character
Analysis

This line says a lot about Framton's character. If you were Vera, how would you describe him to your teenaged friends later on?

- VERA:** Poor, dear Auntie. She often told me how they went out, her husband with his white waterproof hunting coat over his arm, and Chuck, the oldest son, singing, "Bertie, why do you bound?" He always did that, sang, "Bertie, why do you bound?" to tease the spaniel. It got on the poor dog's nerves, he said.
- NARRATOR 1:** The girl turned eerily and stared out glossy-eyed through the open window.
- VERA:** You know, sometimes on still evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that Auntie is right, that they will all come walking in through that window . . .
- NARRATOR 2:** She broke off with a shudder.
- NARRATOR 1:** It was a relief to Mr. Nuttel to see the aunt come hurrying in.
- MRS. SAPPLETON:** I'm so sorry to have kept you. I hope Vera has been amusing you?
- FRAMTON NUTTEL**
(still stuttering): Umm. She has been very . . . she's been very . . . interesting.
- NARRATOR 2:** The aunt seated herself across from the guest. Meanwhile, in a flurry of skirts, Vera moved to stand directly behind her.
- MRS. SAPPLETON:** I hope you don't mind the open window. *My husband and our boys* will be home soon from shooting, and they always come in this way.
- NARRATOR 1:** Behind the aunt, the niece covered her heart with the palm of her hand and shook her head as if to say, *tsk, tsk*.
- MRS. SAPPLETON:** They've been out in the soggy fields hunting pheasant, so they'll make a fine mess all over my poor carpets. It's so like you menfolk to come stomping in, covered with mud from the bogs!
- NARRATOR 2:** Mrs. Sappleton rattled on cheerfully.
- MRS. SAPPLETON:** There have been very few birds lately. I don't think it will be much of a duck season at all.
- NARRATOR 1:** To Framton, it was all purely horrible. He tried to change the subject.
- FRAMTON NUTTEL:** The doctors tell me my illness comes from some kind of *disorder*.

THINK ABOUT IT

Put it in your own words: How would you summarize what Vera has told Framton thus far?

THINK ABOUT IT

Vera is the story's antagonist. What do you think an antagonist is?

NARRATOR 2: He became aware that Mrs. Sappleton was giving him only a tiny bit of her attention.

MRS. SAPPLETON: They tell me snipe is their best bet.

NARRATOR 1: And her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the fields beyond.

NARRATOR 2: It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence, thought Mr. Nuttel, that he should visit on such a tragic anniversary!

FRAMTON NUTTEL: They've ordered complete rest. In my condition, I'm not to have any *excitement* at all.

MRS. SAPPLETON: I see . . . I do hope they get a duck!

FRAMTON NUTTEL: On the matter of my diet, they are not so much in agreement.

MRS. SAPPLETON: Is that right? There's nothing like a good, crisp duck right from the oven!

FRAMTON NUTTEL: Yes, some say asparagus and greens will help, while others say . . .

NARRATOR 1: Mrs. Sappleton was on the verge of a yawn when suddenly her face brightened.

MRS. SAPPLETON: Here they are at last! Just in time for tea! And don't they look as if they're muddy up to their eyeballs!

NARRATOR 2: Framton shivered slightly and looked toward the girl—only to find her with dazed horror in her eyes, staring out the open window.

MRS. SAPPLETON: I'm so glad you'll have the chance to meet them! After all, they are the men of the family.

NARRATOR 1: Framton swung around in his seat and looked through the window.

NARRATOR 2: In the deepening twilight, three ghostlike figures were walking across the lawn.

NARRATOR 1: Each carried a gun, and each was wearing a white rain slick splattered in mud.

CHUCK (offstage): Bertie, why do you bound?

NARRATOR 2: Meanwhile, Framton was grabbing wildly for his cane and hat.

CHUCK: Bertie! I say, Bertie, why do you bound?

What's going on in this scene? Are Framton and Mrs. Sappleton listening to each other? Is Mrs. Sappleton aware of Framton's illness?

These few lines represent the story's climax or "high point." Why do you think so?

"...why do you bound?" The author put this phrase in for some very specific reasons. What does it mean and how do you think it relates to the rest of the story?

NARRATOR 1: The hallway, the gravel drive, and the front gate were dimly noted stages in Framton's panicked retreat.

NARRATOR 2: And a bicyclist coming down the road had to drive into a hedge to avoid colliding with him.

MR. SAPPLETON: Here we are, everyone! We're fairly muddy, but most of it's dry.

DAVE: Who was that running off as we came up?

CHUCK: He made that fellow on his bicycle crash into the shrubs!

MRS. SAPPLETON: A most extraordinarily odd little man. His name was Nuttel.

MR. SAPPLETON: Nuttel, you say?

MRS. SAPPLETON: That's right. He could only talk about his illnesses, and then he dashed off without a word of apology. It was as if he'd seen a ghost!

NARRATOR 1: It was here that our teenaged villainess spoke up.

VERA: I suspect it was the spaniel.

DAVE: Little Bertie here? Who would be afraid of little Bertie?

VERA: He told me he had an unnatural fear of dogs. Apparently, he was once hunted into a cemetery by a pack of wild dogs and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the snarling beasts grinning and foaming just above him.

MR. SAPPLETON: My goodness! What a tragedy!

VERA: Enough to make anyone lose his nerve!

NARRATOR 2: Yes, imagination on short notice was the girl's specialty.

Why does Framton run from the house?

How do you think this incident will change Framton? What do you predict might happen to him?

What does this last line mean? What does it say about Vera?

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi

by Rudyard Kipling (England, 1894)

This is Kipling's story of a heroic young mongoose that saves an English family from a pair of vengeful cobras. Originally from *The Jungle Book*, it gives young people an introduction to British-occupied India and young actors the opportunity to experiment with characterization. It's a good story for looking at "perspective." Consider incorporating flutes (recorders) into the beginning and end of the snake charmers' narration.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Snake Charmer 1

Snake Charmer 2

Teddy: An English boy living in India

Alice: Teddy's mother

Big Man: Teddy's father

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi: A heroic mongoose

Darzee: A songbird

Deezar: Another songbird, Darzee's wife

Nag: A hooded king cobra

Nagina: Another hooded king cobra, Nag's wife

Chuchundra: The fearful muskrat

Chorus: Darzee and others

Vocabulary

bungalow
curiosity

roaming
stealthily

triumph
valiant

tuft
scuttled

brood
quivered

Scene 1: A Bungalow in India

- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** This is the story of the great war Rikki-tikki-tavi fought throughout the rooms and garden of a big bungalow in India.
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** When Rikki-Tikki was very young, a flood washed him out of his burrow and carried him down a ditch to the middle of a garden.
- TEDDY:** Look, Mother, here's a dead mongoose. We should give him a proper funeral.
- ALICE:** Perhaps he isn't really dead, Teddy. Let's dry him off.
- BIG MAN:** He's not dead—just half choked. Now don't frighten him, and we'll see what he'll do once he's warmed up a bit.
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** Soon Rikki was himself again and, like all mongooses, he was eaten up with curiosity.
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** The mongoose motto is "Run and find out," so within moments Rikki had run around the entire room, and then he jumped on the boy's shoulder.
- BIG MAN:** Don't be frightened, Teddy. That's how he makes friends.
- TEDDY:** *Ouch!* He's tickling me.
- RIKKI:** *Rikk-tikk-tikki!*
- ALICE:** Good gracious, he's a wild creature! I suppose he's tame only because we've been kind to him.
- BIG MAN:** Every mongoose is like that. As long as Teddy doesn't pick him up by the tail, he'll run in and out of the house all day long.
- RIKKI (aside):** There is much to find out about this family. I shall certainly *stay* and find out.
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** Rikki spent all that day roaming the house.
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** And when Teddy went to bed, Rikki-tikki climbed up, too.
- ALICE:** I don't like that. He may bite the child.
- BIG MAN:** He'll do no such thing. Having a mongoose around is the surest way to protect against deadly snakes. Why, if one came into the room right now . . .

What is the setting of this story?

- ALICE:** *Shhh!* I don't want to think of anything so awful. Snakes are the one thing I hate about India.
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** And well she should, for a cobra inside the garden walls brings danger and death.

Scene 2: The Bungalow Garden

- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** The next morning, Rikki met Darzee, the songbird, sitting on the edge of his nest, crying softly.
- RIKKI:** What is the matter?
- DARZEE:** Yesterday, one of our babies fell out of the nest, and Nag ate him.
- RIKKI:** That is terrible! Who is this Nag?
- NAG:** *Hissss.* Who is Nag? I am Nag. *Hissss...* look, and be afraid!
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** Out from the brush came a huge cobra, spreading its massive hood.
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** Rikki knew a cobra's business is death.
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** But a mongoose can't stay frightened for long. Rikki knew a mongoose's business is to fight snakes.
- RIKKI:** Well, cobra or no cobra, do you think it is right for you to eat baby birds?
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** Nag watched the grass behind Rikki, hoping to catch Rikki off his guard.
- NAG:** *Hissss...* let us talk. You eat eggs. Why shouldn't I eat birds?
- DEEZAR:** Behind you! Look behind you.
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** Rikki jumped up in the air as the head of Nagaina, Nag's terrible wife, whizzed past below him.
- NAG:** *Hiss.* Wicked, wicked birds!
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** Rikki's eyes grew red and hot. He sat back on his tail and hind legs and chattered with rage.
- RIKKI:** *Rikk-tikk-tikki!*
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** But Nag and Nagaina disappeared into the grass.

Think Aloud
11

Thus begins the conflict. What is the conflict in this story?

Think Aloud
11

If Rikki eats eggs, why shouldn't Nag eat birds? If you were Rikki, how would you answer this question?

Scene 3: The Garden and Bungalow, at Night

SNAKE CHARMER 1: That night, Rikki went out in the dark and bumped into Chuchundra, the muskrat.

CHUCHUNDRA

(whimpering):

Errh, please don't hurt me, Rikki-tikki!

RIKKI:

Why would a snake-hunter hurt a muskrat?

CHUCHUNDRA:

Errh, how am I to be sure some dark night Nag won't mistake me for you?

RIKKI:

I will take care of Nag.

CHUCHUNDRA:

Errh, but those who kill snakes get killed by snakes. Then what? Nag is everywhere, Rikki-tikki.

RIKKI:

What do you mean by that?

CHUCHUNDRA:

Errh, I mustn't tell you anything, but can't you hear, Rikki-tikki?

SNAKE CHARMER 2:

Rikki listened. He could just catch the faintest *scratch-scratch* of a snake on brickwork.

RIKKI:

That's Nag or Nagaina crawling into one of the bathrooms!

SNAKE CHARMER 1:

Rikki stole off to the bathroom in the bungalow.

SNAKE CHARMER 2:

At the bottom of the wall, there was a brick pulled out for the pipes. Rikki listened. On the other side, Nag and Nagaina were whispering.

NAGAINA:

Hiss. Go in quietly. Remember that the Big Man is the first one to bite. Then we will hunt for Rikki-tikki together. *Hiss*...

NAG:

Hiss. Are you sure there is something to be gained by attacking the people?

NAGAINA:

When the house is emptied of people, Rikki will have to go away, and we will rule the garden. *Hiss*. When our eggs hatch, our young snakes will need room and quiet.

SNAKE CHARMER 1:

Rikki tingled with rage. Then he saw Nag's head come stealthily through the hole.

RIKKI (aside):

If I strike him here, Nagaina will know, but if I fight him on the open floor, the odds are in his favor. What am I to do?

How does the character of Rikki compare to the character of Chuchundra? How is Chuchundra's character important to the story?

SNAKE CHARMER 2: Nag waved to and fro, and then Rikki heard him drinking from the big water jar that was used to fill the bath.

NAG: Ah, that is good. *Hissss.* Now, I shall wait here till the Big Man comes in the morning. Nagaina, do you hear me? I shall wait here in the cool till daytime. Then I will strike.

SNAKE CHARMER 1: There was no answer from outside, so Rikki knew Nagaina had gone away.

SNAKE CHARMER 2: Nag hid by the water jar, but Rikki stayed still. After an hour, he began to move, muscle by muscle, toward the jar.

RIKKI: At last, Nag is asleep. I must aim for the head, and once I am there, I must not let go. O, Rikki!

CHORUS: *At the hole where he went in
Red-Eye called to Wrinkle-Skin.
Hear what little Red-Eye saith:
Nag, come up and dance with death!*

RIKKI: *Rikk-tikk-tikki!*

SNAKE CHARMER 1: Rikki jumped. He bit and held on. He was battered to and fro as a rat is shaken by a dog, but he did not let go.

SNAKE CHARMER 2: The noise of Rikki being thrown about the bathroom woke the family. The Big Man came in with his gun, but Nag was already dead.

BIG MAN: It's the mongoose again, Alice. The little chap has saved our lives now.

RIKKI: I must get some rest if I am to settle with Nagaina. She will be worse than five Nags, and there's no knowing when her eggs will hatch.

How is the water jar a clue to the story's time setting?

Why is Rikki worried about Nagaina's eggs hatching?

Scene 4: The Garden, the Next Morning

SNAKE CHARMER 1: In the morning, news of Nag's death was all over the garden. Darzee chirped a song of triumph at the top of his voice.

DARZEE: *Who hath delivered us, who?
Tell me his nest and his name.
Rikki, the valiant, the true,
Tikki, with eyeballs of flame . . .*

RIKKI: You silly tuft of feathers! Is this any time to sing?

- DARZEE:** *Give him the Thanks of the birds,
Bowling with tail-feathers spread!
Praise him with nightingale-words,
Nay, I will praise him instead.*
- RIKKI:** Are you listening to me, Darzee?
- DARZEE:** Nag is dead! He will never eat our babies again.
- RIKKI:** That's true enough, but what about Nagaina?
- DARZEE:** Nagaina called for Nag, but the Big Man tossed him upon the rubbish heap. Let us sing about the great, the red-eyed Rikki-tikki!
- Who hath delivered us, who? ...*
- RIKKI:** Stop singing a minute, Darzee. You're safe enough in your nest there, but it's war for me down here.
- DARZEE:** For the great, the beautiful Rikki-tikki's sake I will stop. What is it, O Killer of the Terrible Nag?
- RIKKI:** Where does Nagaina keep her eggs?
- DARZEE:** In the melon bed. She hid them there weeks ago.
- RIKKI:** Fly off to the stables and pretend your wing is broken, and let Nagaina chase you away. I must get to the melon bed, and if I went there now she'd see me.
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** Darzee was a feather-brained fellow, but his wife knew that cobra's eggs meant young cobras later on, so she flew off to trick Nagaina.
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** When Deezar found Nagaina, she fluttered in front of the snake and cried out.
- DEEZAR:** Oh, my wing is broken! The boy in the house threw a stone at me and broke it.
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** Then she fluttered more desperately than ever.
- NAGAINA:** *Hiss.* You warned Rikki-tikki when I would have struck him. You've chosen a bad time to be lame.
- DEEZAR:** The boy broke it with a stone!
- NAGAINA:** Before night, the boy will lie very still. *Hiss.* What is the use of running away? I am sure to catch you. Little fool, look at me!
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** Darzee's wife knew better, for a bird who looks at a snake's eyes gets so frightened that she cannot move.

Is this story realistic or unrealistic? How do you know?

- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** Deezar fluttered along the ground, piping sorrowfully, and the snake quickened her pace.
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** Once Rikki heard them going up the path, he raced to find Nagaina's eggs.
- RIKKI:** I am not a day too soon. The minute these hatch, they could each kill a man or a mongoose!
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** A few minutes later, he heard Deezar screaming.
- DEEZAR:** Rikki-tikki, I led Nagaina down the path, and she has gone into the bungalow, and—oh, come quickly—she means to strike!
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** Rikki took the last egg in his mouth and scuttled to the house.

This play is a good example of personification. What do you think personification might mean?

Scene 5: The Bungalow and Garden

- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** Inside the bungalow, the family was just gathering for breakfast.
- TEDDY:** What are we having today, Mother? Something delightful, I hope.
- ALICE:** Isn't everything delightful in India? Especially after such a scare!
- BIG MAN:** Teddy, don't move!
- ALICE:** What is it?
- BIG MAN:** There's a cobra under Teddy's chair. Stay still, Teddy. Whatever you do, don't move!
- NAGAINA:** *Hiss.* Yes, stay still, son of the Big Man that killed Nag. If you move, I strike, and if you do not move, I strike. Oh, foolish people who killed my Nag!
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** It was then that Rikki entered the room.
- RIKKI:** Turn around, Nagaina. Turn and fight!
- NAGAINA:** All in good time. I will settle my account with you shortly. *Hiss.* Look at your friends, Rikki-tikki. They are afraid. If you come a step nearer, I strike.
- RIKKI:** Look at your eggs in the melon bed. Go and look, Nagaina.

- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** The big snake turned half round and saw the one egg Rikki had brought with him.
- NAGAINA:** *Ab-h!* Give it to me.
- RIKKI:** What price for a snake's egg? For a young king cobra? For the last, the very last of the brood?
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** Nagaina spun clear round, forgetting everything for the sake of the one egg.
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** Teddy's father shot out a big hand, caught Teddy by the shoulder, and dragged him across the table, out of reach of Nagaina.
- RIKKI:** Tricked! Tricked! Tricked! *Rikk-tikk-tikk!* The boy is safe, and it was I—I who caught Nag by the hood last night in the bathroom.
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** Then he began to jump, all four feet together, his head close to the floor.
- RIKKI:** It was over before the Big Man came. I did it. *Rikk-tikk-tikki!* Come, Nagaina, come and fight with me.
- NAGAINA:** Give me the egg! *Hiss.* Give me the last of my eggs, and I will go away.
- RIKKI:** Yes, you will go away, and you will never come back. Fight, widow! Fight!
- CHORUS:** *Eye to eye and head to head,
This shall end when one is dead;
Turn for turn and twist for twist—
Hah! The hooded Death has missed!*
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** Rikki-tikki was staying just out of reach of Nagaina's bite, his little eyes like hot coals.
- RIKKI:** *Rikk-tikk-tikki!*
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** Again and again she struck, each time coming within a whisker of Rikki.
- RIKKI:** *Rikk-tikk-tikki!*
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** The egg still lay on the floor, till at last Nagaina snatched it in her mouth and flew like an arrow down the path with Rikki-tikki right behind her.
- TEDDY:** There, Father, the snake has gone into that hole! Rikki's little white teeth were clenched on her tail, and he went down with her!

From whose perspective do we see this story? Would the story be different from Nagaina's perspective? How? What about the other characters?

- BIG MAN:** We can only hope he survives. Very few mongooses care to follow a cobra into its hole. In the dark, they never know when it might open out and give the cobra room to turn and strike.
- ALICE:** Oh, how very awful!
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** The family watched and listened, but for a long time all was silent down the hole.
- DARZEE:** It is all over for Rikki-tikki! We must sing his death song, for Nagaina has surely killed him underground. Valiant Rikki-tikki is dead!
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** Darzee cleared his throat and bowed his head when, suddenly, the grass by the hole quivered.
- TEDDY:** Here he is! Here is our Rikki at last!
- ALICE:** Why, hooray! Our mongoose has done it again!
- RIKKI:** It is all over. Nagaina will never come out again.
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** This set everyone in the garden singing.
- CHORUS:** *Give him the Thanks of the birds,
Bowing with tail-feathers spread!
Praise him with nightingale-words,
Nay, I will praise him instead.*
- SNAKE CHARMER 2:** Rikki-tikki had a right to be proud of himself—but he did not grow too proud.
- SNAKE CHARMER 1:** And he kept that garden as a mongoose should keep it, with tooth and jump and spring and bit, till never a cobra dared show its head inside the walls.
- CHORUS:** *Who hath delivered us, who?
Tell me his nest and his name.
Rikki, the valiant, the true,
Tikki, with eyeballs of flame!*

What is the theme of this story?

THE LEGEND OF Sleepy Hollow

by Washington Irving (United States, 1820)

The Headless Horseman conjures up images of ghosts and zombies—always engaging topics for young students. But “Sleepy Hollow” is more than just a ghost story. Set during the post-Revolutionary War period, it’s the story of schoolmaster Ichabod Crane, one of the most interesting characters in American literature. Students will enjoy theorizing about the truth behind the Horseman. Did Irving intend for readers to believe the legend? Or are there other explanations for Ichabod’s disappearance? This play harkens back to the days of Old English and the Jolly Roger, so encourage your kids to try out their best pirate accent!



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Diedrich Knickerbocker:

Our storyteller

Stage Director: Directs the action in the play

Old Woman 1

Old Woman 2

Ichabod Crane: The superstitious schoolmaster

Katrina Van Tassel:

The village beauty

Brom Bones: The village brute

Baltus Van Tassel:

Katrina’s father

Van Ax: Villager/party guest

Van Ripper: Villager/party guest

Vanderblood: Villager/party guest

Brouwer: Villager/party guest

Nonspeaking parts:

Gunpowder: Ichabod’s horse

The Headless Horseman:
Silent, but dreadful

Vocabulary

entranced
mischief

brooding
shriek

tethered
decrepit

hymn
misshapen

pommel
flimsy

Scene 1: Sleepy Hollow

- KNICKERBOCKER:** I was never one for ghost stories, not till I happened upon a little village called Sleepy Hollow. Had I not seen it for myself, I would have dismissed it as a bit of superstition, but this . . . I shudder to think of it!
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** A lanky fellow enters, entranced by a book. As he walks, he absentmindedly whistles “Yankee Doodle.”
- KNICKERBOCKER:** My name is Diedrich Knickerbocker. The year was 1790, and as I wandered the drowsy shadows of the Hollow, I encountered a man named Ichabod Crane.
- OLD WOMAN 1:** Look here. It’s the new schoolmaster!
- OLD WOMAN 2:** Good afternoon, Schoolmaster.
- ICHABOD (startled):** Why, good afternoon, ladies.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** He was tall but lank with long arms and hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves. His head was small with huge ears and a long nose.
- OLD WOMAN 1:** Will you be attending the Van Tassels’ party tonight?
- ICHABOD:** That I will. I merely need to fetch my horse for the ride home.
- OLD WOMAN 2:** Well, you enjoy yourself, Schoolmaster. But be wary—there’s mischief in the air.
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** Ichabod bows, then returns to his reading and whistling.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** Wary, indeed! It’s said the Hollow is bewitched. The people are given to all kinds of marvelous superstitions . . . including the Legend of the Headless Horseman.

The setting of a story is its time (or era) and place. How would you describe the setting of this story?

Scene 2: The Van Tassel’s Estate

- KNICKERBOCKER:** Ichabod rode a broken-down plow horse. It was all skin and bones, and its tail was knotted with burrs. Still, it must have had some spark, for it went by the name of Gunpowder.
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** Ichabod dismounts in front of a huge estate.

KNICKERBOCKER: It was toward evening that Ichabod arrived at the Van Tassels'. He could not help but chuckle at the possibilities.

ICHABOD: Someday this may all be ours, Gunpowder! If only I can win the hand of Katrina Van Tassel!

KNICKERBOCKER: Katrina Van Tassel was as rosy-cheeked as one of her father's peaches. From the moment Ichabod laid eyes upon her, his only thought was how to gain her affections.

KATRINA: Good evening, Master Crane. Welcome to our home.

ICHABOD
(clearing his throat): Why, thank you, Miss Katrina.

KNICKERBOCKER: But Ichabod wasn't the only one interested in Katrina. Another was a burly, roaring hero of the countryside known as Brom Bones. Whenever a prank or brawl happened, the simple folk of Sleepy Hollow always shook their heads and guessed Brom Bones was at the bottom of it.

STAGE DIRECTOR: Brom Bones enters, strutting and pumping his chest.

BROM (loudly): Here I am, Katrina! What say you we go take a ride on Daredevil?

KATRINA (giggling): Don't be silly! Put Daredevil in the barn and come in the house. And don't act like such a brute!

BROM: Say, is that the schoolmaster's horse? What's he doing here? Come to give you singin' lessons?

KATRINA: The schoolmaster is an honored guest. What fun it is to have such a gentleman in our midst.

BROM: I don't know what you see in him. He's got dinner plates where his ears should be and shovels for feet.

KATRINA: You're just jealous.

BROM: Of him? Why, he looks like a scarecrow that's escaped the cornfield!

KNICKERBOCKER: Poor Ichabod. He would have had a pleasant life, if only his path had not been crossed by young Katrina!

What kind of person is Brom? How are he and Ichabod alike? How are they different?

Knickerbocker's line gives a hint about the story's conflict. What do you think he means by it?

Scene 3: The Party

STAGE DIRECTOR: The guests gather in the great parlor.

VAN TASSEL: Welcome! Welcome to the party, everyone! Let the music and dancing begin!

ICHABOD: Dear Katrina, may I have this dance?

STAGE DIRECTOR: Katrina glances slyly at Brom.

KATRINA: Why, certainly, Master Crane.

KNICKERBOCKER: Ichabod prided himself upon his dancing. Not a limb about his loosely hung body was still. But as he went clattering about the room with the beautiful Katrina, he was unaware that Brom Bones sat brooding in one corner.

BROM: I don't like this one bit.

STAGE DIRECTOR: The dance ends. Ichabod bows to Katrina then makes his way toward a group of older guests. They are sitting by the fire, telling marvelous tales of ghosts and goblins.

VAN AX: Many a ghost haunts the Hollow. There's the old Dutchman who walks the docks, shouting for a musket and a sword.

VAN RIPPER: And there's the woman in white, who haunts the dark glen at Raven Rock. To hear her shriek on a winter night before a storm is a bad omen.

OLD WOMAN 1: In these parts, Mr. Crane, you must take care to live a decent life. Those who don't run the risk of being carried away in the dead of night!

KNICKERBOCKER: All these tales, told in those drowsy whispers with which people talk in the dark, sank deep in the mind of Ichabod. This, in turn, caught the attention of Brom.

VANDERBLOOD: But, my friend, nothing we've told you rivals the Headless Horseman.

ICHABOD: The Headless Horseman?

OLD WOMAN 2: Yes, dear man. He is said to be the ghost of a soldier whose head had been carried away by a cannonball during the Revolutionary War. His ghost is often seen hurrying along in the darkness.

VAN AX: With the Horseman about, one doesn't dare to be caught upon the roadway during the witching hour.

Classic
Activities
10

What does Katrina's glance suggest?

Classic
Activities
10

What significance do the names of the characters hold?

- VANDERBLOOD:** His body is buried in the churchyard, and every night the ghost rides forth . . . in search of his head.
- VAN RIPPER:** He cannot rest until he finds it. The speed with which he rides is like a midnight blast. It's because he's in a hurry to get back to the churchyard before the light of day.
- VANDERBLOOD:** He's been seen several times of late, patrolling the hills. I myself have seen his horse tethered among the graves in the churchyard.
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** A decrepit old man interrupts the storytellers.
- BROUWER:** I didn't believe in the Horseman until one night last year. I met him in the road near the Old Tree. I suspect he was returning from his search, but I didn't know who he was. I called to him: "Show me your face, good man." He didn't answer, and when he turned there was nothing there—just the stump of a neck. Before I could react, he grabbed me by the shoulder and forced me to get up behind him.
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** The room is silent. The old man takes a bite out of his apple and chews it slowly.
- ICHABOD:** Wh-what happened next?
- BROUWER:** How we galloped! Over bush and brake, over hill and swamp . . . then we reached the bridge. That's when the Horseman suddenly turned into a skeleton, threw me into the brook, and sprang away over the treetops with a clap of thunder!
- ICHABOD:** Oh, my!
- BROUWER:** Oh, my, indeed! I will never forget it!
- BROM:** I'm not afraid of the Horseman. Ay, I too have seen him. I was returning one night from a neighboring village when he overtook me. Rather than give in to his terror, I offered to race him for a bowl of punch. That's right, a bowl of punch! And I would have won it too, but just as we came to the old church bridge, the Horseman vanished in a flash of fire.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** Ay, it was true. The old church bridge was surrounded by overhanging trees, which cast a gloom even in the daytime. It was the place the Headless Horseman was most frequently encountered, but it was also the place he could not pass.
- BROM:** If ever the Horseman comes after you, head for the bridge. If you can but reach that bridge, you are safe.
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** One by one, the guests depart, but hoping for a moment alone with Katrina, Ichabod is the last to leave.

Read-Aloud
Activities
10

The villagers' tales provide a clue to one of the themes of this play. What themes can you identify?

Read-Aloud
Activities
11

What do you think Ichabod wanted to talk to Katrina about? How do you think their conversation went?

Scene 4: The Ride Home

- KNICKERBOCKER:** It was midnight when a disappointed Ichabod finally departed, and all those stories of ghosts and goblins now came crowding upon his thoughts.
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** Ichabod trots along, flinching at every sound and shape.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** He remembered all too clearly the warnings of the townspeople.
- VAN AX:** One doesn't dare to be caught upon the roadway during the witching hour.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** The wind's howl became the woman in white.
- VAN RIPPER:** *Ohhhhhwww...* To hear her shriek on a winter night before a storm is a bad omen.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** A bullfrog croaking became the ghost of the Old Dutchman.
- OLD WOMAN I:** *Crooaak!* Take care to live a decent life. Those who don't run the risk of being carried away in the dead of night!
- STAGE DIRECTOR:** Ichabod clutches tightly at Gunpowder's reins. To calm his nerves, he begins to whistle.
- KNICKERBOCKER:** His normally cheerful version of "Yankee Doodle" sounded like a funeral hymn. It was then he saw it: In the shadows on the edge of the road, something huge and misshapen towering above them.
- VANDERBLOOD:** Every night, the ghost rides forth in search of his head.
- ICHABOD:** *Gulp!* ... What's to be done, Gunpowder?
- KNICKERBOCKER:** Every hair upon the schoolmaster's head stood on end.
- ICHABOD:** Wh-who-who ... are you? I-I-I say there, wh-who are y-y-you?
- KNICKERBOCKER:** The shadowy creature put itself in motion and stood at once in the middle of the road.
- ICHABOD:** *Gulp!* I s-s-say, sir, wh-wh-what is it you w-w-want with me?
- KNICKERBOCKER:** When there came no reply, Ichabod rained a shower of kicks upon Gunpowder, but the stranger whirled his horse to give chase.
- ICHABOD:** R-r-run, Gunpowder!

Where are these people? Are they with Ichabod?

What's to be done? What would you do if you were Ichabod?

KNICKERBOCKER

(growing in intensity):

As poor Ichabod glanced over his shoulder, he was horror-struck, for the man behind him was headless, and the head, which should have rested on his shoulders, was hanging from the pommel of the saddle!

ICHABOD:

Fly, Gunpowder, fly!

KNICKERBOCKER:

Away they dashed, stones flying and sparks flashing. Ichabod's flimsy garments fluttered in the air as he stretched his long, lank body over his horse's head. And suddenly, he remembered what Brom Bones had said.

BROM:

If you can but reach that bridge, you are safe.

KNICKERBOCKER:

Thundering forward, he heard the black steed close behind him.

ICHABOD:

There it is, Gunpowder. The old church bridge!

KNICKERBOCKER:

He whipped wildly in the air, spurring his horse onward.

ICHABOD:

Hyaw, hyaw! Come on, Gunpowder!

KNICKERBOCKER

(most intensely):

Gunpowder's hooves pounded upon the planks of the bridge. Ichabod cast a look behind, expecting the goblin to vanish in a clap of thunder . . . but instead he saw it rise up and hurl its head . . . at him!

ICHABOD:

Ahhhhhhhhhh!

Epilogue

KNICKERBOCKER

(calmly now):

The next morning, the old horse wandered home, but Ichabod never returned. A search led to the bridge. Along the bank of the brook, where the water ran dark and deep, Ichabod's hat was found and, close beside it, a shattered pumpkin. The brook was searched, but the body of the schoolmaster was nowhere to be found, leaving the good people to shake their heads and conclude that Ichabod Crane had been carried off . . . by the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow.



Knickerbocker wants you to believe Ichabod was carried off, but how else can you explain his disappearance?

Literary Elements/Story Discussion

- 1 **What is the title of the story?**
- 2 **Who is the author?**
- 3 **Setting:** When and where does the story happen?
- 4 **Main character:** Who is the story about?
- 5 **Conflict:** What is the main character's problem?
- 6 **Resolution:** How does the main character fix the problem?
- 7 **Theme:** What is the universal idea behind the story?
- 8 **Moral:** What lesson are we supposed to learn from the story?
- 9 **Realism:** Is the story realistic or unrealistic? What evidence is there?
- 10 **Plot:** Retell or summarize the main events of the story in just a few sentences.

Play Performance Scoring Guide

Student: _____ Date: _____ Grade Level: _____

Play: _____ Part: _____

	Fluency	Delivery	Stage Presence	Comprehension
<p>Exceeds expectations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reads without error Intonation and expression consistently appropriate to character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently appropriate volume Pacing as if speaking naturally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects toward audience Memorizes lines Acts and puts character in voice, speaks with accent, etc. Recognizes cues without prompting Demonstrates leadership when practicing/performing May incorporate props where appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to identify and elaborate on literary elements and performance objections during discussion and assessment activities
<p>Meets expectations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reads with minimal errors Some intonation and expressiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriately loud volume Consistent pacing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently faces audience Holds script away from face Attempts to act with voice characterization, etc. Follows along, recognizes cues Demonstrates cooperation when practicing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to identify most literary elements and performance objectives during assessment activities Participates in discussions
<p>Does not yet meet expectations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequency or nature of errors suggests need for more practice Frequent stumbles, flat intonation, or lack of expression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too quiet Choppy or rushed pacing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tends to turn back to audience Tends to speak into script Does not add character—just reads lines Loses place, misses cues Tends to be unprepared or unfocused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not participate in discussions Unable to identify most literary elements or performance objectives