Name _____ Date _____

Rip Van Winkle

Myth or legend · 4th–5th grade

In a village at the foot of the Catskill Mountains in New York lived a cheerful man named Rip Van Winkle. Everyone liked Rip. He fixed toys for children, told stories and helped any neighbor who asked. The only work he avoided was his own: his fences fell down and his fields grew weeds, and his wife scolded him every day.

One autumn afternoon, to escape the scolding, Rip took his gun and his dog, Wolf, and wandered high into the mountains. As the sun set, he heard a voice calling, "Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle!" A short, bearded man appeared, carrying a heavy barrel, and waved for Rip to help him.

Rip followed him to a hollow among the rocks, where a group of strange little men in old-fashioned clothes were bowling. Each time a ball rolled, it rumbled like thunder. They drank from the barrel in silence. When no one was looking, Rip took a sip. Then another. Soon his eyes grew heavy, and he fell into a deep sleep.

When Rip woke, it was a bright morning. His gun was rusty and falling apart. Wolf was gone. His joints were stiff, and when he touched his chin, he found a white beard down to his belt. "One night in these mountains has made me old!" he thought.

Rip limped back to his village, but nothing looked right. The houses were different, and he didn't know a single face. People stared at his long beard. At the old inn, where a picture of King George had hung, there was now a picture of a man labeled General Washington.

Rip asked for his old friends. "Gone to war," people said, or "Moved away years ago." Then a young woman holding a baby stepped forward. She was his daughter, all grown up. Rip had slept for twenty years, right through the American Revolution.

His daughter took him home to live with her family. Rip spent the rest of his days sitting at the inn, telling his strange story to anyone who would listen. Some people believed him and some didn't, but every time thunder rolled over the Catskills, the villagers said that the little men were bowling again.

Questions

1. What kind of person was Rip at the start?

2. Why did Rip go into the mountains?

3. What made Rip fall asleep?

4. What clue showed that the country had changed?

5. How long did Rip sleep?

6. What would surprise you most if you woke up twenty years from now?

7. Was Rip a good neighbor? Was he a good worker? Can someone be both?

The lesson in my own words

Answer Key

1. Friendly and helpful, but lazy about his own work.
2. To escape his wife's scolding.
3. Drinking from the little men's barrel.
4. The inn's picture of King George was now General Washington.
5. Twenty years.
6. Answers will vary.
7. Answers will vary.

Lesson: Time keeps moving, so don't sleep through your own life.