



Lesson 3: Literature

Imagine that a time machine suddenly appears in your classroom. The door swings open to reveal a passenger seat made of shiny red leather. A loud mechanical voice booms from inside:

“Please enter and be seated. Fasten the safety belt, and then choose your destination.”

What time and place would you visit? What would you do once you arrived there?

Reading is like time travel: It can take your imagination to almost any time or place you want to go. All you have to do is open a book and allow your imagination to step inside.

In this lesson, you will learn about the tools an author uses to build a good story. If the pieces of the writing are put together well, they will help your imagination take flight.

Are you ready to enter the time machine? Turn the page and get your imagination in gear. And don't forget to fasten your seat belt!

What is your favorite kind of story? Mystery? Horror? Science fiction? Romance? Action adventure? No matter what kind you like best, most stories have some common elements. If you tried to write the shortest possible description of a story, or **narrative**, it might look like this:

Something happens to someone, somewhere, at some time.

The “something” that happens is the **plot**, or the action of the story. The “someone” is the story's main **character** (or characters). The “somewhere” and “some time” are called the **setting**. In a good story, the plot, character, and setting all work together to create an experience for the reader.

The following story tells about a man who has just awakened from a 20-year nap. Read the selection. It will be used to help you understand the tips in this lesson.

adapted from

Rip Van Winkle

by Washington Irving

Rip Van Winkle is a lazy man who is dissatisfied with his life. One day, while squirrel hunting in New York’s Catskill Mountains, he decides to stop and take a nap. He awakens twenty years later to find that the world around him has changed.

As Rip neared the village, he met a number of people, none of whom he knew. This somewhat surprised him, for he thought he knew everyone in the country ’round. Their dress, too, was of a different fashion from that which he had grown used to. Those he met were equally surprised upon seeing him, and all stopped and stared and rubbed their chins. This repeated gesture caused Rip, involuntarily, to do the same. When he did so, to his amazement, he found that his beard had grown a foot long!

He now entered the outskirts of the village. A troop of strange children ran at his heels, hooting after him and pointing at his gray beard. The dogs, too, not one of which he recognized as an old friend, barked at him as he passed.

The very village was changed. It was larger, and with many more people. There were rows and rows of houses which he had never seen before, and those which had been familiar to him had disappeared. Strange names hung over the doors, strange faces peeked out from the windows— everything was strange. . . .

He now hurried forth to his old haunt, 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. Over the door was painted “The Union Hotel by Jonathan Doolittle.” Instead of the great tree that once sheltered the quiet little Dutch inn in the past, there was now a tall pole with something on top that looked like a red nightcap, and from it fluttered a flag, on which was arranged a collection of stars and stripes.

All this Rip found impossible to understand. He recognized on the sign, however, the ruby face of King George, under which he had relaxed so many a peaceful evening. But, alas, even this had been changed. The red coat was exchanged for a blue one, and a sword was held in the hand instead of a scepter.¹ The head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted in large letters, “GENERAL WASHINGTON.”

¹**scepter:** a staff or baton that represents the authority of a royal person



There was, as usual, a crowd of old people about the door, but none that Rip recognized. The very character of the people seemed different. There was a busy, bustling, angry tone about it, instead of the usual lack of concern and drowsy peacefulness. He looked in vain for the wise Nicholas Vedder, with his broad face and double chin, or for Van Bummel, the schoolmaster, complaining about the contents of an old newspaper. In place of these, he saw a lean, grumpy-looking fellow, with his pockets full of pamphlets, arguing forcefully about the rights of citizens . . . elections . . . members of Congress . . . liberty . . . Bunker Hill . . . heroes of seventy-six . . . All these were perfect nonsense to the bewildered Van Winkle.

The appearance of Rip, with his long, grizzled beard, his rusty shotgun, his sloppy dress, and an army of women and children at his heels, soon attracted the attention of the tavern politicians. They crowded around him, eyeing him from head to foot with great curiosity. The speaker hurried up to him, drew him aside, and asked him “on which side he voted.” Rip stared at him blankly. Another short but busy little fellow pulled him by the arm and, rising on tiptoe, whispered in his ear, “Are you Federal or Democrat?” Rip was equally at a loss to understand the question.

Then a knowing, self-important old gentleman, in a sharp cocked hat, made his way through the crowd. He planted himself before Rip Van Winkle, with one hand on his hip, the other resting on his cane, and his keen eyes penetrating into Rip’s very soul. He asked in a serious tone what brought him to the election with a gun on his shoulder and a mob at his heels and whether he meant to start a riot in the village.

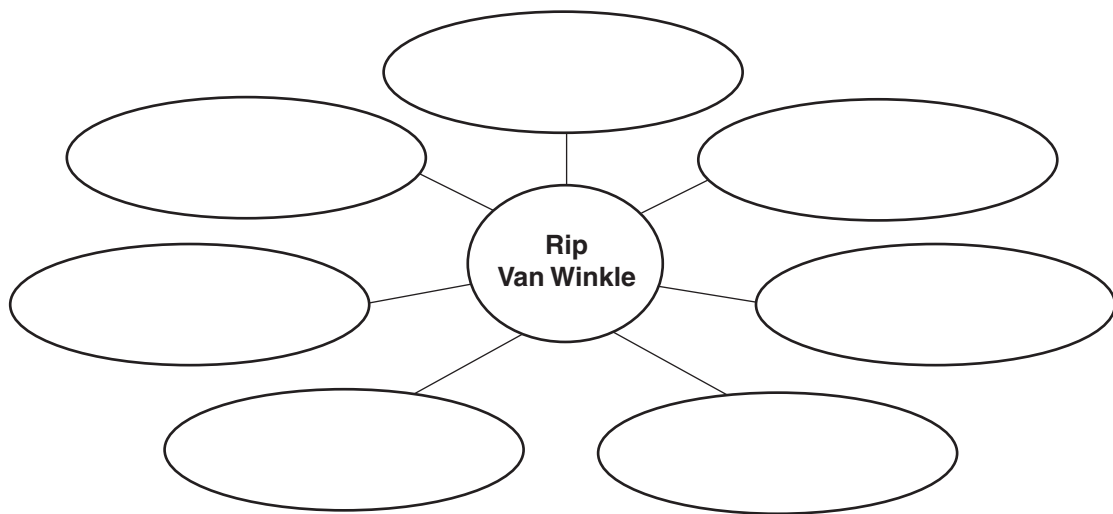
“Alas! Gentlemen,” cried Rip in confusion, “I am a poor, quiet man, a native of this area, and a loyal subject of the king, God bless him!”

Here a general shout burst from the crowd: “A spy! A spy! Hustle him! Away with him!”

**TIP 1: Identify details that describe the characters.**

Character details can take many forms: appearance, thoughts, feelings, actions (including movement, gestures, and expressions), speech, and ways in which the character is treated by others. (Such traits are sometimes called **characteristics**.) Everything about that character makes up who he or she is. Paying attention to details will help you learn a lot about what a character is like.

1. Use the following character web to note details about Rip Van Winkle. List as many details as you can find in the selection. You may draw additional branches of the web if you need them.



Use the details you gathered in Number 1 to answer the following questions.

2. What is one reason the villagers are surprised by Rip?
 - A. He is carrying a sword.
 - B. He is passing out pamphlets.
 - C. He is wearing a cocked hat.
 - D. His grizzled beard is over a foot long.
3. How does Rip feel about what he sees in the village?
 - A. angry
 - B. happy
 - C. puzzled
 - D. amused

**TIP 2: Identify details that describe the setting.**

Details that describe setting might include the point in history, the season, the time of day, the weather, the location, the landscape, and so on. All of these things can add to your understanding of a story.

4. Where and when does this scene from “Rip Van Winkle” take place?

5. Underline details in the story to support your answer to Number 4.

6. What important event has taken place during Rip’s 20-year nap?

**TIP 3: Find the conflict in a scene or story.**

Most plots are based on conflict. The **conflict** is the main problem the character faces. Characters might have conflicts with other characters, with nature, or within themselves.

7. What is Rip Van Winkle’s main problem?
- He is a spy and a loyal supporter of the king.
 - He is faced with changes he does not understand.
 - He is being followed by a crowd of women and children.
 - He is unshaven, his clothes are ragged, and his gun is rusty.

Character Clues

Here are some questions to ask yourself about the main character of a story:

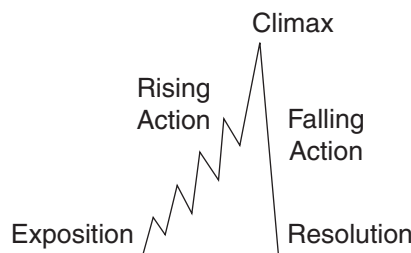
- What is the character like?
- What does the character want most? Why?
- What is the main problem the character faces?
- How does the character view his or her situation?
- What kinds of relationships does he or she have with other characters in the story?
- How does the character change as the plot moves forward?

8. How is Rip’s problem affected by the setting of the story?



TIP 4: Follow the plot to learn how the conflict is resolved.

The story unfolds as the character or characters face the problem and try to solve it. You can use a graphic organizer to help you follow the key events that make up the plot. Look at the following story map:



- **Exposition** is when the characters, setting, and initial conflict are introduced. This is like an introduction.
- The **rising action** includes all the events that lead to the climax. Characters develop, the conflict becomes more apparent, and the setting develops.
- The **climax** is the turning point of the story. This is when there is the most tension, the conflict is at its height, and the events in the story will take a dramatic turn. (Sometimes the climax comes at the very, very end of a story.)
- The **falling action** is the result of the climax. This leads to the story’s resolution.
- The **resolution** is when the conflict is resolved, or at least when the characters acknowledge they cannot resolve the conflict.

In a well-written story, nothing is included by chance. All parts work together to create the whole piece. But some details and events may be more **significant** (important or meaningful) than others, such as those that reveal the nature of the characters or move the plot forward. To recognize these important elements, ask yourself questions such as, *How would the story have been different if this event didn’t happen?*

9. How does Rip respond when he wakes up and finds that the setting is different?

10. Does Rip do anything to address the fact that everything around him is “very strange”? Explain.

Paying attention to causes and effects also can help you follow the plot.

11. What causes the townspeople to call Rip a spy?
- A. He says he is loyal to the king.
 - B. He does not tell how he votes.
 - C. He starts a riot in the village.
 - D. He says he is a Democrat.
12. What is the significance of the sign at the Union Hotel having been changed to show General Washington?
- A. It shows that there has been a change in government.
 - B. It shows that the people have forgotten who their ruler is.
 - C. It shows that an election will soon be held in the colonies.
 - D. It shows that Rip has forgotten who was on the sign before.

One way an author can develop a plot is through the use of irony. **Irony** simply means that things aren't as they seem. **Verbal irony** takes place when a speaker says one thing but means another. **Situational irony** occurs when events lead to the opposite of what is expected. **Dramatic irony** occurs when the reader knows important facts that the characters do not.

13. How is Rip's confusion in the inn an example of irony?

14. How do you predict Rip's problem will be resolved?



TIP 5: Use what you learn about the characters, setting, and plot to determine the theme of the story.

You learned in Lesson 2 that a theme is the main message or lesson the author wants to share through the writing. One way to figure out the theme in a fictional story is to ask yourself what lessons the characters learn.

15. What is the main theme of the scene you read from "Rip Van Winkle"?

- A. Time heals all wounds.
- B. Times change, even if people don't.
- C. Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
- D. Treat others as you want to be treated.



TIP 6: Identify who is telling the story.

The person telling the story is called the **narrator**. Some narrators are characters within the story. They tell the story based on how they think and feel. These are called **first-person narrators**. Stories told in this way are said to be in first-person point of view.

A **first-person point of view** includes only the events that the narrator sees, is a part of, or knows about second-hand. Think of a first-person narrator as being right inside the story, a part of the action. The following paragraph is an example:

Last night, my brother Andrew and I lay awake in our beds listening to the storm. I was worried that a bolt of lightning would strike our half-built tree house. Something more serious seemed to be on Andrew's mind, though. When the lightning flashed, I could see him clutching the bedspread beneath his chin. His face seemed filled with fear. I knew he wasn't scared of storms, so I couldn't help wondering, *What's up with him?*

A **third-person narrator** is not a character in the story. This type of narrator describes the characters and events in a story without being a part of the action. He or she acts more like an invisible observer who sees and hears everything that takes place. There are two types of third-person narrators. A **third-person omniscient narrator** tells the thoughts of the important characters in a story, whereas a **third-person limited narrator** tell the thoughts of only one character in a story. Here is an example of an omniscient narrator:

Andrew and Peter lay awake in their beds, listening to the storm. Peter was mostly concerned about lightning striking their half-built tree house. Andrew had other things to think about. He felt there was something creepy about this old house their family had just moved into. The night before, he was sure he heard strange clanking noises coming from the attic. Now this storm was bringing all his fears to life. It seemed like a perfect night for a haunting.

Now answer some point-of-view questions about “Rip Van Winkle.”

16. Which point of view does the author use in “Rip Van Winkle”? Circle the correct answer.

first person

third-person limited

third-person omniscient

17. How do you know?



TIP 7: Recognize how foreshadowing or flashbacks help you understand a story.

Stories are often told in the order in which events happen. But sometimes authors mix the sequence up a little bit to give readers clues about the past or future. You should pay careful attention to these interruptions because the author is probably trying to tell you something.

Foreshadowing is a hint about something that will happen later in the story. It sets up future events. When you see foreshadowing, think about why the author chooses to give you this hint at this point in the story.

For example, think about the final line in the second example on the previous page: “It seemed like a perfect night for a haunting.” The author is probably foreshadowing that something scary or haunting is going to occur.

Instead of looking forward like foreshadowing, a **flashback** looks back. A flashback tells readers about something that happened in the past. A flashback gives the reader clues about characters or events in the story.

For example, think about this sentence: “Andrew’s heart beat faster every time he thought about the storm that had almost destroyed his family’s house.” This sentence gives readers a clue about something in the past that is important to the story that is to come.

**TIP 9: Word choice helps to establish a story’s tone.**

Tone is the general feeling, or mood, of a selection. The tone might be positive or negative, serious, or amusing. It might be scary, exciting, sad, relaxed, mysterious, humorous, suspenseful, and so on. Authors choose specific words to help create this sense for the reader.

Reread paragraph 6 from “Rip Van Winkle.”

There was, as usual, a crowd of old people about the door, but none that Rip recognized. The very character of the people seemed different. There was a busy, bustling, angry tone about it, instead of the usual lack of concern and drowsy peacefulness. He looked in vain for the wise Nicholas Vedder, with his broad face and double chin, or for Van Bummel, the schoolmaster, complaining about the contents of an old newspaper. In place of these, he saw a lean, grumpy-looking fellow, with his pockets full of pamphlets, arguing forcefully about the rights of citizens . . . elections . . . members of Congress . . . liberty . . . Bunker Hill . . . heroes of seventy-six . . . All these were perfect nonsense to the bewildered Van Winkle.

19. Which word best describes the tone in the tavern?
- A. cheerful
 - B. creepy
 - C. calm
 - D. tense
20. Circle details in the selection that helped you answer Number 19.

Drama

Many books and stories are made into plays, movies, or television shows. These are called dramas. **Dramas** are stories written to be performed by actors. Sometimes this means acting on a stage. Other times it means acting in front of a camera.

In a drama, a writer provides a lot of information only to the director and the actors. For example, there is information about how characters look, dress, and behave as well as about the setting of the story.

Dramatic writing contains the following elements:

- The **cast of characters** lists all of the characters in the work and a brief summary of who they are and how they are related to the other characters.
- Dramas are divided into **acts**, which are further divided into **scenes**. Acts and scenes usually are divided according to the setting, a change in the plot, or which characters are on stage.
- **Stage directions** are usually written in italics and/or in parentheses. They describe the setting and tell the actors how to speak their lines and how to move about the stage.
- **Dialogue** refers to the words the characters say. In fiction, dialogue is placed in quotation marks. In drama, the dialogue is given without quotation marks, following the name of the character who speaks the line.
- **Monologue** is a speech given by a single actor.
- **Narrator** is the “voice,” or teller, of the story. In fiction, the narrator uses phrases such as “he said” and “she said,” along with descriptions of the action. Many plays do not have narrators; the details of the action must be shown by the characters. If a play has a narrator, he or she usually gives less information than a narrator of a fictional story would.

from
Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm

by Kate Douglas Wiggin
adapted for the stage by Ben Wagoner

Act 1, Scene 1

SETTING: Outside the post office of Maplewood, a quaint little town. The year is approximately 1900. REBECCA is inside the stagecoach and speaks to MRS. RANDALL outside by poking her head through a small window. MR. COBB holds reins in hands, ready to go.

REBECCA: Good-bye, mother, don't worry. You know it isn't as if I hadn't traveled before.

MRS. RANDALL: *(aside to Mr. Cobb, with a snort)* She's been to Wareham and stayed overnight; that isn't much to be journey-proud on!

REBECCA: *(eagerly and willfully)* It was traveling, mother. It was leaving the farm, and putting up lunch in a basket, and a little riding and a little steam cars, and we carried our nightgowns.

MRS. RANDALL: Don't tell the whole village about it, if we did. Haven't I told you before *(whispering sternly)* that you shouldn't talk about nightgowns and stockings and—things like that, in a loud tone of voice, and especially when there are men-folks round?

REBECCA: I know, mother, I know, and I won't. All I want to say is—

(MR. COBB gives a cluck, slaps the reins, and the stagecoach begins to move slowly.)

REBECCA: *(continuing)* All I want to say is that it is a journey when *(The stage is really under way now, and REBECCA has to put her head out of the window over the door in order to finish her sentence.)* it is a journey when you carry a nightgown! *(The last word is uttered in a high, treble voice.)*

(MRS. RANDALL watches as the stagecoach exits then gathers up her packages. As she turns toward home, she shades her eyes with her hand and looks into the distance.)

MRS. RANDALL: Mirandy'll have her hands full, I guess. But I shouldn't wonder if it would be the making of Rebecca.

21. What do the stage directions tell the reader?
- A. the time and location of the action
 - B. a description of where Rebecca is going
 - C. a description of the characters' costumes
 - D. a list of all the props the characters will need



TIP 10: Read all parts of a drama.

Each character's speeches are his or her **lines**. Between the lines are the **stage directions**. These tell how a character's lines should be spoken and how the actors should move about. When you are reading a play, the stage directions can help you picture the action in your mind.

22. Describe Rebecca's character, based on how she says her lines.

23. Based on the selection from the play, what is Mrs. Randall's attitude toward her daughter?
- A. kind and patient
 - B. impatient and worried
 - C. calm and understanding
 - D. frightened and angry



TIP 11: Understand the difference between narration and stage directions.

Narrators may give a little or a lot of information about the characters and events in the story. Sometimes a play will have its own narrator who actually speaks to the audience. Stage directions tend to be much briefer. Their main purpose is to tell the actors how to deliver their lines. Stage directions also tend to be given in present tense.

- 24. Which of these sentences is most likely a stage direction?
 - A. Suddenly, he heard a small voice above the rattle of the wheels.
 - B. Mr. Cobb waited until this flood of conversation ceased.
 - C. Rebecca sits down carefully, trying not to make a sound.
 - D. At this moment, a thought gradually spread through Mr. Jeremiah Cobb’s slow-moving mind.

- 25. Try turning the following selection from the novel into a script. This scene comes after the one you just read.

“It’s a good growing day, isn’t it?” Rebecca asked. Mr. Cobb replied, “It is, certain; too hot, most. Why don’t you put up your parasol?”¹

She extended her dress still farther over the article in question as she said, “Oh, dear, no! I never put it up when the sun shines. Pink fades awfully, you know. . . .”

¹**parasol:** a cloth umbrella used to protect the face from the sun



TIP 12: Look for the point of view in drama by observing and listening to the actors.

Playwrights cannot always give the reader certain kinds of information during the play: how a character feels, what a character thinks, and why a character acts in a certain way. Instead, these things are presented to the audience through the actors’ actions and dialogue. The dialogue of a play is very important. It must help the audience follow the plot of the play.

It is also important to watch the body language of actors. You can detect their point of view by the way they move. For example, a character might not say a word, but might stomp across the stage. By watching this behavior (or reading the stage directions), you know the character is angry.

Lesson Practice begins on the following page.