

The Devil and Tom Walker

Essential Course
of Study
EGOS

Short Story by Washington Irving

COMMON CORE

RL 1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of inferences drawn from the text.

RL 2 Determine two themes of a text and analyze their development. **RL 4** Analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including language that is fresh, engaging, or beautiful. **RL 6** Distinguish what is directly stated from what is really meant. **L 3** Apply knowledge of language to comprehend more fully when reading. **L 4a** Use context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

Meet the Author

Washington Irving 1783–1859

The Headless Horseman has thundered through readers' nightmares for nearly 200 years. Rip Van Winkle has been inspiring laughter for just as long. These characters, along with scores of others that populate his writing, helped make Washington Irving the first American writer to achieve an international reputation.

A Reluctant Lawyer Born when the nation was new and patriotism at its fiercest, Washington Irving was named for the country's first president. He began studying law at 16 but never showed much enthusiasm for it. He did, however, have a passion for writing, a playful mind, and keen powers of observation. "I was always fond of visiting new scenes and observing strange characters and manners," he once wrote. In 1807, he began publishing light satirical pieces about New York politics, culture, and theater.

Also Known As . . . In 1809, Irving penned *A History of New York from the Beginning of Time Through the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, a satire of both historical texts and the local politics they chronicled. It was considered a comic masterpiece, but for a time no one knew who had written it—the manuscript was said to have been left at an inn by an old lodger named Diedrich Knickerbocker.

Knickerbocker was one of many eccentric narrators created by Irving, who didn't sign his own name to his works until he was over 40.

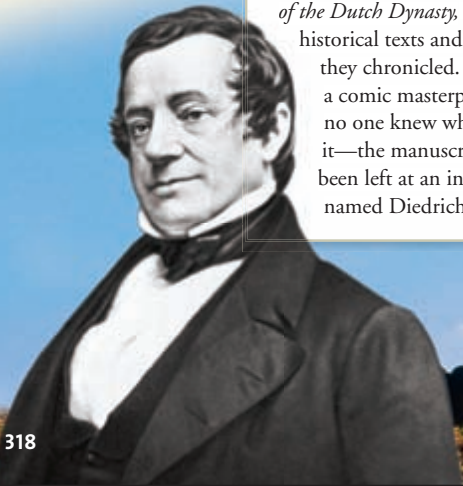
American Abroad In 1815, Irving began traveling through Europe, remaining there for 17 years. With the encouragement of Sir Walter Scott—the author of *Ivanhoe* and a fan of Irving's *History*—he began writing a series of stories that blended the legends of Europe with the tales he had heard while wandering as a young man through New York's Catskill Mountains and Hudson Valley. The stories, including both "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle," appeared in 1820 as *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* The collection was wildly successful. However, in 1824, Irving published *Tales of a Traveller* (which contained "The Devil and Tom Walker"), and the book was not well received. In fact, the criticism was so harsh that Irving stopped writing fiction altogether.

Irving returned to America in 1832 to live with his brother on the Sunnyside estate. He died at the age of 76 and was buried near the haunting ground of his famous horseman—in New York's Sleepy Hollow Cemetery.

DID YOU KNOW?

Washington Irving . . .

- was a spectator at the trial of Aaron Burr.
- served as a colonel in the War of 1812.
- inspired the name of the New York Knicks basketball team.
- lost the love of his life when she died at 17.



Author Online



Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML11-318

● TEXT ANALYSIS: SATIRE

Irving was a master of **satire**, a literary device in which people, customs, or institutions are ridiculed with the purpose of improving society. In this passage, Irving pokes fun at quarrelsome, complaining women:

... Though a female scold is generally considered to be a match for the devil, yet in this instance she appears to have had the worst of it.

Satire is often subtle, so as you read, watch for its indicators: humor, exaggeration, absurd situations, and irony.

● READING SKILL: ANALYZE IMAGERY

Irving develops his characters and establishes mood through imagery—words and phrases that appeal to the five senses.

*... There lived near this place a **meager, miserly fellow**, of the name of Tom Walker. He had a wife as miserly as himself. ... They lived in a **forlorn-looking house that stood alone** and had an **air of starvation**.*

As you read, use a chart like the one below to record images from the story. Also include your inferences about how the images support the story's characters and mood.

Images	Characterization	Mood
house with a look of starvation	Tom and his wife are miserly.	depressing

Review: Make Inferences

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The following words are critical to the story of a miser who would trade his soul for money. Check your understanding of each one by rewording the sentence in which it appears.

1. The **melancholy** sight of the graveyard chilled him.
2. The **persecution** of the Puritans went unchallenged.
3. The mention of gold awakened his **avarice**.
4. The corrupt **usurer** charged 20 percent interest.
5. **Speculating** in land deals held the promise of quick profits.
6. Hard economic times are **propitious** for moneylenders.
7. People who flaunt their wealth are guilty of **ostentation**.
8. He was a strict **censurer** of other people's vices.



Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

Are you willing to PAY ANY PRICE?

People who'll stop at nothing to achieve wealth, success, or fame are often said to have "sold their soul." In other words, they have sacrificed something important—moral beliefs, privacy, family—in order to get what they want. Consider this kind of trade-off. Do you think it might ever be worth the consequences?

DISCUSS Working with a partner, list several people—real or fictional—who fit this profile. Then pick one such person and list his or her gains and their consequences. Assign a value to each item and decide whether, overall, the prize was worth the price. Share your conclusions with the rest of the class.



The **DEVIL** *and* Tom Walker

Washington
Irving

BACKGROUND The story of Tom Walker is a variation on the legend of Faust, a 16th-century magician and astrologer who was said to have sold his soul to the devil for wisdom, money, and power. Washington Irving reinvented the tale, setting it in the 1720s in an area of New England settled by Quakers and Puritans. In Irving's comic retelling of the legend, the writer satirizes people who present a pious public image as they "sell their soul" for money.

A few miles from Boston in Massachusetts, there is a deep inlet, winding several miles into the interior of the country from Charles Bay, and terminating in a thickly wooded swamp or morass. On one side of this inlet is a beautiful dark grove; on the opposite side the land rises abruptly from the water's edge into a high ridge, on which grow a few scattered oaks of great age and immense size. Under one of these gigantic trees, according to old stories, there was a great amount of treasure buried by Kidd the pirate. The inlet allowed a facility to bring the money in a boat secretly and at night to the very foot of the hill; the elevation of the place permitted a good lookout to be kept that no one was at hand; while the remarkable trees formed good landmarks by which the place might easily be found again. The old stories add, moreover, that the devil presided at the hiding of the money and took it under his guardianship; but this, it is well-known, he always does with buried treasure, particularly when it has been ill-gotten. Be that as it may, Kidd never returned to recover his wealth; being shortly after seized at Boston, sent out to England, and there hanged for a pirate. **A**

Analyze Visuals ►

Artist John Quidor is well-known for his series of fantastic paintings based on Irving's writings. In this detail, a man discovers a store of hidden gold. What clues from the painting's images, colors, and dark tones help you visualize and better understand the imagery in the story?

A IMAGERY

Reread lines 1–15. What details in the description suggest that this is an ill-fated place?



About the year 1727, just at the time that earthquakes were prevalent in New England, and shook many tall sinners down upon their knees, there lived near this place a meager, miserly fellow, of the name of Tom Walker. He had a wife as miserly as himself: they were so miserly that they even conspired to cheat each other.

20 Whatever the woman could lay hands on, she hid away; a hen could not cackle but she was on the alert to secure the new-laid egg. Her husband was continually prying about to detect her secret hoards, and many and fierce were the conflicts that took place about what ought to have been common property. They lived in a forlorn-looking house that stood alone and had an air of starvation. A few straggling savin trees, emblems of sterility, grew near it; no smoke ever curled from its chimney; no traveler stopped at its door. A miserable horse, whose ribs were as articulate as the bars of a gridiron,¹ stalked about a field, where a thin carpet of moss, scarcely covering the ragged beds of puddingstone,² tantalized and balked his hunger; and sometimes he would lean his head over the fence, look piteously

30 at the passerby and seem to petition deliverance from this land of famine. **B**

The house and its inmates had altogether a bad name. Tom's wife was a tall termagant,³ fierce of temper, loud of tongue, and strong of arm. Her voice was often heard in wordy warfare with her husband; and his face sometimes showed signs that their conflicts were not confined to words. No one ventured, however, to interfere between them. The lonely wayfarer shrunk within himself at the horrid clamor and clapper-clawing;⁴ eyed the den of discord askance;⁵ and hurried on his way, rejoicing, if a bachelor, in his celibacy. **C**

One day that Tom Walker had been to a distant part of the neighborhood, he took what he considered a shortcut homeward, through the swamp. **D**

40 shortcuts, it was an ill-chosen route. The swamp was thickly grown with great gloomy pines and hemlocks, some of them ninety feet high, which made it dark at noonday, and a retreat for all the owls of the neighborhood. It was full of pits and quagmires, partly covered with weeds and mosses, where the green surface often betrayed the traveler into a gulf of black, smothering mud; there were also dark and stagnant pools, the abodes of the tadpole, the bullfrog, and the water snake; where the trunks of pines and hemlocks lay half-drowned, half-rotting, looking like alligators sleeping in the mire. **D**

Tom had long been picking his way cautiously through this treacherous forest; stepping from tuft to tuft of rushes and roots, which afforded precarious footholds

50 among deep sloughs; or pacing carefully, like a cat, along the prostrate trunks of trees; startled now and then by the sudden screaming of the bittern,⁶ or the quacking of wild duck rising on the wind from some solitary pool. At length he arrived at a firm piece of ground, which ran out like a peninsula into the deep bosom of the swamp. It had been one of the strongholds of the Indians during their wars

1 Targeted Passage

COMMON CORE L 4a

Language Coach

Multiple-Meaning Words

Find "common property" in line 23. *Common* here means "shared." What meaning does *common* have in the expression *common thief*?

B IMAGERY

Identify the images in lines 16–30 that help to characterize Tom and his wife. What **character traits** do these images reveal?

C SATIRE

In lines 31–37, Irving satirizes scolding women and the institution of marriage. What humorous details indicate this satire?

D IMAGERY

What kind of **mood** is established by the description of the swamp in lines 40–47?

1. **as articulate . . . gridiron**: as clearly separated as the bars of a grill.
2. **puddingstone**: a rock consisting of pebbles and gravel cemented together.
3. **termagant** (tŭr'mă-gənt): a quarrelsome, scolding woman.
4. **clapper-clawing**: scratching or clawing with the fingernails.
5. **eyed . . . askance** (ə-skăns'): looked disapprovingly at the house filled with arguing.
6. **bittern**: a wading bird with mottled, brownish plumage and a deep, booming cry.

with the first colonists. Here they had thrown up a kind of fort, which they had looked upon as almost impregnable, and had used as a place of refuge for their squaws and children.

Nothing remained of the old Indian fort but a few embankments, gradually sinking to the level of the surrounding earth, and already overgrown in part by
60 oaks and other forest trees, the foliage of which formed a contrast to the dark pines and hemlocks of the swamp.

It was late in the dusk of evening when Tom Walker reached the old fort, and he paused there awhile to rest himself. Anyone but he would have felt unwilling to linger in this lonely, **melancholy** place, for the common people had a bad opinion of it, from the stories handed down from the time of the Indian wars, when it was asserted that the savages held incantations⁷ here, and made sacrifices to the evil spirit.

Tom Walker, however, was not a man to be troubled with any fears of the kind. He reposed himself for some time on the trunk of a fallen hemlock, listening to
70 the boding cry of the tree toad, and delving with his walking staff into a mound of black mold at his feet. As he turned up the soil unconsciously, his staff struck against something hard. He raked it out of the vegetable mold, and lo! a cloven skull, with an Indian tomahawk buried deep in it, lay before him. The rust on the weapon showed the time that had elapsed since this death-blow had been given. It was a dreary memento of the fierce struggle that had taken place in this last foothold of the Indian warriors.

“Humph!” said Tom Walker, as he gave it a kick to shake the dirt from it. **E**

“Let that skull alone!” said a gruff voice. Tom lifted up his eyes, and beheld a great black man seated directly opposite him, on the stump of a tree. He was ex-
80 ceedingly surprised, having neither heard nor seen anyone approach; and he was still more perplexed on observing, as well as the gathering gloom would permit, that the stranger was neither Negro nor Indian. It is true he was dressed in a rude half-Indian garb, and had a red belt or sash swathed round his body; but his face was neither black nor copper-color, but swarthy and dingy, and begrimed with soot, as if he had been accustomed to toil among fires and forges. He had a shock of coarse black hair, that stood out from his head in all directions, and bore an ax on his shoulder.

He scowled for a moment at Tom with a pair of great red eyes.

“What are you doing on my grounds?” said the black man, with a hoarse,
90 growling voice.

“Your grounds!” said Tom, with a sneer, “no more your grounds than mine; they belong to Deacon Peabody.”

“Deacon Peabody be d—d,” said the stranger, “as I flatter myself he will be, if he does not look more to his own sins and less to those of his neighbors. Look yonder, and see how Deacon Peabody is faring.”

melancholy
(mə'lən-kōl'ē) *adj.*
gloomy; sad

E MAKE INFERENCES
Look again at lines 68 and 77. What can you infer about Tom Walker from his reaction to the swamp and to his grisly discovery of the skull?

7. **incantations:** verbal charms or spells recited to produce a magic effect.



The Devil and Tom Walker (1856), John Quidor. Oil on canvas, 68.8 cm × 86.6 cm.
© The Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund, 1967.18.

▲ Analyze Visuals

This Quidor painting illustrates the first meeting between Tom and the devil. In your opinion, how well do the artist's choices of color and shading and his depiction of Tom's character match the story? Explain.

Tom looked in the direction that the stranger pointed, and beheld one of the great trees, fair and flourishing without, but rotten at the core, and saw that it had been nearly hewn through, so that the first high wind was likely to blow it down. On the bark of the tree was scored the name of Deacon Peabody, an eminent man, who had waxed wealthy by driving shrewd bargains with the Indians. He now looked around, and found most of the tall trees marked with the name of some great man of the colony, and all more or less scored by the ax. The one on which he had been seated, and which had evidently just been hewn down, bore the name of Crowninshield; and he recollected a mighty rich man of that name, who made a vulgar display of wealth, which it was whispered he had acquired by buccaneering.⁸ **F**

“He’s just ready for burning!” said the black man, with a growl of triumph. “You see, I am likely to have a good stock of firewood for winter.”

“But what right have you,” said Tom, “to cut down Deacon Peabody’s timber?”

“The right of a prior claim,” said the other. “This woodland belonged to me long before one of your white-faced race put foot upon the soil.”

“And pray, who are you, if I may be so bold?” said Tom.

“Oh, I go by various names. I am the wild huntsman in some countries; the black miner in others. In this neighborhood I am he to whom the red men consecrated this spot, and in honor of whom they now and then roasted a white man, by way of sweet-smelling sacrifice. Since the red men have been exterminated by you white savages, I amuse myself by presiding at the **persecutions** of Quakers and Anabaptists;⁹ I am the great patron and prompter of slave dealers, and the grand master of the Salem witches.” **G**

“The upshot of all which is that, if I mistake not,” said Tom, sturdily, “you are commonly called Old Scratch.”¹⁰

“The same, at your service!” replied the black man, with a half-civil nod.

Such was the opening of this interview, according to the old story; though it has almost too familiar an air to be credited. One would think that to meet with such a singular personage, in this wild, lonely place, would have shaken any man’s nerves; but Tom was a hard-minded fellow, not easily daunted, and he had lived so long with a termagant wife that he did not even fear the devil.

It is said that after this commencement they had a long and earnest conversation together, as Tom returned homeward. The black man told him of great sums of money buried by Kidd the pirate, under the oak trees on the high ridge, not far from the morass. All these were under his command, and protected by his power, so that none could find them but such as propitiated his favor. These he offered to place within Tom Walker’s reach, having conceived an especial kindness for him; but they were to be had only on certain conditions. What these conditions were may be easily surmised, though Tom never disclosed them publicly. They must have been very hard, for he required time to think of them, and he was not a man

F MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 96–105. Why do you think the trees are marked with the men’s names?

persecution

(pŭr’sī-kyōō’shən) *n.* the act or practice of oppressing or harassing with ill-treatment, especially because of race, religion, gender, or beliefs

G SATIRE

Reread lines 115–118. What do they tell you about the author’s attitude toward the activities of the early settlers? What led you to make that inference?

2 Targeted Passage

Language Coach

Word Definitions

Propitious means “helpful or advantageous; favorable.” *Propitiated* in line 131 means “gained the good will of.” On page 327, line 164, you’ll see the phrase “propitiatory offering.” What might *propitiatory* mean?

8. **buccaneering**: robbing ships at sea; piracy.

9. **presiding . . . Anabaptists**: exercising authority over the oppression of Christian groups that the Puritans considered heretical.

10. **Old Scratch**: a nickname for the devil.



Forest Landscape (1800s), Asher Brown Durand. Oil on canvas, 76.2 cm × 66 cm. © Brooklyn Museum of Art/ Bridgeman Art Library.

to stick at trifles when money was in view. When they had reached the edge of the swamp, the stranger paused. “What proof have I that all you have been telling me is true?” said Tom. “There’s my signature,” said the black man, pressing his finger on Tom’s forehead. So saying, he turned off among the thickets of the swamp, and 140 seemed, as Tom said, to go down, down, down, into the earth, until nothing but his head and shoulders could be seen, and so on, until he totally disappeared.

When Tom reached home, he found the black print of a finger burnt, as it were, into his forehead, which nothing could obliterate.

The first news his wife had to tell him was the sudden death of Absalom Crowninshield, the rich buccaneer. It was announced in the papers with the usual flourish that “a great man had fallen in Israel.”¹¹

11. **a great man . . . Israel:** a biblical reference—“Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?” (2 Samuel 3:38)—used, with unconscious irony, by the papers to mean that an important member of God’s people on earth had passed away.

COMMON CORE RL.2

THEME


The theme of the danger of greed goes back to ancient Greece. When the gods give greedy King Midas the ability to turn anything he touches into gold, Midas does not realize that his touch will accidentally kill his own daughter. Tom Walker also fails to understand that his greed for wealth will require a terrible personal sacrifice. This theme continues in 20th-century fiction. In John Steinbeck’s novel, *The Pearl*, a humble pearl diver and his family become unexpectedly wealthy, until the greed of their neighbors and friends for a piece of that wealth leads to tragedy. Why do you think stories about the risks of greed continue to be written?

Tom recollected the tree which his black friend had just hewn down and which was ready for burning. “Let the freebooter¹² roast,” said Tom; “who cares!” He now felt convinced that all he had heard and seen was no illusion.

150 He was not prone to let his wife into his confidence; but as this was an uneasy secret, he willingly shared it with her. All her **avarice** was awakened at the mention of hidden gold, and she urged her husband to comply with the black man’s terms, and secure what would make them wealthy for life. However Tom might have felt disposed to sell himself to the devil, he was determined not to do so to oblige his wife; so he flatly refused, out of the mere spirit of contradiction. Many and bitter were the quarrels they had on the subject; but the more she talked, the more resolute was Tom not to be damned to please her.

At length she determined to drive the bargain on her own account, and if she succeeded, to keep all the gain to herself. Being of the same fearless temper as her
160 husband, she set off for the old Indian fort toward the close of a summer’s day. She was many hours absent. When she came back, she was reserved and sullen in her replies. She spoke something of a black man, whom she met about twilight hewing at the root of a tall tree. He was sulky, however, and would not come to terms; she was to go again with a propitiatory offering, but what it was she forbore to say.

The next evening she set off again for the swamp, with her apron heavily laden. Tom waited and waited for her, but in vain; midnight came, but she did not make her appearance; morning, noon, night returned, but still she did not come. Tom now grew uneasy for her safety, especially as he found she had carried off in her apron the silver teapot and spoons, and every portable article of value. Another night elapsed,
170 another morning came; but no wife. In a word, she was never heard of more.

What was her real fate nobody knows, in consequence of so many pretending to know. It is one of those facts which have become confounded by a variety of historians. Some asserted that she lost her way among the tangled mazes of the swamp, and sank into some pit or slough; others, more uncharitable, hinted that she had eloped with the household booty and made off to some other province; while others surmised that the tempter had decoyed her into a dismal quagmire, on the top of which her hat was found lying. In confirmation of this, it was said a great black man, with an ax on his shoulder, was seen late that very evening coming out of the swamp, carrying a bundle tied in a check apron, with an air
180 of surly triumph. 

The most current and probable story, however, observes that Tom Walker grew so anxious about the fate of his wife and his property that he set out at length to seek them both at the Indian fort. During a long summer’s afternoon he searched about the gloomy place, but no wife was to be seen. He called her name repeatedly, but she was nowhere to be heard. The bittern alone responded to his voice, as they flew screaming by; or the bullfrog croaked dolefully from a neighboring pool. At length, it is said, just in the brown hour of twilight, when the owls began to hoot, and the bats to flit about, his attention was attracted by the clamor of carrion crows¹³ hovering about a cypress tree. He looked up, and beheld a bundle tied in a

avarice (äV'ä-rĭs) *n.*
immoderate desire for wealth; greed

COMMON CORE L3

Language Coach

Fixed Expressions Look at “confirmation of” in line 177. *Of* often follows *confirmation*, such as in the statement “I need *confirmation* of this information.” Other phrases using *confirmation* include “[to] await confirmation” and “further confirmation.” Use each phrase in a sentence of your own.

GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Irving emphasizes ideas and creates lyricism through the use of **parallelism**, the repetition of grammatical structures. In lines 173–177, for example, the writer uses parallelism to present three possible fates of Tom’s wife.

12. **freebooter**: pirate.

13. **carrion crows**: crows that feed on dead or decaying flesh.

190 check apron, and hanging in the branches of the tree, with a great vulture perched hard by, as if keeping watch upon it. He leaped with joy; for he recognized his wife's apron and supposed it to contain the household valuables. 1

"Let us get hold of the property," said he consolingly to himself, "and we will endeavor to do without the woman."

As he scrambled up the tree, the vulture spread its wide wings, and sailed off screaming into the deep shadows of the forest. Tom seized the checked apron, but, woeful sight! found nothing but a heart and liver tied up in it!

Such, according to this most authentic old story, was all that was to be found of Tom's wife. She had probably attempted to deal with the black man as she had 200 been accustomed to deal with her husband; but though a female scold is generally considered a match for the devil, yet in this instance she appears to have had the worst of it. She must have died game, however; for it is said Tom noticed many prints of cloven feet stamped upon the tree, and found handfuls of hair that looked as if they had been plucked from the coarse black shock of the woodman. Tom knew his wife's prowess by experience. He shrugged his shoulders, as he looked at the signs of a fierce clapper-clawing. "Egad," said he to himself, "Old Scratch must have had a tough time of it!" 1

Tom consoled himself for the loss of his property with the loss of his wife, for he was a man of fortitude. He even felt something like gratitude towards the black 210 woodman, who, he considered, had done him a kindness. He sought, therefore, to cultivate a further acquaintance with him, but for some time without success; the old blacklegs played shy, for, whatever people may think, he is not always to be had for calling for: he knows how to play his cards when pretty sure of his game.

At length, it is said, when delay had whetted Tom's eagerness to the quick, and prepared him to agree to anything rather than not gain the promised treasure, he met the black man one evening in his usual woodsman's dress, with his ax on his shoulder, sauntering along the swamp, and humming a tune. He affected to receive Tom's advances with great indifference, made brief replies, and went on humming his tune.

By degrees, however, Tom brought him to business, and they began to haggle 220 about the terms on which the former was to have the pirate's treasure. There was one condition which need not be mentioned, being generally understood in all cases where the devil grants favors; but there were others about which, though of less importance, he was inflexibly obstinate. He insisted that the money found through his means should be employed in his service. He proposed, therefore, that Tom should employ it in the black traffic; that is to say, that he should fit out a slave ship. This, however, Tom resolutely refused: he was bad enough in all conscience; but the devil himself could not tempt him to turn slave trader.

Finding Tom so squeamish on this point, he did not insist upon it, but proposed, instead, that he should turn **usurer**; the devil being extremely anxious for 230 the increase of usurers, looking upon them as his peculiar people.

To this no objections were made, for it was just to Tom's taste.

"You shall open a broker's shop in Boston next month," said the black man.

"I'll do it tomorrow, if you wish," said Tom Walker.

"You shall lend money at two percent a month."

"Egad, I'll charge four!" replied Tom Walker.

1 IMAGERY

Which images in lines 189–192 suggest that Tom's discovery won't be a pleasant one?

1 SATIRE

How does Irving use humor and exaggeration to satirize a "female scold" in lines 199–207?

B Targeted Passage

usurer (yoo'zher-er) *n.*
one who lends money, at interest, especially at an unusually or unlawfully high rate of interest

“You shall extort bonds, foreclose mortgages, drive the merchants to bankruptcy—”

“I’ll drive them to the d——l,” cried Tom Walker.

“You are the usurer for my money!” said blacklegs with delight. “When will
240 you want the rhino?”¹⁴

“This very night.”

“Done!” said the devil.

“Done!” said Tom Walker. So they shook hands and struck a bargain. **K**

A few days’ time saw Tom Walker seated behind his desk in a countinghouse¹⁵
in Boston.

His reputation for a ready-moneyed man, who would lend money out for a
good consideration, soon spread abroad. Everybody remembers the time of Gov-
ernor Belcher, when money was particularly scarce. It was a time of paper credit.
The country had been deluged with government bills; the famous Land Bank¹⁶
250 had been established; there had been a rage for **speculating**; the people had run
mad with schemes for new settlements; for building cities in the wilderness; land-
jobbers¹⁷ went about with maps of grants, and townships, and Eldorados¹⁸ lying
nobody knew where, but which everybody was ready to purchase. In a word, the
great speculating fever, which breaks out every now and then in the country, had
raged to an alarming degree, and everybody was dreaming of making sudden for-
tunes from nothing. As usual the fever had subsided; the dream had gone off, and
the imaginary fortunes with it; the patients were left in doleful plight, and
the whole country resounded with the consequent cry of “hard times.”

At this **propitious** time of public distress did Tom Walker set up as usurer in
260 Boston. His door was soon thronged by customers. The needy and adventurous,
the gambling speculator, the dreaming land-jobber, the thriftless tradesman,
the merchant with cracked credit; in short, everyone driven to raise money by
desperate means and desperate sacrifices hurried to Tom Walker.

Thus Tom was the universal friend of the needy and acted like a “friend in
need”; that is to say, he always exacted good pay and good security. In proportion
to the distress of the applicant was the hardness of his terms. He accumulated
bonds and mortgages; gradually squeezed his customers closer and closer; and
sent them at length, dry as a sponge, from his door.

In this way he made money hand over hand, became a rich and mighty man,
270 and exalted his cocked hat upon ‘Change.¹⁹ He built himself, as usual, a vast

K SATIRE

Reread lines 232–243.
How does Tom compare
with the devil in
terms of his greed and
mercilessness? Decide
what comment Irving is
making about usurers in
general.

speculating

(spĕk'yə-lā'tīng) *n.*
engaging in risky
business transactions on
the chance of a quick or
considerable profit

propitious

(prə-pīsh'əs) *adj.* helpful
or advantageous;
favorable

14. **rhino**: a slang term for money.

15. **countinghouse**: an office in which a business firm conducts its bookkeeping, correspondence, and similar activities.

16. **Land Bank**: Boston merchants organized the Land Bank in 1739. Landowners could take out mortgages on their property and then repay the loans with cash or manufactured goods. When the Land Bank was outlawed in 1741, many colonists lost money.

17. **land-jobbers**: people who buy and sell land for profit.

18. **Eldorados**: places of fabulous wealth or great opportunity. Early Spanish explorers sought a legendary country named El Dorado, which was rumored to be rich with gold.

19. **exalted . . . 'Change**: proudly raised himself to a position of importance as a trader on the stock exchange.

house, out of **ostentation**; but left the greater part of it unfinished and unfurnished, out of parsimony. He even set up a carriage in the fullness of his vain-glory,²⁰ though he nearly starved the horses which drew it; and as the ungreased wheels groaned and screeched on the axletrees, you would have thought you heard the souls of the poor debtors he was squeezing. **L**

As Tom waxed old, however, he grew thoughtful. Having secured the good things of this world, he began to feel anxious about those of the next. He thought with regret on the bargain he had made with his black friend, and set his wits to work to cheat him out of the conditions. He became, therefore, all of a sudden, a violent churchgoer. He prayed loudly and strenuously, as if heaven were to be taken by force of lungs. Indeed, one might always tell when he had sinned most during the week, by the clamor of his Sunday devotion. The quiet Christians who had been modestly and steadfastly traveling Zionward²¹ were struck with self-reproach at seeing themselves so suddenly outstripped in their career by this new-made convert. Tom was as rigid in religious as in money matters; he was a stern supervisor and **censurer** of his neighbors, and seemed to think every sin entered up to their account became a credit on his own side of the page. He even talked of the expediency of reviving the persecution of Quakers and Anabaptists. In a word, Tom's zeal became as notorious as his riches. **M**

Still, in spite of all this strenuous attention to forms, Tom had a lurking dread that the devil, after all, would have his due.²² That he might not be taken unawares, therefore, it is said he always carried a small Bible in his coat pocket. He had also a great folio Bible on his countinghouse desk, and would frequently be found reading it when people called on business; on such occasions he would lay his green spectacles in the book, to mark the place, while he turned round to drive some usurious bargain.

Some say that Tom grew a little crackbrained in his old days, and that fancying his end approaching, he had his horse new shod, saddled and bridled, and buried with his feet uppermost; because he supposed that at the last day the world would be turned upside down; in which case he should find his horse standing ready for mounting, and he was determined at the worst to give his old friend a run for it. This, however, is probably a mere old wives' fable. If he really did take such a precaution, it was totally superfluous; at least so says the authentic old legend, which closes his story in the following manner:

One hot summer afternoon in the dog days, just as a terrible black thundergust was coming up, Tom sat in his countinghouse, in his white linen cap and India silk morning gown. He was on the point of foreclosing a mortgage, by which he would complete the ruin of an unlucky land speculator for whom he had professed the greatest friendship. The poor land-jobber begged him to grant a few months' indulgence. Tom had grown testy and irritated, and refused another day.

ostentation
(ōs' tēn-tā'shən) *n.*
display meant to
impress others; boastful
showiness

L IMAGERY
Find the images in lines 264–275 that are used to describe both Tom and his clients. What do these images tell you about Tom and his methods?

censurer
(sēn'shər-ər) *n.* one
who expresses strong
disapproval or harsh
criticism

4 Targeted Passage

M SATIRE
What kind of churchgoer is represented by Tom in lines 276–289? Think about what Irving is suggesting about this kind of individual.

20. **vainglory**: boastful, undeserved pride in one's accomplishments or qualities.

21. **Zionward**: toward heaven.

22. **the devil . . . due**: a reference to the proverb "Give the devil his due," used to mean "Give even a disagreeable person the credit he or she deserves." Here, of course, the expression is used literally rather than figuratively.

“My family will be ruined and brought upon the parish,” said the land-jobber. “Charity begins at home,” replied Tom; “I must take care of myself in these hard times.”

“You have made so much money out of me,” said the speculator.

Tom lost his patience and his piety. “The devil take me,” said he, “if I have made a farthing!”²³

Just then there were three loud knocks at the street door. He stepped out to see who was there. A black man was holding a black horse, which neighed and stamped with impatience.

320 “Tom, you’re come for,” said the black fellow, gruffly. Tom shrank back, but too late. He had left his little Bible at the bottom of his coat pocket, and his big Bible on the desk buried under the mortgage he was about to foreclose; never was a sinner taken more unawares. The black man whisked him like a child into the saddle,

23. **farthing:** a coin worth one-fourth of a penny, formerly used throughout the British Empire.

Tom Walker’s Flight (about 1856), John Quidor. Oil on canvas, 26¹/₄” × 33¹/₄”. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, 1979.7.84.

▼ Analyze Visuals


What elements in this painting by Quidor emphasize the human fear of the supernatural and the consequences of greed? Explain.



gave the horse the lash, and away he galloped, with Tom on his back, in the midst of the thunderstorm. The clerks stuck their pens behind their ears, and stared after him from the windows. Away went Tom Walker, dashing down the streets; his white cap bobbing up and down, his morning gown fluttering in the wind, and his steed striking fire out of the pavement at every bound. When the clerks turned to look for the black man, he had disappeared.

330 Tom Walker never returned to foreclose the mortgage. A countryman, who lived on the border of the swamp, reported that in the height of the thundergust he had heard a great clattering of hoofs and a howling along the road, and running to the window caught sight of a figure, such as I have described, on a horse that galloped like mad across the fields, over the hills, and down into the black hemlock swamp toward the old Indian fort; and that shortly after a thunderbolt falling in that direction seemed to set the whole forest in a blaze.

The good people of Boston shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, but had been so much accustomed to witches and goblins, and tricks of the devil, in all kinds of shapes, from the first settlement of the colony, that they were not
340 so much horror-struck as might have been expected. Trustees were appointed to take charge of Tom's effects. There was nothing, however, to administer upon. On searching his coffer²⁴ all his bonds and mortgages were found reduced to cinders. In place of gold and silver, his iron chest was filled with chips and shavings; two skeletons lay in his stable instead of his half-starved horses, and the very next day his great house took fire and burnt to the ground. **N**

Such was the end of Tom Walker and his ill-gotten wealth. Let all griping money
brokers lay this story to heart. The truth of it is not to be doubted. The very hole
350 under the oak trees whence he dug Kidd's money is to be seen to this day; and the neighboring swamp and old Indian fort are often haunted in stormy nights by a figure on horseback, in morning gown and white cap, which is doubtless the troubled spirit of the usurer. In fact the story has resolved itself into a proverb so prevalent throughout New England, of "The Devil and Tom Walker." 

5 Targeted Passage

N IMAGERY

Reread lines 341–345. What **message** do these images suggest about material possessions and those who seek them?

COMMON CORE RL.2

THEME

Irving's story is a satirical version of the legend of Faust, who sold his soul to the devil. The Faust theme often appears in works of literature and film. One recent example is the best-selling 2003 novel, *The Devil Wears Prada*, and its 2006 film version. In this satire of the fashion industry, a young woman begins to lose herself as she tries to please her demanding boss in order to have a successful career. What other recent stories, novels, plays, or films can you think of that relate to the Faust theme?

24. **coffers**: safes or strongboxes designed to hold money or other valuable items.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** What character traits do Tom Walker and his wife share?
2. **Recall** What bargain does Tom make with the stranger in the forest?
3. **Summarize** How does Tom try to avoid fulfilling his end of the bargain?

Text Analysis

4. **Compare Character Traits** As Tom gets older, he begins to worry about his actions and becomes “a violent churchgoer.” But does he really change? Support your opinion with examples from the text. Use a chart like the one shown to collect evidence.

	<i>Before the Bargain</i>	<i>As He Ages</i>
<i>Attitude</i>		
<i>Statements</i>		
<i>Actions</i>		

5. **Draw Conclusions** In your opinion, is there any way Tom could have escaped the consequences of his deal with the devil? Use evidence from the text and your own knowledge of human nature to support your answer.
6. **Analyze Imagery** What inferences can you make about how each of the following images supports characterization and mood?
 - the trees and the swamp (lines 40–47)
 - the hewn trees (lines 96–102)
 - Tom’s new house (lines 270–272)
 - Tom as a churchgoer (lines 279–289)
7. **Analyze Satire** Through statements he makes about Tom Walker, his wife, and his community, what messages is Irving communicating about
 - women (lines 31–37)?
 - the slave trade (lines 224–227)?
 - the Puritan attitude (lines 115–118)?
 - moneylenders (lines 228–230)?

Text Criticism

8. **Critical Interpretations** The story of Tom Walker engaged readers both here and in Europe for many different, and sometimes conflicting, reasons. Look at the story again through the eyes of each of the following people. What reasons would you give for recommending the story to others?
 - revolutionary
 - Puritan
 - American politician
 - banker

Are you willing to **PAY ANY PRICE?**

Tom Walker goes to extreme lengths to acquire wealth. Are there things in life that are worth paying any price for? If so, what are they, and what are the consequences of seeking them?

COMMON CORE

RL 1 Cite evidence to support analysis of inferences drawn from the text. **RL 3** Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story. **RL 4** Analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including language that is fresh, engaging, or beautiful. **RL 6** Distinguish what is directly stated from what is really meant.

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Choose the vocabulary word that best matches each description below.

1. someone who loves to nag, criticize, and sneer
2. your mood if you suddenly lost your job, your best friend, or your dog
3. what a hot day is to lemonade vendors
4. a pretentious display that is meant to impress others
5. what the Bill of Rights was written to prevent
6. what someone who buys stock in a struggling company is doing
7. a person you don't want to have help you out of financial difficulties
8. a feeling that can make someone drool in a department store

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• construct • expand • indicate • reinforce • role

Irving uses several examples of wicked characters to **reinforce** the idea that greed is bad. In a short paragraph, **indicate** how Irving could have also included positive **role** models to illustrate moderation. Use three of the Academic Vocabulary words in your writing.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE LATIN ROOT *spec*

When Tom Walker's neighbors speculated in land, they were hoping to spot opportunities for a quick profit. The Latin root *spec* in the word *speculating* actually means "to look at" or "to see or behold." Words containing this root, or the related forms *spect* and *spic*, usually have something to do with light, sight, or clarity.

PRACTICE Match each definition below with the appropriate word from the word web, considering what you know about the origin of the Latin root *spec* and the other word parts shown. Then, say whether the words are nouns or adjectives, checking a dictionary if necessary.

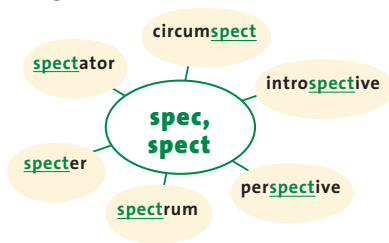
1. tending to look within, at one's own thoughts or feelings
2. an observer of an event
3. a ghostly sight or apparition
4. showing unwillingness to act rashly; prudent
5. a point of view
6. a range of colored light

WORD LIST

avarice
censurer
melancholy
ostentation
persecution
propitious
speculating
usurer

COMMON CORE

L4b-c Identify and use patterns of word changes that indicate different parts of speech; consult reference materials to determine or clarify a word's part of speech.
L6 Acquire and use academic words and phrases.



Interactive Vocabulary **THINK** central

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KEYWORD: HML11-334

Language

◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Recognize Parallelism

Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 327. Irving uses parallelism—the repetition of grammatical structures—to create emphasis or to add rhythm. Look at this example:

Tom's wife was a tall termagant, fierce of temper, loud of tongue, and strong of arm. (lines 31–32)

Notice that each of the highlighted phrases contains an adjective (*fierce, loud, and strong*) followed by a prepositional phrase (*of temper, of tongue, and of arm*). How does the parallelism affect the description of Tom's wife?

PRACTICE Write down each of the following sentences from the selection. Then identify the parallel elements from each sentence as shown and write your own sentence with similar parallel elements.

EXAMPLE

... No smoke ever curled from its chimney; no traveler stopped at its door.
No frown ever crossed his face; no complaint crossed his lips.

1. "Oh, I go by various names. I am the wild huntsman in some countries; the black miner in others. . . . I am the great patron and prompter of slave dealers, and the grand master of the Salem witches."
2. . . . Midnight came, but she did not make her appearance; morning, noon, night returned, but still she did not come.
3. He built himself, as usual, a vast house, out of ostentation; but left the greater part of it unfinished and unfurnished, out of parsimony.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Expand your understanding of Irving's "The Devil and Tom Walker" by responding to this prompt. Then, use the **revising tips** to improve your story.

WRITING PROMPT

WRITE A STORY An archetypal plot is a basic story line that serves as a frame for stories across time and cultures. Write a **one- to three-page story** around a situation where a character makes a "deal with the devil" in a modern setting. Be sure to show the results of the main character's actions.

REVISING TIPS

- Use parallel verbs (such as *saw, went, bought*) to add rhythm and vary syntax.
- Use parallel phrases to enhance your style.
- Use parallel sentences to clarify meaning.

COMMON CORE

L 3 Apply knowledge of language to make effective choices for meaning or style. L3a Vary syntax for effect. W 3d Write narratives using precise words and phrases.

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