

Symbolism of rip van winkle written by washington irving



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The story of Rip Van Winkle is set years before and after the American Revolution. In Irvin's story, Rip Van Winkle, a man who wandered into the mountains after listening to the ongoing nagging of his wife, experiences strange encounters. He comes upon men, said to be the spirits of Hudson's crew, who are playing a game of nine pins, and after drinking, he lies under a tree and goes to sleep. He wakes up twenty years later. Because he was used to what the world was like before the Revolutionary War of the United States, he notices how things changed drastically. Irvin uses the characters Rip to represent America, Dame to represent Britain, and the townspeople to represent the American people, to show the reader how the various parties participated in the American Revolution.

Rip's wife calls him lazy because he does nothing around their home. He would rather go hunting with his dog or go to the village and gossip with men. Everyone in the village loves Rip. The narrator states, "The children of the village, too, would shout with joy whenever he approached". Rip made it his place to satisfy everyone but the people of his family. A few examples include Rip playing with the children, teaching them to fly kites, telling the children stories, never refusing to help his neighbors, and he ran errands for people. The narrator's states, "In a word Rip was ready to attend to anybody's business but his own; but as to doing family duty, and keeping his farm in order, Rip found it impossible". This is what causes Rip to be troubled by his wife. This can also be looked at as a representation of the American society as the US shows their efforts to take care of foreign affairs while not tending to their own. He is used to display American struggles and immaturity. Rip's big error is his failure to be there and provide for his own

family. One day Rip goes away to the mountains to escape from his nagging wife, only to take a sip of a drink and fall asleep for 20 years. When Rip wakes up and returns to town, he is puzzled by the many changes that have occurred such as his appearance and everything in the village. The character of Rip can also symbolize the American people who were struggling with finding their own identity.

Dame Van Winkle is the wife of Rip Van Winkle, who has a very sharp tongue. She is constantly nagging at her husband for his laziness and irresponsibility towards their home. The narrator shows this trait by saying, “She was continually dinning in his ears about his idleness, his carelessness, and the ruin he was bringing on his family”. She is never satisfied with his deeds, and rightly so. The events in the story exhibit that she is the reason for her husband’s unhappiness. Dame represents the country of Great Britain. Her demandingness represents the power that the British tried to bring upon the American colonies, which eventually made them tired, as it did Rip. The tyranny he faces at home makes him escape to the mountains, which seems to be Rip’s happy place. Dame was the repressive hand that caused Rip to find his escape with the feeling of freedom, as did the colonists once they were able to escape the government’s rule of the crown.

The townspeople in the story represented the American society, showing how things were before and after the Revolution. It seems as though the townspeople were a bit conceited before the revolution, which is how they represent America while under British regulation. When Rip arrives back to town 20 years later, the townspeople grew to the expectation of their new government.

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In Irvin's Rip Van Winkle, Irvin displays changes in American beliefs from the experiences through the American Revolution. The short story provides insight to the characteristics of the American colonists and how the passage of time has modified the society.