

Talking about *Rip Van Winkle*

by Washington Irving · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/rip-van-winkle/

Warming *up*

Easy openers. Anyone at the table can answer these, including the youngest.

1. Twenty years is a long nap. If you could sleep straight through one thing — a chore, a car ride, a week of school — what would you pick, and what would you be sad to miss while you were out?
2. Rip's dog Wolf is the only one in the house on his side. If you had to take one animal up a mountain with you for the afternoon, who are you taking?

The real *conversation*

Pick two or three, not all of them. Parents answer too, honestly.

1. Rip will fix a neighbour's fence, run errands for anyone who asks, and mind other people's children all day — and let his own farm fall to pieces. Do you know somebody like that? Is he a good man or not?
2. Irving makes Rip's wife the joke of the whole story, never gives her a first name, and has her die offstage in a fit of temper — and Rip is relieved. She was married to a man who would not work. Whose side are you actually on?
3. Rip looks at his grown son leaning against a tree, exactly as he used to lean, and says he isn't himself any more. If everything around you changed overnight but you didn't, how much of you would still be you?
4. He slept through a whole war and the end of a king, and Irving says the changes of states and empires 'made but little impression on him.' Is there something going on right now that you'd be sorry to have slept through? Would the answer be the same for everyone at this table?
5. The old inn sign was not thrown away. Somebody painted King George's red coat blue, put a sword in his hand, and wrote GENERAL WASHINGTON underneath. Where have you seen something old painted over or renamed instead of replaced?

The big *one*

Save it for last.

Rip comes home to find that the two things he ran away from — the farm and the marriage — are both gone, and he is happy. He gets to sit on the bench outside the inn for the rest of his life telling his story. Is that a happy ending? Would it be a happy ending for the people at this table?

Do it *together*

Paint over the sign. The cleverest thing in the story is a piece of pub signage: the same board, the same face, repainted from King George into General Washington. Walk to one building near your house — a shop, a school, a sign at the end of the road — and work out together what it used to be. Older neighbours and a phone are both fair game. Then each draw that one place twice on the same sheet: how it looks now, and how it will look when someone your kid's age is grown. The rule is that one thing has to stay the same in both drawings, the way King George's face stayed on the board. Whoever picks the best thing to keep wins.