

Talking about *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*

by Washington Irving · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/sleepy-hollow/

Warming up

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

1. Would you rather ride home through those woods at midnight on a horse that is fast and nervous, or one that is slow and calm? Defend your choice.
2. Ichabod can eat more than anyone in the valley and Brom Bones can out-ride anyone in the valley. If one of them had to sit next to you at dinner, which one?

The real conversation

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

1. Ichabod is not really in love with Katrina — Irving shows him in the barnyard pricing her father's farm and imagining selling the whole thing. Once you know that, who do you want to win? Does it make Brom's prank fair?
2. Brom scares Ichabod out of town instead of fighting him, it works perfectly, and nobody can ever prove he did it. Clever, or cruel? Does the fact that it worked change your answer?
3. Irving tells us plainly that Ichabod turned up alive, went west, and became a judge. The old women of the town go right on saying the ghost got him. Why would people rather keep the ghost? Where have you seen that happen?
4. Ichabod's whole defence against being frightened is to sing psalm tunes loudly in the dark. It doesn't work, and he does it anyway, every night. What's your version of singing in the dark?
5. Everyone in Sleepy Hollow believes strange things, and Irving says newcomers start believing them too within a few months. Is there something you believe mostly because everyone around you does? How would you even find out?

The big one

Save it for last.

The hat was on the bank and the smashed pumpkin was lying right beside it, and the whole town still chose the headless horseman. Two hundred years later most of us still do. Is there a story the people at this table like too much to go and check?

Do it *together*

Give your own street a legend. Irving hung his ghost on real places a few minutes from his own door — a stream, a church, a bridge people crossed every day. Walk to one spot near your house: a bend in the road, the biggest tree, the dark end of the parking lot. Together, decide what happens there after dark, who it used to be, and the one small detail that makes people believe it. Then, like Brom Bones, agree privately on the ordinary explanation. Tell the legend to the next visitor and see whether they check.