

“The Devil and Tom Walker” by Washington Irving
Suggested Lesson Procedure; Total Time: ~280 Minutes

1) Jigsaw Pre-Reading Activity (~45 Minutes)

Purpose: Students will build essential background knowledge, helping them better understand and engage with the story

Teacher Steps

1. Divide the class into 7 groups of 3–4 students.
2. Assign each group one topic to research:
 - Group 1: Washington Irving
 - Group 2: American Romanticism
 - Group 3: Satire and Allegory
 - Group 4: The Faust Legend
 - Group 5: Gothic Literature
 - Group 6: Folklore
 - Group 7: Puritan & Quaker Culture in 1720s New England
3. Give groups time to research and prepare.
 - Each group should:
 - Research their assigned topic
 - Identify at 3-5 essential points their classmates need to know
 - Create a brief visual or written summary (notes, a mini-poster, or a shared slide)
 - Choose one spokesperson or plan how they will present their findings
4. Bring the class together for presentations.
 - Each group teaches their topic to the entire class while classmates take notes.
 - By the end, every student should have a complete set of background information for all topics.

If your class tends to get rowdy, struggles with group work, or if you simply prefer a more structured approach, you can teach this pre-reading information directly. Present the material using slides and have students take notes traditionally. This option still gives students the background they need, while allowing you to maintain classroom control and teach in the style that works best for you.

2) Vocabulary (Before Reading) (~25 Minutes)

Use the PowerPoint to introduce and teach each vocabulary term. As you review the slides, have students write the definitions in their vocabulary charts. If you prefer, you may also have students define the words independently.

3) Read The Short Story The Devil and Tom Walker (~30 Minutes)

Read “The Devil and Tom Walker” together as a class, pausing as needed for clarification and discussion. If you prefer, you may also have students read the text independently before regrouping for analysis and follow-up activities.

4) Comprehension Questions (~70 Minutes)

Have students work in pairs to answer the comprehension questions. After they’ve discussed and recorded their responses, review each question together as a whole class to check understanding and clarify any misconceptions.

5) Paired Texts Assignment (~50 Minutes)

Assign students to read the story of King Midas. After reading, have them complete the paired texts questions that follow to compare and connect the two stories. Review answers if you would like to, or collect students’ responses to grade.

6) Creative Writing Assignment (~60 Minutes)

Challenge students to write an extended ending to the story.

Jigsaw Pre-Reading Activity

Topic	Notes
Washington Irving	
American Romanticism	
Satire and Allegory	
The Faust Legend	
Gothic Literature	
Folklore	
Puritan & Quaker Culture in 1720s New England	

Vocabulary Chart

Word	Part of Speech	Definition	Synonyms
avarice			
usurer			
termagant			
persecution			
propitious			
piety			
ostentation			
eminent			
obliterate			
farthing			

Name:

Date:

“The Devil and Tom Walker” by Washington Irving
Reading Questions

1. What details in the first paragraph suggest that the swampy forest is a dangerous place?

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2. How does the author portray Tom and his wife, and what traits do these descriptions reveal about them?

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3. How does the description of the couple’s home develop the mood of the story, and what does it reveal about Tom and his wife?

4. How does Irving use exaggeration and humor to satirize Tom’s wife?

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5. How does Irving portray the Devil, and what might this portrayal suggest about American society in the 18th and 19th centuries, specifically regarding Native Americans?

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6. Why are the trees marked with the men’s names?



7. What does it mean when the Devil chops down one of the trees?

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8. Based on the evidence Tom discovers, what likely happened to his wife?

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9. The newspaper calls Absalom Crowninshield “a great man” when he dies, even though he was a notorious buccaneer. How is Irving using satire here, and what aspect of society is he mocking through this exaggerated praise?

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10. What point is Irving making about the slave trade, and how does he work this criticism into the narrative?

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11. In what ways is Tom just as greedy and ruthless as the Devil, and what message is Irving sending readers about moneylenders (usurers)?

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12. What kind of religious person does Tom become, and what is Irving suggesting about individuals with this behavior?

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13. Tom suggests reviving the persecution of Quakers and Anabaptists. What does this reveal about his character and the kind of “religion” he practices?

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14. What does Tom say right before the Devil takes him, and why is his statement ironic?

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15. What happens to all Tom’s possessions? What lesson about material possessions is portrayed by this imagery?

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16. How does the story function as an allegory, and what moral does it communicate?

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17. The story suggests that shortcuts to wealth come with consequences. What is a goal you have that requires real effort, and why is working for it important?

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18. The story shows how greed can damage relationships. What are some things you think are important to focus on in order to maintain positive, healthy relationships with the people you care about?

Name:

Date:

Paired Texts: Analysis Questions
King Midas and The Devil and Tom Walker

1. Explain what motivates King Midas to make his wish and compare it to why Tom Walker makes his deal. How are their desires similar or different?

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2. Compare how each author introduces supernatural beings (Dionysus/satyr vs. the Devil). How do these supernatural figures influence the plot?

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3. What is the turning point (climax) in both stories? Explain what moment forces each protagonist to realize the mistake of their selfish choices.

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4. What theme about greed is shared between the two stories?

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5. Compare how each author uses symbolism (gold in King Midas, the “swamp” or “forest” in Tom Walker). What abstract ideas do these symbols represent?

6. Explain an example of situational irony from each story.



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7. Which story ends with a more hopeful message, and why?

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8. How does the tone in King Midas differ from the tone in The Devil and Tom Walker?

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9. How do the authors' purposes differ in the stories of King Midas and The Devil and Tom Walker?

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10. Which story teaches its lesson more effectively, in your opinion? Explain.

Name:

Date:

Extended Ending

Write a new ending to *The Devil and Tom Walker*. In your version, imagine that the Devil offers Tom a second deal, sending the story in a new direction.

As you write, consider the following questions:

What setting will I choose for my continuation of the story?

What new events can I add to change the plot or Tom's fate?

How will Tom react to the new deal—fearful, greedy, defiant, or something else?

In my ending, is the Devil truly offering mercy, or is he deceiving Tom with a trick?

What message or moral do I want my ending to communicate?

What tone do I want—dark, humorous, suspenseful, or ironic?

How will my new ending connect back to the themes Irving used (greed, moral corruption, temptation)?

Your ending should be a minimum of two fully developed paragraphs. Be creative, stay true to the spirit of the story, and make the ending uniquely your own.

You may switch the POV if you'd like—for example, change it from third-person narration to first-person from Tom's perspective (or even from the Devil's).



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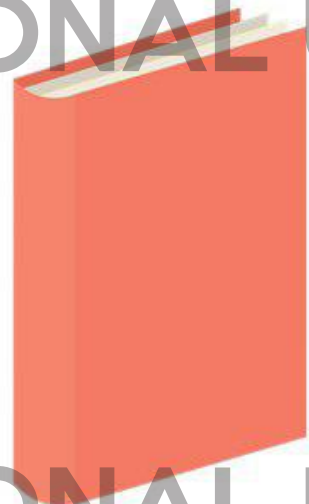
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Before Reading “The Devil and Tom Walker”

- Written by Washington Irving
- American Romantic Literature
- Satire
- Allegory
- Faustian Legend
- Gothic Fiction
- Folklore
- Setting: New England, 1700s



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Washington Irving

- Washington Irving (1783–1859) was an American writer, diplomat, and attorney best known for creating the classic tales “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.”
- Although he studied law, he preferred writing and began his literary career using the pen name Jonathan Oldstyle.
- Irving’s early literary success helped shape the foundation of American literature.



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American Romanticism

- American Romanticism was a 19th-century literary and artistic movement that highlighted intense emotion, personal freedom, and the spiritual power of nature, emerging partly as a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism and the rise of industrialization.
- Romantics saw the profit motive of industrial capitalism as a corrupting force that degraded both the environment and human dignity.
- Prominent writers of the movement include Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.



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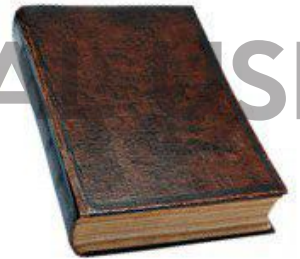
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Romantic Era Literature Characteristics

- Nature is powerful or spiritual
- Focuses on the path of the individual
- Characters seek to find inner truth, deeper meaning, spiritual insight, and a world beyond reality
- Emotion and intuition take priority over logic
- Frequent use of mysterious or supernatural elements
- Highlights everyday people, the "common man"
- Idealized the pre-industrial past as an era of greater authenticity and innocence



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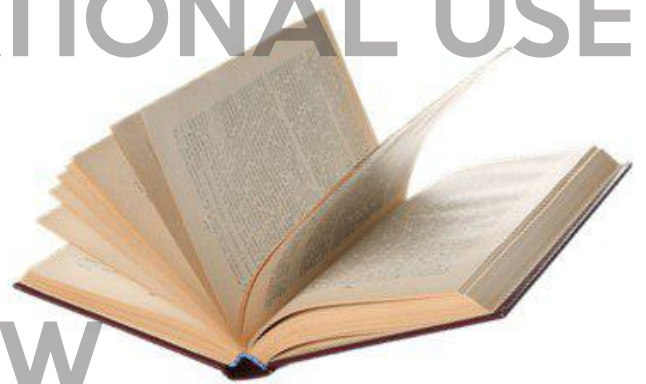
Satire

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Satire is a literary genre in which people, customs, or institutions are ridiculed with the purpose of improving society

Author will use humor, irony, absurd situations, and exaggerations to highlight human foolishness often targeting politics or social issues



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Allegory

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An allegory is literature that conveys a deeper message beneath the surface, often teaching a moral lesson or commenting on political or social issues.

Allegories use symbolism throughout the entire narrative, so that most main characters and their actions represent deeper ideas beyond the literal story.

Symbolism = one thing stands for something else

Allegory = the whole story is built as one big extended symbol

For example:

"The Lorax" is an allegory that shows how greed and uncontrolled industry can damage the environment.



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Faustian Legend

Faust is a legendary figure from German folklore, most famous for making a deal with the devil in exchange for knowledge, power, or pleasure.

The story of Tom Walker is a variation of the Faust legend.

Elements of a Faustian Legend:

- 1) The Pact: A central figure enters into a deal with the Devil or a demonic agent
- 2) The Bargain: The individual trades away their soul or moral integrity in exchange for power, wealth, knowledge, pleasure, or other worldly gains
- 3) The Consequences: The agreement ultimately ends in tragedy, with the devil claiming the soul or the protagonist facing ruin as the cost of the bargain
- 4) Themes: Faustian tales warn against unchecked ambition, greed, temptation, and valuing material rewards over spiritual or moral principles



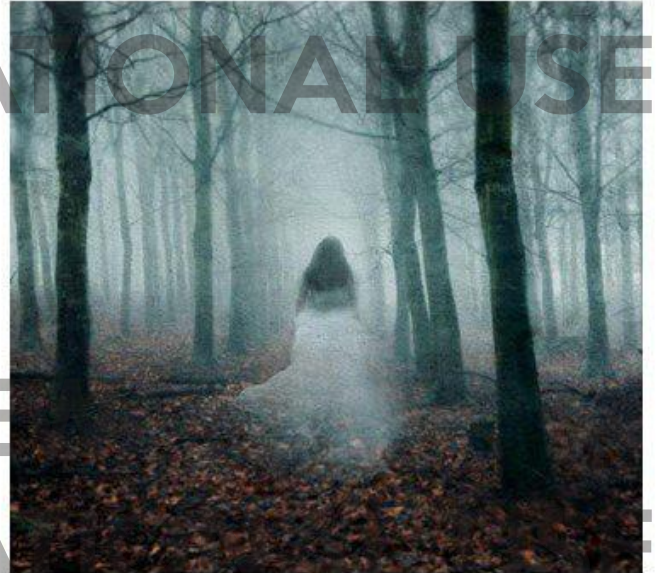
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Gothic Fiction

- Dark, creepy and gloomy setting
- Foreboding atmosphere
- A sense of mystery, suspense, and dread
- Supernatural and psychological elements
- Characters experience heightened emotions and may suffer from madness, anxiety, or guilt



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Folklore

Folklore is the stories, beliefs, and traditions a community passes down over time, usually by telling them aloud.

It changes over time and has different versions, reflecting the creativity and experiences of the people who tell and retell it.

It provides insight into a culture's values, history, and social experiences.



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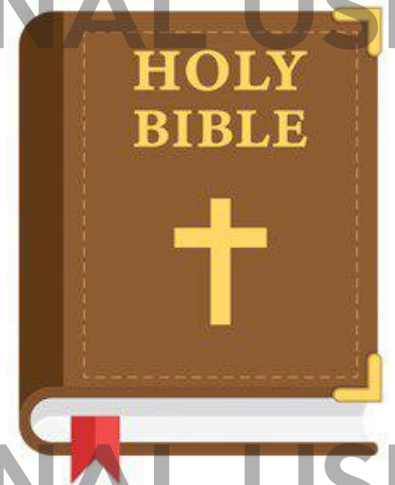
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Setting

- "The Devil and Tom Walker" is set in the 1720s in an area of New England settled by Quakers and Puritans.
- Puritans and Quakers were known for strict moral codes and outward displays of piety.
- Puritan New England was known for harsh judgment, intolerance, and moral rigidity.
- Religion controlled daily life, social behavior, laws, and moral expectations.
- Belief in the devil, witches, curses, and omens was widespread.



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avarice

(noun)

Extreme greed for wealth

Synonyms: greediness, covetousness

Sentence: Bob's avarice drove him to work long hours, never satisfied with the money he had.



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usurer

PREVIEW

(noun)

Someone who lends money at extremely high interest rates

Synonyms: moneylender, loan shark

Sentence: The villagers avoided the usurer because anyone who borrowed from him ended up in worse debt than before.



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termagant

(noun)

A harsh, turbulent, quarrelsome woman

Synonyms: tyrant, shrew

Sentence: The Queen of Hearts embodies a classic termagant, barking irrational orders and raging at anyone who dares displease her.



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persecution

(noun)

Cruel or unfair treatment, especially due to beliefs

Synonyms: hostility, mistreatment

Sentence: Many families fled the country to escape religious persecution and find a place where they could worship freely.



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propitious

(adjective)

Describes favorable or likely to lead to success

Synonyms: promising, opportune

Sentence: The clear skies and calm winds made it a propitious day for sailing.



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piety

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(noun)

Religious devotion or deep respect for faith

Synonyms: devotion, reverence

Sentence: Olivia's piety was evident in the way she volunteered at the church and treated others with kindness.



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ostentation

(noun)

Showy display meant to impress others

Synonyms: showiness, extravagance

Sentence: Theo's ostentation was obvious when he arrived at the party in a gold-plated sports car.



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eminent

(adjective)

Famous, respected, or distinguished

Synonyms: distinguished, renowned

Sentence: The eminent scientist received an award for her groundbreaking research on climate change.



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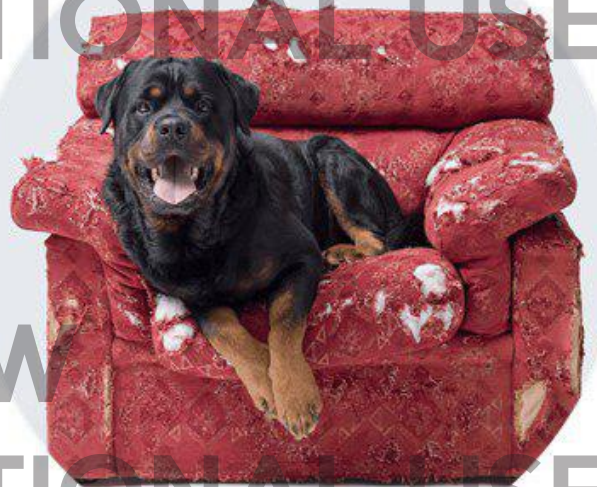
obliterate

(verb)

To completely destroy or wipe out

Synonyms: erase, annihilate

Sentence: My dog Noodles will
obliterate the furniture if I leave him
home alone for too long.



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farthing

(noun)

A tiny amount of money (in old British currency, $\frac{1}{4}$ of a penny)

Synonyms: penny, cent

Sentence: He bought the antique for just a farthing at a yard sale, not realizing its true worth.



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