

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

A Doll's House

by Henrik Ibsen

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A Doll's House

Background Lecture

It is said that the slam of the door at the end of *A Doll's House* was heard around the world. Henrik Ibsen's characters were realistic—they were not heroes and heroines or kings and queens as the protagonists and antagonists of previous dramas had been. They did not live in castles, and they were not assisted by gods and goddesses. They lived in a middle class world and faced money and relationship problems much like the ones their audiences faced. Even more than that, *A Doll's House* challenged the accepted values of that middle-class society. Ibsen dared to present a woman who was not willing to settle for the role her culture had assigned to her. Nora's choice at the end of the play was so shocking that one early actress refused to play the part as written. For all of these reasons, Ibsen is now called “the father of modern drama.”

All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classic Edition of *A Doll's House*, copyright 2005.

A Doll's House

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. give a synopsis of the play.
2. discuss literary terms relating to the play.
3. write a short character sketch for the three major characters (Nora, Torvald, and Krogstad) and indicate what actions they take and why.
4. identify and discuss the characteristics of this play that mark it as a realistic play and a departure from the romantic plays that preceded it.
5. discuss the major themes of the play:
 - the “coming-of-age” and loss-of-innocence” themes
 - the loss of female identity that the inferior position of women in this society
 - the concept that one’s highest duty is to oneself, even if that duty appears to break all the rules of society
 - the idea that the appearance of things does not always mirror reality and sometimes may mask the true reality.
6. define and give examples from the play of:
 - Litotes
 - Irony
 - Foreshadowing
 - Simile
 - Metaphor
 - Foil
7. explain the symbolism of the macaroons, the letter box, and the changing light in the play.
8. discuss the characteristics of the play that cause it to be called a “social problem” play.
9. examine fatherhood and motherhood as it is portrayed in the play.
10. discuss the values of the main characters and how they do or do not act on them.
11. plot the play, explaining the basic events of the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement.
12. discuss Ibsen’s use of realism and his possible reasons for doing so.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. How do the differences between appearance and reality shown in the play contribute to the rising action?
2. What elements cause this play to be considered realistic rather than romantic?
3. Give examples of the use of foreshadowing in the play and explain how it helps or impedes the rising action.
4. Give examples of the uses of irony in the play and explain how they contribute to the overall effect.
5. There are several father figures in the play: Mrs. Linde's father, Dr. Rank's father, Anne Marie's child's father, Nora's father, Torvald as father, Krogstad as father. There are also several mother figures: Mrs. Linde, Anne Marie, Nora. Compare and contrast Ibsen's portrayal of the roles of mothers and fathers in their children's lives.
6. Nora uses the word "wonderful" many times, from talking about money at the beginning to talking about her marriage at the end. Explain how her use of the word illustrates her transition from a "doll" to a woman.
7. Trace Nora's transition from dependence to independence. Evaluate her final situation. Has she gained more or lost more? How has this occurred? Cite examples from the play to support your opinion.
8. Evaluate Torvald's, Nora's, Christine's and Krogstad's concepts of honor. Do you agree with any of them about what is and is not honorable?
9. Compare and contrast Torvald's treatment of Nora with his opinion that mothers have a moral influence over their children. Is his judgment consistent?
10. Analyze the central metaphor of the play.
11. Christine Linde is a foil to Nora. Defend this statement with textual evidence.
12. Ibsen said that his plays were about "the struggle which all serious minded human beings have to wage with themselves to bring their lives into harmony with their convictions." Explain how this theme is shown in the play.

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Act I

Vocabulary

backwater – stagnating or spiritless
barrister – [British] a lawyer
blackguard – an unprincipled character; a ruthless person
broach – to introduce a subject for discussion
caprices – whims; quick changes of mind
confectioner – an owner of a shop that sells candy, cakes, or sweets
deprave – to corrupt, warp, or mark with dishonesty
dissimulation – the hiding of the truth; deceit
economise – to use money frugally
entreaties – repeated pleas or requests
featherhead – a flighty person; scatterbrained
gilt – covered with gold or looking like gold
imprudent – impulsive; not thought out
incredulously – with disbelief
indulgent – giving in to; liberal
palled – bored or made tiresome
plucky – showing strength of character in dire circumstances
precarious – unsteady; subject to abrupt change
procuring – finding or bringing about
solicitor – [British] a lawyer of lower rank who is not allowed in higher court
spendthrift – a person who wastes money
unassailable – unable to be disproved
unsavory – without taste; offensive
watering-place – a place, such as a spa or seaside resort, that people visited for rest and relaxation
wheedling – convincing another by trickery or flattery

1. Brainstorm the words “doll’s house.” What is suggested by the title of this play?

Act III

Vocabulary

abyss – an enormous divide that cannot be bridged
apparition – a ghost-like image
appease – to pacify, make concessions, or soothe
captivating – holding attention by intrigue
consternation – fear, dread, or state of worry
conviction – clear certainty
curtsey – a lady's gesture of showing respect; a small bow
forfeit – to give up or lose as punishment
hypocrite – a deceitful person; a person who says one thing but does another
lucrative – capable of making a good deal of money
prudently – wisely
reproaching – scolding, criticizing, or shaming
repudiating – rejecting; having nothing to do with
spasmodic – in unsteady outbursts

1. Why do Krogstad and Christine meet?

2. Define the literary term used in this quotation: "Look at me now I am a shipwrecked man clinging to a bit of wreckage."

3. What does Christine propose to Krogstad and why?
