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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

A Doll's House

by Henrik Ibsen

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A Doll's House

Background

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.”

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Terms and Definitions

Antagonist - the person or force that is in conflict with, or opposes, the protagonist. **Example:** Nurse Ratched opposes McMurphy throughout *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Characterization - the methods, incidents, speech, etc., an author uses to reveal the people in the book. Characterization is depicted by what the person says, what others say, and by his or her actions.

Climax - the point of greatest dramatic tension or excitement in a story. **Examples:** Othello's murder of Desdemona. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the person chasing Scout is killed.

Denouement - the portion of a literary work that follows the climax and resolves the plot's loose ends. **Example:** After Sherlock Holmes solves the crime (the climax), the last few pages are left for him to explain how he did it and to clear up any remaining mysteries.

Exposition - the background information that the reader has to know and/or understand before reading the play or novel. The information is usually dealt with at the beginning of the book. Sometimes, exposition reveals things that occurred before the actual *plot* begins. **Example:** The chorus in *Romeo and Juliet* explains the *setting*, the feud between the families, and the future deaths of the main characters in fourteen lines of *poetry*.

Falling Action - additional action that follows the climax. **Example:** After the deaths near the end of *Hamlet*, the Prince of Norway enters, and Horatio explains what happened.

Foil - a character whose qualities or actions usually serve to emphasize the actions or qualities of the main character, the protagonist, by providing a strong contrast. On occasion, the foil is used as a contrast to a character other than the main one. **Examples:** Hotspur contrasts Prince Hal in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*; the Roadrunner of cartoon fame uses Wile E. Coyote as his foil.

Foreshadowing - the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come. Foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense. **Example:** Two small and seemingly inconsequential car accidents predict and hint at the upcoming, important wreck in *The Great Gatsby*.

Irony - a perception of inconsistency, sometimes humorous, in which the significance and understanding of a statement or event is changed by its context. **Example:** The firehouse burned down.

- **Dramatic Irony** - the audience or reader knows more about a character's situation than the character does and knows that the character's understanding is incorrect. **Example:** In *Medea*, Creon asks, "What atrocities could she commit in one day?" The reader, however, knows Medea will destroy her family and Creon's by day's end.
- **Structural Irony** - the use of a naïve hero, whose incorrect perceptions differ from the reader's correct ones. **Example:** Huck Finn.
- **Verbal Irony** - a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant; sarcasm. **Example:** A large man whose nickname is "Tiny."

Litotes - a conscious understatement that achieves the opposite effect of the words themselves.

Example: I like money a little.

Metaphor - a comparison of two things that are basically dissimilar in which one is described in terms of the other. **Example:** The moon, a haunting lantern, shone through the clouds.

Protagonist - the central or main character in a story around whom the plot centers.

Examples: Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*; David Copperfield in *David Copperfield*.

Realism - a literary movement that has at its core the depiction of life as it really is, with no attempt to hide or gloss over the problems, hardships, or ugliness of life. **Example:** *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Rising Action - the part of the story's plot that adds complications to the problems and increases the reader's interest.

Simile - a comparison between two different things using either *like* or *as*. **Examples:** I am as hungry as a horse. The huge trees broke like twigs during the hurricane.

Symbol - an object, person, or place that has a meaning in itself and that also stands for something larger than itself, usually an idea or concept; some concrete thing which represents an abstraction. **Example:** The sea could be symbolic for "the unknown." Since the sea is something that is physical and can be seen by the reader, and also has elements that cannot be understood, it can be used symbolically to stand for the abstraction of "mystery," "obscurity," or "the unknown."

Theme - the central or dominant idea behind the story; the most important aspect that emerges from how the book treats its subject. Sometimes theme is easy to see, but, at other times, it may be more difficult. Theme is usually expressed indirectly, as an element the reader must figure out. It is a universal statement about humanity, rather than a simple statement dealing with plot or characters in the story. Themes are generally hinted at through different methods: a phrase or quotation that introduces the novel, a recurring element in the book, or an observation made that is reinforced through plot, dialogue, or characters. It must be emphasized that not all works of literature have themes in them. **Example:** In a story about a man who is diagnosed with cancer and, through medicine and will-power, returns to his former occupation, the theme might be: "Real courage is demonstrated through internal bravery and perseverance." In a poem about a flower that grows, blooms, and dies, the theme might be: "Youth fades, and death comes to all."

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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 (p.15) at the beginning to talking about her marriage (p.81) 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.

13. Ibsen said, “There are two kinds of moral laws, two kinds of conscience, one in man and a completely different one in woman.” Explain how this is shown in the play, and give your opinion as to whether it is still true today.
14. Explain how the play does or does not suggest that women are equal to men.
15. Compare and contrast the relationship between Nora and Torvald with that between Christine and Krogstad.
16. Critics call *A Doll’s House* a “social problem” play. In your opinion, what is the social problem and what is Ibsen saying about it?
17. Ibsen was criticized for having Nora leave Torvald, and was even forced to rewrite the ending for one production because the actress refused to play it as written. What would you say to these critics?

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Test

I. Multiple Choice

1. Torvald has
 - A. an ugly wife.
 - B. a traditional view of women.
 - C. a hereditary disease.
 - D. trouble with his children.
 - E. an inability to manage money.
2. Nora's macaroon cookies would be considered symbolic of
 - A. her sweet tooth.
 - B. her desire to spend money irresponsibly.
 - C. her secrets from Torvald.
 - D. Torvald's dislike of sweets.
 - E. her love for her children.
3. Nora committed the crime of forgery
 - A. because Christine suggested it.
 - B. because she inherited dishonesty from her father.
 - C. because she could not manage money.
 - D. because she secretly dislikes Torvald.
 - E. because she needed money for a trip.
4. Nora first tells Christine her secret
 - A. inadvertently.
 - B. so that Christine would take her more seriously.
 - C. because Christine was left with nothing when her husband died.
 - D. so that Christine would help her with Torvald.
 - E. because Christine needs a job.
5. Christine's mother was ill, so Christine
 - A. married a man with money instead of Krogstad.
 - B. married Krogstad to begin a new life.
 - C. went to Nora for help.
 - D. thought about committing suicide.
 - E. stole some money.

6. Dr. Rank
 - A. wanted to take Nora away from her “doll house” life.
 - B. treated Torvald when he was ill.
 - C. covers up Nora’s crime.
 - D. wants Nora to know how he feels before he dies.
 - E. secretly hates Nora.
7. The nurse, Anne, left her daughter
 - A. because she did not want to be a mother.
 - B. because she wanted to marry a rich man.
 - C. because she had to nurse Nora for a living.
 - D. because she was pregnant again.
 - E. because she was sick.
8. Torvald despises Krogstad
 - A. because he believes Krogstad to be a hypocrite and a liar.
 - B. because Krogstad needs money.
 - C. because Krogstad has two sons.
 - D. Because Krogstad is not married.
 - E. because Krogstad works at his bank.
9. Krogstad wants Nora to
 - A. repay his money with exorbitant interest.
 - B. speak to Christine for him because he loves her.
 - C. use her influence with Torvald so he can keep his job.
 - D. adopt his sons.
 - E. leave Torvald and marry him.
10. Christine believes that Nora
 - A. should borrow money from Dr. Rank.
 - B. leave Torvald and marry Dr. Rank.
 - C. tell Dr. Rank about her forgery.
 - D. end her relationship with Dr. Rank.
 - E. tell Torvald that Dr. Rank is dying.
11. Torvald believes that bad people
 - A. are unfortunate.
 - B. should be helped.
 - C. should be put to death.
 - D. cannot make a living.
 - E. are the products of deceitful mothers.

12. The tarantella is
- A. a sweet dessert.
 - B. a lively dance.
 - C. a type of dress.
 - D. a slow and stately dance.
 - E. a kind of champagne.
13. Torvald is afraid he will look ridiculous if he
- A. dances with Nora.
 - B. eats macaroons.
 - C. lets Krogstad keep his job.
 - D. plays with his children.
 - E. drinks too much champagne.
14. Nora likes talking to Dr. Rank because
- A. he talks about entertaining things.
 - B. he is dying.
 - C. she feels sorry for him.
 - D. he reminds her of her father.
 - E. he likes the children.
15. Christine and Krogstad
- A. decide to leave town together.
 - B. hate Nora and Torvald.
 - C. are very rich.
 - D. are going to get married.
 - E. can not stand each other.
16. Dr. Rank leaves cards with black crosses in the letter box
- A. as a joke.
 - B. to threaten them.
 - C. by mistake.
 - D. because he feels guilty for loving Nora.
 - E. to announce his imminent death.
17. At the fancy dress ball
- A. Nora danced badly.
 - B. Torvald loved watching Nora dance.
 - C. Dr. Rank got sick.
 - D. Nora's dress got torn.
 - E. Krogstad crashed the party.

18. After the ball
 - A. Torvald goes straight to bed.
 - B. Nora plays hide and seek with the children.
 - C. Torvald reads his letters.
 - D. Dr. Rank tells Torvald he loves Nora.
 - E. Christine tells them she plans to marry Krogstad.
19. After the ball, Nora and Torvald, for the first time,
 - A. have a serious conversation as adults.
 - B. fight about money.
 - C. dance together.
 - D. drink too much champagne.
 - E. plan a vacation together.
20. A Doll's House is considered a "realistic" play because
 - A. there is a happy ending.
 - B. the deus ex machina solves all the problems.
 - C. the heroine is rich and famous.
 - D. the people are middle class and speak normally.
 - E. the monologues explain the theme clearly.

Essay Questions (Pick any two)

1. Ibsen said, "A man shares the responsibilities and the guilt of the society to which he belongs." Nora and Torvald are products of their society. Explain their actions based on these statements.
2. Analyze the relationship between Nora and Dr. Rank. If Dr. Rank had married Nora, do you think they would have been happy together?
3. Evaluate the use of symbolism in the play (for example, the macaroons, the use of lighting, and the role of the letterbox).
4. Compare and contrast the different views of what it means to be "womanly" or "manly" in the play.

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Test Answer Key

1. B	6. D	11. E	16. E
2. C	7. C	12. B	17. B
3. E	8. A	13. C	18. C
4. B	9. C	14. A	19. A
5. A	10. D	15. D	20. D

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Study Guide Teacher's Copy

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

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?

It suggests dolls, unreal people, children playing, and the theme that appearance is frequently quite different from reality.

2. Some translators claim that a more accurate translation of the title is “a doll house.” What difference does it make to the meaning if it is possessive?

If it the title is possessive, then the house belongs to a particular doll, but the house is not Nora's, and she is not the only doll in it. Nora treats her children like dolls, and Torvald himself is trying to live an unreal life based on appearance only.

3. How do Torvald's references to Nora suggest that he does not take her seriously?

He always refers to her in the diminutive and as though she is not human. She is never an equal partner or a thinking human being.

4. What do the macaroon cookies symbolize for Nora?

The macaroons symbolize one small rebellion for Nora.

5. Torvald accuses Nora of eating macaroons, but he believes her when she denies it. What does this reveal about Torvald?

Torvald either trusts Nora, or he does not take her seriously enough to think that she would defy him.

6. What Christmas present does Nora ask for?

Nora asks for money.

7. What did Nora do for three weeks before last Christmas?

She was shut away working on something.

8. Why does Christine come to visit Nora?

She wants to renew an old acquaintance. She also needs a job.

9. Explain whether Nora does or does not appear to be happy with her life in Act I.

Although Nora hums and dances and laughs, there are hints that she is feeling constricted by her life. For example her comment: "...it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man." Also, her rebellion with the macaroons shows that she is not entirely resigned to being the obedient little wife.

10. Analyze Nora's attitude toward Christmas. What does the holiday mean to her?

Nora never says or does anything to suggest that this is a Christian holiday. She speaks only of buying things and pleasing the children.

11. What seems to be Christine's opinion of Nora. Does she respect her?

Christine seems to think that Nora has led a charmed life and has never had to worry about anything. Like Torvald, she does not seem to respect Nora as an adult woman.

12. Nora is defensive with Christine. Why is she defensive, and what does she tell Christine as part of that defense?

Nora senses Christine's low opinion of her, and she wants to prove that Christine is wrong. Although she does not fight against Torvald's belittling her, Nora seems to be angry when Christine evinces the same attitude, so she tells Christine that she once had to borrow money to save her husband's life.

13. Why is Christine surprised that Nora has borrowed money? Does the fact that she has done so change Christine's opinion of Nora?

Christine is surprised because women cannot borrow money on their own. Christine's opinion has changed, but not necessarily for the better. Christine seems to doubt Nora's judgment.

14. Why does Nora plan to wait until she is older and less attractive to tell Torvald what she did? What does this imply about her belief in his love for her?

Nora assumes that Torvald will be grateful to her, so she plans to reveal her deed when she needs his gratitude. Her desire to wait implies that she understands how important her appearance is to Torvald. However she also believes he holds deep feelings for her, which will be enhanced by his gratitude.

15. Find an example of litotes and verbal irony in the conversation between Dr. Rank and the two women. Both examples are in one sentence.

When Christine says she must live, the doctor says, "Yes, the general opinion seems to be that it is necessary."

16. How does Torvald agree to help Christine?

Torvald says that he will give Christine a job.

17. When the children come home, Torvald says, "...the place will only be bearable for a mother now!" What does this indicate about his role in his children's lives?

By his own choice, Torvald does not spend much time with his children.

18. What game does Nora play with her children?

Nora plays hide-and-go-seek, another game that relates to appearance versus reality.

19. Nora says, "...dogs don't bite nice little dolly children." What does this indicate about Nora's role with her children?

Nora treats her children as Torvald treats her: with love but no respect or understanding of them as individuals.

20. Who is Krogstad?

Krogstad works at Torvald's bank. He is the one Nora borrowed money from to save Torvald's life.

21. What does Krogstad want to discuss with Nora?

Nora owes him, and he wants his money.

22. What does Nora admit to Krogstad that gives him even more power over her?

Nora admits that she forged her father's signature on the loan.

23. Nora says, "...I don't know much about law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that." What things does she mean, and why is her viewpoint naïve?

She assumes that her reasons for borrowing the money will be a sufficient defense for breaking the law. She has been so protected from reality by her father and her husband that she has no idea how the courts work.

24. How does Krogstad threaten Nora?

He tells her to pay him or he will tell Torvald what she has done.

25. What opinion does Dr. Rank express about Krogstad?

Dr. Rank says that Krogstad has a "diseased moral character."

26. Nora says, "...everything I think of seems so silly and insignificant." She is speaking of her costume for the ball. Do you think Torvald is only referring to her costume in his answer?

Torvald says, "Does my little Nora acknowledge that at last?" It seems clear that he is speaking about her whole personality being "silly and insignificant."

27. How is dramatic irony shown throughout the conversation between Nora and Torvald after Krogstad leaves?

Torvald expresses his opinion that Krogstad has been "persistently poisoning his own children with lies and dissimulation." He also says that "almost everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother." The audience knows that Nora is taking all these statements to heart as if they referred to her.

28. What have you learned about the characters of Nora and Torvald in the exposition and rising action? Do you like these people?

Answers will vary.

29. Explain why critics call this a "realistic" play. How are the characters' traits revealed?

It is realistic because the characters are revealed through their actions and their dialogue. There are no long monologues as in earlier dramas. Nor is there a chorus to explain the meaning of the action. The characters are not royal or important; they are normal, middle class people living regular lives.

Act II

Vocabulary

amicably – in a friendly way

contrive – to invent or improvise a scheme

disheveled – fallen into disorder or an unkempt condition

expedient – the means to reach an end

fancy – whim; fantasy

inexorable – unable to be persuaded

irresolute – unsure of what to do

moralised – preached good or bad behavior

obstinacy – stubbornness

prevaricate – to lie

retribution – repayment; a fine

rogue – a playful, mischievous person

scurrilous – dirty; vulgar

variegated – composed of a number of different colors in stripes or sections

1. What is Nora anxious about?

Nora is wondering if Krogstad will follow through on his threat.

2. Explain the foreshadowing which occurs in this scene between Nora and her nurse, Anne-Marie. Why is Anne-Marie's story important to Nora?

Nora wants to know how the nurse could leave her child, and the nurse says she was "obliged to," but that her daughter has not forgotten her.

3. What dance does Torvald decide Nora should perform for the ball?

He wants her to dress as a Neapolitan fisher girl and perform a dance she has learned before, the Tarantella.

4. What does Nora tell Christine about Dr. Rank's health?

Dr. Rank is ill with consumption of the spine, which he inherited from his philandering father.

5. What advice does Christine give Nora about Dr. Rank?

She advises Nora to "make an end of it" with Dr. Rank.

6. Why does Nora enjoy talking to Dr. Rank?

Dr. Rank likes to listen to Nora talk about her early life, whereas Torvald does not like to hear about any time when he did not know her.

7. Explain the argument between Torvald and Nora over Krogstad.

Nora, desperate to appease Krogstad, begs Torvald to let Krogstad keep his job. Torvald says that he cannot without making himself “ridiculous” before his staff.

8. What are the things Nora says she will do if Torvald gives in to her?

She says she will do “tricks,” “chirp about in every room,” and “play the fairy and dance.”

9. Why is Torvald afraid of appearing “ridiculous” to his staff?

Torvald is always worried about how he appears to others, and giving in to his wife would make it look as though he is “a man to be swayed by all sorts of outside influence.” He also does not like Krogstad’s familiar manner towards him.

10. What does Dr. Rank reveal to Nora. What does he want to do for her?

Dr. Rank confesses that he would “give his life” for her. He wants her to trust him and tell him her problem.

11. Why does Nora reject Dr. Rank’s help?

Nora does not say exactly why she cannot accept his help, but it seems that as long as their relationship did not go beyond flirting, appearances could be kept up. Now that he has declared himself, she says that she cannot tell him anything.

12. Appearance and reality are constantly at odds in this play. How is Dr. Rank one example of this?

Dr. Rank has the appearance of being a healthy older man and a good friend to Nora. In reality he is very sick, and he is in love with her.

13. There is a line in the Bible about how the “sins of the fathers” affect their children. How is Dr. Rank an example of this?

Dr. Rank’s father’s actions are what cause Dr. Rank to be sick.

14. How does the light change in the scene between Dr. Rank and Nora?

Nora brings in the lamp.

15. What is symbolic about the change in lighting?

Before the light is brought in, Nora and Dr. Rank are flirting and talking about forbidden things. After she brings in the light, Nora says to the Doctor, “...don’t you feel ashamed of yourself, now the lamp has come?” She puts their relationship back on a socially acceptable footing.

16. What does Nora say about talking to the maids?

She says they “never moralized” and talked about “entertaining things.” She is implying that Torvald, like her father, moralizes and is dull, while Dr. Rank, like the maids, is “entertaining.”

17. What does Krogstad come to tell her?

He tells her that he has been dismissed from his job.

18. Nora hints that she may commit suicide. Why does Krogstad say it would be pointless?

He would still expose her, and her family would still be disgraced.

19. What does Krogstad really want?

Ultimately, Krogstad wants Torvald’s job. He wants revenge for years of humiliation.

20. Why does Nora take Christine into her confidence?

Nora is too upset and desperate to keep her worries to herself.

21. Do you think Christine is a good friend to Nora? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.

22. There is a great deal of emphasis placed on the letter box from now until the end of the play. What does it symbolize?

The letter box holds the truth. It symbolizes the revealing of secrets.

23. What miracle does Nora expect?

She expects Torvald to take the blame for her actions.

24. There are two things in this Act that Nora wants to rip up. What are they and what do they symbolize?

First she wants to destroy the dress (symbol of Torvald’s control), and then she wants to rip up the IOU note which Krogstad is holding (symbol of Krogstad’s control and Nora’s secret from her husband).

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?

Christine intends to ask him to recall the letter.

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

Krogstad's statement is a metaphor.

3. What does Christine propose to Krogstad and why?

She suggests that they get married because his sons need a mother and she needs someone to care for.

4. Christine and Krogstad discuss the value of being realistic rather than romantic. How is this reflected in the play as a whole?

The play itself is realistic rather than romantic. Torvald's and Nora's relationship problems are real ones, and there is no romantic, happy ending to them.

5. In Act I Torvald said, "...an atmosphere of lies infects and poisons the whole life of a home." Why is this ironic, given Christine's statement: "...they must have a complete understanding between them, which is impossible with all this concealment and falsehood going on."

Torvald did not know when he said it that Nora had been lying to him. He had been talking about Krogstad. Christine, who is going to marry Krogstad and knows all about his actions, is talking about Torvald and Nora.

6. Why does Torvald recommend that Christine take up embroidering, instead of knitting?

As always, Torvald is concerned with appearances. He says embroidering looks more graceful.

7. Nora says, "Everything you do is quite right, Torvald." Does she mean it? Does Torvald take her at her word?

She does not mean it but Torvald, once again, takes her at her word.

8. What advances does Torvald make toward Nora after Christine leaves? What does champagne have to do with his mood?

Torvald is hinting that he wants to make love. He is a little drunk.

9. Why does Dr. Rank visit (both his stated reason and his real reason)?

Dr. Rank says he wants a cigar. Actually, he wants to tell Nora that he is dying, and he leaves his black-marked cards in the letter box.

10. Why does the lamp in the hall go out once Torvald takes the letters from the box?

There are several interpretations: the light of Torvald's life has gone out, though he does not know it yet; the apparent happiness of their household is at an end; appearance is changing into reality.

11. How does Torvald react to Nora's news about Dr. Rank?

Torvald is amazingly casual about the death of his friend. He decides that it is "best so" for Rank, and best also for he and Nora because they will be forced to rely on each other.

12. Identify the literary term in the following quotation: "And so he hides himself away like a wounded animal."

Torvald's statement is a simile.

13. After Torvald has read the letter, Nora says, “You shall not take it upon yourself” and Torvald says “No tragedy airs, please” What does Nora begin to understand at that point?

She realizes that Torvald has not even thought of taking her guilt upon himself, as she assumed that he would. More than that, he has no understanding of the love which inspired her to do what she did.

14. Why does Torvald feel he “dare not trust” the children to Nora? How does this reflect what he said in Act II about “deceitful” mothers?

Torvald believes that Nora’s personality would infect the children with deceit.

15. Although he does not trust her with the children, Torvald wants them to continue living together. Why? How did his advice to Christine about knitting foreshadow this?

Once again, Torvald wants to keep up appearances. Just as he thinks embroidery is better he wants Nora to stay so that he will look like the man he wants people to see.

16. What does the second letter from Krogstad say?

Krogstad has changed his mind. Happy with Christine, he has no stomach for destroying Torvald now.

17. In Act I, Nora said, “...how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly independence, to know that he owed me anything!” Compare this to Torvald’s statement: “I should not be a man if this womanly helplessness did not just give you a double attractiveness in my eyes” and his later statement that “no man would sacrifice his honour for the one he loves.” What view of masculine and feminine is being portrayed?

Answers will vary.

18. How does Torvald react to the second letter?

Torvald cries, “I am saved!”

19. What is Nora’s reaction to the second letter and to Torvald?

Nora is stunned, but not happy as she would have been had the bond been returned earlier. She has come to see Torvald for what he is, and she is beginning to realize that she cannot remain with him.

20. Torvald tells Nora that he has “forgiven” her and Nora thanks him. Is she really thankful?

She is not thankful. She has decided to leave.

21. What does Torvald say he has done for Nora in forgiving her? Why is this ironic?

He has given her a “new life,” which is more literally true than he knows. He believes she has “become both wife and child” even more than she was before, but she is maturing now faster than he.

22. When Nora wants to talk to Torvald, she says, “this is a settling of accounts.” How does this have a double meaning for Nora?

It was accounting, or dealing with money, that got Nora into difficulties in the first place. Now she is realizing just how much of herself she has given to him over the years.

23. In the eight years they have been married, Nora says she and Torvald have never done what?

They have never sat down and had a serious talk as two equal adults.

24. How does Nora compare her life with her father to her life with Torvald?

She says that her father treated her like a doll, and that when she married Torvald she was “simply transferred” from one to the other, but her status remained the same.

25. Why does Nora decide to leave?

Nora says that she must “educate” herself, because she is “not fit” to raise her children as she is.

26. Torvald tells Nora that she has a “sacred duty” as a wife to remain. What does he mean?

Torvald implies that her wedding vows give her a religious obligation to remain with him.

27. What does Nora have to say about religion?

Nora says that she does not “know what religion is.”

28. In Act I, Nora said, “I should just love to say well, I’m damned!” How does this foreshadow all that has happened?

Answers will vary. Example: Some people will consider Nora damned for abandoning her family. She may feel damned herself in realizing how little she knows herself. Also, if she had committed suicide as she once considered, she would have been considered damned by the church.

29. What was the “wonderful thing” Nora was waiting for?

Nora was expecting Torvald to understand her motivation for what she did, and to be grateful to her for her sacrifices, and to want to protect her from the consequences of forgery. She expected him to show a manly self-sacrifice for his wife.

30. Is Nora in despair at the end of the play, or merely angry?

Answers will vary.

31. At least one critic of Ibsen’s has said there is nothing in *A Doll’s House* which is not necessary to the action and development of the play. Would you agree?

Answers will vary.

32. Is the climax of the play when Nora realizes that Torvald will not give her a miracle or at the very end of the play with the famous slamming of the door? Is there falling action and a denouement? Support your answer.

Answers will vary.

A Doll's House

Study Guide Student Copy

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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?

2. Some translators claim that a more accurate translation of the title is “a doll house.” What difference does it make to the meaning if it is possessive?
3. How do Torvald’s references to Nora suggest that he does not take her seriously?
4. What do the macaroon cookies symbolize for Nora?
5. Torvald accuses Nora of eating macaroons, but he believes her when she denies it. What does this reveal about Torvald?
6. What Christmas present does Nora ask for?
7. What did Nora do for three weeks before last Christmas?
8. Why does Christine come to visit Nora?
9. Explain whether Nora does or does not appear to be happy with her life in Act I.

10. Analyze Nora's attitude toward Christmas. What does the holiday mean to her?
11. What seems to be Christine's opinion of Nora. Does she respect her?
12. Nora is defensive with Christine. Why is she defensive, and what does she tell Christine as part of that defense?
13. Why is Christine surprised that Nora has borrowed money? Does the fact that she has done so change Christine's opinion of Nora?
14. Why does Nora plan to wait until she is older and less attractive to tell Torvald what she did? What does this imply about her belief in his love for her?
15. Find an example of litotes and verbal irony in the conversation between Dr. Rank and the two women. Both examples are in one sentence.
16. How does Torvald agree to help Christine?
17. When the children come home, Torvald says, "...the place will only be bearable for a mother now!" What does this indicate about his role in his children's lives?

18. What game does Nora play with her children?
19. Nora says, "...dogs don't bite nice little dolly children." What does this indicate about Nora's role with her children?
20. Who is Krogstad?
21. What does Krogstad want to discuss with Nora?
22. What does Nora admit to Krogstad that gives him even more power over her?
23. Nora says, "...I don't know much about law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that." What things does she mean, and why is her viewpoint naïve?
24. How does Krogstad threaten Nora?

25. What opinion does Dr. Rank express about Krogstad?
26. Nora says, "...everything I think of seems so silly and insignificant." She is speaking of her costume for the ball. Do you think Torvald is only referring to her costume in his answer?
27. How is dramatic irony shown throughout the conversation between Nora and Torvald after Krogstad leaves?
28. What have you learned about the characters of Nora and Torvald in the exposition and rising action? Do you like these people?
29. Explain why critics call this a "realistic" play. How are the characters' traits revealed?

Act II

Vocabulary

amicably – in a friendly way

contrive – to invent or improvise a scheme

disheveled – fallen into disorder or an unkempt condition

expedient – the means to reach an end

fancy – whim; fantasy

inexorable – unable to be persuaded

irresolute – unsure of what to do

moralised – preached good or bad behavior

obstinacy – stubbornness

prevaricate – to lie

retribution – repayment; a fine

rogue – a playful, mischievous person

scurrilous – dirty; vulgar

variegated – composed of a number of different colors in stripes or sections

1. What is Nora anxious about?
2. Explain the foreshadowing which occurs in this scene between Nora and her nurse, Anne-Marie. Why is Anne-Marie's story important to Nora?
3. What dance does Torvald decide Nora should perform for the ball?
4. What does Nora tell Christine about Dr. Rank's health?
5. What advice does Christine give Nora about Dr. Rank?
6. Why does Nora enjoy talking to Dr. Rank?

7. Explain the argument between Torvald and Nora over Krogstad.
8. What are the things Nora says she will do if Torvald gives in to her?
9. Why is Torvald afraid of appearing “ridiculous” to his staff?
10. What does Dr.Rank reveal to Nora. What does he want to do for her?
11. Why does Nora reject Dr.Rank’s help?
12. Appearance and reality are constantly at odds in this play. How is Dr. Rank one example of this?
13. There is a line in the Bible about how the “sins of the fathers” affect their children. How is Dr. Rank an example of this?
14. How does the light change in the scene between Dr. Rank and Nora?
15. What is symbolic about the change in lighting?

16. What does Nora say about talking to the maids?
17. What does Krogstad come to tell her?
18. Nora hints that she may commit suicide. Why does Krogstad say it would be pointless?
19. What does Krogstad really want?
20. Why does Nora take Christine into her confidence?
21. Do you think Christine is a good friend to Nora? Why or why not?
22. There is a great deal of emphasis placed on the letter box from now until the end of the play. What does it symbolize?
23. What miracle does Nora expect?
24. There are two things in this Act that Nora wants to rip up. What are they and what do they symbolize?

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."
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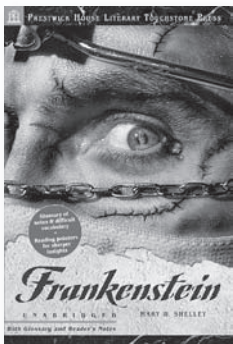
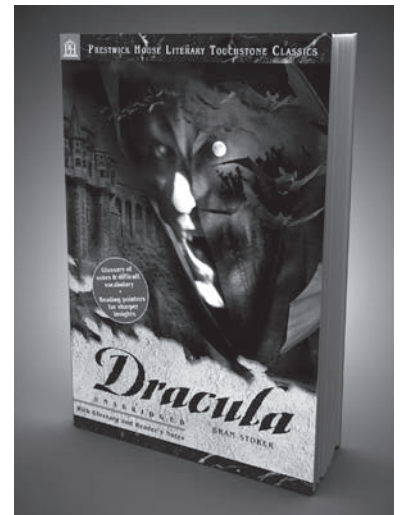
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