

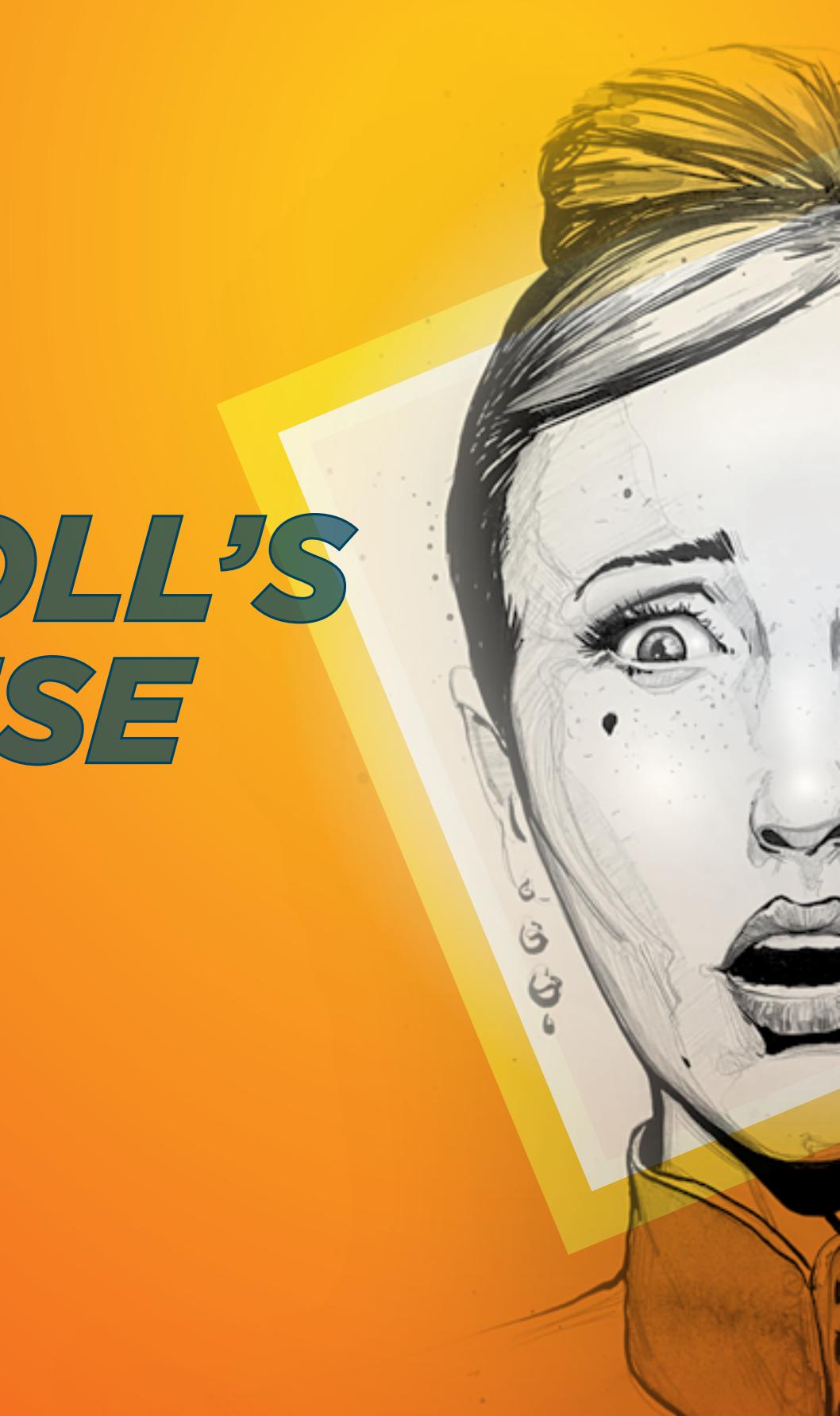


DENVER CENTER FOR
THE PERFORMING ARTS
Theatre Company

INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

A DOLL'S HOUSE



SYNOPSIS

After eight years of marriage and a lifetime of being nothing but a toy in the eyes of men, Nora Helmer experiences a personal awakening. Initially, Nora is very childlike and frivolous, her only purpose being the beautiful, carefree wife of a successful man. As the drama unfolds, Nora reveals she is not just a "silly girl," but rather an intelligent, determined woman who has spent years secretly paying off the debt she acquired to travel to Italy for her husband's health. Krogstad, fearful for his termination at the bank, attempts to blackmail Nora. He threatens to tell Torvald that she forged her father's signature and that he is still owed. After realizing the truth, Torvald puts himself and his reputation before his wife. In this play Henrik Ibsen explores personal freedom and gender stereotypes in 1879 Norway where women lacked opportunities to fulfill their personal desires and ambitions or assert independence in a male-dominated world.



INSIDE OUT

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Lynde Rosario Editor
Madison Stout Contributing Writer
David Saphier Education Contributor

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SEASON SPONSORS



A DOLL'S HOUSE
BY HENRIK IBSEN
DIRECTED BY CHRIS COLEMAN

Producing Partners
Martin and Jo Semple & Susan Fox Pinkowitz
and Ted Pinkowitz

SEP 6 – NOV 24
RICKETSON THEATRE

PLAYWRIGHT: HENRIK IBSEN

Henrik Ibsen was born in Skien, Norway on March 20, 1828 into a prosperous business family. However, after his father declared bankruptcy when Ibsen was eight years old, his family was thrown into poverty. At 15, Ibsen became a pharmacist's apprentice and spent his free time writing poetry and painting. At the age of 23 he was appointed director and playwright to a new theatre at Bergen, where he had to write a new play every year. From 1857 to 1862 he worked at the Norwegian Theatre in Christiania (present

day Oslo). He married Suzannah Thoresen in 1858 and they had one son, Sigurd. After some failures and rejected works, Ibsen exiled himself to Italy and Germany for 27 years. During this time, he wrote many plays and became known as one of the world's most famous dramatists. Ibsen continued to write until 1900, when he suffered the first of several strokes that would afflict him over the next years. On May 23, 1906, he passed away in Christiania.

SELECTED DRAMAS BY IBSEN

1866 - Brand
1867 - Peer Gynt
1869 - The League of Youth
1873 - Emperor and Galilean
1877 - Pillars of Society
1879 - A Doll's House
1881 - Ghosts
1882 - An Enemy of the People

1884 - The Wild Duck
1886 - Rosmersholm
1888 - The Lady from the Sea
1890 - Hedda Gabler
1892 - The Master Builder
1896 - John Gabriel Borkman
1899 - When We Dead Awaken

IBSEN'S INSPIRATION FOR A DOLL'S HOUSE

In 1872 Norway, Laura Petersen married Victor Kieler. Victor contracted tuberculosis and was prescribed a warmer climate by his doctors. Laura took out a loan without her husband's knowledge which funded a trip to Italy, ultimately ensuring a full recovery for Victor. When payment was due on the loan, Laura forged a check but was discovered. When the bank refused the forged check, Laura was forced to confess to her husband.

Enraged at this criminal act for his sake, Victor claimed that Laura was unfit to be a wife and mother to her children. Laura consequently suffered a nervous breakdown and was committed to an asylum. After a month she was discharged and Victor allowed her to return to their home.

TIME PERIOD: NORWAY

1854: Women achieved equal inheritance rights.

1869: Unmarried women gained legal majority at 21, the same age as men.

1880s: The women's movement is established and the first battles over strategies and goals were fought.

1884: Universities are opened to women. The Norwegian Women's Rights Association is established.

1890s: Efforts turn to educating housewives and female servants.

1907: Women are allowed to stand for election.

1913: Women win the right to vote.

Ibsen's Norway had only become a liberated country in 1814 after having been under Danish control. They entered a union with Sweden until 1905, but despite having their own constitution and government, political leaders

struggled to gain more power for their Parliamentary body from the Swedish monarchy. During the 19th century, the country became highly industrialized with its success in foreign trade, mining, and agricultural productivity. By the end of the 19th century, Norway had the third largest merchant fleet in the world and its economy rested on the shipping industry. Railroads as well played an influential role in the economy by significantly reducing the shipping costs of goods and making travel more convenient, increasing tourism across the country. Society in Norway was distinguished between "the cultured people" and "the common people," or simply, the upper class and everyone else.

Sources:

Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century: A European Perspective. Edited by Sylvia Paetschek and Bianka Pietrow-Enker.
Women in European Culture and Society : Gender, Skill and Identity from 1700 by Deborah Simonton.
"Law and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Norway" by Vulhelm Aubert. *JSTOR*. Cornell University Press, 1989. Web. 18 June 2019 Accessed. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Norway

TIME PERIOD: THE WORLD

The latter half of the 19th century witnessed an increase in personal liberties and the beginning of the technological revolution in Europe and around the world. New empires, imperialism, and militarism rose in Europe and Asia, labor unions and strikes occurred worldwide, and the United States was recovering from the Civil War and beginning the Reconstruction era. The British Empire continued to grow, the German Empire emerged, and Bulgaria and Romania declared independence from the Ottoman Empire. Modern cities grew, contributing to the economic prosperity of the time.

At the height of the Second Industrial Revolution, the first transcontinental railroad was completed in the United States in 1869. Between 1876 and 1879, Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, Thomas Edison the phonograph and the light bulb, and Emile Berliner the microphone.

Sources:

Ibsen: A Collection of Critical Essays by Rolf G. Fjelde.
Ibsen by Harold Clurman.
Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century: A European Perspective. Edited by Sylvia Paetschek and Bianka Pietrow-Enker.

THEMES

Women's Rights Vs. Human Rights

In 1878, one year before *A Doll's House*, Ibsen declared, "A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess female conduct from a male standpoint." When Ibsen looked around at the society he inhabited, he found women to be subjected to male judgments and norms, overlooked and neglected in society. Ibsen was one of the few male allies for women at the time. He saw women as humans which is why he consistently denied ever writing for 'their cause.' At a banquet for the Norwegian League for Women's Rights in Christiania on May 26, 1898, Ibsen said, "To me it has seemed a problem of mankind in general... My task has been the description of humanity." He was writing for the cause of all humanity, which he felt was embedded in the freedom of all people; the need of every individual to find out the kind of person he or she really is and to strive to become that person. Ibsen investigated women as full moral beings struggling against the cultural norms that defined and limited them. Ibsen's insistence on women as autonomous human beings is the most striking manifestation of the radicalism that makes him a standard-bearer of modernism.

In his plays, Ibsen's portrayals follow a pattern. A person starts out with the expectations of fulfillment. Then they find themselves involved in a series of conflicts and troubles which almost always brings ruin to them and forces them to injure others. The result is solitude, death, or the announcement of social programs that have been thoroughly discredited by what has gone on before. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the institutions as well as the mores of society had come completely under the control of the middle class, and its ethos is challenged only by a handful of European artists and intellectuals. Ibsen was primary among them, whose ethos was: the good of the individual is identical with the good of society. Ibsen wrote in one of his letters,

"...a man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs... to write is to summon one's self, and play the judge's part." Social consciousness is used to examine and judge the middle-class world itself. Ibsen questioned the existence of "female nature" critically, examining the exclusiveness of the categories "masculine" and "feminine" both within people and within systems.

Source:

Ibsen: A Collection of Critical Essays by Rolf G. Fjelde.

Ibsen by Harold Clurman.

Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century: A European Perspective. Edited by Sylvia Paetschek and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker.

Women's Role in Society

The second half of the 19th century, when many things were achieved in terms of women's rights, is seen now as a pivotal starting point for international women's suffrage. Women had no social or political power, nor did they have much power in their own household. Though working-class women could work as teachers, domestic servants, and do some clerical work, upper and middle-class women were expected to please their husbands by keeping and adorning their house and raising their children.

In 1854, Norwegian women were given the same inheritance rights as their male counterparts, when before they could only inherit half as much as their brothers. By the 1860s women were allowed to support themselves through trade in the same way a man could and in 1869 all unmarried women were granted "majority" status at the age of 21. This was only the beginning and still, women struggled and hesitated to break out of their societal bonds.

Women could not enter into any legal agreement or control their own money at the time, nor could they hold government or industrial jobs. Women were very dependent on men for their well-being. A married woman was not allowed to take loans without her husband's consent and unmarried women typically relied on their fathers for financial matters as

well. According to Nicholas Bentley, the education of women at the time “was aimed at keeping them in a state of unsophisticated dependence on men. The resulting innocence of mind and emotion appealed strongly to the Victorian male’s idealized picture of himself.” Working class female children were given an education that would prepare them to become domestic servants, while upper-class ladies were expected to play musical instruments and sing.

Sources:

“The Status of Women in Norway” by Karin Brzelius Heffermehl. *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1972, pp. 630–646.
The Day Before Yesterday: A Photographic Album of Daily Life in Victorian and Edwardian Britain introduced by Peter Quennell.
The Victorian Scene by Nicolas Bentley.
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/dolls-house>
www.jstor.org/stable/839034
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminism_in_Norway
<https://www.gerivalton.com/housemaids-and-her-duties/>

Love and Marriage

The play revolves around Nora and Torvald’s marriage. In late 19th century Norway, there were rules of marriage, dictated by society with strict guidelines as to the roles husbands and wives play. The wife was expected to obey, allow her husband to take care of her, while she cared for their home and children. As articulated by 18th century Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, wives were responsible for ensuring their husband’s happiness. The middle classes were mostly receptive to Enlightenment ideas of women as companions to husbands and educators of children. Thus, the good wife and mother became central to visions of the ideal woman.

Typically, a woman entered marriage being expected to be her husband’s helpmate and support, to bend her will to his, and in the final analysis, it was her duty to obey. In some cases, the expectation was subtle and assumed; in others it was far more overt, flaring into violence and compulsion. For some

women, marriage was an asymmetrical relationship, given that husbands were often older, more experienced and more worldly. Nora and Torvald fit this mold. Nora truly believes they love each other and aren’t married out of obligation or necessity like many of the relationships around her. The façade of their marriage falls apart when Nora reveals to Mrs. Linde that she broke the law and the rules of marriage in order to save her husband’s life, placing love above those rules and keeping her crime in dark. Torvald is appalled with Nora’s actions, and she soon realizes he never truly loved her, but rather loved the idea of loving her.

Sources:

Women in European Culture and Society : Gender, Skill and Identity from 1700 by Deborah Simonton.

Children and Parenting

Motherhood had long been valued, but part of the Enlightenment legacy was the glorification of mothering as a central and essential part of a woman’s being. Women’s universal role in marriage was to have and rear children. For many, the early education of children also became a mother’s responsibility. Torvald is adamant that parents, specifically mothers, have a significant influence upon their children and are crucial in the development of who their children become. Nora, Torvald, and Dr. Rank each express a parent’s necessity to be honest because immorality is passed from parent to child like a disease. After Torvald learns of Nora’s deceit, he forbids her to interact with their children, saying that “nearly all young criminals had lying mothers.” The play suggests that as parents have a moral obligation to their children, children too are obligated to protect their parents. Both Nora and Mrs. Linde were confronted with familial obligations and, while Mrs. Linde sacrificed love in order to provide for her family, Nora abandoned her father in his time of need and choose to be with her husband instead.

Sources:

Women in European Culture and Society: Gender, Skill and Identity from 1700 by Deborah Simonton.

Gender Roles

The identities of men and women were intimately tied up in their roles in marriage. Men were supposed to be in charge, women to acquiesce; he was supposed to guide and protect her. Men were expected to understand business and women were not. Issues of money, property and control were at the heart of nineteenth century thought about marriage. When a woman married, her loyalty was to her husband. She could not file a legal suit, nor serve as a witness to any civil act. Men were the active citizens, and women the passive citizens, secondary to men. There emerged a vision of the domestic female who was sheltered within the private, domestic domain, while the vigorous male operated in the public arena.

Throughout the play, Nora is treated like a child by the other characters. Torvald assumes his wife isn't smart or responsible enough to handle money, so he gives her an allowance and lessons in the ways of the world. He calls her his "pet" and his "property," as well as other diminutive names to evoke her helplessness and her dependence on him. This not only establishes Torvald's power over Nora but also dehumanizes her. Neither Krogstad nor Dr. Rank takes her seriously and even the other female character, Mrs. Linde, calls her a "child." As the title alludes, Nora is seen as a doll throughout the play, something to decorate her husband's home. She is an object to Torvald, he takes pleasure in her beauty and the beauty of their home. He likes the idea of a beautiful, carefree wife who doesn't have to work but is a showpiece. Her only duty is to be "a wife and a mother above all else." In this play, women sacrifice their personal desires, ambitions, and their dignity for the welfare of their family. As the drama unfolds Nora manifests Ibsen's concern for personal rights, and her awareness of the truth increases her desire to rebel and find her own independence.

Sources:

Women in European Culture and Society: Gender, Skill and Identity from 1700 by Deborah Simonton.
Women in Nineteenth-Century Europe by Rachel G. Fuchs and Victoria E. Thompson.

Money and Work

Money is a major conflict and the source of rising action throughout the play. Within the first scene, Torvald mentions his promotion and the raise that he will be getting as a result, yet he still chastises Nora for her frivolous spending. Though the setting is in their home, much of the dialogue centers on Torvald's position at the bank. When Nora's old friend visits in hopes of acquiring a job from Torvald, leaving Krogstad feeling vulnerable, Krogstad blackmails Nora in hopes of insuring his job. Years prior, Nora had borrowed money from Krogstad to pay for the trip to Italy, going behind her husband's back and forging her father's signature. The bank represents the pervasive presence money has on the characters as a symbol for power and a tool of manipulation.

Bankers/Lawyers: By the late 19th century, the top 20% of the Norwegian population received more than half of the national income. Men began to be defined and ranked in society by the position they held rather than their heritage. The upper-middle class was comprised of successful business and industrial families, as well as bankers, attorneys, doctors, and engineers. These men held high authority and social status positions and often owned multiple homes and employed a large number of household servants. Upper-class men often participated in a number of leisure activities including golf, hunting, playing cards and vacations by the sea. Their wives often joined sewing clubs and philanthropy organizations.

Bookkeepers: Women who were fortunate enough to receive some education, including basic arithmetic and reading, were able to apply for secretarial or bookkeeping positions in the city. These women were considered white-collar workers and earned just under the equivalent of five dollars a week. As long as these women weren't married, they could handle their own money and sign legal documents. Though they were only making half of their male counterparts, white-collar women could provide for themselves, not necessarily needing to rely on their husbands or fathers.

Maid: During the 18th and 19th centuries, domestic work was the second largest category of employment behind agriculture. Over 25% of women 20 years or older were employed in domestic servitude. Most upper-class families employed several maids, valets, and nannies tending to their home. Housemaids were under their master's care and were provided with accommodations, clothing, and a small allowance. This allowance was never enough for a woman to be able to save up and retire, making this occupation a lifelong career. Women often sought this type of work because their husbands alone couldn't provide for their family. These women had to give up all familial responsibilities, including raising their own children, in order to serve their master's house and care for his children.

Sources:

State of labor in Europe, 1878, Hathi Trust Digital Library.
http://www.historydoctor.net/Notes/rich_poor_and_middle_class_life.htm
<https://www.hierarchystructure.com/19th-century-england-social-hierarchy/>
<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-middle-classes-etiquette-and-upward-mobility>
<https://www.gerwalton.com/housemaids-and-her-duties/>

Deceit and Forgery

At the start of the play, Nora seems to be the perfect wife, obeying her husband and caring for her children, though she slowly begins to reveal small instances of independence and deceit. She indulges in macaroons at the beginning of the first act and directly lies to Torvald when

he asks her if she has eaten them. Later, Mrs. Linde finds out that Nora holds a much larger secret from her husband, that she has borrowed money illegally from Krogstad. Krogstad is disliked by Torvald because of his own forgery. In his attempts to piece together his own life, Krogstad threatens to disrupt Nora's. Deceit is a corrupting force, and though love motivates Nora's dishonesty, her actions wouldn't be considered deceitful if society allowed women to handle financial matters.

Nora is presented as performing a life of perpetual self-denial, continually lying to Torvald, manipulating him by flattery and flirtation. Torvald is shown through the first two acts of the play as strongly ethical; he has a natural bent for preaching morals to others. He turns every scene with Nora, until the final one, into a little moral lesson, against debt, against extravagance, against lying, against hypocrisy. For Torvald Helmer, ethical principles are genuine rules of conduct, even though he didn't fully comprehend their implications. His stance that it would be unethical to borrow money actually endangered his life, which was saved by Nora's instinctual criminal action of forging her father's signature.

As with many crimes, there were matters of degree in sentencing for forgery, which took into account the intent and severity of the crime. According to the Norway General Penal Code, forgery of any object containing a statement significantly related to another crime is punishable by fines and imprisonment for at least two years. Based on this, it is unlikely that Nora's forgery of her father's signature to obtain a loan would be considered a related crime, therefore she would face no criminal penalties. But if Krogstad were to have revealed the forgery, she could have been rejected by her husband and lost custody of her children.

Sources:

Ibsen's Heroines by Lou Andreas-Salomé.
Text and Supertext in Ibsen's Drama by Brian Johnston.
<https://www.un.org/Depts/los/>
LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/NOR_penal_code.pdf <https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-happen-woman-nineteenth-century-dolls-house-554841>

RECEPTION

19th Century Responses

A Doll's House was published on December 4, 1879 in Copenhagen. The first performance took place at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen on December 21, 1879 which created an unprecedented sensation among the public. Haldvan Koht, one of Ibsen's most distinguished Norwegian biographers, speaks of the bombshell effect of *A Doll's House*: "It pronounced a deathknell on accepted social ethics." Translator Michael Meyer's adds, "No play had ever contributed so momentously to social debate, been so widely and furiously received among people not normally interested in theatrical or even artistic matters." Norwegian and Danish reviews of the world premiere show that *A Doll's House* was received in a cultural moment when the war between idealists and realists was already raging. The culture war that broke out in Scandinavia was articulated as a battle between Christian idealists and freethinking realists. In contrast to the theatre of the previous generation, a common consensus could no longer be found among audiences. Ibsen challenged the most basic assumption of the function of theatre—his work did not create a community, it divided it.

Some critics found *A Doll's House* relatable and were excited that for the first time a playwright was commenting on the very strict pillars of the upper-middle class society and shedding light to the apparent doll-houses of the late 19th century. Others, however, feared how this would affect the institution of marriage, religion, and women's place in society, responding negatively to Nora's strength and independence. Many worried the play would be a bad influence on audience members. Still, other critics took a more middle ground, priding Nora's strength, yet warning spectators not to model her actions in their own lives and disregard their responsibilities.

Though many critics were scandalized by Ibsen's bold challenge to societal norms, every performance of the original production was sold out. At the time the

play seemed like a threat to marriage, religion, women's place in society. The final emotional impression left by Nora's choice was, critics agreed, one of dissonance and confusion rather than triumph, with Nora seeming selfish and spiteful when she slams the door on her husband and children, and therefore unnatural. Critic and theatre manager M.W. Brun asked: "is there one mother among thousands of mothers, one wife among thousands of wives, who would behave as Nora behaves, who would desert husband, children and home merely in order to become a "human being?" I answer with conviction: no and again no!"

In Germany, one actress refused the role of Nora, appalled that the female protagonist slammed the door on her marriage and opted to do something different with her life other than being a wife and mother. In Italy, actress, Eleonora Duse, wanted to use Luigi Capuana's Italian translation for her production in 1891, provided the ending was changed, but she eventually gave in on this point. In January 1886, Karl Marx's youngest daughter, Eleanor, hosted the first readings in England of *A Doll's House* in the Henrietta Frances Lord translation. She incorporated Ibsen into the Socialist movement but ignored Ibsen's belief that spiritual revolution is required prior to social change.

Sources:

- Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism : Art, Theater, Philosophy* by Toril Moi.
- Henrik Ibsen, The Critical Heritage* edited by Michael Egan.
- Ibsen's Lively Art : A Performance Study of the Major Plays* by Frederick J. Marker, Lise-Lone Marker.
- The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen* edited by James McFarlane.
- <https://pages.stolaf.edu/th271-spring2014/commentary-by-artists-or-critics-a-dolls-house/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Doll%27s_House

20th Century Responses

In Russia, December, 1906, Vsevolod Meyerhold staged an anti-naturalistic, anti-literalistic production moving the production from the 19th century ‘actor-virtuoso’ era into an era of ‘stylistic innovation’ of directorial authority. Sergei Eisenstein assembled the set through a constructivist vision of visual chaos that “gave the impression that everything was collapsing.” The actors were clad in their blue canvas working clothes of the Bolshevik era. Meyerhold’s production focused on the inner spirit of the work itself, not the social or psychological circumstances of Nora’s personal plight. In Meyerhold’s 1922 production, when Nora deserted Torvald and his crumbling bourgeois world, she took the children with her.

Productions of *A Doll’s House* in the 1920s and 30s had begun to use modern dress and audiences found it disconcerting to see a modern woman submit to Helmer’s terms of endearment. By the 1960s productions began to de-emphasize the idea that the play is about women’s

liberation and to question its underlying social assumptions in order to focus more on the relationships of human beings to one another and the awakening of social consciousness.

A Doll’s House received great attention in the 1970s with the revival of the feminist movement. By 1981 the shift back toward a focus on Nora’s psychology took place with Ingmar Bergman’s production in Munich (*Nora*) which evoked a strong visual image of oppressiveness and closure. In this production the final scene took place in the Helmer bedroom to stress the sexual intimacy of their marriage. Here Nora was made the controlling consciousness of the play.

Sources:

- Ibsen’s Lively Art : A Performance Study of the Major Plays* by Frederick J. Marker, Lise-Lone Marker.
The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen edited by James McFarlane.
<https://www.huntingtontheatre.org/articles/dolls-house-articles/Gallery/Ibsens-Audience/>
<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/aug/10/dolls-house-henrik-ibsen-relevant>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Norway

A GLOSSARY OF TERMS FROM THE PLAY

Appease: To pacify, to yield or concede to demands sometimes at the expense of one’s principles.

Capricious: subject to sudden change, erratic, or fickle.

Conciliate: To overcome distrust, to win over or gain favor with, to reconcile.

Contraband: Anything prohibited by law from being imported or exported.

Credulous: Willing to believe or trust too easily, gullible.

Disreputable: Having a bad reputation, dishonorable.

Evasion: An act of avoiding something, a trick or excuse to get around something.

Frivolous: Lacking seriousness or importance, self-indulgent, carefree.

Grafter: Someone who dishonestly uses their position to take advantage of others, specifically to gain money or property.

Hack: One who forfeits professional integrity in exchange for money or reward.

Imperturbable: Incapable of being agitated, not easily excited, calm, impassive, and steady.

Magnanimity: Having a lofty, generous, and courageous spirit.

Prodigal: A person who spends money wastefully.

Retribution: punishment inflicted as vengeance for a wrong or criminal act.

Scrupulous: Possessing moral or ethical standards, showing strict regard for justice and what is right.

Spendthrift: A person who spends money carelessly.

Squalid: Filthy in appearance from lack of care or neglect.

Squander: To spend or use (money, time, etc.) extravagantly or wastefully.

Subordinate: Inferior or placed below in rank.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Pre-Performance Questions

1. What do you know about this play and why is it considered a modern classic?
2. How do women function in a society that is biased to benefit men?
3. Why is honesty important for relationships to work?
4. Why do we make choices when we know the consequences may be detrimental to our well being?

Post-Performance Questions

1. How do the technical aspects of costume, scenic design, lighting and sound help enhance the production?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Nora and Torvald Helmer? How does the relationship change through the play?
3. Have the societal norms of the role of husband and wife changed since the play was originally written? What has or has not changed?
4. How are the roles of mother and father portrayed in the play? How do the Helmer children fit into the story?
5. How does money and status reveal itself through the play?
6. How is feminism celebrated and brought to the forefront of the play?
7. How would you describe the relationship between Dr. Rank and Nora?
8. How would you describe the relationship between Kristine and Krogstad?
9. What does the dance that Nora performs have to do with the story?
10. What does Krogstad want from Nora and what does he do to try to get it?
11. Why is Torvald upset with what Nora has done? What changes his mind about the severity of Nora's action?
12. What do you think happens to Nora in the 15 years following the play's ending?

A Doll's House

ACTIVITIES

Perspective Writing | Monologue: Personal Narratives for Characters

1. Select an important moment from the play, *A Doll's House*. This should be a moment that has more than one person in attendance. For example, when Torvald and Nora have their discussion about money or Krogstad confronting Nora.
2. From this moment, the students are to pick a character from the story and to give the character's perspective and attitude of what transpired. Explanations of how they felt about this moment and what affects them should be explored.
3. Each student will write a short monologue describing the moment from the character's perspective of what they experienced.
4. Compare the monologues about the event from other characters that were involved. Discuss the similarities and differences that arose during the writing process. Was there general agreement of what happened or marked differences? Why were the moments similar or different? Were the variations subtle or obvious? Did the class agree on what was important to include and why? If not how would the elimination of some elements change the way the story would be understood when read?

Writing PG: Articulate the position of self and others using experiential and material logic.

Writing PG: Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.

Contemporizing *A Doll's House*

1. Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* takes place in the late 19th century. Either individually or in a small group, pick a scene from the play to contemporize.
2. By utilizing stage directions and dialogue, adapt a scene from the play that sets the scene in the 21st Century.
 - a. Discuss what changes from the play that would need to be made: What adaptations or updating will you make to the play's underlying themes? How does the way your characters speak differ from those of Ibsen's characters?
 - b. How does your scene differ from the scene from the play?
3. After writing the scene, have different students read the parts of the scene.
 - a. In what ways was the scene changed to make it more contemporary?
 - b. Was the adaptation successful in maintaining Ibsen's themes? Why or why not?
 - c. In what ways does updating a script help or hurt a text?
4. After discussing, invite the adapters to share their process in contemporizing the scene. What did they find was more effective? What surprised them?

Writing PG: Effectively use content-specific language, style, tone and text structure to compose or adapt writing for different audiences and purposes.

Writing PG: Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.

Drama and Theatre Arts PG: Employ drama and theatre skills, and articulate the aesthetics of a variety of characters and roles.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The Denver Public Library recommends:

Read!

***Voluntary madness : my year lost and found in the loony bin* by Norah Vincent. (2008)**

A Doll's House was inspired by Ibsen's friend, Laura Kieler, who obtained a loan, illegal for women to do at the time, to pay for her husband's medical treatment. Her husband rewarded her fraud by sending her to an asylum. In this book, the author voluntarily checks herself into three mental health facilities, updated versions of asylums. The author had been worn down by pretending to be a man for more than a year previous, an experience that she found just as limiting as life as a woman. Although she thought she was conducting immersive journalism, she ended up trying to find herself as much as Nora needed to.

Watch!

***Master of the House* (1925, Criterion Collection 2014)**

Carl Dryer, giant of Danish Film, told a compelling and heartfelt story about an overburdened and underappreciated housewife in his debut film *Master of the House*. You can see Dryer's genius in this spare film told mostly in a single room much like *A Doll's House*'s staging. Dryer and Ibsen dealt with female subjugation with heart and sincerity long before the "F"word (feminism) became popular.

Listen!

***Making marriage simple : ten truths for changing the relationship you have into the one you want* by Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt. (2013)**

Marriage isn't easy, but Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt claim to have relationships down to a science, and this distilled into ten simple truths. According to these two, counseling professionals with three decades as a married couple, the experiences of frustration, incompatibility and conflict can all be leveraged to create healthier and more fulfilling commitments. So why wait until your marriage reaches a crisis during Christmastime to learn new, healthier ways of relating? The choice is there to be had. Torvald and Nora's unraveling marriage is a part of theater history, but our paths needn't be so set. Read by the authors!

Download!

***The Dept of Speculation* by Jenny Offil. (2014)**

In this pithy epistolary novel we are given glimpses into the life of the narrator as she meets and marries, has a baby and tries to have a writing life and just in general a life. As Offill's narrator states : "The Buddhists say there are 121 states of consciousness. Of these, only three involve misery or suffering. Most of us spend our time moving back and forth between these three." I think that Nora could identify with that. Downloadable in eBook and audio eBook formats from denver.overdrive.com.



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