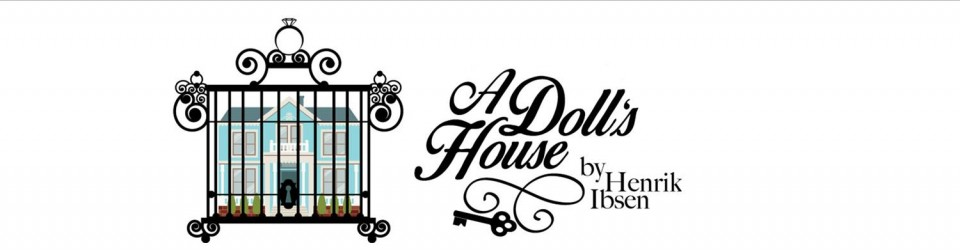
****

**Mrs. Ballantyne**

**A Level English Literature**

[**Genre and Form**](#_z74wj038x4ii) **1**

[Realism mind map](#_b5gbpfh9on4y) 1

[Elements of a play script](#_lt8222ajnn2j) 2

[The Well-Made Play](#_28kp18kw0yd6) 3

[**Initial noticings**](#_llg3wvmvqli3) **4**

[**Symbolism**](#_qsbht17945r4) **5**

[**Context**](#_tljqo0glwwvn) **6**

[Background of “A Doll’s House” - 19th Century](#_25rp3pvccejh) 6

[Authored by Shannon Cron](#_3igro5426rco) 6

[**Exposition**](#_dao5d8imqcn) **9**

[**Class Activities**](#_an8thj1mtegb) **10**

[Act I of a Doll’s House: Dice roll discussion](#_u7f0tplu517t) 10

[Act 2: Write your own discussion questions](#_2oskhcfiihz7) 11

[Act 3: Character sketch think/pair/share](#_1ux9lgom55hh) 12

[**Quotes for memorisation**](#_cztngdjcrqax) **13**

[**Sentence Stems**](#_12oq1gnxae0b) **14**

[**Criticism**](#_gvwlpf8ds0mx) **15**

[Reading 1: A Doll’s House and trends in literary criticism.](#_ha4y6xdo7rvp) 15

[Reading 2: Commentary by Artists or Critics – “A Doll’s House”](#_igdzrkqnbk1v) 15

[**Consolidating knowledge in acts**](#_fxyz7biycql7) **18**

[Act One](#_bubfhwyxp1o) 18

[Act Two](#_qo4xkqshf3vw) 19

[Act Three](#_gjdgxs) 20

[**Knowledge Organiser**](#_5hfq94gswqm3) **21**

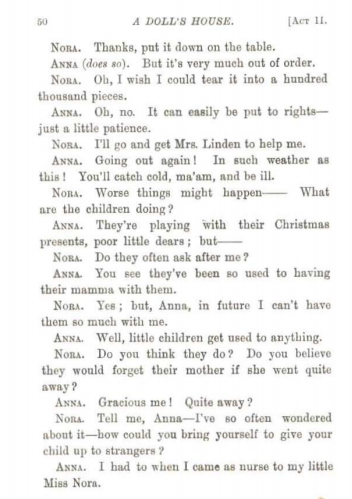
# **Genre and Form**

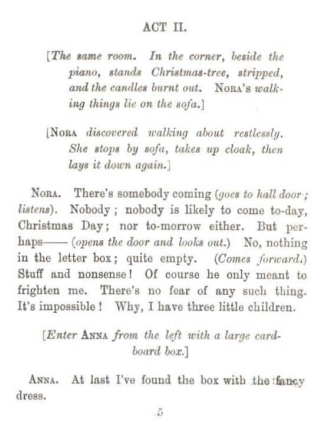
## **Realism mind map**

****

## **Elements of a play script**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Element** | **Definition** |
| Scene directions |  |
| Staging directions |  |
| Character stage directions |  |
| Act and scene breaks |  |
| Character tags |  |
| Dialogue |  |
| Punctuation for effect |  |





## 

## **The Well-Made Play**

Many of the plays from Ibsen’s early and middle periods, including *A Doll’s House*, follow the conventions of the “well-made play.” This was a term used by the influential French playwright Eugène Scribe (1791-1861) to describe a play with the following elements:

• A very **tight *plot***that typically revolves around **a missing element**— letters, a lost or stolen document, an absent person.

• ***Subplots***that are related to the missing element and add tension to the work. These subplots do not have to be substantial, and they often involve revelation of information, that is, who knows what at any given time in the story.

• A ***climax* or scene of revelation**, in which the missing element is revealed. This scene often saves the hero of the play from ruin or embarrassment.

• A ***dénouement*, or closing scene**, in which explanations are supplied to resolve all the earlier questions or mysteries in the play. This scene, according to Scribe, is to follow very soon after the climax. In French, the word dénouement means “untying,” so the term suggests unraveling all the knotted conditions or circumstances on which the initial problems— and the plot—were based.

Interestingly, however, as Ibsen’s work matured in the middle period, he began to experiment with form as well as subject. While he tackled the traditional social structures of his day, Ibsen also showed increasing independence from the established form of the “well-made play.” *A Doll’s House* has several elements of the “well-made play,” but it also departs from this model in important respects. Chief among these is the closing structure of the play. In terms of the “well-made play,” the climax, which is the revelation of Nora’s fraud in obtaining a loan and Helmer’s reaction to that news, would be followed by the expected ending of Nora’s submission to Helmer. However, the play has a longer dénouement, with an ending that shocked audiences in Ibsen’s day. The nontraditional resolution is Nora’s startling decision to leave husband and home in order to find herself.

# 

# 

# **Initial noticings**

|  |
| --- |
| **Pages 1-10** |

**Contemporary Link: Consider nicknames**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Male** | **Female** |

# **Symbolism**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Tarantella**  On Torvald’s insistence, Nora dances the Tarantella, a Southern Italian [folk dance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_folk_dance) characterized by a fast upbeat tempo, accompanied by [tambourines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tambourine). The "magico-religious" tarantella is a delirium-inducing solo dance. The original legend tells that someone who had supposedly been bitten by the [tarantula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarantula) (or the [Mediterranean black widow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_black_widow)) spider had to dance to a upbeat tempo to sweat the poison out.  **Macaroons**  At the beginning of the play, Nora eats them but H doesn’t allow her to, so she hides them and eats them when she’s not in H’s vision. When H sees them, N claims Mrs. Linde brought them.  **Christmas Tree**  **Disease**  **The Letterbox** | Nora’s frenetic performance of the dance could symbolise her ridding herself of the poison of deceit in her marriage - or perhaps stepping outside of her role as a prim Victorian housewife and enveloping herself in a fiery fit of passion. Furthermore, the dance was later applied as a supposed cure for the behavior of neurotic women ("'Carnevaletto delle donne'"); Nora’s behaviour in the play was unorthodox.  Shows H is superior and controlling. They might also symbolise the collection of secrets and lies she has. It alludes to marital problems as she has to lie about something as small as a sweet. |

# **Context**

## **Background of “A Doll’s House” - 19th Century**

### ***Authored by Shannon Cron***

In the case of *A Doll’s House*, both the world of the play and the world Ibsen lived in are the same. Ibsen wrote *A Doll’s House* in Norway in 1879, and the play presumably took place sometime in the same decade. Set in an upper-middle class home, the play demonstrates the importance of social class in late-19th century Norway. Born into the upper-middle class himself, Ibsen not only understood the importance of social class, but also the expectations placed on its members. Likewise, *A Doll’s House* tells the story of Nora and Torvald: a married couple living in a society where to keep your social standing, you have to abide by its strict, and at times, suffocating standards. Nora and Torvald are living proof that upper-middle class life can be a comfortable one–if you fit into its narrow margins.

The growth and prosperity of Norway’s upper-middle class began in 1843, with a great economic boom (Larson). This boom lasted until approximately 1875, meaning that Nora and Torvald were still reaping its effects (Larson). This boom can mainly be attributed to Norway’s success in foreign trade, mining and growth in agricultural productivity. Additionally, Norway––which only became an independent nation in 1814––was becoming more industrialized, and therefore bringing more money into the country as well as creating more jobs and opportunities (Hagemann 417-418). As a result, the upper-middle class became larger. Before this class existed, most of the people with wealth were a part of the aristocracy, and therefore born into money (Larson). Now, people could work their way up, and enter into the upper-middle class through hard work and education (Larson).

While this economic boom brought prosperity, it also brought an obsession with, and an over-awareness of money (Hagemann 417-419). This is evident in the plot of *A Doll’s House*. Nora owes Krogstad money, which causes her immense stress. Torvald is obsessed with staying out of debt. Nora and Torvald are thrilled are at the prospect that Torvald might get a raise at the bank, which would mean more money for the entire family. However, Torvald’s tight grip around the families funds lead Nora to lie about what she uses their money for, creating tension and dishonesty in their marriage and, ultimately, influencing Nora’s decision to leave the house.

Furthermore, expectations about being upper-middle class were also forming during this time in Norway. Commonly referred to as “bourgeois respectability,” expectations of the upper middle-class included financial success without any debt, good morals (or at least making it appear that’s the case), and a stable, patriarchal family (Willcoxon) (Hagemann 417-419). A woman’s main responsibility centered around being a housewife, whose most prominent task was to serve her husband and children (Hagemann 417-419). The audience sees this patriarchal structure at work when Nora lets Torvald call her his “little skylark,” who she does whatever her husband says (Ibsen 2). Torvald is the strong male figure who makes and manages the money, as well as controlling the household. Clearly aware of the subordination of women in late-19th century Norwegian society, Ibsen wrote in his notes for *A Doll’s House* in 1878, “A woman cannot be herself in contemporary society, it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view” (Ibsen/McFarlane 90).

This is why Nora’s proclamation that she also had “a duty to herself” shocked audiences of the time (Ibsen 82). Not only was the patriarchal structure a social tradition and something expected of the upper middle class, but there were also laws that correlated with its ideology. For example, women were not allowed to borrow money without their husbands’ consent or vote. Again, Nora goes against the social norms when she borrows from and repays money to Krogstad behind Torvald’s back. Perhaps the only thing about the world of the play that differs from the world of Ibsen is that Nora’s behavior was completely unprecedented in the 1870’s.

**Works Citied**

Hagemann, Gro. “Citizenship and social order: gender politics in twentieth-century Norway and Sweden.” *Women’s History Review* 11.3 (2002): 417-429.

Ibsen, Henrik. Ed. James Walter McFarlane. *Henrik Ibsen: A Critical Anthology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970. 90. Print.

Ibsen, Henrik, James Walter. McFarlane, and Jens Arup. “A Doll’s House.” *Four Major Plays*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. 1-88. Print.

Arup. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. 1-88. Print.

Larson, Karen. *A History of Norway*. Princeton: n.p., 1948. Print.

Willcoxon, Jeanne. Theatre 271. St. Olaf College. 4 April 2014.

Further Context Notes:

|  |
| --- |
|  |

# **Exposition**

No play can be comprised purely of conflict. Some speeches, incidents, or scenes are included to give additional dimension to explain background information that will have an effect on character development, relationships among the characters, or the progress of the plot. Such material is called exposition. In many earlier plays, from the classics of Greek drama through Shakespeare, a chorus or character gives an initial speech that is almost an orientation. Ibsen, however, took a more subtle approach, and he was one of the first playwrights to weave the exposition into the drama itself. In this way, he challenged his audience to understand—almost to participate in—the gradual rise of tension in the conflict.

In *A Doll’s House*, the exposition occurs in several scenes:

|  |
| --- |
| **Examples of exposition**:   * Mrs. Linde’s comments on Nora’s youthful reputation as a spendthrift * The nursemaid’s acknowledgment that she raised Nora after placing her own child out for adoption |

# **Class Activities**

## **Act I of a Doll’s House: Dice roll discussion**

**1. Freedom**

1. What is your personal definition of freedom?
2. Who seems to have the most freedom in “A Doll’s House” thus far? Why?
3. Who seems to have the least freedom in “A Doll’s House” thus far? Why?

**2. Individual responsibility**

1. Do your responsibilities to others impede your rights as an individual?
2. Outline the responsibilities of the male characters in the play thus far.
3. Outline the responsibilities of the female characters in the play thus far.

**3. Parental expectations 1**

1. What are our society’s expectations for mothers?
2. What are our society’s expectations for fathers?
3. Can a person contradict these expectations and still be a good mother or father?

**4. Parental expectations 2**

1. Do society’s expectations prevent a parent’s growth as an *individual*?
2. Are society’s expectations of parents outdated in today’s world?
3. How do the expectations of parents today compare with those in “A Doll’s House”?

**5. Love and sacrifice**

1. Does love require sacrifice?
2. Has anyone in the play sacrificed for anyone else thus far?
3. Do you infer that there might be an upcoming sacrifice in the play? If so, what?

**6. Miscellaneous**

1. How are children affected by their relationships with parents/guardians?
2. What kinds of experiences cause a person to understand him or herself more deeply?
3. When is it appropriate to challenge the beliefs of society?

## **Act 2: Write your own discussion questions**

*Include the page numbers so your classmates can look up the passages! Ensure you don’t ask closed (yes/no) questions; engage in higher-order questioning that sparks discussion.*

1. Write a specific question about stage directions in Act II.
2. Pick a quote that you can ask classmates to explain the significance of.
3. Write a question about Dr. Rank.
4. Pick a theme and compose a question on it relative to Act II.
5. Choose a prop from Act II and quiz your classmates on how it helps shape the scene.
6. Write a question about Nora and her father.
7. Compose a question regarding references to status or reputation in Act II.
8. Develop a question about the very significant Tarantella dance.
9. Write a question involving irony in Act II.
10. Write a question about the use of subtext in a specific part.
11. Free choice: Write any sort of Act II question you want!

# 

## **Act 3: Character sketch think/pair/share**

1. What does this character look like? How does he/she carry himself/herself? How does he/she dress?

2. How does this character speak? Does he/she have any identifiable speech patterns?

3. How does the social and historical context affect this character’s thinking and actions?

4. What is this character’s main motivation? Why?

5. Describe any redeeming qualities this character may have.

6. Analyze the character’s personality flaws. From what do they stem?

7. Choose an object this character holds or would hold dear. Explain the connection.

8. Who would be this character’s contemporary counterpart? Explain your choice.

# 

# **Quotes for memorisation**

|  |
| --- |
|  |

# 

# **Sentence Stems**

* The ornate Christmas tree in the living room discloses…
* Torvald’s diction could be characterised as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ per his use of

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, whilst Nora’s is more

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as she \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

* Krogstad is characterised as a cunning recalcitrant through…

* Ibsen’s use of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ projects *or* repudiates *or* establishes\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

* The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ tone of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ scene is

amplified by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

* At first glance, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; however, on

closer inspection, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

* Mrs. Linden serves as a foil to…
* The quotation \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ underpins the idea of …
* Tension is heightened in the moment that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

evoking \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the audience.

# **Criticism**

## Reading 1: *A Doll’s House* and trends in literary criticism.

Ibsen was living in Europe when he wrote *A Doll’s House*; it was published in 1879. While social critics, such as John Stuart Mill, were writing and speaking for an expanded role for women (Mill’s *Subjection of Women* was published in 1869), the movement for women’s suffrage was not yet a robust one, and women had a very narrow role in society. In many countries, as in Norway, they could not borrow money; in many places, women could not even own property. Instead, they were often treated as property rather than as people. Middle and upper-class women were generally educated at home if at all, and they were not prepared for careers.

Literary critics were, by and large, not social critics, and they tended to accept the status quo for women. Thus, when *A Doll’s House* was published, it was regarded as quite a radical work because of the inversion of the social order that occurs in the play. More recently, however, feminist criticism has emerged as a new way of looking at literary works. Beginning in the 1970s, a number of female critics have argued for a reexamination of literary works with the goal of gaining insights into the evolving role of women and understanding how both women and men have used women in literature to further certain points of view.

In the world of feminist criticism, Henrik Ibsen demands close study for his use of women as protagonists and fully formed characters. Nora Helmer and other women created by Ibsen were intended to drive home the point that no society can flourish if half its members are in bondage. Ibsen’s full development of Nora, as contrasted with his limited treatment of Helmer, is designed in part to bolster the argument that women should be full participants in society. Nora’s radical decision at the end of the play is intended to argue that a woman can be a better wife and mother if she is fully actualized—that is, if her own intellectual and

emotional needs are met in the process.

***-Author Unknown***

## Reading 2: Commentary by Artists or Critics – “A Doll’s House”

*Authored by Shannon Cron*

Since *A Doll’s House* first premiered in 1879, critics have been voicing opinions about the production. Although the historical and social context of Ibsen’s time varies greatly with that of today––particularly the role of women––critics have always found A Doll’s House to be relevant to society. In 1879, critics saw Nora’s actions as shocking and scandalous for a woman, whereas today, critics tend to see Nora’s actions as a way of reinforcing an individual’s right––regardless of gender––to protect themselves.

First off, during Ibsen’s time, many critics were shocked––negatively and positively––by Nora’s character and her choice to abandon the pillars of upper-middle class society by leaving her family (or, put more simply, her ability to make a choice on her own). Some critics found A Doll’s House to be relatable as well as influential in potentially changing social norms. One review––written in 1879 for the *Social Demokraten*––reacted positively, proclaiming:

**“Finally an event at The Royal Theatre, and an event of the first class! This play touches the lives of thousands of families; oh yes there are thousands of such doll-homes, where the husband treats his wife as a child he amuses himself with, and so that is what the wives become. . . Who, after seeing this play, has the courage to speak scornfully about run-away wives? Is there anyone who does not feel that it is this young and delightful young woman’s duty, her inescapable duty, to leave this gentleman, this husband, who slowly sacrifices her on the altar of his egotism, and who fails to understand her value as a human being”** (Social Demokraten)**.**

In saying that “there are thousands of such doll-homes,” it becomes clear to a modern audience that Nora and Torvald’s relationship was typical in a Norwegian, upper-middle class home in the late 19th century (Social Demokraten). This quote also indicates that Nora’s behavior was not common, and that this play presented a radically different viewpoint. According to the *Social Demokraten,* Ibsen not only presented a radical viewpoint, but one that audiences might have willingly latched onto.

However, other critics feared just that. Some critics responded negatively to Nora’s strength and independence, believing the ideas Ibsen presented mould negatively impact audience members. For example, Erik Vullum––a Norwegian Journalist––wrote in his 1879 review of *A Doll’s House*:

**“I am thinking about the fact that it is Nora, that is, the woman, who acts as a spokesman both when it comes to the dissolution of the marriage and to entrusting the children she herself has borne to the care of a nanny. There is something indescribably unnatural in this, and therefore, in the final instance, artificial. Even if one can accept that there possibly may exist a woman who has done such a thing, one still feels dissatisfied to the utmost degree when it appears to be something that perhaps also has the sympathy of the author. If a woman, warped by a certain contemporary school of thought, can persuade herself that she is protecting her independence, freedom and honour by behaving à la a trumpet of doom over a dispirited husband and letting him sink down into his well-deserved ruin, there is no need for it in the female nature as such”** (Vullum).

Given the expectations of women in the late 1800’s, Nora’s choice to leave her home was not something that was seen in upper middle class Norwegian society––and certainly not seen on stage. Vullum dismissing her as “unnatural” and deeming her actions “artificial” demonstrates how shocking Nora’s character was to audiences at the time (Vullum).

Other critics recognized the boldness of Nora’s departure as well. Amalie Skram, a Norwegian journalist writing in the 1880’s, saw *A Doll’s House* as a “warning,” suggesting that while audiences see Nora’s strength, they should not fail to notice the problems with her decision (Skram). Skram continued:

**“When the woman first has risen, she will never let herself be stopped again. Like Nora, she will let the duties that her doll-life gave birth to fall dead to the ground, because the work with her own, neglected self will absorb and annul everything else. Even a mother’s love is torn up with the roots and thrown away in pain, because the waters of the Deluge in the moment of wakening has passed over her soul and washed away everything that used to grow in there. She will fight until she has total understanding of her human worth, of her sovereign right to choose her place and take up her life’s work without being relegated to marriage as an institution of maintenance”** (Skram).

From this perspective, Nora’s actions were not only unheard of but also a bad influence on the audience. If spectators were to model their own lives after Nora’s actions, they might also get lost in the “deluge” and forget all of her responsibilities (Skram). This “awakening” might be freeing for a woman, but ultimately her desire to live for herself puts her family at risk because she would no longer have time to care for it (Skram). Therefore, according to Skram, the message that *A Doll’s House* sends is dangerous for society, even if it liberates Nora.

Fredrick Peterson, an 1880’s Norwegian journalist, expressed similar concerns, particularly about *A Doll’s House*‘s affect on the institution of marriage. He explained:

**“The lack of reconciliation has wide-reaching consequences for the effect of this play within the world of readers. As far as marriage is concerned, it is far too easy to get ideas which simultaneously thoroughly annul it, and suppress the woman from the equality with the man which the execution of the principles of Christian marriage finally have granted her”** (Peterson).

This quote shows how much social standards and expectations influenced people of that time and how appalled some people were at Ibsen’s willingness to speak out about its flaws.

Although critics such as Skram, Peterson and Vullum found *A Doll’s House* to be a negative influence for audiences, other critics found these types of views to be inaccurate. Expanding on the depth of Nora’s character, William Archer writes:

**“If she were really and essentially the empty headed doll we hear so much about, the whole point of the play would be gone. . . The critics in fact, sublimely unconscious of the way in which they thereby drive home the poet’s irony fall into the very same misunderstanding of Nora’s character which makes Helmer a byword for masculine stupidity and are no less flabbergasted than he when the doll pulls out of her masquerade dress and turns out to be a woman after all. And Nora is not really childish, still less she is ‘neurotic'”** (Archer).

Archer explained that the misunderstanding of Nora’s character, and furthermore, the misunderstanding of husbands to wives, and to people in society, is a major theme of the play. In other words, critics become so caught up in how dramatically Nora’s actions contradict the expectations of the upper middle class that they misunderstand the message that is much less political than it is about human nature and our relationships with each other.

Critics today lean more on Archer’s side, typically recognizing Ibsen’s ability to stage humanity. Although critics of Ibsen’s day were distracted by his portrayal of a strong woman making her own decisions, the play is less about gender roles and more of humanity as a whole. Michael Meyer explains:

**“A Doll’s House is no more about women’s rights than Shakespeare’s Richard II is about the dive right of kings, or Ghostsabout syphilis or An Enemy of the People about public hygiene. Its theme is the need of every individual to find out what kind of person he or she really is and strive to become that person”** (Meyer).

Although it is easy to interpret A Doll’s House as a play promoting feminist ideals, A Doll’s House is about more than a woman fighting for her rights. Joan Tempelton stated, **“Ibsen’s Nora is not just a woman arguing for female liberation; she is much more. She embodies the comedy as well as the tragedy of modern life,”** proving that Nora’s actions are not a pro-feminist device, but a way to depict humanity (Templeton 28).

Past and present, critics are intrigued by Ibsen’s A Doll’s House. No one denies that Ibsen’s play made an impact on society in the late 1800’s, whether they agreed with it or not. As time passed, critics continued to recognize how this play’s themes transcend it’s 19th century context to relate to the lives of people today.

# 

# **Consolidating knowledge in acts**

## **Act One**

* N arrives with Christmas shopping.
* N/T discuss household expenses.
* T- teases N. About eating macaroons/sweets.
* Arrival of 2 visitors: Linde and Rank
* L asks N to use influence on H to get her a job.
* N tells L her secret
* K comes to see H
* R, N, L all discuss K’s corruptions
* H offers L a job
* N plays with kids. Receives a shock.
* K (moneylender) asks N to use influence to keep his job. Threatens her.
* N forged father’s signature on IOU.
* H lectures N about lying. N diverts H with talk of the upcoming party.
* H says K corrupts his kids.
* N then refuses to see her children.

Vocabulary:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Stove | Prominent feature; heart of house; stage directions which demand N to warm/replenish. |
| Krone | Currency → coming into use. |
| Ducks-and-drake | Old fashioned expression meaning to squander money. |
| Steamer | Common mode of transport |
| Dollers | Former national currency |
| Telegram | New means of communication |
| Note of Hand | Handwritten promise → IOU |

Act 1 Lecture Notes:

## **Act Two**

* N asks her old nurse whether she misses her own child.
* N shows L her costume for the party.
* They discuss R illness, L warns N about her closeness with the doctor.
* N explains that R is not the source of the loan.
* N asks T to give K a job and he resists.
* When she presses him, he sends K a note of dismissal.
* T promises N that he can cope with any consequence.
* R arrives and tells N he is dying.
* They flirt over her costume and she is on the verge of asking him for money.
* He confesses his love for her, and she realises that she cannot.
* K enters and informs N the price of his silence is a better job at the bank. He drops a letter in the box explaining this to T.
* N tells L, who offers to intercede with her former admirer K.
* N tries to distract T from the letter by rehearsing her dance for the party.

Vocabulary:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Nanny | Poorer women with illegitimate or dead babies would be employed to breastfeed the children of wealthy mothers or if the mother had died. |
| Confirmed | Formally received into the church. |
| Muff | A woollen or fur tube to warm the hands. |
| Delicate | An expression that covers any form or poor or weak health. |
| Scribbler | A poor quality journalist. |
| Foie gras | Goose liver pate – very expensive |
| Card | Visitors handed a calling card to the maid, who would bring it to her employer to be told whether to admit the caller |
| Back stairs | Conventionally the entrance for servants. K’s furtive use of them may surprise the maid. |
| Particoloured | Made of patches of brightly coloured material; associated with the theatrical |
| Expecting | A euphemism for “pregnant” |

Act 2 lecture notes:

## **Act Three**

* Krogstad comes to see Mrs Linde at the Helmer’s’ and they reach a new understanding.
* Krogstad wishes to take back his letter but Mrs Linde urges him not to.
* Helmer brings Nora home after her dance.
* Helmer tries to make love to Nora but they are interrupted.
* Dr Rank calls. Nora asks about his last test and he lets her know that death is certain. He leaves after a final goodbye.
* Helmer finds Rank’s cards with the black cross. He still presses Nora to make love, but she tells him to read his letters, intending to kill herself.
* Helmer discovers Krogstad’s letter and erupts in a rage.
* A letter arrives from Krogstad returning the document with the forged signature.
* Helmer rejoices that he is saved, but ignores his wife.
* He goes on to forgive her at great length, while she changes her clothes.
* Nora emerges in everyday dress and says that she is leaving him.

Vocabulary:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Domino | A cloak with a hood, a compromise between fancy dress and plain evening wear. |
| Capricious | Wilful and changeable. |
| Mascot | A lucky charm, personal to the owner. |
| Havanas | Cuban cigars, the most expensive kind. |
| Hairpin | In this period, a simple piece of bent wire; women’s elaborate hairstyles required a large number of these. |

Act 3 lecture notes:

# **Knowledge Organiser**

You should endeavour to learn everything included in this Knowledge Organiser. This is not the only thing you need to learn for the exam (!) but will ensure you have got additional information to draw on in your Paper 2. Remember to use all the materials and notes you have been given.

Start testing yourself on the knowledge organiser using the look, cover, say, write and check method for each box. Remember, by learning this earlier it will enter your long term memory and be easier to recall in your exams.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Context** | |
| Arguments raged all over Scandinavia as to whether Nora was right (*‘I believe that before everything else I’m a human being – just as much as you are.. or at any rate I shall try to become one’*) | The play is concerned not just with the status of women, but how society is damaged by refusing them equality with men. All in the house are changed by Nora’s personal journey. |
| By the end of the nineteenth century it had been performed in Germany, France, Britain and the USA although most performances were **modified or censored** as it was considered so shocking. | *A Doll’s House* ‘exploded like a bomb into contemporary life’ (Halvdan Koht, Ibsen’s biographer) |
| The relationship between crime and sickness was debated in the nineteenth century – **Darwinism** suggesting that criminals are unhealthy and will thus die out, rather than people responsible for their actions. Moral invalidity is **satirically** explored in *Erewhon* (1872) a novel by Butler (Ibsen’s contemporary) – the sick are treated as criminals and those who commit crimes are cared for as if they are ill. | In the 1920s *A Doll’s House* was **banned in China**. Jiang Qing (1914-91), later wife of Mao Zedong, was an advocate of rights for women (such as the right not to have their feet bound) and made her name as Nora in the 1935 production, seen as the beginning of cultural modernity in China. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Characters** | |
| Nora | Long and complex female dramatic role, often misunderstood by early audiences. She takes charge of her own growth from the flighty girl in Act 1 to the sober figure in Act 3. Her physical vitality reflects the nature of her inner journey. She becomes aware that her personality has been constructed by others (the **hegemony** of male authority to the **church**). |
| Torvald/ Helmer | A good husband by nineteenth century standards. He is gentle and expresses real anxiety as well as playful exaggeration. He believes he loves Nora and is often playful in spirit. His tragedy is that he doesn’t know himself –he conforms and doesn’t question the rules of society and believes that his titles (‘husband’ and ‘employer’) give him unquestionable wisdom. |
| Mrs Linde | Quiet and polite, a little frail – a **foil t**o Nora and her confidante. She is independent and has a passion for work. She isn’t a passive victim and owns her choices including that of not marrying Krogstad but a wealthier man. |
| Krogstad | Name means ‘**crooked**’ – he begins the play as a stock villain. He refuses to discuss the morality of Nora’s crime, what matters is the transgression not the motive. He doesn’t see Helmer as a moral superior and fights to keep his job for his children. He feels contempt for Helmer but not Nora. He becomes decisive once he knows Mrs Linde loves him. |
| Dr Rank | Shares Voltaire’s (French writer and philosopher) cynical approach to life. Acts as a detached observer, offering advice to the **protagonists** but not changing the course of the action. He is an ‘honest man’ cut off from participating fully in life because of the moral sickness of his father. He has a fantasy of being Nora’s husband. |
| The Nurse (Anna-Maria) | A few lines but an important role; the children are happy around her and Nora respects her and her domain, asking permission to remove the children’s coats. She feels proud of Nora’s beauty as she gets ready for the party. She has suffered most of all the characters, experiencing poverty and disgrace and having to give up her own child. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Synopsis** | |
| Act 1 | Set on **Christmas Eve**. Torvald is concerned about Nora’s extravagance who eats sweets and wants money for Christmas. Mrs Linde arrives and wants Nora to influence Torvald to get her a job at the bank. Krogstad arrives, he is facing redundancy at the bank. He blackmails Nora to use her influence to help him, or he will reveal the loan she took. Torvald condemns liars and *“lying mothers”.* |
| Act 2 | **Christmas Day.** Nora tries to intercede for Krogstad before Torvald becomes angry. He recalls the shoddy reputation of Nora’s father and sends Krogstad a letter of dismissal promising he is *“man enough”* to deal with any trouble.  Dr Rank tells Nora he is dying from syphilis and declares his love for her.  Krogstad leaves a note in the letterbox telling Torvald everything. Nora considers suicide and confides in Mrs Linde. |
| Act 3 | **The party is going on upstairs**. Krogstad and Mrs Linde rekindle their love, she believes the truth must come out for the sake of Nora and Torvald. After the party Torvald wants to make love with Nora. Dr Rank arrives to tell Nora he is now in the final stages of the disease and leaves two calling cards with black crosses on them. Nora tells Torvald off for being insensitive as he wants to continue, she tells him to read all his letters.  He goes in to a rage when he reads the letter from Krogstad informing Nora their marriage is over but they will pretend to remain respectable. Krogstad sends another letter promising no further action, Torvald thinks he is saved but Nora is disillusioned. Nora tells Torvald he denied her a chance to grow up, she has ceased to love him and leaves slamming the door behind her. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Themes** | |
| The individual and society | A doll’s character is determined by its owner and doesn’t have a role in public. **Existentialism** is the idea that a person is not born with innate characteristics but shapes a self through the choices they make. Nora’s identity is determined by others and eventually chooses not to ‘act out’ the role of mother and wife but to leave. |
| Death, disease and heredity | Helmer thinks Nora’s requests for money are hereditary and doesn’t waver from the **Darwinism** idea that physical and moral qualities can be inherited. Dr Rank does not feel anger at his father (unlike Nora who judges him *‘a horrible man’*) and is surprisingly forgiving, angry only an the unjustness of hereditary disease. Helmer and Rank use the **metaphor** of corrupt behaviour as moral sickness. Helmer thinks it spreads around the home; Rank thinks that society should act with limited compassion with ‘moral invalids’; Mrs Linde argues society is responsible to care for those who are ‘sick’ in this way. The play has graphic images of death from Rank, Nora and Krogstad. |
| Theatricality | Ibsen told his actors to avoid ‘theatrical accents’ and to copy the life they saw around them. When Helmer and Nora are most conscious they are performing they express themselves and their relationship most clearly (e.g. the fancy dress party). Following the dance Nora is able to express the role performance has played in her life, her flirtatiousness and games mean she has hidden herself from her husband and doesn’t know who she is anymore. |
| Money | Nora borrowed twelve hundred dollars to save her husband’s life – it is represented by a piece of paper that shows her crime. Her criminal act bought her out of the domestic sphere and into the world of money, which belongs to men. Helmer is quick to condemn Nora because he is afraid of the power of money. |
| The Law | The contemporary judicial system was particularly male. Ibsen said *“… with laws written by men and prosecutors and judges who regard feminine conduct from a masculine point of view.”* Nora’s views on laws taking in to account motives is radical and feminist. The fact she suggests what laws should be like is revolutionary. |
| Morality | Ibsen undermines a didactic moral view and a didactic society (i.e. the protagonist should be punished for what they have done, but they aren’t). There are contradictions between the conservative and Christian idea of moral causality and the radical liberalism of the value system that Ibsen uses in the play. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Dramatic points** | |
| *A Doll’s House* can be considered one of the first **naturalist** plays. It was radical and original by showing a slice of real life. | **Symbolism** is used in Nora’s tarantella – it reveals Nora’s inner conflict through the wildness of her dance and shows Nora as a work of art for her husband to stare at and enjoy. |
| *A Doll’s House* rejected **romanticism** through realistic stage sets; a less declamatory acting style and; a realistic situation. | Ibsen told his friends that Nora’s name was actually a pet name for Leonora. This means she is never once addressed as an adult in the play. |
| Clearly a Norwegian play – the imagery when contemplating suicide are dark and icy; the conversation with Dr Rank in Act 2 showing mutual sorrow is set in the darkness of a wintry day in the north. | *A Doll’s House* follows Scribe’s prescription for a **well made play.** The **exposition** sets up the situation, the **development and complication** in Act 2 shows Nora’s trouble and her tarantella to delay the inevitable is a **strong curtain.** Act 3 moves towards the **climax**, a possible **resolution** is hinted at. At the **denouement** all secrets are revealed before a **reversal of expectation** when Nora announces she is leaving her marriage. |
| A contemporary commentator at the time wrote of the ending that when Nora leaves “*that slammed door reverberated across the roof of the world”.* |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Social and political protest** | |
| Power and powerlessness | Torvald represents an authoritative masculine middle class who asserts power even by forgiving Nora. When Nora leaves, she asserts her power. |
| Respectability | Fears over reputations being ruined by the decisions that have been made. |
| The power of money | Money is how control is asserted and the characters’ lack of money and need for money drives much of the action. |
| Rebellion | Nora’s dramatic exit demonstrates rebellion against oppression and control. |
| Setting | A domestic setting in one room. It shows the oppression and repression in day to day life and demonstrates the focus of the middle classes of ‘keeping up appearances’. |
| Social commentary | *A Doll’s House* reflects Ibsen’s concerns about women’s rights and explores how ‘free’ people can be oppressed by social expectations and what sacrifices might need to be made to be truly free. |

*\*From Jencefauxpas on TES*