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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Hedda Gabler

by Henrik Ibsen

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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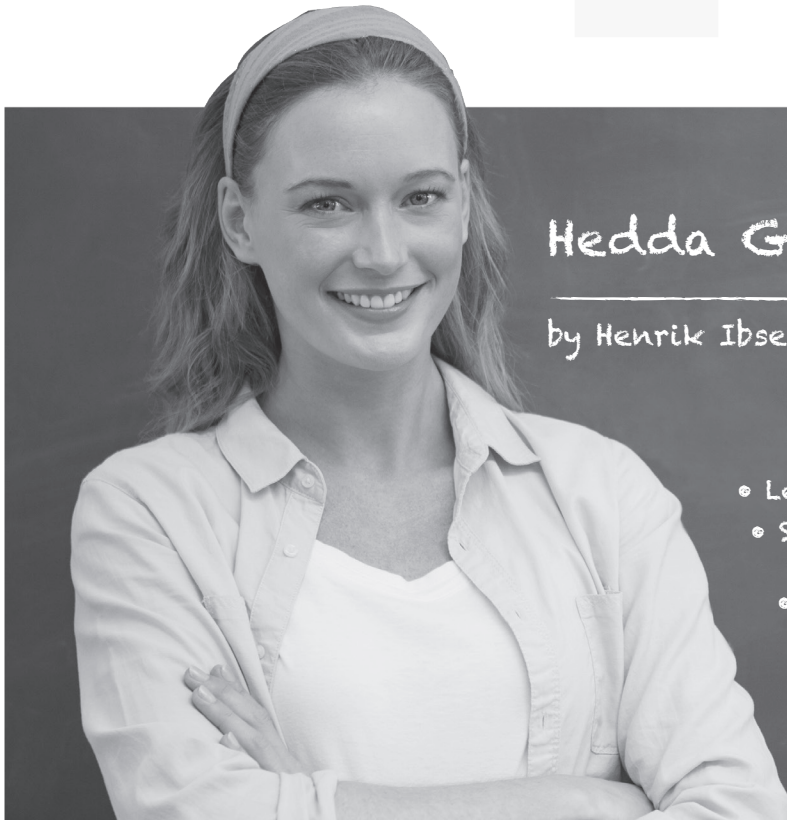
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P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938
www.prestwickhouse.com
800.932.4593

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Hedda Gabler

Note to the Teacher

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) popularized a new form of drama during his career that was shocking to his audiences and critics. Instead of light drama about forgettable characters, Ibsen conducted a dramatic search for the reality of middle class life. He used short, expressive words and realistic dialogue to show how men and women were being oppressed, not by the unrelenting forces of the gods and monsters of classicism and romanticism, but by the very realistic forces of their own jealousies and passions.

As people living in the twenty-first century, we may not be able to completely understand why Hedda was driven to do the things she did, but we can see how the lives of unfulfilled people, trapped by the conventions of society or by total immersion in their careers, can still be a problem for the women and men of today. *Hedda Gabler* is a fascinating look at a tragic character in conflict with the raging forces of freedom and oppression.

All references come from the Dover Thrift edition of Hedda Gabler, published 1990.

Hedda Gabler

Objectives

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

1. identify each of the characters, the relationships between them, and what they want in the play.
2. write a character sketch of one of the characters.
3. analyze the writing style of Ibsen and identify his use of realistic dialogue through short, expressive words.
4. give a clear synopsis of the play.
5. identify and discuss the dramatic structure of the play.
6. draw inferences about each of the characters.
7. identify the major themes of the play.
8. identify and discuss Ibsen's use of symbols.
9. explain why the play is titled *Hedda Gabler*, not "Hedda Tesman."
10. define and cite examples of the following literary terms:
 - Foreshadowing
 - Symbol
 - Irony
 - Theme
 - Cliché
11. analyze the difference between the social norms of contemporary women and those of Hedda Gabler's society.
12. explain the role of manipulation in the play.

Hedda Gabler

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. The characters in a play usually have very strong intentions or goals that they strive to achieve in order to feel fulfilled. What are the intentions of each of the major characters in *Hedda Gabler*? Do they achieve these goals?
2. A review of a London production of *Hedda Gabler* from over one hundred years ago said, “Hedda’s soul is a-crawl with the foulest passions of humanity.” Would you say that is an accurate representation of Hedda? Why or why not?
3. *Hedda Gabler* has been called the story of a woman who will not or cannot conform to what her society considers normal for a woman. How does this compare with what society considers “normal” for women today? What has changed? What has remained the same?
4. At the top of Act I, Berta, Aunt Julia, and Tesman talk about Hedda before she arrives. What do you understand about her before she even appears?
5. Tesman has a vocal tic, in which he adds “eh” to many of his lines. What does this tell you about the character of George Tesman?
6. Ibsen has said that he likes to combine comedy and tragedy in the same play. What are some funny moments in the tragedy of *Hedda Gabler*?
7. Provide some examples of the forces of oppression at work in the play. Give examples of the forces of freedom.
8. Dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows something that the characters onstage do not know. Discuss where dramatic irony occurs in the play and how effective it is in building tension and contributing to the rising action.
9. Why do you think that Ibsen called the play “*Hedda Gabler*” and not “*Hedda Tesman*”? Does this choice of title explain anything about the character?
10. Define foreshadowing and provide a few examples that foreshadow the conclusion of the play.
11. Discuss how Ibsen handles each of the following themes:
 - society versus the individual
 - the conflict between ideals and action
 - the struggle for self-realization
 - women in a masculine world.
12. Define *symbol* and discuss Ibsen’s use of symbolism in *Hedda Gabler*.

ACT IV

VOCABULARY

appropriation – taking without the owner's permission, stealing

boudoir – a woman's bedroom

brooding – in deep thought

delirium – a disturbed state of mind, madness

forlorn – sad; lonely

ludicrous – unreasonable; ridiculous

shroud – a cloth that covers the body of the dead

1. Why is Hedda dressed in black at the start of Act IV?

Auntie Rina has died. A point could be made that she is also wearing black for Lövborg because she wants to believe that she has enough power over him to make him commit suicide for her sake. She is wearing black to appear to mourn for Auntie Rina, while really mourning Lövborg.

2. What reason does Hedda give Tesman for burning Lövborg's manuscript?

She tells Tesman that she just could not stand to see anyone eclipsing him (George). She makes it seem like she did it for Tesman's sake, but in reality she did it to force Lövborg to do what she wanted.

3. How does Tesman react to this news?

At first, he is appalled and starts shouting. Then he reasons that she must have a very deep love, a love that literally burns for him. He has never dreamed that she could show her love like that. He is ecstatic.

4. What does Hedda finally tell Tesman in Act IV?

She finally tells him she is pregnant. She cannot actually say the words, however. She hints, hesitates, and tells him to speak to Aunt Julia.

5. What does Judge Brack say has happened to Lövborg?

He tells them that Lövborg shot himself in the chest and is in the hospital "at the point of death."

6. What does Hedda say about Lövborg shooting himself? What are the others' reactions?

Everyone is shocked when she calls it something beautiful, worth doing, and "the one right thing." She tells everyone he had the courage to do what had to be done.

6. What does Hedda say about Lövborg shooting himself? What are the others' reactions?

7. After Judge Brack's news, to what do Tesman and Mrs. Elvsted decide to dedicate their lives?

8. After Tesman and Mrs. Elvsted leave the room, Judge Brack tells Hedda the truth about Lövborg. What actually happened to him?

9. Why is Hedda now in Judge Brack's power?

10. What does Judge Brack suggest Hedda tell the authorities?

11. How does Hedda respond to this?
