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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



An Enemy of the People

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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An Enemy of the People

Objectives

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

1. write a short character sketch for three characters: Dr. Thomas Stockmann, Peter Stockmann, and Hovstad. Explain the role of the character in the play and what the cause and result of his actions were.
2. discuss the idea of persuasion as it relates to the People's Messenger. Relate the idea to modern journalism and media practices.
3. discuss the theme of environmentalism that is part of the plot-vehicle of the play. Explain why Ibsen's use of pollution is well suited as a theme.
4. analyze the relationships between family members. Identify the brother vs. brother conflict between Thomas and Peter and the teacher/student relationship of Thomas and Petra.
5. analyze the writing style of Ibsen. Write about the abruptness of the dialogue and the straightforward narrative.
6. define and find examples of the following literary terms:
 - irony
 - protagonist
 - antagonist
 - metaphor
 - climax
 - conflict
 - simile
 - theme
7. point out how self-preservation controls much of Peter Stockmann's attitudes and actions, in contrast to Dr. Stockmann, who cares very little about his or his own family's situation.
8. explain two of the three types of conflict that occur in the play and find examples of both.
9. understand why the people of the town, especially the powerful and semi-powerful, rally against Dr. Stockmann, despite his having their best interests at heart.

An Enemy of the People

Questions for Essay or Discussion

1. Explain the title An Enemy of the People. To whom does this title refer and why is this character an enemy of the people?
2. Discuss the relationship between Dr. Stockmann and Peter Stockmann. How does their relationship affect the town?
3. What role does the town newspaper the People's Messenger play in the development of the plot?
4. In Act IV Dr. Stockmann and the townspeople argue over who controls the town government: the poor masses or a select group of privileged lawmakers. Which do you think is true in the society in the play and in your own society and why?
5. How would you describe the relationship between Petra and Dr. Stockmann? Is Petra's occupation and belief system like the majority of women in her society?
6. Discuss the environmental issues raised by the play with respect to the time period in which it was originally written and performed.
7. Compare and contrast Hovstad and Aslaksen with particular emphasis on each character's attitude toward the Baths situation.
8. Is the end of the play plausible? Discuss your reaction to the ending including what changes (if any) you would make to Act V?
9. Compare the private and public lives and opinions of Peter and Thomas. In other words, is what they say motivated by what each one truly believes, or is there a personal element in their attacks, strongly held ideas, and duty?

An Enemy of the People

Act I

Vocabulary

acquiesce – to consent or comply
arrack – an alcoholic drink
capital – excellent
duffer – one who attempts to deceive
indefatigable – tireless
infusoria – a disease-causing one-celled organism
mettle – spirit; courage
pagan – one who does not belong to one of the major organized religions
sepulchre – tomb
toddy – a drink made with spirits, hot water, sugar, and a slice of lemon

1. Cite an example of irony in the first act.

2. Why would invalids travel to the town? How could this help the town?

3. What does Peter say is one of Dr. Stockmann's "ingrained" tendencies?

4. Why does Billing think that Dr. Stockmann is anxious over the mail not yet arriving?

5. How does Hovstad counter Dr. Stockmann's argument that the officials in the town are "men of ability and knowledge"?

6. How does the way Hovstad views the pollution problem differ from the way Dr. Stockmann sees it?

7. Who is the mayor of the town?

8. According to Aslaksen, what is the greatest virtue in a citizen?

9. Aslaksen holds what office in the town? How is this important?

10. How long does Peter Stockmann say the renovations on the Baths will take?

11. How would you characterize Dr. Stockmann based on his belief that the mayor and the rest of the authorities will readily go along with the doctor's opinions?

6. How has Mrs. Stockmann's opinion at this point in the play changed from what it was?

7. For what position is Billing campaigning?

8. What is revealed as Hovstad's real motivation for printing the article?

9. How does Petra react to Hovstad's gesture?

10. Is the position of Hovstad and Aslaksen not to print the article genuine or not?

11. Describe how Peter Stockmann persuades Aslaksen and Hovstad to change their opinions about the renovations.

12. What is the reaction of the two newspapermen to the mayor's argument?
