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



A Doll's House

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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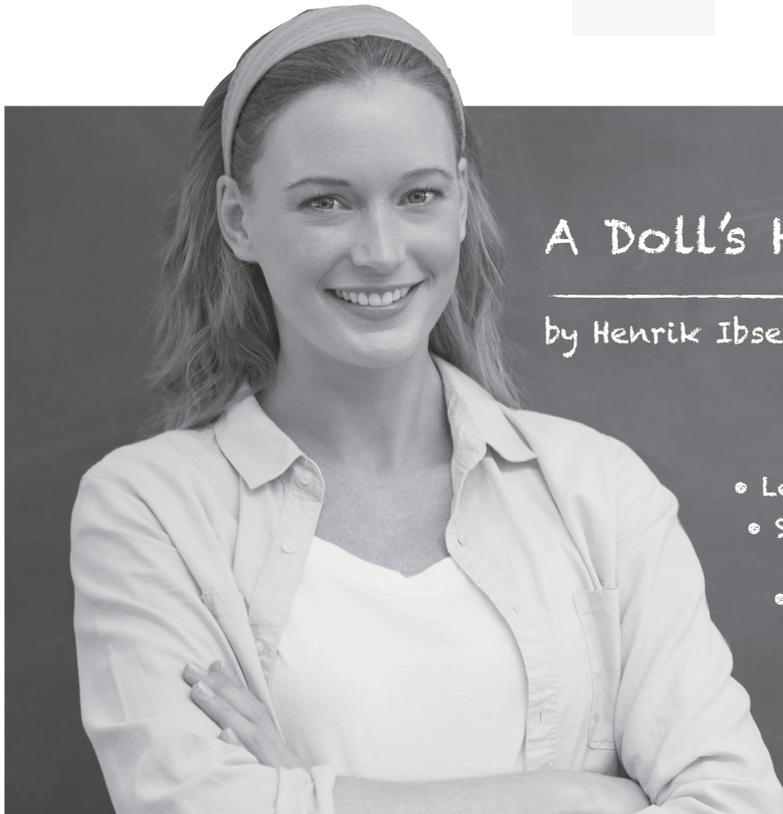
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A Doll's House

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.

A Doll's House

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 at the beginning to talking about her marriage 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.

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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?

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?

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?

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?

16. What does the second letter from Krogstad say?

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?

18. How does Torvald react to the second letter?
