English

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| **Ibsen** |
| **A Doll’s House** |
| 1879 |

1. According to Stephen Flaxman, an expert on Ibsen, *A Doll’s House* raises four major problems: (1) the rights of women, (2) the economic basis of middle-class marriage, (3) the theory of heredity, and (4) the criticism of orthodox religion. Keep these problems in mind during the play to see whether Ibsen expresses any opinions about them or whether, as some critics say, he only asks questions and never answers them.

2. Describe thoroughly, the setting of the play. Include a description of the sets, era, times of day/night, geography, social climate, any functions of the setting that affect the play as a whole. Come to a conclusion.

Act One

3. Explain the **symbolism** of (1) the spring and the blue sky, and (2) the macaroons.

4. Explain the use of **irony** in the first act.

5. Explain Nora’s major speech in the first act (about one-third of the way through, beginning in the Watt translation, “But i couldn’t possibly let him know. Good heavens, don’t you see…).

Act Two

6. Analyze the character of Doctor Rank. Explain as much about his motivation as Ibsen lets us see.

7. Explain Ibsen’s use of Bank to reveal Nora’s character. Begin by listing her character traits that surface in the interview with him.

Act Three

8. Compare and contrast the two relationships Ibsen draws most clearly, Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, and Nora and Helmer. Cite specific lines and incidents from the text as your evidence. Come to a conclusion.

9. Analyze Nora’s reasons for leaving her family. Discuss at least four of the things she “needs to know.”

10. The play finishes with one of the most famous of all endings in drama. It has been called the “closing of the door of the nineteenth century.” Explain why.

The play as a whole

A. Buckner B. Trawick of the University of Alabama says that Ibsen often gains suspense through an analytic method of allowing us to misjudge a character and then to discover his true character. Apply this observation to *A Doll’s House*.

B. Does a person have the right and freedom to do what Nora does? Are duties to husband and children more sacred than duties one might feel to oneself?

Some questions for discussion:

1. What were the Victorian attitudes towards the relationship between a husband and a wife?
2. Is there a difference between the ethical codes of men and those of women? How do you know? If there are, what, specifically, are those differences?
3. Who is the stronger person, Torvald or Nora?
4. What childlike qualities are established for Nora at the very beginning of the play?
5. What values of Nora’s society encourage women to lie? of ours?
6. Explain Nora’s ethical code.
7. On what grounds can Nora be criticized negatively for her actions at the end of the play? On what grounds can her actions be justified?

