*Ibsen*

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| A Doll’s House |

*Some questions from college literature texts*

1. Which elements and aspects of *A Doll’s House* are most realistic? What makes them realistic? Which are least realistic? Why?
2. Consider Ibsen’s use of symbolism in the play, with specific reference to Doctor Rank, macaroons, the Christmas tree (decorated and stripped), the presents, the locked mailbox, the tarantella, Nora’s black shawl, her final change of clothing in act 3, and the slamming of the door at the close of the play.
3. Discuss the extent to which Nora may be considered a victim of circumstances and society or a villain who is responsible for the problems in the play. Which view does Ibsen seem to take? What is your view? Why?
4. Describe the kinds of role-playing that characterize the Helmer marriage. To what degree does Nora play the role that Torvald expects? Is there any evidence to suggest that she knows she is playing a role? What degree of self-awareness, if any, characterizes Torvald’s role-playing?
5. When Nora pleads to have Krogstad reinstated in the bank, Torvald refuses, asking, “is it to get about now that the new manager has changed his mind at his wife’s bidding?” Later, when Torvald has read Krogstad’s first letter, he claims that his marriage has been destroyed, but that he and Nora must “save the remains, the fragments, the appearance.” Discuss Torvald’s character in the light of these and similar statements. What concerns Torvald most about marriage? Life?
6. One of the themes that Ibsen explores in *A Doll’s House* is the idea that weakness and corruption are passed in the blood from generation to generation. Examine this theme in connection with Krogstad and his sons, Nora and her children, Nora and her father, and Doctor Rank.
7. Discuss the ideas about individual growth, marriage, and social convention that the play explores. How are these ideas developed? How are they related? Which character most closely embodies and expresses Ibsen’s ideas?

*Besides accommodating himself to the conventions of realism in* A Doll’s House*, Ibsen also made the play a cause célèbre by raising questions in it about the rights of women, a subject that was beginning to receive attention in the late nineteenth century.* A Doll’s House*, written in 1879, performed in London (1889) and Paris (1894), attracted attention wherever it played. Nonetheless, Ibsen insisted that the play was less about the rights of women than about human rights generally, less about the particular social conditions responsible for the position of women in nineteenth-century Norway than about the need for individuals of both sexes to treat each other with mutual respect.*

1. Describe Torvald Helmer. What aspects of his character are most evident in the early scenes? Does he give any evidence of having changed by the end of the play? Do you think he is capable of sharing the kind of marriage Nora describes at the end of the play?
2. Evaluate Nora’s behavior. Does she make the right decision in leaving her family? Why or why not?
3. Ibsen has remarked that *A Doll’s House* is more about human rights than women’s rights. What kind of rights do you think he had in mind?
4. *A Doll’s House* has been performed with an alternative ending in which Nora and Torvald are reconciled, and Nora remains with her family. Is this an artistically appropriate and theatrically effective ending? Why or why not?
5. Consider the function of the following characters: Nils Krogstad, Dr. Rank, and Kristine Linde.
6. Examine the play’s plot. How does Ibsen control our responses and arouse our curiosity? Point out places where the tempo or pace of the play changes. What effects do these changes have?
7. Identify two or three visual details or objects that function as symbols, and explain their significance.
8. Choose one scene important for its revelation of character and explain how you would dramatize it.
9. What do you think of the way Helmer addresses Nora? How much are his pet names for her an expression of affection, and how much do they express condescension?
10. What is Nora’s attitude toward money? Is it realistic? Does her attitude toward money point to a significant flaw in her character?
11. What is the dramatic situation? Describe it in terms of Nora as protagonist, her objective, and obstacles.
12. Nora wants to help Mrs. Linde, and yet in certain ways she is unable to comprehend Mrs. Linde’s plight. Cite instances of Nora’s naiveté in her first scene with Mrs. Linde.
13. Describe the differences in character between DR. Rank and Helmer. Why do you suppose Ibsen included Dr. Rank in the story?
14. With the dialogue between Nora and Krogstad at the end of Act I we become aware of the play’s problem. What is it? Why did Nora forget the I.O.U.? Would you have done the same?
15. Is Krogstad a villain? Explain the change of heart in Act III. Does it seem realistic?
16. In Act II Helmer tells Nora “Let what will happen, happen. When the real crisis comes, you will not find me lacking in strength or courage. I am man enough to hear the burden for us both.” How do these words contradict his actions in Act III? What does this contradiction tell you about Helmer’s character?
17. Discuss the irony of Helmer’s response to Krogstad’s first letter. Discuss the irony of his response to the second letter.
18. What is the “miracle” Nora was hoping for?
19. The most famous dialogue in *A Doll’s House* comes near the end of Act III:

*Nora* What do you call my most sacred duties?

*Helmer* Do I have to tell you? Your duties towards your husband, and your children.

*Nora* I have another duty which is equally sacred.

*Helmer* You have not. What on earth could that be?

*Nora* My duty towards myself.

Do you think Nora is right in leaving her husband and children?

1. Discuss the symbolic significance of the play’s title.

***NOTES***