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# Synopsis and Summary of Acts - A Doll's House Study Guide

## Synopsis

A Doll's House traces the awakening of Nora Helmer from her previously unexamined life of domestic, wifely comfort. Having been ruled her whole life by either her father or her husband Torvald, Nora finally comes to question the foundation of everything she has believed in once her marriage is put to the test.

Having borrowed money from a man of ill-repute named Krogstad by forging her father's signature, she was able to pay for a trip to Italy to save her sick husband's life (he was unaware of the loan, believing that the money came from Nora's father.) Since then, she has had to contrive ways to pay back her loan, growing particularly concerned with money and the ways of a complex world.

When the play opens, it is Christmas Eve, and we find that Torvald has just been promoted to manager of the bank, where he will receive a huge wage and be extremely powerful. Nora is thrilled because she thinks that she will finally be able to pay off the loan and be rid of it. Her happiness, however, is marred when an angry Krogstad approaches her. He has just learned that his position at the bank has been promised to Mrs. Linde, an old school friend of Nora's who has recently arrived in town in search of work, and he tells Nora that he will reveal her secret if she does not persuade her husband to let him keep his position. Nora tries to convince Torvald to preserve Krogstad's job, using all of her feminine tricks (which he encourages), but she is unsuccessful. Torvald tells her that Krogstad's morally corrupt nature is physically repulsive to him and impossible to work with. Nora becomes very worried.

The next day, Nora is nervously moving about the house, afraid that Krogstad will appear at any minute. Her anxiety is reduced by being preoccupied with the preparations for a big fancy-dress party that will take place the next night in a neighbor's apartment. When Torvald returns from the bank, she again takes up her pleas on behalf of Krogstad. This time, Torvald not only refuses but also sends off the notice of termination that he has already prepared for Krogstad, reassuring a scared Nora that he will take upon himself any bad things that befall them as a result. Nora is extremely moved by this comment. She begins to consider the possibility of this episode transforming their marriage for the better—as well as the possibility of suicide.

Meanwhile, she converses and flirts with a willing Dr. Rank. Learning that he is rapidly dying, she has an intimate conversation with him that culminates in him professing his love for her just before she is able to ask him for financial help. His words stop her, and she steers the conversation back to safer ground. Their talk is interrupted by the announcement of Krogstad's presence. Nora asks Dr. Rank to leave and has Krogstad brought in.

Krogstad tells her that he has had a change of heart and that, though he will keep the bond, he will not reveal her to the public. Instead, he wants to give Torvald a note explaining the matter so that Torvald will be pressed to help Krogstad rehabilitate himself and keep his position at the bank. Nora protests against Torvald's involvement, but Krogstad drops the letter in Torvald's letterbox anyway, much to Nora's horror. Nora exclaims aloud that she and Torvald are lost. Still, she tries to use her charms to prevent Torvald from reading the letter, luring him away from business by begging him to help her with the tarantella for the next night's party. He agrees to put off business until the next day. The letter remains in the letterbox.

The next night, before Torvald and Nora return from the ball, Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, who are old lovers, reunite in the Helmers' living room. Mrs. Linde asks to take care of Krogstad and his children and to help him become the better man that he knows he is capable of becoming. The Helmers return from the ball as Mrs. Linde is leaving (Krogstad has already left), with Torvald nearly dragging Nora into the room. Alone, Torvald tells Nora how much he desires her but is interrupted by Dr. Rank. The doctor, unbeknownst to Torvald, has come by to say his final farewells, as he covertly explains to Nora. After he leaves, Nora is able to deter Torvald from pursuing her any more by reminding him of the ugliness of death that has just come between them, Nora having revealed Dr. Rank's secret. Seeing that Torvald finally has collected his letters, she resigns herself to committing suicide.

As she is leaving, though, Torvald stops her. He has just read Krogstad's letter and is enraged by its contents. He accuses Nora of ruining his life. He essentially tells her that he plans on forsaking her, contrary to his earlier claim that he would take on everything himself. During his tirade, he is interrupted

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by the maid bearing another note from Krogstad and addressed to Nora. Torvald reads it and becomes overjoyed. Krogstad has had a change of heart and has sent back the bond. Torvald quickly tells Nora that it is all over after all: he has forgiven her, and her pathetic attempt to help him has only made her more endearing than ever.

Seeing Torvald's true character for the first time, Nora sits her husband down to tell him that she is leaving him. After he protests, she explains that he does not love her—and, after tonight, she does not love him. She tells him that, given the suffocating life she has led until now, she owes it to herself to become fully independent and to explore her own character and the world for herself. As she leaves, she reveals to Torvald that she hopes that a "miracle" might occur: that one day, they might be able to unite in real wedlock. The play ends with the door slamming on her way out.

## Summary of Acts

### Act One

Nora Helmer enters her lovely living room laden with packages and a Christmas tree, humming a happy tune and sneaking a macaroon. Her husband, Torvald, greets her with questions about her spending, calling Nora his "little lark," "squirrel," "spendthrift," and "sweet tooth." Nora reminds him that they have no worries since Torvald has just been offered a bank managerial position, but her husband opts for caution. When Torvald inquires what she desires for Christmas, Nora asks for money. Two visitors enter the house: Dr. Rank accompanies Torvald to his study, and Mrs. Linde, an old friend who has been out of touch, joins Nora. The two women share confidences, and Nora reveals that she has hidden more than macaroons from her husband. Due to Torvald's serious illness several years prior, Nora explains, she had to finance a year of recovery in Italy. While she told Torvald that her father had left them the money, Nora actually forged her father's signature and borrowed the money from a lawyer named Krogstad. Justifying her dishonesty by saving Torvald's health and pride, Nora explains that she has been secretly working to pay off the loan, and she is almost free of her debt. Krogstad enters next, hoping to salvage his position at the bank by speaking to Torvald. After Krogstad leaves, Nora is able to talk Torvald into giving Mrs. Linde a position at the bank. Torvald, Dr. Rank, and Mrs. Linde leave, and Nora visits with her three children. Krogstad returns with a threat: Nora must get Torvald to keep Krogstad's position at the bank, or Krogstad will reveal Nora's deception and forgery. Upon Torvald's return, Nora questions him about Krogstad's past, and Torvald explains that Krogstad lost his own reputation due to forgery. Declaring that such a lie "infects the whole life of a home," Helmer returns to his study, leaving Nora anxious but determined.

### Act Two

The curtain rises on the same room the next day, which is Christmas. Nora paces frantically, anxious that Krogstad will return to reveal her forgery to Torvald. The nurse enters with a box of masquerade clothes for the next evening's festivities, and Nora questions her about children who grow up without mothers. Kristine Linde enters, and as she helps Nora repair her masquerade dress, Nora confides in her friend once again. Assuring Kristine that she did not get the money from Dr. Rank, Nora asks Mrs. Linde to play with the children while she speaks to Torvald. Promising "to scamper about and do tricks" if only Torvald would give in, Nora asks her husband to keep Krogstad at the bank. Reminding her that rumors would spread about his wife's influence, Torvald denies Nora's request. When she says his concerns about propriety are "petty," Torvald becomes incensed and sends Krogstad's termination letter to his home. Dr. Rank confides to Nora that he is dying and that he has loved her for years. Unable to ask the doctor for help after his admission, Nora asks for a lamp to be brought in. Krogstad, having received his termination, returns to threaten Nora again, and the two admit that though they have both considered suicide, neither can brave it. Krogstad leaves, but his letter revealing all is clearly heard entering the mail slot. Nora keeps Torvald from reading the letter by begging his help with the tarantella dance she will perform at the masquerade. Dancing frenetically as though her "life were at stake," Nora keeps Torvald occupied re-teaching her the dance. But tomorrow night, she promises him, "then you'll be free."

### Act Three

The act opens, once again, in the Helmer's living room, where Kristine Linde awaits the Helmers' return from the party upstairs. Nora has just danced the tarantella. As Mrs. Linde waits, Krogstad arrives at her request. Kristine asks Krogstad to give them a second chance at a relationship. Krogstad agrees,

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promising to retrieve his letter of revelation, but Kristine convinces him to let the truth come to light for the good of both Nora and Torvald. The Helmers arrive from the party, Kristine leaves, and Torvald's amorous mood is interrupted by a visit from Dr. Rank, who leaves his calling card marked by the black cross that announces his impending death. Helmer tells Nora that he has often wished for some danger to befall her so that he can rescue her, and Nora seizes this opportunity to encourage Torvald to read Krogstad's letter. Torvald reads it and immediately chastises Nora, claiming she has wrecked his happiness and ruined his future. Torvald explains that Nora can stay in the house but will be unfit to raise the children. "From now on," Torvald claims, "happiness doesn't matter; all that matters is . . . the appearance." When a letter arrives including Nora's cancelled debt, Torvald is happy again. But Nora is forever changed by her husband's reaction, and after removing her masquerade costume, she sits down with Torvald to share the first serious conversation of their eight year marriage. Declaring she has been "wronged greatly" by both her father and her husband, Nora compares her existence in their homes to a doll in a doll house. When Torvald declares his wife cannot leave because her husband and children are her "most sacred duties," Nora responds with "I have other duties equally sacred. . . . Before all else, I'm a human being." Nora is determined to remain strangers unless "the greatest miracle of all" could happen – the ability to live together in a "true marriage." Nora departs, and the audience is left with the sound of a door slamming shut.

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# Themes, Motifs & Symbols - A Doll's House Study Guide

## Themes, Motifs & Symbols

### Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

#### **The Sacrificial Role of Women / Role of women in the society**

In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen paints a bleak picture of the sacrificial role held by women of all economic classes in his society. In general, the play's female characters exemplify Nora's assertion (spoken to Torvald in Act Three) that even though men refuse to sacrifice their integrity, "hundreds of thousands of women have." The following points show how women sacrifice in this society.

- In order to support her mother and two brothers, Mrs. Linde found it necessary to abandon Krogstad, her true—but penniless—love, and marry a richer man.
- The nanny had to abandon her own child to support herself by working as Nora's (and then as Nora's children's) caretaker. As she tells Nora, the nanny considers herself lucky to have found the job, since she was "a poor girl who'd been led astray."
- Though Nora is economically advantaged in comparison to the play's other female characters, she nevertheless leads a difficult life because society dictates that Torvald be the marriage's dominant partner.
- Torvald issues decrees and condescends to Nora, and Nora must hide her loan from him because she knows Torvald could never accept the idea that his wife (or any other woman) had helped save his life.
- Furthermore, she must work in secret to pay off her loan because it is illegal for a woman to obtain a loan without her husband's permission. By motivating Nora's deception, the attitudes of Torvald—and society—leave Nora vulnerable to Krogstad's blackmail.
- Nora's abandonment of her children can also be interpreted as an act of self-sacrifice. Despite Nora's great love for her children—manifested by her interaction with them and her great fear of corrupting them—she chooses to leave them. Nora truly believes that the nanny will be a better mother and that leaving her children is in their best interest.

#### **Parental and Filial Obligations**

Nora, Torvald, and Dr. Rank each express the belief that a parent is obligated to be honest and upstanding, because a parent's immorality is passed on to his or her children like a disease. In fact, Dr. Rank does have a disease that is the result of his father's depravity. Dr. Rank implies that his father's immorality—his many affairs with women—led him to contract a venereal disease that he passed on to his son, causing Dr. Rank to suffer for his father's misdeeds. Torvald voices the idea that one's parents determine one's moral character when he tells Nora, "Nearly all young criminals had lying -mothers." He also refuses to allow Nora to interact with their children after he learns of her deceit, for fear that she will corrupt them. Yet, the play suggests that children too are obligated to protect their parents. Nora recognized this obligation, but she ignored it, choosing to be with—and sacrifice herself for—her sick husband instead of her sick father. Mrs. Linde, on the other hand, abandoned her hopes of being with Krogstad and undertook years of labor in order to tend to her sick mother. Ibsen does not pass judgment on either woman's decision, but he does use the idea of a child's debt to her parent to demonstrate the complexity and reciprocal nature of familial obligations.

#### **The Unreliability of Appearances**

Over the course of *A Doll's House*, appearances prove to be misleading veneers that mask the reality of the play's characters and -situations. Our first impressions of Nora, Torvald, and Krogstad are all eventually undercut. Nora initially seems a silly, childish woman, but as the play progresses, we see that

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she is intelligent, motivated, and, by the play's conclusion, a strongwilled, independent thinker. Torvald, though he plays the part of the strong, benevolent husband, reveals himself to be cowardly, petty, and selfish when he fears that Krogstad may expose him to scandal. Krogstad too reveals himself to be a much more sympathetic and merciful character than he first appears to be. The play's climax is largely a matter of resolving identity confusion—we see Krogstad as an earnest lover, Nora as an intelligent, brave woman, and Torvald as a simpering, sad man.

Situations too are misinterpreted both by us and by the characters. The seeming hatred between Mrs. Linde and Krogstad turns out to be love. Nora's creditor turns out to be Krogstad and not, as we and Mrs. Linde suppose, Dr. Rank. Dr. Rank, to Nora's and our surprise, confesses that he is in love with her. The seemingly villainous Krogstad repents and returns Nora's contract to her, while the seemingly kindhearted Mrs. Linde ceases to help Nora and forces Torvald's discovery of Nora's secret.

The instability of appearances within the Helmer household at the play's end results from Torvald's devotion to an image at the expense of the creation of true happiness. Because Torvald craves respect from his employees, friends, and wife, status and image are important to him. Any disrespect—when Nora calls him petty and when Krogstad calls him by his first name, for example—angers Torvald greatly. By the end of the play, we see that Torvald's obsession with controlling his home's appearance and his repeated suppression and denial of reality have harmed his family and his happiness irreparably.

## **Marriage as an Unequal Partnership**

At the heart of *A Doll's House* is the marriage between Nora and Torvald—one fairly typical of the era. Is it a good or exemplary marriage? Is it an equitable relationship for the woman?

A close analysis of the dialogue shows a very unequal relationship with Torvald holding all the power. In fact, the interactions between husband and wife serve a specific purpose: they illustrate the banality of the discourse between the two. Torvald does not address his wife regarding any subject of substance. Instead, he bestows her with pet names that often begin with the personal pronoun "my" and often include the diminutive "little": "Is that my little lark?" In this respect, Torvald may think he is flattering his wife. However, he is actually reducing her to a cute, harmless pet—one that is clearly owned.

And like a pet, Nora is expected to obey her owner/husband and his petty tyrannical rules: she is forbidden from eating macaroons and must do so on the sly—which she clearly resents. Additionally, when Torvald addresses Nora, he belittles her by constantly bringing up her lack of responsibility with money. Depending on the translation, Nora is "spendthrift," "prodigal" and "little moneybags." All of these terms, spoken affectionately, are passively aggressive.

*A Doll's House* has few stage directions indicating tone of voice, so there is a great deal of freedom in the manner in which the actor can play the part Torvald. He can be played like a patriarchal tyrant or a fatuous, passive-aggressive sexist. The second option is, perhaps, the better choice; Torvald's utter obliviousness to his own oppressive behavior is a driving force in the play. He berates his wife for knowing nothing about worldly matters but, ultimately, is himself unaware of the measures she has taken to save his life. Torvald is so self-centered that he continues to see his wife how he wants her to be or how she fails to be his ideal woman; he never sees the actual woman she is.

## **Materialism**

Torvald in particular focuses on money and material goods rather than people. His sense of manhood depends on his financial independence. He was an unsuccessful barrister because he refused to take "unsavory cases." As a result, he switched jobs to the bank, where he primarily deals with money. For him, money and materialism may be a way to avoid the complications of personal contact.

## **Respect and Reputation**

The men of *A Doll's House* are obsessed with their reputation. Some have good standing in their communities and will do anything to keep it; others have lost their good name and will do anything to get it back. Though the play is set in the living room of a private residence, the public eye is constantly peeking through the curtains.

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## **Disease and Morality**

Dr. Rank has inherited his consumption from his father, who lived a morally questionable life, and in much the same way, Nora worries that her morally reprehensible actions (fraudulently signing her father's name) will infect her children. Corruption, the play suggests, is hereditary. As he does in other plays, such as *The Wild Duck*, Ibsen explores the tension between real life and moral ideals.

## **Higher Moral Values vs. Societal Mores and Laws**

As Nora reveals to Mrs. Linde, she faced a moral crisis at the beginning of her marriage. Unable to procure, in a legal manner, the funds needed to save her husband's life, she resorts to forging her father's name as guarantor of the loan. She places her love and concern for her husband's well-being above the law. Since she diligently works to pay back the loan, the offense does not seem so severe; it is a crime in definition only. In a higher sense, Nora has not acted in an immoral manner.

However, those who adhere to societal standards, like her husband, ultimately have different values. Torvald values social respectability and honor above all else, including actions done out of love. Nora values love over social honor. Consequently, a conflict emerges regarding their prioritization of values.

## **The Unexamined Life is Not Worth Living**

This paraphrase to a Socrates aphorism applies to Torvald and Nora. However, Nora eventually stops to look at herself and her marriage and doesn't like what she sees. So she steps out of her old persona and into a new one, and then walks into an uncertain future. She has begun examining her life.

## **Motifs**

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

## **Nora's Definition of Freedom**

Nora's understanding of the meaning of freedom evolves over the course of the play. In the first act, she believes that she will be totally "free" as soon as she has repaid her debt, because she will have the opportunity to devote herself fully to her domestic responsibilities. After Krogstad blackmails her, however, she reconsiders her conception of freedom and questions whether she is happy in Torvald's house, subjected to his orders and edicts. By the end of the play, Nora seeks a new kind of freedom. She wishes to be relieved of her familial obligations in order to pursue her own ambitions, beliefs, and identity.

## **Letters**

Many of the plot's twists and turns depend upon the writing and reading of letters, which function within the play as the subtext that reveals the true, unpleasant nature of situations obscured by Torvald and Nora's efforts at beautification. Krogstad writes two letters: the first reveals Nora's crime of forgery to Torvald; the second retracts his blackmail threat and returns Nora's promissory note. The first letter, which Krogstad places in Torvald's letterbox near the end of Act Two, represents the truth about Nora's past and initiates the inevitable dissolution of her marriage—as Nora says immediately after Krogstad leaves it, "We are lost." Nora's attempts to stall Torvald from reading the letter represent her continued denial of the true nature of her marriage. The second letter releases Nora from her obligation to Krogstad and represents her release from her obligation to Torvald. Upon reading it, Torvald attempts to return to his and Nora's previous denial of reality, but Nora recognizes that the letters have done more than expose her actions to Torvald; they have exposed the truth about Torvald's selfishness, and she can no longer participate in the illusion of a happy marriage.

Dr. Rank's method of communicating his imminent death is to leave his calling card marked with a black cross in Torvald's letterbox. In an earlier conversation with Nora, Dr. Rank reveals his understanding of Torvald's unwillingness to accept reality when he proclaims, "Torvald is so fastidious, he cannot face up to -anything ugly." By leaving his calling card as a death notice, Dr. Rank politely attempts to keep Torvald

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from the “ugly” truth. Other letters include Mrs. Linde’s note to Krogstad, which initiates her -life-changing meeting with him, and Torvald’s letter of dismissal to Krogstad.

## **Symbols**

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

### **The Christmas Tree**

The Christmas tree, a festive object meant to serve a decorative purpose, symbolizes Nora’s position in her household as a plaything who is pleasing to look at and adds charm to the home. There are several parallels drawn between Nora and the Christmas tree in the play. Just as Nora instructs the maid that the children cannot see the tree until it has been decorated, she tells Torvald that no one can see her in her dress until the evening of the dance. Also, at the beginning of the second act, after Nora’s psychological condition has begun to erode, the stage directions indicate that the Christmas tree is correspondingly “dishevelled.”

### **New Year’s Day**

The action of the play is set at Christmastime, and Nora and Torvald both look forward to New Year’s as the start of a new, happier phase in their lives. In the new year, Torvald will start his new job, and he anticipates with excitement the extra money and admiration the job will bring him. Nora also looks forward to Torvald’s new job, because she will finally be able to repay her secret debt to Krogstad. By the end of the play, however, the nature of the new start that New Year’s represents for Torvald and Nora has changed dramatically. They both must become new people and face radically changed ways of living. Hence, the new year comes to mark the beginning of a truly new and different period in both their lives and their personalities.

### **Dress and Costume**

Nora's fancy dress for the party symbolizes the character she plays in her marriage to Torvald. Take note of when Nora is supposed to be wearing it and for whom. Note too that when she leaves Torvald in the last act, she first changes into different clothes, which suggests the new woman she is to become.

### **The Masquerade Ball**

The masquerade ball that Torvald and Nora attend represents the lies and deceit that people resort to in everyday life. At a masquerade, people hide behind masks. Their true selves cannot be seen through the costume. Nora is hiding behind a mask of lies, keeping the truth from her husband and Dr. Rank. She is pretending and “playing a part” much like people do at a masquerade ball. It is not long after the ball that the mask comes off and the truth is revealed.

### **The Tarantella**

A tarantella is a folk dance from southern Italy that accelerates from its already quick tempo and alternates between major and minor keys. In its constant fluctuation, it is like Nora's character. In this Act, it serves as Nora's last chance to be Torvald's doll, to dance and amuse him. Also, the tarantella is commonly (and falsely) known as a dance that is supposed to rid the dancer of the bite of the tarantula. Applied to the play, its use suggests that Nora is trying to rid herself of the deadly poison of an outside force, however fruitlessly. Rather than alleviating the bite, though, the music and her life only continue to accelerate and spin out of control.

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# CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERISATION - A Doll's House Study Guide

## Character List

### Nora

The protagonist of the play and the wife of Torvald Helmer. Nora initially seems like a playful, naïve child who lacks knowledge of the world outside her home. She does have some worldly experience, however, and the small acts of rebellion in which she engages indicate that she is not as innocent or happy as she appears. She comes to see her position in her marriage with increasing clarity and finds the strength to free herself from her oppressive situation.

### Torvald Helmer

Nora's husband. Torvald delights in his new position at the bank, just as he delights in his position of authority as a husband. He treats Nora like a child, in a manner that is both kind and patronizing. He does not view Nora as an equal but rather as a plaything or doll to be teased and admired. In general, Torvald is overly concerned with his place and status in society, and he allows his emotions to be swayed heavily by the prospect of society's respect and the fear of society's scorn.

### Krogstad

A lawyer who went to school with Torvald and holds a subordinate position at Torvald's bank. Krogstad's character is contradictory: though his bad deeds seem to stem from a desire to protect his children from scorn, he is perfectly willing to use unethical tactics to achieve his goals. His willingness to allow Nora to suffer is despicable, but his claims to feel sympathy for her and the hard circumstances of his own life compel us to sympathize with him to some degree.

### Mrs. Linde

Nora's childhood friend. Kristine Linde is a practical, down-to-earth woman, and her sensible worldview highlights Nora's somewhat childlike outlook on life. Mrs. Linde's account of her life of poverty underscores the privileged nature of the life that Nora leads. Also, we learn that Mrs. Linde took responsibility for her sick parent, whereas Nora abandoned her father when he was ill.

### Dr. Rank

Torvald's best friend. Dr. Rank stands out as the one character in the play who is by and large unconcerned with what others think of him. He is also notable for his stoic acceptance of his fate. Unlike Torvald and Nora, Dr. Rank admits to the diseased nature (literally, in his case) of his life. For the most part, he avoids talking to Torvald about his imminent death out of respect for Torvald's distaste for ugliness.

### Bob, Emmy, and Ivar

Nora and Torvald's three small children. In her brief interaction with her children, Nora shows herself to be a loving mother. When she later refuses to spend time with her children because she fears she may morally corrupt them, Nora acts on her belief that the quality of parenting strongly influences a child's development.

### Anne-Marie

The Helmers' nanny. Though Ibsen doesn't fully develop her character, Anne-Marie seems to be a kindly woman who has genuine affection for Nora. She had to give up her own daughter in order to take the nursing job offered by Nora's father. Thus, she shares with Nora and Mrs. Linde the act of sacrificing her own happiness out of economic necessity.

### Nora's father



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Though Nora's father is dead before the action of the play begins, the characters refer to him throughout the play. Though she clearly loves and admires her father, Nora also comes to blame him for contributing to her subservient position in life.

## Analysis of Major Characters

### Nora Helmer

At the beginning of *A Doll's House*, Nora seems completely happy. She responds affectionately to Torvald's teasing, speaks with excitement about the extra money his new job will provide, and takes pleasure in the company of her children and friends. She does not seem to mind her doll-like existence, in which she is coddled, pampered, and patronized.

As the play progresses, Nora reveals that she is not just a "silly girl," as Torvald calls her. That she understands the business details related to the debt she incurred taking out a loan to preserve Torvald's health indicates that she is intelligent and possesses capacities beyond mere wifedom. Her description of her years of secret labor undertaken to pay off her debt shows her fierce determination and ambition. Additionally, the fact that she was willing to break the law in order to ensure Torvald's health shows her courage.

Krogstad's blackmail and the trauma that follows do not change Nora's nature; they open her eyes to her unfulfilled and underappreciated potential. "I have been performing tricks for you, Torvald," she says during her climactic confrontation with him. Nora comes to realize that in addition to her literal dancing and singing tricks, she has been putting on a show throughout her marriage. She has pretended to be someone she is not in order to fulfill the role that Torvald, her father, and society at large have expected of her.

Torvald's severe and selfish reaction after learning of Nora's deception and forgery is the final catalyst for Nora's awakening. But even in the first act, Nora shows that she is not totally unaware that her life is at odds with her true personality. She defies Torvald in small yet meaningful ways—by eating macaroons and then lying to him about it, for instance. She also swears, apparently just for the pleasure she derives from minor rebellion against societal standards. As the drama unfolds, and as Nora's awareness of the truth about her life grows, her need for rebellion escalates, culminating in her walking out on her husband and children to find independence.

### Torvald Helmer

Torvald embraces the belief that a man's role in marriage is to protect and guide his wife. He clearly enjoys the idea that Nora needs his guidance, and he interacts with her as a father would. He instructs her with trite, moralistic sayings, such as: "A home that depends on loans and debt is not beautiful because it is not free." He is also eager to teach Nora the dance she performs at the costume party. Torvald likes to envision himself as Nora's savior, asking her after the party, "[D]o you know that I've often wished you were facing some terrible dangers so that I could risk life and limb, risk everything, for your sake?"

Although Torvald seizes the power in his relationship with Nora and refers to her as a "girl," it seems that Torvald is actually the weaker and more childlike character. Dr. Rank's explanation for not wanting Torvald to enter his sickroom—"Torvald is so fastidious, he cannot face up to anything ugly"—suggests that Dr. Rank feels Torvald must be sheltered like a child from the realities of the world. Furthermore, Torvald reveals himself to be childishly petty at times. His real objection to working with Krogstad stems not from -deficiencies in Krogstad's moral character but, rather, Krogstad's overly friendly and familiar behavior. Torvald's decision to fire Krogstad stems ultimately from the fact that he feels threatened and offended by Krogstad's failure to pay him the proper respect.

Torvald is very conscious of other people's perceptions of him and of his standing in the community. His explanation for rejecting Nora's request that Krogstad be kept on at the office—that retaining Krogstad would make him "a laughing stock before the entire staff"—shows that he prioritizes his reputation over his wife's desires. Torvald further demonstrates his deep need for society's respect in his reaction to Nora's deception. Although he says that Nora has ruined his happiness and will not be allowed to raise the children, he insists that she remain in the house because his chief concern is saving "the appearance" of

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their household.

## **Krogstad**

Krogstad is the antagonist in *A Doll's House*, but he is not necessarily a villain. Though his willingness to allow Nora's torment to continue is cruel, Krogstad is not without sympathy for her. As he says, "Even money lenders, hacks, well, a man like me, can have a little of what you call feeling, you know." He visits Nora to check on her, and he discourages her from committing suicide. Moreover, Krogstad has reasonable motives for behaving as he does: he wants to keep his job at the bank in order to spare his children from the hardships that come with a spoiled reputation. Unlike Torvald, who seems to desire respect for selfish reasons, Krogstad desires it for his family's sake.

Like Nora, Krogstad is a person who has been wronged by society, and both Nora and Krogstad have committed the same crime: forgery of signatures. Though he did break the law, Krogstad's crime was relatively minor, but society has saddled him with the stigma of being a criminal and prohibited him from moving beyond his past. Additionally, Krogstad's claim that his immoral behavior began when Mrs. Linde abandoned him for a man with money so she could provide for her family makes it possible for us to understand Krogstad as a victim of circumstances. One could argue that society forced Mrs. Linde away from Krogstad and thus prompted his crime. Though society's unfair treatment of Krogstad does not justify his actions, it does align him more closely with Nora and therefore tempers our perception of him as a despicable character.

# GENERAL ESSAY QUESTIONS AND SAMPLE ESSAYS WITH ANSWERS

## - A Doll's House

### 1. How could the submissive, selfish and silly Nora of the first two acts transform herself into an independent woman by the end of the last act? Is the transformation realistic?

While Nora puts on a convincing performance of being a submissive, selfish and foolish woman during the first act, there are early signs that this is not the real her. When she asks Torvald for more money despite having just been on a spending spree, she appears selfish and grasping. But we soon discover, in her conversation with Mrs Linde, that she is not squandering the money to satisfy her own desires, but using it to pay off the loan she took out in order to save her husband's life. In doing so, she has denied herself new things so that her husband and children can have all they need. Her arranging the loan and the trip to Italy - and her subsequent careful management of money and of her secret - show an astonishing strength of character. In addition, she secretly takes jobs to pay off the loan, a step towards the independence she finally embraces. But in the first two acts, Nora does not dare to acknowledge her own strength, let alone use it. There are many reasons for this. Chief among them are that her beloved Torvald, and society in general, would not comfortably countenance such strength in a woman. So it is easier for Nora to keep her head below the parapet rather than risk the consequences of showing herself as she is.

Nora's submissiveness to Torvald is not all it seems. By playing the doll-child according to his wishes, she manipulates him into the role of indulgent father-figure. But in spite of her skill at 'managing' him, there is one instance in which she desperately wants him to adopt the manly and dominant role: she wants him to rescue her from the ruin caused by Krogstad's revelations. When he fails to provide the strength she needs, she realizes that she no longer loves him, as he is not the man she thought him. It is almost inevitable that she is forced to find that strength within herself. Her realization that she wants to pursue her independence is not so much a transformation as an awakening to a strength she has possessed all along.

### 2. In what way does A Doll's House explore social issues?

A Doll's House shines a searchlight on Victorian society, drawing attention to its hypocrisy and use of public opinion to suppress individuality. The critic Bjorn Hemmer, in an essay in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, wrote: "The people who live in such a society know the weight of 'public opinion' and of all those agencies which keep watch over society's 'law and order': the norms, the conventions and the traditions which in essence belong to the past but which continue into the present and there thwart individual liberty in a variety of ways."

Torvald lives by society's norms, and when faced with a choice of whether to support his wife or society, he sides with society. When he realizes that she has broken the law in forging her father's signature on the loan document, he never questions the morality of such a law: it is left to Nora to do that. His aim is to preserve the appearance of respectability and ensure his continued acceptance in society. He has become so shaped by society's conventions that he cannot see his wife's suffering. In *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, Gail Finney writes that in Ibsen's own notes for this play, he notes that a mother in modern society is "like certain insects who go away and die when she has done her duty in the propagation of the race." This view is confirmed by Torvald's rejection of Nora when he discovers her secret; he says she is not fit to bring up their children if her reputation is tarnished. For Torvald, public life has obscured and overtaken private self. In order to find out who she is and what she wants, Nora has to reject the life that society prescribes

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for her as a wife and mother, and strike out on her own. "I am going to see," she tells Torvald in Act 3, "who is right, the world or I."

But this is not simple. The nineteenth century saw a huge shift from the old social order of self-improvement within a stable rural society to a new social order founded on money. But women at the time could not control money without the authority of the man who 'owned' them, be it husband, brother or father. Single and lone women like Mrs Linde had more control over their lives and money than married women, who were discouraged from taking jobs and had to surrender money matters to their husbands. But as Mrs Linde's story shows, having no male 'provider' brought its own problems.

In sum, women had little power. Power lay with people like Torvald, who is a banker and lawyer. Torvald is able to dictate the fate not only of his family but of Mrs Linde (by giving her a job) and Krogstad (by giving away his job). He is gratified by the prospect of sacking Krogstad because he disapproves of his morality. In effect, the Torvalds of this world defined morality. As we have seen with regard to Nora's crime, they also defined the law, and therefore, who was a criminal. It is worth noting that Ibsen based the episode of Nora's forgery on a similar 'crime' committed by a female friend of his, which ended tragically for her, so he was drawing attention to what he saw as a genuine social problem. He supported economic reform that would protect women's property and befriended European feminists.

Other social issues addressed in the play include how women should be educated, both for the responsibilities of family and for self-fulfillment; the right of women to define their role in the family and society; the degrading effects of poverty on self-fulfillment (as with Mrs Linde and the Nurse); and the scourge of venereal disease (as suffered by Dr Rank).

### **3. How do different characters use the words "free" and "freedom"? How does the use of these words change throughout the play?**

It is Torvald who introduces the concept of freedom in the play, claiming that "There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt." He defines freedom in economic terms, as befits an age where power depended upon money. He is also adopting society's values, as debt was disapproved of and considered a sign of moral degeneracy. The dramatic irony behind his words lies in the fact that Torvald would not have any life at all if his wife had not gone into debt, though he does not realize this.

Like Torvald, Krogstad sees freedom as moral respectability in the eyes of society. His job at the bank is the means by which he will "cut [himself] free" from the stigma of his "indiscretion" of forgery. The problem with this approach is that his "freedom" depends upon the whim of his employer, who also sits in moral judgment on him and can withdraw his job if he finds that he falls short in that respect.

Mrs Linde feels proud that by working hard, she was able to support her brothers and mother, and "I was privileged to make the end of my mother's life almost free from care." Like Torvald, she is defining freedom in economic terms. But she is operating at a lower economic level than he is. She is talking of being able to provide the necessities of life, whereas he is talking of the relative luxury of being free from debt.

In Act 1, Nora is delighted that soon she will have paid off her debt to Krogstad and will be "free

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from care, quite free from care; to be able to play and romp with the children; to be able to keep the house beautifully and have everything just as Torvald likes it!" At this point, she defines her freedom in terms of the very things that (as she later realizes) restrict her: her role as a submissive wife and mother.

By the end of Act 2, Krogstad's letter revealing Nora's debt and forgery of her father's signature is sitting in Torvald's letterbox. Nora, who fears yet hopes that Torvald will shield her by taking the entire blame upon himself, means to disappear or commit suicide, thereby saving him from disgrace. She tells him: "Then you will be free." Thus Torvald will maintain his respectability by means of Nora's obliterating herself from his world.

At the end of the play, Nora has been awakened to Torvald's narrow-mindedness and no longer sees freedom in terms of bondage to him or obliteration of herself. On the contrary, she defines freedom for herself and Torvald as complete independence from each other, as she leaves the marriage to forge a new life for herself: "I set you free from all your obligations. You are not to feel yourself bound in the slightest way, any more than I shall. There must be perfect freedom on both sides."

#### **4. Compare Torvald's and Nora's attitudes toward money.**

Torvald and Nora's first conversation establishes Torvald as the member of the household who makes and controls the money and Nora as the one who spends it. Torvald repeatedly teases Nora about her spending, and at one point Mrs. Linde points out that Nora was a big spender in her younger days. These initial comments paint Nora as a shallow woman who is overly concerned with material delights. Yet Nora's generous tip to the porter in the play's opening scene shows that she is not a selfish woman. More important, once the secret of Nora's loan is made known to the audience, we see that Nora's interest in money stems more from her concern for her family's welfare than from petty desires. We realize that the excitement she has expressed over Torvald's new, well-paying job results from the fact that more spending money means she can finally pay off her debt to Krogstad.

While Torvald seems less enthralled by money because he doesn't talk about it except to chastise Nora for her spending, he is obsessed with having a beautiful home, including a beautiful wife. He considers these things important to his reputation, and keeping up this reputation requires money. Although Torvald accuses Nora of wasting money, Nora spends her money mostly on worthy causes, whereas Torvald uses his for selfish, shallow purposes.

#### **5. Why does Torvald constantly reprimand Nora for her wastefulness and foolishness while simultaneously supporting her behavior? What insight does this contradiction give us into Torvald and Nora's relationship?**

Torvald perceives Nora as a foolish woman who is ignorant of the way society works, but he likes Nora's foolishness and ignorance because they render her helpless and therefore dependent on him. It soon becomes clear to us that Nora's dependence, not Torvald's love for Nora as a person, forms the foundation of Torvald's affection for her. In Act One, Torvald teases Nora about wasting money but then tries to please her by graciously giving her more. Similarly, he points out her faults but then says he doesn't want her to change a bit. He clearly enjoys keeping Nora in a position where she cannot function in the world without him, even if it means that she remains foolish.

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In general, Torvald disapproves of any kind of change in Nora's constant, obedient demeanor because he needs to control her behavior. When Nora begins to dance the tarantella wildly in Act Two, he is unsettled. In Act One, Nora says that it would humiliate Torvald if he knew he was secretly in debt to her for his life, indicating that Torvald wants the power in his marriage to be one-sided rather than mutual.

## 6. Compare and contrast Mrs. Linde and Nora at the end of the play.

By the end of Act Three, both Nora and Mrs. Linde have entered new phases in their lives. Nora has chosen to abandon her children and her husband because she wants independence from her roles as mother and wife. In contrast, Mrs. Linde has chosen to abandon her independence to marry Krogstad and take care of his family. She likes having people depend on her, and independence does not seem to fulfill her. Despite their apparent opposition, both Nora's and Mrs. Linde's decisions allow them to fulfill their respective personal desires. They have both chosen their own fates, freely and without male influence. Ibsen seems to feel that the nature of their choices is not as important as the fact that both women make the choices themselves.

7. Using specific examples, discuss how Ibsen's "progress from one work to the other" is due to a "perpetual scrutiny of the same general questions regarded from different points of view."
8. Do you feel that Ibsen's drama is "dated"? To defend your view, cite dramatic themes in these plays which you consider to be universal, or limited in scope.
9. Show how the first act forewarns the audience of almost all the forthcoming events in the rest of the drama.
10. Point out some instances where Ibsen is able to "externalize" inner problems by using effective symbols.
11. At least one character in each play prefers an imaginary view of life to a realistic viewpoint. With this in mind, discuss the life-view of Torvald Helmer.
12. In what ways does the vocation of Torvald Helmer provide additional insight into his character?
13. Devise an alternative ending for A Doll's House, trying not to violate Ibsen's dramatic thesis. Defend either your new conclusion or the inviolability of Ibsen's original ending.
14. Explain the symbolic significance of hereditary disease in A Doll's House.
15. Do today's women face the same sort of barriers that women did in Nora's time?
16. In what ways is Torvald caged by societal expectations? What about the other men in the play? Krogstad? Dr. Rank?
17. What is important about the title? Who is the "doll" Ibsen refers to?
18. Who is the more significant female character in terms of plot development, Nora or Kristine? Explain your answer.
19. Do you think Kristine's decision not to prevent Krogstad from revealing the truth to Torvald is a betrayal of Nora? Does this act ultimately hurt or benefit Nora?
20. How does Henrik Ibsen reveal character in A Doll's House? Is Nora a sympathetic character? Did your opinion of Nora change from the beginning of the play to its conclusion?
21. Does the play end the way you expected? Do you think this was a happy ending?
22. A Doll's House is generally considered a feminist work. Do you agree with this characterization? Why or why not?
23. How essential is the setting, both in terms of time period and location? Could the play have taken place anywhere else? Would the final outcome have had the same impact if A Doll's House had been set in the present day? Why or why not?

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24. Knowing that the plot is based on a series of events that happened to a female friend of Ibsen's, did it bother you that he used Laura Kieler's story without it benefiting her?
  25. Which actress would you cast as Nora if you were to stage a production of *A Doll's House*? Who would play Torvald? Why is the choice of actor important to the role? Explain your choices.

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## SAMPLE AND PRACTICE EXCERPTS - A Doll's House Study Guide

Read the extract below and answer the questions that follow. (25 marks)

**Nora:** It's a shame to say that. I do really save all I can.

**Helmer:** (laughing) That's very true, - all you can. But you can't save anything!

**Nora:** (smiling quietly and happily) You haven't any idea how many expenses we skylarks and squirrels have, Torvald.

**Helmer:** You are an odd little soul. Very like your father. You always find some new way of wheedling money out of me, and as soon as you have got it, it seems to melt in your hands. You never know where it has gone. Still, one must take you as you are. It is in the blood: for indeed it is true that you can inherit these things, Nora.

**Nora:** Ah, I wish I had inherited many of papa's qualities.

**Helmer:** And I would not wish you to be anything but just what you are, my little skylark. But do you know, it strikes me that you are looking-rather—what shall I say- rather uneasy today?

**Nora:** do I?

**HELMER:** You do, really. Look straight at me.

**Nora** :(( looks at him) well?

**Helmer:** (wagging his finger at her) Hasn't Miss Sweet Tooth been breaking rules in town today?

**Nora:** No; what makes you think that?

**Helmer:** Hasn't she paid a visit to the confectioner's?

**Nora:** No, I assure you, Torvald-

**Helmer:** Not been nibbling sweets?

**Nora:** No, certainly not.

**Helmer:** Not even take a bite at a macaroon or two?

**Nora:** (going to the table on the right) I shouldn't think of going against your wishes.

**Helmer:** No, I am sure of that: besides, you gave me your word- (Going up to her) Keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself, my darling. They will be revealed tonight when the Christmas tree is lit, no doubt.

**Nora:** Did you remember to invite Doctor Rank?

**Helmer:** No. But there is no need; as a matter of course, he will come to dinner with us. However, I will ask him when he comes this morning. I have ordered some good wine. Nora, you can't think how I am looking forward to this evening.

**Nora:** So am I! And how the children will enjoy themselves, Torvald!

**Helmer:** It is splendid to feel that one has a perfectly a safe appointment, and a big enough income. It is Delightful to think of, isn't it?

**Nora:** It's wonderful!

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- a. Place this extract in its immediate context.( 4 marks)
- b. Explain the dramatic irony in this extract ( 3marks)
- c. Helmer says here" it is splendid to feel that one has a perfectly safe appointment". What is he referring to?
- d. What issues on money and gender emerge in this extract? ( 4 marks)
- e. Identify and illustrate any two ways the playwright has used language to achieve foregrounding in this extract.( 4 marks)
- f. What do we learn about the character of Nora in this extract.( 4 marks)
- g. Imagine you are directing this play. Which quality would you look for in an actor to play the role of Torvald( 2 marks)
- h. Explain the meaning of the following expressions as used in the extract? (3 marks)
  - i. Wheedling money out of me
  - ii. Confectioner's
  - iii. you gave me your word

**Read the extract and answer the questions that follow**

**Nora:** I didn't find it dull.

**Helmer:** (smiling) but there was a precious little, result, Nora.

**Nora:** oh, you shouldn't tease me about that again. How could I help the cat's going in and tearing everything to pieces?

**Helmer:** of course you couldn't, poor little girl. You had the best of intentions to please us all, and that's the main thing. But it is a good thing that our hard times are over.

**Nora:** yes.it is wonderful

**Helmer:** this time I needn't sit here and be dull all alone and you needn't to ruin your dear eyes and your pretty little hands-

**Nora:** (clapping her hands) no, Torvald, I needn't any longer, need i! It's a wonderfully lovely to her you say so! (Taking his arm) now I will tell you how I have been thinking we ought to arrange things. Torvalds. As soon as Christmas is over (a bell rings in the hall.) there's the bell. (She tidies the room). There's someone at the door. What a nuisance!

**Helmer:** if it is a caller, remember I am not at home.

**Maid:** (in the doorway) a lady to see you ma'am. A stranger.

**Nora:** ask her to come in.

**Maid:** (to Helmer) The Doctor came at the same time, sir.

**Helmer:** did he go straight into my room?

**Maid:** yes, sir.

*Questions*

- a. What didn't Nora find dull? ( 2 marks)
- b. What has happened that has made the couple happy?(2 marks)
- c. Discuss two themes evident in this extract.( 4 marks)

- d. There's someone at the door. Add a question tag.( 1 mark)
- e. Who is the lady who has come to see Nora? Why does she want to see Nora?( 4 marks)
- f. How has Torvalds been portrayed in this extract? Write you answer in note form( 4 marks)
- g. Comment on the effectiveness of any style in this extract.(2 marks)
- h. Briefly explain what happens after this extract.( 2 marks)
- i. Explain the meaning of the following expressions as used in this extract.( 4 marks)
  - i. Tease.....
  - .....
  - ii. Dull.....
  - .....
  - iii. Nuisance.....
  - .....
  - iv. A caller.....
  - .....

**Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.**

**Nora:** oh, yes, that one; but this one is another. I ordered it. Torvald mustn't know about it.

**Rank:** oho! Then that was the great secret.

**Nora:** of course. Just go in to him; he is sitting in the inner room. Keep him as long as-

**Rank:** Make your mind easy: I won't let him escape (goes into the Helmer's room)

**Nora:** (to the maid) and he is standing waiting in the kitchen?

**Maid:** yes, he came up the back stairs.

**Nora:** but didn't you tell him no one was in?

**Maid:** yes, but it was no good.

**Nora:** he won't go away?

**Maid:** No; he says he won't until he has seen you ma'am.

**Nora:** well, let him come in- but quietly. You mustn't say anything about it to anyone. It is a surprise to my husband.

**Maid:** yes, ma'am, I quite understand. (Exit)

**Nora:** this dreadful thing is going to happen! It will happen in spite of me! No, no, no, it can't happen- it shan't happen.

- a. Place this extract in its immediate context.( 4 marks)
- b. What is referred to as the 'it' by Nora in the first line? What does it reveal about the character of Nora?( 3 marks)
- c. Explain the use of soliloquy in this extract.( 2 marks)
- d. Who is waiting in the Kitchen and why has he come?( 3 marks)
- e. This dreadful thing is going to happen.( write in reported speech)
- f. Explain one issue depicted in this extract.( 2 marks)
- g. Explain the dreadful thing that Nora fears might happen.
- h. How is the maid depicted in this extract? ( 2 marks)
- i. Explain the meaning of the following expressions as used in the extract.( 4 marks)

- i. Make your mind easy
- ii. I won't let him escape
- iii. It was no good
- iv. Dreadful

**Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow.**

**Krogstad:** Are you sure of that?

**Mrs.Linde:** Quite sure, but-

**Krogstad:** (with a searching look at her) is that what it all means? - That you want to save your friend at any cost? Tell me frankly. Is that it?

**Mrs. Linde:** Nils, a woman who has once sold herself for another's sake doesn't do it a second Time.

**Krogstad:** I will ask for my letter back.

**Mrs.Linde:** No.no.

**Krogstad:** Yes, of course I will. I will wait here until Helmer comes; I will tell him he must give me my letter back. - That it only concerns my dismissal- that he is not to read it-

**Mrs.Linde:** No Nils, you must not recall your letter.

**Krogstad:** But, tell me wasn't it for the very purpose that you asked me to meet you here?

**Mrs. Linde:** In my first moment of fright, it was. But twenty-four hours have elapsed since then, In that time I have witnessed incredible things in this house. Helmer must know all about it. This unhappy secret must know all about it. This unhappy secret must be Disclosed; they must have a complete understanding between them which is impossible With all this concealment and falsehood going on.

**Krogstad:** Very well, if you take this responsibility. But then there is one thing I can do in that Case and I shall do it once.

**Mrs.Linde:** (listening) you must be quick and go. The dance is over; we are not safe a moment Longer.

**Krogstad:** I will wait for you below.

**Mrs.Linde:** yes, do. You must see me back to my door-

**Krogstad:** I have never had such an amazing piece of god fortune in my life.

- a. Explain what has happened before this extract.( 2 marks)
- b. Explain why Krogstad says he would ask for his letter back? ( 3 marks)
- c. 'Nils, a woman who has once sold herself for another's sake doesn't do it second time'. Explain what makes Mrs.Linde say this.( 3 marks)
- d. Make notes on we what we learn about the character of Mrs.Linde in this extract.( 4 marks)
- e. Explain the irony in this extract.(2 marks)
- f. 'But there is one thing I can do in any case and I shall do it at once.' What is that Krogstad does later and how does it affect the rest of the play.( 4 marks)
- g. 'I have never had such an amazing piece of good fortune in my life!' rewrite beginning 'Never...'
- h. What piece of good fortune is Krogstad referring to? ( 2 marks)
- i. Explain the meaning of the following words and phrases as used in this extract?
  - i. At any cost
  - ii. Recall
  - iii. Elapsed

iv. Incredible things

**Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow.**

**Nora:** But it was absolutely necessary that he should not know! My goodness can't you Understand that? It was necessary he should have no idea what a dangerous condition He was in. it was to me that the doctors came and said that his life was in danger And that the only thing to save him was to live in the South. Do you suppose I didn't try?

First of all, to get what I wanted as it were for myself? I told him how much I should love to travel on road like other young wives; I tried tears and entreaties with him; I told him that he ought to remember the condition I was in, and that he ought to be kind and indulgent to me; I even hinted that he might raise a loan. That nearly made him angry Christine. He said I was thoughtless and that it was his duty as my husband not to indulge me in my whims and caprices- as I believe he called them. Very well, I thought, you must be saved- and that was how I came to devise a way out of the difficulty-

**Mrs. Linde:** and did your husband never get to know from your father that the money had come From him?

**Nora:** No, never. Papa died just at that time. I had meant to let him into it. But he was was so ill Then- alas, there was never any need to tell him.

**Mrs. Linde:** and since then have you never told your secret to your husband?

**Nora:** Good heavens, no! How could you think so? A man who has such strong opinion about these things! And besides, how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly independence, to know that he owed me anything! It would upset our mutual relations altogether; our beautiful happy home would no longer be what it is now.

**Mrs. Linde:** Do you mean never to tell him about it?

**Nora:** (meditatively and with half-smile) yes-someday perhaps after many years when I am no longer as nice-looking as I am now. Don't laugh at me! I mean, of course, when Torvald is No longer as devoted to me as he is now; when my dancing and dressing-up and reciting Have paled on him; then it may be a good thing to have something in the reserve- (Breaking off) what nonsense! That time will never come. Now what do you think I am of No use? I can tell you, too, that this affair has caused me a lot of worry. It has been by No means easy for me to meet my engagements punctually. I may tell you that there is something that is called, in business, quarterly interest and another thing called?

Payment in installments and it is always dreadfully difficult to manage them. I have had To save a little here and there, where I could, you understand. I have not been able to Put aside much from housekeeping money for Torvald must have a good table. I Couldn't let my children be shabbily dressed: I have felt obliged got use up all he Gave me for them, the sweet little darlings.

- a. Place this extract in its immediate context.( 4 marks)
- b. State and explain any two aspects of style used in this extract. ( 4 marks)
- c. In about 35 words, summarize Nora's reasons for not revealing the secret to Torvald.( 4 marks)
- d. What is the attitude of Mrs.Linde towards Nora in this extract( 3 marks)
- e. Explain two themes evident in this extract.( 4 marks)
- f. Comment on the character of Nora in this extract.( 2 marks)
- g. Explain the meaning of the following words.( 4 marks)
  - i. Indulgent
  - ii. To let him into the secret
  - iii. Put aside
  - iv. Caprices

**Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow.**

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**Mrs. Linde:** is Doctor Rank a man of means?

**Nora:** yes, he is.

**Mrs. Linde:** and has no one to [provide for?

**Nora:** no, no one: but-

**Mrs.Linde:** and comes her every day

**Nora:** yes, I told you so.

**Mrs. Linde:** but how can this well-bred man be so tactless?

**Nora:** I don't understand you at all.

**Mrs. Linde:** Don't prevaricate, Nora. Do you suppose I don't guess who lent you the two? Hundred and fifty pounds?

**Nora:** are you out of your senses? How can you think of such a thing! A friend of ours who Comes here every day! Do you realize what a horribly painful position that would? Be?

**Mrs. Linde:** No, certainly not. It would never have entered into my head for a moment. Besides, he had no money to lend then: he came into his money afterwards.

**Mrs. Linde:** well, I think that was lucky for you, my dear Nora.

**Nora:** no, it would never have come into my head to ask Doctor Rank. Although I am quite sure That if I had asked him.

**Mrs. Linde:** but of course, you won't.

**Nora:** Of course not. I have no reason to think it could possibly be necessary. But I am quite Sure that if I told Doctor Rank-

**Mrs. Linde:** behind your husband's back.

**Nora:** I must make an end of it with the other one, and that will be behind his back too. I must make an end of it with him.

**Mrs.Linde:** yes, that is what I told you yesterday, but-

**Nora:** (walking up and down) a man can put a Thing like that straight much easier than a woman-

**Mrs.Linde:** One's husband, yes.

**Nora:** nonsense! (Standing still) when you pay off a debt you get your bond back, don't you?

**Mrs.Linde:** Yes, as a matter of course.

**Nora:** and can tear it into a hundred thousand pieces, and burn it up- the nasty dirty paper!

**Mrs. Linde:** (looks hard at her, lays down her sewing and gets up slowly) Nora, you are Concealing something from me.

**Nora:** Do I look as if I were?

**Mrs.Linde:** Something has happened to you since yesterday morning. Nora, what's it?

a. What happens immediately after this extract?( 2 marks)

- b. Discuss any two issues brought out in this extract?( 4 marks)
- c. Explain the use of any two dramatic techniques in this extract.( 4 marks)
- d. Linde is said to be laying down her sewing in this extract. What was she sewing and how is relevant to the events in this play.(3 marks)
- e. 'Something has happened to you since yesterday morning.' Rewrite as an interrogative.( 1mark)
- f. What is Nora concealing from Mrs.Linde? explain what happens when Mrs.Linde learns of it later in this extract.( 3 marks)
- g. Give the meaning of the following expressions as used in this extract.
  - i. A man of means
  - ii. Prevaricate
  - iii. I must make an end of it.
  - iv. Concealing

**Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow.**

**Nora:** I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human Being, just as you are- or at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald that most people would think you right and that views of that kind are to be found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.

**Helmer:** can you not understand your place in your own home? Have you not any reliable guide in such matters as that? - have you known religion?

**Nora:** I am afraid, Torvald, I do not exactly what religion is.

**Helmer:** What are you saying?

**Nora:** I know nothing but what the clergyman said when I went to be confirmed. He told us that religion was this and that, and the other. When I am away from all this, and I am alone, I will look into the matter too. I will see if what the clergyman said is true, or at all events if it is true for me.

**Helmer:** This is unheard of in a girl of your age! But if religion cannot lead you aright, let me try and awaken your conscience. I suppose you have some moral sense? Or-answer me- Am I to think you have none?

**Nora:** I assure you, Torvald that is not an easy question to answer. I really don't know. The thing perplexes me all together. I only know that you and I look at it in a quite different light. I am learning, too, that the law is quite another thing from what I suppose; but I find it quite impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it, a woman has no right to spare her old dying father, or to save her husband's life. I can't believe that.

**Helmer:** you talk like a child. You don't understand the conditions of the world in which you live.

**Nora:** No, I don't. But now I am going to try. I am going to see if I can make out who is right, the world or I.

- a. Recount the circumstances leading to the events in this extract.(5 marks)
- b. What is it that Nora doesn't believe any longer?( 2 marks)
- c. How is Torvald depicted in this extract.( 4 marks)
- d. From elsewhere in the play, how is Nora's character portrayed in a different way from the way she is portrayed in this extract.( 2 marks)
- e. Discuss any concern addressed in this extract.( 2 marks)
- f. Why does Helmer ask Nora if she has no religion? ( 2 marks)
- g. Explain the imagery in this extract.( 2 marks)
- h. Describe the mood in this extract.( 2 marks)
- i. What is the meaning of the following expressions as used in this extract.(4 marks)

- i. I am a reasonable being
- ii. Clergyman
- iii. Conscience
- iv. Perplexes

**Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow.**

**Nora:** But you must believe me, Mr.Krogstad: it is not in my power to help you at all.

**Krogstad:** Then it is because you haven't the will; but I have the means to compel you.

**Nora:** You don't mean that you will tell my husband that I owe you money?

**Krogstad:** Hm-suppose I were to tell him?

**Nora:** it would be perfectly infamous of you. (Sobbing) to think of his learning my secret which Has been my joy and pride, in such an ugly, clumsy way-that he should learn it from you! And it would put me in a horribly disagreeable position-

**Krogstad:** only disagreeable?

**Nora:** (impetuously) well, do it then!-and it will be the worse for you. My husband will see for Himself what a blackguard you are, and you certainly won't keep your post then.

**Krogstad:** I asked you if it was only a disagreeable scene at home you were afraid of.

**Nora:** If my husband does get to know of it, of course he will at once pay you what is still owing You and we shall have nothing more to do with you.

**Krogstad:** (coming a step nearer) listen to me, Mrs Helmer. Either you have a bad memory or You know very little of business. I shall be obliged to remind you of a few details.

**Nora:** what do you mean?

- a. 'it is not in my power to help you at all' how is this statement ironic considering earlier events in this play.( 2 marks)
- b. Explain why Krogstad wants Nora to help him( 3 marks)
- c. Why has Nora's secret been her joy and pride, in such an ugly, clumsy way?( 4 marks)
- d. "I asked you if it was only a disagreeable scene at home that you were afraid of?" rewrite in direct speech.
- e. Explain any one theme evident in this extract( 3 marks)
- f. What is Nora's attitude towards Krogstad in this extract?( 3 marks)
- g. Discuss one character trait for each of the following.(4 marks)
- h. Krogstad
- i. Nora
- j. Krogstad tells Nora the he shall be obliged to remind her of a few details. Briefly explain these details.( 3 marks)
- k. Explain the meaning of the following expressions as used in this extract.( 4 marks)
  - i. Compel
  - ii. Infamous
  - iii. Disagreeable
  - iv. Blackguard

**Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow.**

**Mrs. Linde:** Nora-it was Krogstad who lent you the money!

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**Nora:** Yes, and now Torvald will know about it.

**Mrs.Linde:** Believe me, Nora, that's the best thing for both of you.

**Nora:** you don't know all. I forged a name.

**Mrs.Linde:** Good heavens!

**Nora:** I only want to say this to you, Christine- you must be my witness

**Mrs.Linde:** Your witness? What do you mean? What am I to-?

**Nora:** if I should go out of my mind and it might easily happen-

**Mrs. Linde:** Nora!

**Nora:** or anything else should happen to me -anything, for instance, that prevent my being Here-

**Mrs.Linde:** Nora! Nora! You are quite out of your mind.

**Nora:** and if it should happen that there was someone who wanted to take all the responsibility, all the blame, you understand-

**Mrs. Linde:** Yes, yes-but how can you suppose-?

**Nora:** Then you must be my witness, that is not true Christine. I am in my right senses now, and Now I tell you no one else has known anything about it; I and I alone, did the whole thing. Remember that.

**Mrs. Linde:** I will, indeed. But I don't understand all this.

**Nora:** how should you understand it? A wonderful thing is going to happen.

- a. Briefly explain what has just happened before this extract.( 3 marks)
- b. 'Believe me Nora, that's the best thing for both of you.' From elsewhere in the play, which reasons does Mrs.Linde give to support what he says now?( 3 marks)
- c. Explain the dominant theme in this extract( 3 marks)
- d. Explain what tone would be appropriate in reading Nora's parts in this extract.( 2 marks)
- e. From this extract, how has Nora violated social ethics?( 2 marks)
- f. Nora says a wonderful thing is going to happen. From the rest of the play, explain what she means by that?( 3 marks)
- g. Discuss one aspect of style in this extract.( 2 marks)
- h. What do we learn about the character of Mrs.Linde in this context.( 2 marks)
- i. 'I and I alone did the whole thing' Rewrite beginning 'The whole thing...'
- j. Explain the meaning of the following expressions as used in this extract. ( 4 marks)
  - i. Forged
  - ii. Go out of my mind
  - iii. Prevent my being here
  - iv. Right senses

**Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow.**

**Helmer:** miserable creature- what have you done?

**Nora:** let me go. You shall not suffer for my sake. You shall not take it upon yourself.

**Helmer:** No tragic airs, please. (Locks the hall door) here you shall stay and give me explanation. Do you understand what you have done? Answer me! Do you understand what you? nHave done?



**Nora :**( looks steadily at him and says with a growing look of coldness in her face) yes now I am Beginning to understand thoroughly.

**Helmer:** (walking about the room) what a horrible awakening! All these years- she who was my Joy and pride- a hypocrite, a liar-worse, worse -a criminal. The unutterable ugliness Of it all- For shame! (Nora is silent and looks steadily at him. He stops in front of her) I ought to have suspected something of that sort would happen. I ought to have seen it. All your father's want of principle has come out in you. No religion, no morality, no sense of Duty- how I am punished for having winked at what he did! I did it for your sake, and this is How you repay me.

**Nora:** yes, that's just it.

**Helmer:** Now you have destroyed all my happiness. You have ruined all my future. It is horrible To think of! I am in the power of an unscrupulous man; he can do what he likes with me, Ask anything he likes of me, give me any orders he pleases- I dare not refuse. And I Must sink to such miserable depths because of a thoughtless woman.

**Nora:** when I am out of the way, you will be free.

- a. what has happened before this extract( 2 marks)
- b. Explain what Nora means by saying 'you shall not suffer for my sake'( 3 marks)
- c. Describe Helmer's change of attitude towards Nora.( 3 marks)
- d. Describe two character traits of Krogstad from this extract ( 4 marks)
- e. Explain two recurring ideas in this extract ( 4 marks)
- f. Explain the use of satire in this extract.( 2 marks)
- g. 'When I am out of the way, you will be free.' Give two possible meanings of Nora's words considering what happens later in the play.( 2 marks)
- h. 'Here you shall stay and give me an explanation.' Rewrite beginning 'You....'
- i. Explain the meaning of the following expressions as used in the excerpt.( 4 marks)
  - i. Take it upon yourself
  - ii. No tragic airs
  - iii. Your father's want of principle
  - iv. Unscrupulous man

**Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow.**

**Helmer:** (standing at the open door). Yes, do. Try and calm yourself, and make your mind easy again, my frightened little singing bird. Be at rest, and feel secure; I have broad wings to shelter you under. (Walks up and down by the door) how warm and cozy our home is, Nora. Here is The shelter for you; here I will protect you like a hunted dove that I have saved from A hawk's claws; I will bring peace to your poor beating heart. It will come, little by Little, Nora, believe me. Tomorrow morning you will look upon it differently; soon Everything will be just as it was before. Very soon you won't need me to assure You that I have forgiven you; you will yourself feel the certainty that I have done so. Can You suppose I should ever think of such thing as repudiating you, or even reproaching You? You have no idea what a true man's heart is like, Nora. There is something so Indescribably sweet and satisfying, to a man, in the knowledge that he has forgiven his Wife- forgiven her freely, and with all his heart. It seems as if that had made her, as it Doubly his own; and she has in a way become both wife and child to him. So you shall Be for me after this, my little scared helpless darling. Have no anxiety about anything, Nora; Only be frank and open with me, and I will serve as will and conscience both to you- what Is this? Not gone to bed? Have you changed your things?

**Nora:** (in everyday dress) yes, Torvald, I have changed my things now.

**Helmer:** But what for? - So late as this.

**Nora:** I shall not sleep tonight.

**Helmer:** But, my dear Nora-

**Nora:** (looking at her watch) it is not so very late. Sit down here, Torvald. You and I have so much to say to one another. (She sits down at one side of the table)

**Helmer:** Nora-what's this? - This cold, set face?

**Nora:** sit down. It will take some time: I have a lot to talk over with you.

**Helmer:** (sits down at the opposite side of the table) you alarm me, Nora! And I don't understand You.

**Nora:** no, that is just it. You don't understand me, and I have never understood you either -before tonight. No, you mustn't interrupt me. You must simply listen to what I say. Torvald, this is settling of accounts.

**Helmer:** what do you mean by that?

- a. Place this excerpt in its immediate context.( 4 marks)
- b. How is the character of Helmer brought out in this excerpt?( 4 marks)
- c. Comment on the use of imagery in this extract?( 4 marks)
- d. What are the two main issues of concern that are addressed in this extract( 4 marks)
- e. Describe the tone of Torvald in his first line? ( 2 marks)
- f. I shall not sleep tonight. Rewrite in the affirmative.( 1 mark)
- g. Why is Nora in everyday dress? ( 2 marks)
- h. Explain the meaning of the following words as used in excerpt( 4 marks)
  - i. Repudiating
  - ii. Reproaching
  - iii. Indescribably
  - iv. Accounts

**Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow.**

**Nora:** yes, tremendous! A barrister's profession is such an uncertain thing, especially if he won't Unsavory cases; and naturally Torvald has been willing to do that, and I quite agree with Him. You may imagine how pleased we are! He is to take up his work in the bank at the New Year. And then he will have a big salary and lots of commissions. For the future we Can live quite differently- we can do just as we like. I feel so relieved and happy, Christine! It will be splendid to have heaps of money and not need to have any anxiety, Won't it?

**Mrs.Linde:** Yes, anyhow I think it would be delightful to have what one needs.

**Nora:** No, not only what one needs, but heaps and heaps of money.

**Mrs.Linde:** (smiling) Nora. Nora, haven't you learned sense yet? In our schooldays you were a Great spendthrift.

**Nora:** (laughing) yes, that is what Torvalds says now. (Wags her finger at her) but 'Nora, Nora' is Not so silly as you think. We have not been in a position for me to waste money. We have Both had to work.

**Mrs.Linde:** You too?

**Nora:** yes; odds and ends, needlework, crotchetwork, embroidery and that kind of thing (dropping Her voice) and other things as well. You know Torvald left his office when we were Married? There was no prospect of promotion there, and he had to try and earn more than Before. But during the first year he overworked himself dreadfully. You see he had to Make money every way he could, and he worked early and late; but he couldn't stand and Fell dreadfully ill, and the doctors said it was necessary for him to go south.

- a. Explain what happens after this extract.( 2 marks)

- b. Identify and illustrate two character traits of Nora and comment on them( 4 marks)
- c. Identify two aspects of style in this excerpt and comment on their effectiveness.( 4 marks)
- d. Explain two thematic concerns that are addressed in this extract.( 4 marks)
- e. In this extract, Torvalds is portrayed as overworking. Where else is portrayed in a similar way?( 2 marks)
- f. What was Torvald's reaction when Nora told him he needed to go south for treatment? ( 2 marks)
- g. 'There was no prospect of promotion there' rewrite adding a question tag.(1 mark)
- h. Nora says Torvald has been calling her spendthrift. Give two instances where Torvald referred to her as a spendthrift?( 2 marks)
- i. Explain the meaning of the following words as used in this extract.( 4 marks)
  - i. Barrister
  - ii. Unsavoury
  - iii. Prospect
  - iv. Dreadfully

**Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow.**

**Nora:** yes, you could-couldn't you?

**Helmer:** And I hear he is a good worker too. But I knew him when were boys. It was one of those Harsh friendships that so often prove an incubus in afterlife I may as well tell you plainly, We were once on very intimate terms with one another. But this tactless fellow lays no Restraint on himself when other people are present. On the contrary, he thinks it gives Him the right to adopt a familiar one with me and every minute it is ' I say, Helmer, Old Fellow" and that sort of thing I assure you it is extremely painful for me. He would make My position at the bank intolerable.

**Nora:** Torvald, I don't believe you mean that.

**Helmer:** Don't you? Why not?

**Nora:** because it is such a narrow minded way of looking at things.

**Helmer:** What are you saying? Narrow-minded? Do you think I am narrowing minded?

**Nora:** no, just the opposite dear-and it is exactly for that reason.

**Helmer:** It is the same thing. You say my point of view is narrow-minded, so I must Be so too. Narrow0minded! Very well- I must put an end to this. (Goes to the hall and calls) Helen!

**Nora:** what are you going to do?

**Helmer:** (looking among his papers) settle it. (Enter MAID) look here; take this letter and go Downstairs with it at once. Find a messenger and tell him to deliver it, and be quick. The address is on it, here is the money.

**Maid:** very well, sir. (Exit with the letter)

**Helmer:** (putting his papers together) now then, little misses Obstinate.

**Nora:** (breathlessly) Torvald- what was that letter?

**Helmer:** Krogstad's dismissal.

**Nora:** call her back, Torvald. There is still time. Oh Torvald, call her back! Do it for my sake- for Your own sake- for the children's sake! Do you hear me Torvald? Call her back. You don't Know what that letter will bring upon us.

**Helmer:** It's too late.

**Nora:** Yes, it's too late.

**Helmer:** My dear Nora, I can forgive the anxiety you are in, although really it is an insult to me. It is indeed. Isn't it an insult to think that I should be afraid of starving a quill's driver vengeance? But I forgive you nevertheless, because it is such eloquent witness to your great love for me. (Takes her in his arms). And that it should be, my own darling Nora. Come what will, you may be sure that I shall have both courage and strength if they may be needed. You will see I am a man enough to take everything upon myself.

- a. Explain what happens after this extract.( 3 marks)
- b. Comment on two issues addressed in the text.( 4 marks)
- c. State and explain the character trait for each of the two characters in this extract.( 4 marks)
  - i. Torvald
  - ii. Krogstad
- d. Why does Nora want the maid to be called back?( 3 marks)
- e. Identify two literary strategies used in this extract( 4 marks)
- f. Referring to other parts of the text, why can't Torvald work with Krogstad?( 2 marks)
- g. Because it is such a narrow minded way of looking at things' rewrite using narrow mindedly' (1 mark)
- h. Explain the meaning of the following words as used in this extract.(4 marks)
  - i. Intolerable
  - ii. Narrow-minded
  - iii. Obstinate
  - iv. vengeance