



Exploring Senior Cycle Texts

A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen

A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen is a drama included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2027 and 2028. It may be used as part of the Comparative at Ordinary Level or Higher Level.

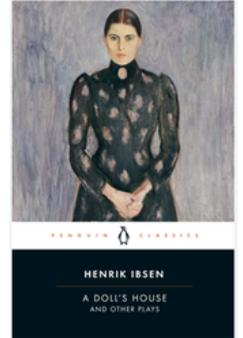


Image courtesy of
Penguin Books

Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons.
- You may like to adapt and adjust the tasks to suit your context.
- *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen covers themes which could be considered sensitive or controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.



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Guide for this Text

Before you read... (Teacher Guidance)

1. Vocabulary preview

Provide key terms from the extract (e.g. spendthrift, skylark, squirrel, allowance etc). Have students predict their meanings and discuss how these words might relate to the characters' relationship.

2. Exploring the title

Show the title *A Doll's House* and tell students the extract involves a wife asking her husband for money. Ask: What might this reveal about their relationship? What tone do you expect — loving, playful, controlling, or something else?

3. Context investigation

In small groups, have students discuss and research what roles men and women were expected to play in 19th-century families compared to today. Information could be presented in Venn diagram form or another suitable format.

4. Individual reflection

Ask students write a short paragraph responding to:

What does money represent in relationships — love, power, independence, or something else?
They should consider their own experience or ideas seen in media, literature, history etc.



Extract

Background: This extract from early in Act 1 shows Nora asking Torvald Helmer, her husband, for money to buy Christmas presents.

NORA: Hide the Christmas Tree carefully, Helen. Be sure the children do not see it till this evening, when it is dressed. [To the PORTER, taking out her purse.] How much?

PORTER: Sixpence.

NORA: There is a shilling. No, keep the change. [The PORTER thanks her, and goes out. NORA shuts the door. She is laughing to herself, as she takes off her hat and coat. She takes a packet of macaroons from her pocket and eats one or two; then goes cautiously to her husband's door and listens.] Yes, he is in. [Still humming, she goes to the table on the right.]

HELMER: [calls out from his room]. Is that my little lark twittering out there?

NORA: [busy opening some of the parcels]. Yes, it is!

HELMER: Is it my little squirrel bustling about?

NORA: Yes!

HELMER: When did my squirrel come home?

NORA: Just now. [Puts the bag of macaroons into her pocket and wipes her mouth.] Come in here, Torvald, and see what I have bought.

HELMER: Don't disturb me. [A little later, he opens the door and looks into the room, pen in hand.] Bought, did you say? All these things? Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again?

NORA: Yes but, Torvald, this year we really can let ourselves go a little. This is the first Christmas that we have not needed to economise.

HELMER: Still, you know, we can't spend money recklessly.

NORA: Yes, Torvald, we may be a wee bit more reckless now, mayn't we? Just a tiny wee bit! You are going to have a big salary and earn lots and lots of money.

HELMER: Yes, after the New Year; but then it will be a whole quarter before the salary is due.

NORA: Pooh! we can borrow till then.

HELMER: Nora! [Goes up to her and takes her playfully by the ear.] The same little featherhead! Suppose, now, that I borrowed fifty pounds to-day, and you spent it all in the Christmas week, and then on New Year's Eve a slate fell on my head and killed me, and—

NORA: [putting her hands over his mouth]. Oh! don't say such horrid things.

HELMER: Still, suppose that happened,—what then?

NORA: If that were to happen, I don't suppose I should care whether I owed money or not.

HELMER: Yes, but what about the people who had lent it?

NORA: They? Who would bother about them? I should not know who they were.

HELMER: That is like a woman! But seriously, Nora, you know what I think about that. No debt, no borrowing. There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt. We two have kept bravely on the straight road so far, and we will go on the same way for the short time longer that there need be any struggle.

NORA: [moving towards the stove]. As you please, Torvald.

(Ibsen, H. (1992) *A Doll's House*. Translated by Michael Meyer.)



Activities based on extract (Teacher Guidance)

The following questions may be based on the extract included or form part of your extended study of the novel. Students may like to complete the activities individually or collaboratively.

1. Language analysis

Direct students to identify two examples of Torvald's language and explain how they reflect his attitude towards Nora. Then, instruct them to use their ideas to write a response to the question: How does Ibsen use language to reveal gender inequality?

2. Modern interpretation

Pair students have them perform a short section of the extract twice: first as written, then reimagined in a modern context. Direct their discussion afterward: What changes and what stays the same about the power dynamics?

3. Set design

Discuss with pupils the important of set design. Ask them to consider what they think the set would look like in this scene. Direct students to show their thinking either by writing stage directions or sketching the set with labels.

Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

The following questions may be based on the extract included or form part of your extended study of the novel. Students may like to complete the activities individually or collaboratively.

1. Conscience Alley

- Focus Question: Present the question, "Should Nora ask Torvald directly for what she wants, even if it risks his disapproval?" and ask students for an initial personal response.
- Activity Setup: Display an image of Nora. Have each student write an opinion while considering the historical context, then share aloud in a "conscience alley" format.
- Debrief: Lead a reflection on how the activity reveals Nora's dilemma.

2. Personal Essay

Give pupils a prompt: *The things we do to keep the peace.*

Have pupils write a personal essay in which they reflect on the ways people hide their true feelings to maintain harmony in relationships, school, or family life.

3. Discursive Essay

Give pupils a prompt: *Traditional gender roles still influence modern relationships.*

Instruct them to write a discursive essay exploring this statement, referring to modern examples from society, film, or literature.

4. Descriptive Writing

Write a descriptive piece capturing a domestic scene that looks cheerful and perfect on the surface but hides tension beneath.