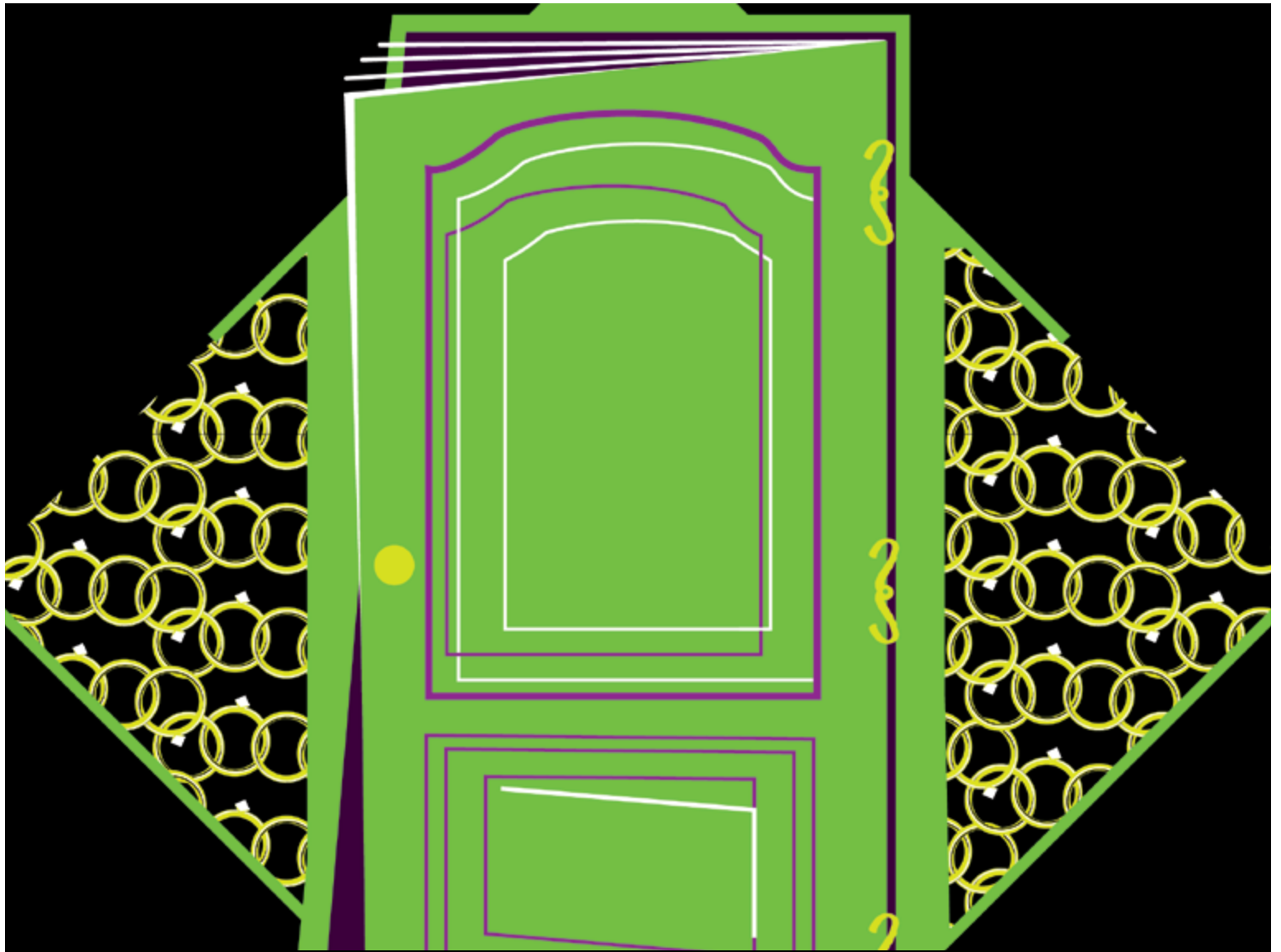




A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2

by

Lucas Hnath

directed by

Luan Schooler

DEEP DIVE

**ARTISTS
REP 18/19**
WE DO THEATRE

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A Doll's House, Part 2, Pictured: Linda Alper,
Photo by: David Kinder

ABOUT ARTISTS REP



Artists Repertory Theatre's mission is to produce intimate, provocative theatre and provide a home for artists and audiences of varied backgrounds to take creative risks. Artists Rep is Portland's premiere mid-size regional theatre company and is led by Artistic Director Dámaso Rodríguez. Founded in 1982, Artists Repertory Theatre is the longest-running professional theatre company in Portland. Artist Rep became the 72nd member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) in 2016 and is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN).

Artists Rep has become a significant presence in American regional theatre with a legacy of world, national, and regional premieres of provocative new work with the highest standards of stagecraft. The organization is committed to local artists and features a company of Resident Artists, professionals of varied theatre disciplines, who are a driving force behind Artists Rep's creative output and identity.

A LETTER TO EDUCATORS

Dear Educators,

We are looking forward to seeing you at Artists Repertory Theatre to experience our production of *A Doll's House, Part 2*, by Lucas Hnath.

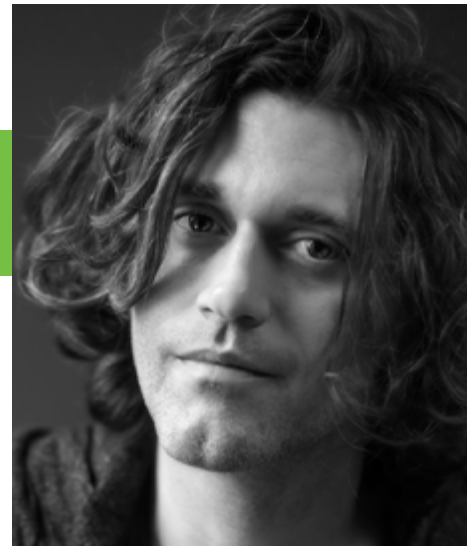
This study guide is provided to enhance your students' theatre experience. There is material for your students to utilize before and after the performance. Our goal is to increase theatre exposure and understanding, as well as to encourage meaningful conversation and provoke thoughtful discussion about the play you will attend. Within this guide there is information about the play's themes, setting, characters, pertinent articles, basic theatre etiquette and more. We hope this information will enhance your class's theatre experience.

Artists Rep provides many opportunities for young people to get involved! Students can shadow professional theatre artists in a variety of disciplines, observe tech rehearsals, and become members of our Student Ambassador Program! Please feel free to contact us or give your students our contact information.

Enjoy the show!

Karen Rathje
Education Director
Artists Repertory Theatre
krathje@artistsrep.org

THE PLAYWRIGHT



Lucas Hnath

Lucas Hnath is an American playwright. He holds a BFA and an MFA from New York University, where he is an assistant professor in the Department of Dramatic Writing. His plays have been produced nationally and internationally, including at the Playwrights Horizons, the Soho Rep, the Royal Court Theatre, and the New York Theatre Workshop. He is a member of the Ensemble Studio Theatre and New Dramatists.

PLAYS

A Doll's House, Part 2 (2017)

Hillary and Clinton (2016)

The Christians (2014)

Isaac's Eye (2014)

Red Speedo (2013)

A Public Reading of An Unproduced Screenplay About the Death of Walt Disney (2013)

Death Tax (2012)

AWARDS

2018 Windham-Campbell Literature Prize in Drama

2017 Steinberg Playwright Award

2015 Whiting Award

2016 Obie Award for Playwriting

2016 Kesselring Prize

2015 Guggenheim Fellowship

2013 Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award Citations

2012 Whitfield Cook Award

***A Doll's House, Part 2*, received eight Tony Award nominations in 2017**

PLAY SYNOPSIS

SPOILER ALERT

A Doll's House, Part 2 (2017), is a sequel to Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879).

The good news is that you do not need to have seen *A Doll's House* to enjoy *A Doll's House, Part 2*. All you need to know is that at the end of Ibsen's play, Nora, a mother and wife, walked out on her husband and three young children, slamming the door behind her, which is frequently referred to as "the slam heard around the world."¹

In *A Doll's House, Part 2*, Nora, is obliged to return home after fifteen years, and raised her children after she left, and her oldest daughter, who does not remember her.

The play begins with Nora knocking on the door she slammed shut behind her fifteen years earlier. Nora has become a successful feminist writer who, under a pseudonym, writes books that attack the institution of marriage and encourage wives to leave unhappy marriages. Unknown to Nora, her husband, Torvald, has never filed for a divorce, which can only be done easily by Norwegian men in 1894, and she cannot legally enter into contracts or conduct business or have lovers until she is divorced. To do those things as a married woman amounts to fraud. She has antagonized a judge whose wife left him after reading one of her books; he has found out her real name; determined that she is not divorced; and he is threatening to blackmail her by exposing her as a married woman who claims to be unmarried. All of her problems can be solved if Torvald will go ahead and file for a divorce.

After returning home, Nora must confront Torvald, who initially refuses to file for a divorce and who tries to explain and justify his behavior and

criticizes Nora for leaving. She then tries to enlist the help of the housekeeper, Anne Marie, who took care of Torvald and the children, and who observes that the only reason Nora could to go off and find herself was that she knew she could rely on Anne Marie to raise the children. Finally, she turns to Emmy, Nora's grown-up daughter, for support, but Emmy resists helping her mother because she feels it would harm her father and because she is engaged to a man who works with her father and she is afraid if Nora causes a scandal, he won't be able to marry her. Unlike her mother, Emmy believes marriage is a good thing, rather than a bad thing. Emmy tells Nora that Torvald has been allowing people to believe that she had died. Emmy proposes that she produce a false death certificate for Nora so that Nora can be reborn as the new person she has created and Emmy and her brothers and Torvald can go on with their lives.

Nora rejects Emmy's solution because she doesn't want to follow the bad rules; she wants to change the rules, and she feels this is her chance to change the rules. But while Nora and Emmy are talking, Torvald has gone ahead and filed for the divorce, even though he realizes that doing so will expose the lie about Nora being dead that he has been hiding, in the hopes that Nora will see him as a better man. Nora thanks him, sits with him for a while, and then announces that she is leaving again, saying, "I find that I'm my best self if I'm by myself."

¹ This phrase, which is often used to describe Ibsen's stage direction at the end of the play, is generally attributed to the noted Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw (*Pygmalion*).

Cited in a speech about Ibsen by George Mason University Professor Rick Davis in 2015: <https://www.norwegianamerican.com/heritage/scholar-on-norways-shakespeare/>

ABOUT THE SETTING

The setting of *A Doll's House* is a typical, middle-class home in an unspecified city in Norway in the winter in 1879.

In *A Doll's House, Part 2*, Nora is returning to her family fifteen years after she left, slamming the door behind her (1894).

The setting is a spare room that feels a touch like a room with a prominent door.

The costumes are specified as "Period, more or less."

The manner of speaking and the mannerisms of the characters is contemporary.

The play begins with a knock at the door.



A Doll's House, Part 2, pictured: Barbie Wu & Linda Alper, Photo by: David Kinder

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

NORA, after leaving her husband, children, and home 15 years earlier, Nora returns as a successful feminist writer to finalize some arrangements with her family

TORVALD, Nora's husband, a banker, who has struggled in her absence and finds her presence unnerving and complicated

ANNE MARIE, the maid of the house who remained with the family to help raise Nora and Torvald's children after Nora left, which has led to some unresolved resentment

EMMY, Nora and Torvald's oldest child, who is not interested in having her mother's life and is about to get married



Linda Alper



Michael Mendelson



Vana O'Brien



Barbie Wu

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

LUAN SCHOOLER

When I was fifteen, I played Nora in the East Anchorage High School winter production of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. No doubt I brought the same understanding and nuance to this role as I had to my performance as the Mayor of Whoville in *Horton Hears a Who* a few months earlier. The boy who played Nora's husband Torvald was sixteen - with a shadow on his upper lip that, when emphasized with mascara, made him look very distinguished - and together we plumbed the depths of one of the most renowned and complex relationships in theatrical history.

In Ibsen's drama, the young wife Nora forges her father's signature and takes out a secret loan to pay for the treatment her deathly ill husband requires. After covertly saving Torvald's life, she spends several years quietly repaying the loan by scrimping on household expenses. When he finds out what she has done, Torvald is outraged, and - ignoring that she saved his life- he declares that she has disgraced him and is morally unfit to raise their children. Realizing that he never has - and never will - regard her as more than a doll/child, Nora hands back her wedding ring and walks out the door, slamming the door behind her and leaving her comfortable, bourgeois life for an uncertain, probably grim future. (You can see why it was a thrilling piece to perform at fifteen - forgery, false accusations, noble self-sacrifice, and door slamming!)

When it premiered in 1879, that slam was heard round the world. Audiences were shocked. Shocked! How dare Ibsen question the appropriateness of men lording it over the little ladies? How could Nora possibly be a decent, moral person if she wants recognition as a thinking human being, and not just as the little wife and mother? What would keep the

chaos at bay if men weren't The Deciders?

Well. Lo, all these years later, we still haven't satisfactorily answered these questions.

A Doll's House, Part 2 is Lucas Hnath's

puckish riposte to Ibsen. *Part 2* starts fifteen years after the Grand Slam with a knock at the very same door. It's a playful, feisty philosophic sparring match, testing propositions about marriage, power, gender roles, and fairness. The delight of this play is that all four characters are bracingly honest, nimble thinkers, equally capable of lobbing trenchant bombs of wit. Into this fizzy brew of Ibsen's provocative notions, Lucas Hnath adds a new, highly combustible ingredient: self-actualization. Nora left her family so that she might become her best self, leading her best life - a distinctly 21st Century notion. All fine and dandy, but at what cost and to whom? She returns to discover that her lofty goals are not universally shared, and when the chickens come home to roost there's a lot more poop to contend with.

I'm delighted to be spending time again with Nora and Torvald (and now Anne Marie and Emmy, too). At fifteen, I may have missed some of Ibsen's finer philosophical points, so it is delicious to wrestle now with Lucas Hnath's marvelous follow up. Like Ibsen, Hnath asks big questions about what we owe to each other and to ourselves - questions that apply equally in our private and social lives. If you are as weary as I am of the infantile blurting that passes for public discourse lately, I hope you'll find it refreshing to hear adults engaged in passionate, articulate, persuasive debate.



"WE HAVE TO STICK OUR NOSES IN SOME S#%T"

LUCAS HNATH'S *A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2*

LUCAS HNATH'S *A Doll's House, Part 2* is the third play Artists Rep has done this season that in some way engages with an earlier text. Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's *Everybody* updated the medieval morality play *Everyman*, while Mike Lew's *Teenage Dick* moved Shakespeare's *King Richard III* into a high school. These plays were re-workings of the earlier material, while *A Doll's House, Part 2* is a sequel placed fifteen years after Ibsen's original, with the same two main characters.

On 21 December 1879, not quite 140 years ago, Henrik Ibsen's play, most often referred to as *A Doll's House*, premiered at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen and ushered in modern theatre. Since that time, most of the focus has been on Nora and her struggle to achieve both her voice and a truer understanding of how the world actually works. From this perspective, some have thought of the play as expressing a form of feminism, even though Ibsen, having been given a testimonial banquet by the Norwegian Society for Women's Rights in 1898, said, "I must decline the honor of consciously having worked for women's rights. I am not even quite sure what women's rights really are. To me it has been a question of human rights."

With the title *A Doll's House*, Nora is obviously the doll who is the plaything of her husband, Torvald, until she awakens. She refers to her children as "lovely doll babies" (61), notes that her father "used to call me his doll-child, and he played with me the way I played with my dolls (109), calls herself Torvald's "doll-wife" (110), and asks Torvald what he will do "if your doll gets taken away" (113). Ibsen's view, however, is even wider, which is why the play should be more correctly referred to as *A Doll House*. Ibsen is making a social-political critique of middle-class bourgeois values and expectations; how they trap men and women, and thus both are victims of the system, both live beneath the roof of a doll house, and both need to be liberated.

The other side of the coin the play explores is what desperate measures one must sometimes resort to in order to survive or resist these values and expectations. The play ends with Nora's leaving her husband and "the sound of

a door slamming shut" (114). In *A Doll's House, Part 2*, Lucas Hnath attempts to answer several questions that have gripped audiences since that most famous of door slams:

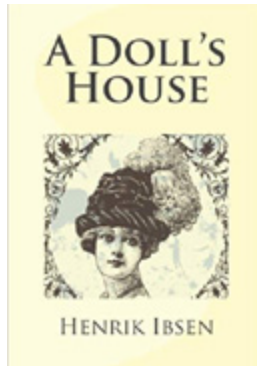
Where did Nora go? What did she do? Would she ever come back? Would Torvald want her back? And what did he do while she was gone?

Before attempting to answer these questions, a bit of a review of the original is perhaps in order.

Nora and Torvald Helmer are both trapped in a world of bourgeois illusions that has its strict rules. Torvald, a lawyer and newly appointed bank manager, is supposed to be in charge of his household: his wife, his children, and his servants. The latter two are supposed to be seen and heard from as little as possible, and that is part of the wife's job. In this world, women cannot sign contracts without a husband's or father's permission and approval, women must show cause to be granted a divorce while men can divorce at will, and a woman's ideal is to be married and taken care of. A woman who has to work to support herself is definitely considered to be of a lower order.

In this bourgeois, sexist world, Torvald has been raised to believe that women are not particularly smart, spend too much money, need to consistently be told what to do, and are therefore not that much higher up on the evolutionary scale than small animals; and thus he refers to Nora as "lark," "squirrel," "songbird," "goose," "hunted dove," "featherhead," "spendthrift," "scatterbrains," "you little helpless thing," and controls the macaroon eating of his "little sweet tooth." For most of their marriage, both Nora and Torvald have accepted without question the role bourgeois society has dictated that they play, and they have each played their roles well, both trapped in the doll house of their own, and society's, making. This makes the play an example of meta-theatre, theatre about theatre, about how roles are acted.

Things change when Torvald becomes ill, and the doctors tell Nora he has to go south, where a better climate will restore him to health. For reasons we aren't given, the doctors confide this knowledge only to Nora; and she must not only arrange the year-long trip to Italy, come up with the



funds to pay for it, but also convince Torvald that she, not he, is the one who needs the trip. Nora decides that she will get her father, without Torvald's knowledge, to sign for the loan; but when he turns out to be too sick, Nora forges his signature and mistakenly dates the signed document three days after her father has died. She secures the loan, takes Torvald to Italy, saves his life, and has been repaying the loan by secretly taking copying jobs and asking Torvald for extra money for household expenses. She has, in fact, been playing a role very different from that expected by society. She has taken on "the man's role" by being Torvalds' savior, at



the same time playing the "feminine role" by begging him for more money.

When the play opens, Torvald is in good health, has just gotten a new higher-paying job, the final loan payment is about to be made, and Nora is

extremely proud of herself for taking on this unfeminine role and saving her husband's life. We thus learn early on that Nora has taken on an additional acting role of pretending to be going along with societal norms while simultaneously seeming to undermine them. Nora's revolutionary spirit is undercut, however, when Torvald agrees to hire Nora's old friend Mrs. Linde for a job at the bank, and thereby dismissing his old acquaintance Krogstad, who has undercut Torvald's authority at the bank by referring to him in public by his first name. Krogstad, who like Nora has committed forgery, is trying to rehabilitate himself. Krogstad is also the person who has secured Nora's loan and to whom she has secretly been making payments, and he threatens her with exposure unless she gets him his job back.

When Nora's efforts are unsuccessful, because Torvald finds Krogstad's first-name calling worse than the forgery and therefore won't rehire him, Krogstad writes a letter to Torvald threatening to expose Nora, and thus ruin him. Nora believes that a miracle will happen, that Torvald will stand up and defend her despite what society says. She believes that Torvald will be able to free himself from the bonds of the doll life that they have both suffered under. Nora, however, is delusional. When Torvald reads Krogstad's letter, all he thinks about is himself and his public standing. Torvald has previously said to Nora, "time and again I've wished you were in some terrible danger, just so I could stake my life and soul and everything for your sake" (104). On reading the letter, however, his first response is, "Now you've

wrecked all my happiness — ruined my whole future... Can you see now what you've done to me?" (106). He takes Nora's action as some sort of personal insult resulting from Nora's hereditary connection to her father, who, according to Torvald, had "no religion, no morals, no sense of duty" (105).

Having been taught that "something of freedom's lost — and something of beauty, too — from a home that's founded on borrowing and debt" (44), he takes Nora's deed as evil and refuses to recognize how what she did saved his life. And as Nora points out, their relationship would have been ruined if Torvald were not only in debt, but in debt both to Krogstad, whom he hates; but also to his wife, who tried to borrow it from her degenerate father. Torvald's back-ward views also include the notion that someone who has committed an outward crime, Krogstad's forgery as well as Nora's, also as a result pollutes those around; and therefore a mother, as the prime influence on the child, would pollute her children if she were to have committed such a crime. Torvald has been taught by society to think only, or at least first, of himself; and when Krogstad agrees to withdraw his threat, Torvald responds with, "I'm saved. Nora, I'm saved!" (107).

As society has taught him to, Torvald thinks only of himself, his appearance, and his reputation. Nora, likewise, has bought into the false romantic bourgeois notion that because she saved Torvald, he will be her knight, the miracle will happen, and he will save her. Again, Ibsen makes clear that both of their positions are problematic. And so when Nora leaves and slams the door at the end of the play, her leaving is at least as negative as it is positive. Even though she leaves, both she and Torvald remain in the dollhouse, and Nora knows she "must educate [her] self" (110).

It has been easier to see that Torvald is in a problematic place at the end of the play when he woodenly tells Nora, "Before all else, you're a wife and a mother" (111). Nora at least knows that there should be more, but she also makes clear that she is leaving because "the miraculous thing didn't come" (112), and that the only possibility for a future would be if they could have a "true marriage" (114). Ibsen wants us to seriously consider whether Nora's leaving is more an act of despair than one of defiance. The play has not only demonstrated how the pressure of bourgeois expectations harms both men and women, but also what steps they feel they are forced to take because of the limitations society imposes on them, whether it's Nora's forgery, Torvald's self-involvement, or even Mrs. Linde's desire to marry Krogstad because alone, she has "nothing to live for now" (51), "no one to care about, and no one to care for" (96).

A Doll's House, Part 2, among other things, attempts to

answer some of the questions Ibsen leaves hanging. When the play begins, Nora, after a fifteen-year absence, returns to her former home. It turns out that she assumed Torvald had filed for divorce (they returned each other's rings at the conclusion of the original), and has gone about her life, including having numerous lovers and signing contracts under her new name. Most importantly, she has become a famous author, having published under a pseudonym a thinly-veiled story of her marriage, in which her heroine rails against the institution, and tells women to never get married or else leave unhappy marriages. The book has made her financially secure, but a conservative judge who hates the book has discovered her true identity, uncovers that Torvald has never filed for divorce, and threatens to out her unless she publicly recants. Because she has signed contracts under a "false" name and without her husband's permission, Nora, like her earlier self, is guilty of forgery and fraud.

Nora's goal is to get Torvald to finally file for divorce. Assuming he won't be inclined to do her a favor, given that she abandoned him, their home, their children, and hasn't communicated in fifteen years, Nora hopes to convince Anne Marie, the family house-keeper and a mother — figure to Nora, to help her convince Torvald.

Before the play opens, Nora has written to Anne Marie to set up a meeting between them when Torvald won't be around. Although Anne Marie refuses to directly admit that Torvald is "broken" (13), she does note that Torvald has never remarried, still works at the same job, that she thinks he should get a dog, and she even suggests that Nora meet with him because "it could repair something" (13). Unlike Nora, Anne Marie has no trouble with the institution of marriage, and believes it "makes a lot of people very happy — very" (23); while Nora predicts that "in the future, 20, 30 years from now, marriage will be a thing of the past" (26). When Nora suggests that she is going to need Anne Marie's help, Anne Marie surprisingly responds, "oh well shit. Shit Nora shit" (31).

This colloquial and totally unexpected language from Anne Marie will most likely cause an outburst from the audience. With this, Hnath adds an unexpected level of humor missing in Ibsen's original, and is blending present-day colloquial language into a much older text. Remember that in the original, when Nora wants to say something "shocking" to Torvald, she comes up with "to hell and be damned!"; which elicits "are you crazy?" and "my goodness, Nora!" (59) as responses. Anne Marie will later also say, "oh fuck

it all" (31) and "I'm pissed off at you" (35). This is an intentional technique designed to jolt the audience and to get them to pause and to remember that we are watching a play, and not get lulled into a sense of we think we know what's happening.

In the midst of this conversation, Torvald unexpectedly returns home, having forgot-ten some papers; and, most surprisingly, he does not recognize Nora. When they finally talk, he makes it clear he didn't want the marriage to end, that Nora has killed the desire in him to remarry (although he has had at least one relationship), and that he wished he had left Nora first. He complains about having had to do favors for Nora's friends (Mrs. Linde), her not taking seriously things he cared about, making fun of him in front of other men, and making him feel as though he were a "wimp" (43). Nora counters with his guilt for "this thing that men do of standing in front of women and looking down at them" (44). This is where the conversation between them gets interesting, when he wonders "if women don't ask that men behave the way we behave...and if we didn't project some kind of confidence... would women even be attracted to men?" (44).

Here, Torvald begins to come to a recognition of the role society has played in enforcing roles on both men and women; and that to get to the underlying truth, "we have to stick our noses in some shit" (47). He accuses Nora of coming to a recognition of the problems in their marriage, but then leaving before they could attempt to work on them. He then announces that he is not giving Nora a divorce, "because you don't deserve for this to be easy" (50), and returns to work. Anne Marie sides with Torvald and tells Nora, "fuck you. You have no gratitude" (56–57), and that she would never have left her own child except out of economic necessity. She then suggests that the only solution left is that Nora must talk to her daughter and see if she can convince Torvald to sign

the divorce papers.

In Ibsen's original, Nora and Torvald's children appear, but they have no speaking roles. And Hnath's most interesting innovation is in his creation of Emmy, Nora's youngest child and only daughter. Emmy tells Nora she is happy, that Nora's leaving made her grow up and take responsibility sooner, and that she feels better for it. She also tells Nora that people in the town eventually thought she had died, and



that Torvald had said nothing in order to preserve his bank job and his position in the community, which could have been threatened if people knew he had been abandoned by his wife. Emmy then offers to commit forgery by arranging for a death certificate for Nora. This will not only preserve Torvald's reputation, but her own, given that she is engaged to someone who works at the bank with Torvald, and she seems to share her father's views on society's rules and the importance of marriage, and declares, "I want to be possessed. I want to be somebody's something" (83), which of course makes Nora respond that "it means that everything I've done since walking out that door, means nothing" (85). Interestingly, Emmy's language echoes that of Mrs. Linde in the original; she praises marriage and laments the possibility of "never finding a home, never finding a place to rest, a person to rest with" (86).

Nora decides she must take control of her life, not allow the forged death certificate, and that she will face the consequences of the judge's vendetta. Torvald then returns, revealing he decided to file for the divorce, got into an argument with the clerk who thought Torvald was crazy given that Nora was dead, but that he got it anyway. To his complete surprise, Nora rejects it, saying he only did it to look good. She has to explain to him how for two years she lived in silence until "I no longer heard a voice in my head other than my voice" (105); and that with Torvald's still looking for the "true marriage" (104), she concludes "that I'm my best self if I'm by myself" (106), and she again walks out the door; although this play does end with "(Nora walks out the door.) (Torvald watches.) (Door shuts...)" (107). While the door slams at the end of Ibsen's original, here it merely "shuts." Nora is gone, presumably never to return, and Nora, Torvald, and Emmy will presumably have to face the consequences of this series of actions.

A Doll's House, Part 2 thus ends somewhat ambiguously. Through the divorce filing, Nora's not having died will be revealed. Torvald's reputation will be ruined for pretending she was dead and letting people feel sorry for him, and he may well lose his job and possibly be implicated in Nora's forgery. Emmy's fiancé, Jorgen, will break off the relationship, and he may also lose his job from guilt-by-association; Emmy and Torvald may well end up alone, and may not be able to continue to employ Anne Marie.

That leaves us with Nora. Does the divorce actually happen? Is the paper Torvald holds a finalized divorce decree and so they are divorced even if Nora doesn't want it? Is it a form Nora needs to sign in order to make it final? That isn't likely given that men could divorce women at will. But if it is in any way not a finalized document, it makes a difference.

Torvald is ruined either way, because the clerk who filled out the divorce form is going to spread the word. If the divorce is finalized, Nora is saved from the judge's wrath, possible jail time, and can go on with her life.

If the document Torvald has is in any way provisional, he can let it go through, or he can honor Nora's wishes. Since she says she doesn't want to be saved by him, and that she's prepared to face the judge's revelations, we must believe Torvald still has the power to prevent the divorce from being finalized, and that he will do the right thing because he has come to some understanding through his conversation with Nora. He has read her book, understands how and why she has portrayed him as she has, and insists, "I'm not like that – not now" (93), and that he thinks about dying and doesn't want her portrayal of him to be the final one. The play thus concludes with Torvald's having done the right thing by Nora, although he ends up ruined. Nora gets her wish to do things as she wants and not be saved by Torvald.

This is a positive ending for Nora psychologically. On the other hand, the judge will most likely make his revelation, and Nora could well be jailed. But it is also true that the jail experience will in all likelihood be the subject of her next book, and it will be an even bigger best seller than her last one. That being said, we must also remember that Nora has said "In the future, 20, 30 years from now, marriage will be a thing of the past" (26). In 1909, thirty years after Ibsen's play premiers, the status of both women and marriage has not substantially changed.

At the conclusion of Ibsen's text, Nora slams the door as she leaves in utter despair; if Hnath's text were meant to leave us with the opposite, Nora's triumph, she would have walked out and left the door open as we watched her stride triumphantly into the future. Once again, however, Nora leaves a closed door behind her. She has gotten her ultimate freedom; both she and Torvald have in their own ways escaped the doll's house, but at some cost, "sticking our noses in some shit."

The play ends not with the loud sound of a slam, but with the softer sound of a shut, a modest step in the right direction.

Ibsen, *Four Major Plays, Volume 1* New York: Signet Classics, 2006.

Hnath, *A Doll's House, Part 2* New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2017

GET INTO THE

WORLD OF THE PLAY

This collection of books, movies, and music are inspired by the world of *Doll's House, Part 2*.

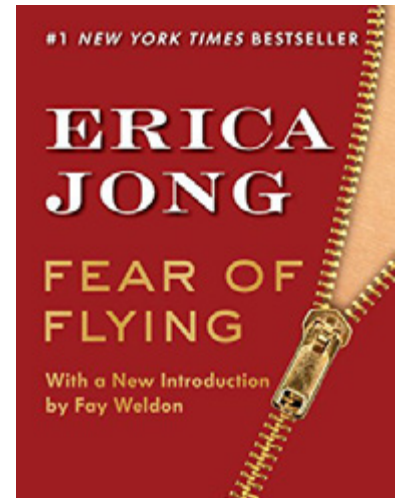
BOOKS

A DOLL'S HOUSE BY HENRIK IBSEN

MRS. OSMOND BY JOHN BANVILLE

FEAR OF FLYING BY ERICA JONG

ORANGES ARE NOT THE ONLY FRUIT
BY JENETTE WINTERSON



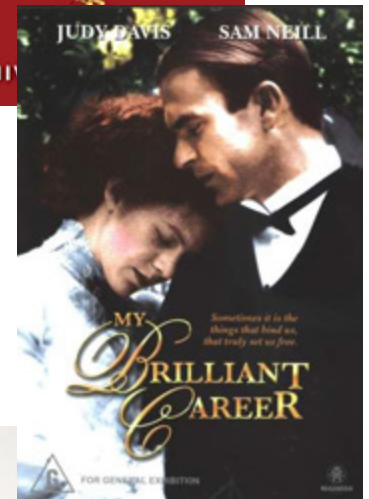
MOVIES

MY BRILLIANT CAREER (1979)

THE SISTERS (2005)

BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S (1961)

THE DAUGHTER (2015)



MUSIC

GRIZZLY BEAR

ARCADE FIRE

BAND OF HORSES

AMANDA PALMER

BROKEN BELLS

OKKERVIL RIVER



THEMES OF A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2

Family Dynamics - traditional roles in marriages and the impact of divorce on family members.

Feminism - women's rights and autonomy.

Imbalance of power in society - gender inequality and the imbalance of power between employers and employees.

Freedom versus responsibility - what do we owe ourselves and what do we owe others?

Domestic stability versus individual growth - must we choose?

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

PLOT

The sequence of events in a play revealed through the action and/or dialogue

tone

The manner the play is written (e.x. casual, comic, serious, somber, etc.)

THEME

The central topic the play investigates

OBJECTIVE

The goal a character has within a play

CONFLICT

The clash between opposing forces, ideas, or interests that creates tension

STAGING

Patterns of movement in a play, including: entrances, exits, and movement on the stage

THE FOURTH WALL

The conceptual barrier between actors onstage and the audience
[When the actors directly interact with the audience, it is referred to as "breaking the fourth wall"]

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

Elements such as sets, costumes, lights, music, props, and makeup used to create a unified and meaningful design for a theatrical production

BACKGROUND TO DISCUSSION TOPICS

A Doll's House

Ibsen's play had an enormous impact when it was first produced, and it continues to be very popular with audiences today. The play is a commentary about gender inequality in the roles of men and women in marriage and in society generally, and Ibsen is often referred to as the first male writer to treat women as people.

A Doll's House is about the unravelling of a family as a mother and wife realizes that she can stand up to her husband and make her own decisions. Nora and Torvald Helmer have three young children and believe they are happily married. Torvald thinks he has worked very hard, but he was unsuccessful in his law practice, and, unbeknownst to him, Nora has committed a fraud to get money to support the family. The play culminates in a dramatic scene between the couple as Nora's fraud is exposed and Torvald first blames, then forgives her - and is finally abandoned as Nora recognizes the truth of her situation. She accuses her husband of having used her as a doll and declares herself unfit to be a wife or mother until she has learned to be herself.

Hnath's sequel to Ibsen's original play is less of a play about Nora finding herself after abandoning her family than it is a play about Nora confronting the people she left behind and hearing about what she has done and how they feel about love and marriage.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

How Does Hnath Draw On And Transform Ibsen's Play?

Ibsen's play is about a marriage and the relationship in that marriage between a husband and wife. In Ibsen's world, a marriage is a reflection of society and is based on a fantasy: a man goes out in the world and works hard and deserves a castle. The woman's role is to make that castle happen. Nora's decision to walk away from her marriage is a statement that women have the right to make their own decisions about how they live their lives. For Ibsen, Nora has made a strong statement for women's rights.

Hnath expands on this statement. Nora has become a successful author writing books about "the way the world is towards women and the ways in which the world is wrong." But Hnath shows that the world has not changed appreciably for Nora. Nora must go back to Torvald to ask him to file for a divorce from her, which she cannot do herself, so she can enter into contracts as a single woman. Additionally, in her dialogue with the people she left behind, Nora hears at length about how they feel about her decision to assert her right to find herself at their expense. For Hnath, Nora is confident of her decision, but she is not necessarily a sympathetic person for having made the decision to abandon her family.

Did Earlier Events Cause Later Ones Or Simply Precede Them?

After leaving her family, Nora has become a successful woman making her own way in the world. However, she is forced to return home and ask Torvald to file for a divorce because in the male dominated society in which she lives, Nora cannot file for divorce on her own even though she is a successful business person in her own right. She would never have returned home without the need to have the divorce filed so she can enter into publishing contracts without the consent of her husband. Torvald's failure to file for a divorce is the reason she returns to confront the people she left behind.

One of the people Nora must confront is her daughter, Emmy. When Nora left, Emmy was too young to remember her mother. Now Emmy is old enough to be married and she has a different view about marriage than her mother and she has her own concerns, including avoiding a scandal caused by her mother's decision to leave that she feels may ruin her own life. Nora's decision to leave has had many impacts and ramifications upon the people she left behind.

Identify And Compare Cultural Perspectives And Contexts That Influence A Work

Although Nora returns to her home after being gone only 15 years, which would make the year of her return 1894, the manner in which the characters speak and their physicality and mannerisms are entirely contemporary. "They're clearly creatures of the contemporary world birthed by feminism, rock-and-roll, and 1960s counterculture." At the same time, although Nora has had considerable success as a writer, and one of her books has sparked controversy by advocating that wives abandon unhappy marriages, it is still illegal for her, as a woman who is separated but not divorced from her husband, to enter into business contracts to publish her books. As Nora says to Torvald, "You and I, a man and a woman, in the eyes of the law, do not have equal rights to a divorce."

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

The Common Core Standards for English, Social Studies and Theatre are set forth at the end of this study guide. The following possible discussion topics are relevant to the following Standards:

English (9-10.RL.9): Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work.

Social Studies (9-10.RH.3): Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

Theatre (TH.8.RE2.HS1): Identify and compare cultural perspectives and contexts that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Since the first production of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in 1879, theatre goers have speculated about what happened to Nora after she slammed the door and walked away from her family. Write a one-page sequel that you would like to see performed on the stage about what you think happened to her.

Lucas Hnath's stage directions for the set design read as follows:

"THE SPACE: The play takes place in a room. It's quite spare. Some chairs, maybe a table, not much else. It ought to feel a touch like a forum. I wouldn't be sad at all if the play were played in the round.

"And it's crucial there be a door. A very prominent door to the outside."

Design a set for your production of *A Doll's House*, Part 2. You do not need to follow Hnath's directions.

Henrik Ibsen was concerned not only with the imbalance of power between men and women in a marriage but also with the imbalance of power between working people and bosses in society. **Debate the following resolution:**

RESOLVED, Anne Marie was the person most hurt by Nora's decision to abandon her family.

Nora talks about changing the "bad rules," saying,

"this is my chance to change the rules because 20, 30 years from now the world isn't going to be the kind of place I say it's going to be unless I'm the one to make it that way."

List ten rules that you would change to make the world the kind of place you want it to be in twenty years.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS?

Do you find it ironic that one of the most famous feminist heroines in the theatre was written by a man?

Do you see this play as being about feminism or is it about the need of every individual to find out the kind of person they are and to strive to become that person?

Do you view Nora as a feminist heroine or as a cruel person who failed her family or as something in between?

Where do you see Emmy fitting on the feminism continuum?

Who has a better argument about marriage: Nora, who says that marriage is a “completely unnecessary process of self-torture” that says “I own you” or Emmy, who makes an argument for being owned?

How does one live authentically without causing emotional harm to those around you? Could Nora have handled this differently? In 1879? Today?

At the end of the play Torvald gives Nora what she wants and files for divorce, even though it will ruin his reputation. Why do you believe he does this?

Emmy comes into the play and meets her mother for the first time since she was a toddler. Nora feared that meeting her daughter would cause emotional harm to Emmy, but is surprised to find that Emmy seems unaffected by the visit. Why is their interaction important to the story?

THEATER ETIQUETTE GUIDELINES

We are so excited you are here! The audience is one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the play is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make your theatre experience enjoyable for everyone.

BE PROMPT

Arrive in plenty of time to settle, find your seats, and get situated. Please visit the restrooms before the show begins.

BE RESPECTFUL

Your behavior and responses affect the quality of the performance and the enjoyment of the production for the entire audience. The performers can see and hear you, just as the audience can see and hear you.

TURN OFF CELL PHONES

You may think texting is private, but the light and motion can be seen by actors and audience members and texting is distracting to those around you. Please do not check your phones, text or take photos during the performance.

HAVE FUN AND PARTICIPATE

Rather than remaining totally silent, please note the difference between appropriate and inappropriate responses.

APPROPRIATE

- Laughter
- Applause
- Participation (when requested)

INAPPROPRIATE

- Talking (including whispering)
- Groaning / Booing
- Using Cell Phones / Devices

STAY WITH US!

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.

NOTES

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UP NEXT

WOLF PLAY

by

Hansol Jung

directed by

Dámaso Rodríguez

