

THE READING ROOM

BA English Literature

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Semester 1 | Drama | Unit 2

Course 01/ENG/MJR/101 | 2026-27 intake

A Doll's House

Henrik Ibsen

Study notes + practice questions + quick revision

Marriage, money and the search for selfhood. Follow Nora's changing understanding of her home and her responsibilities.

Independent study-support draft. Academic review is pending. All questions are original practice questions, not previous-year JNVU questions.

Syllabus: university-titled institutional copy. Direct JNVU approval and intake applicability remain pending. Check the programme and source discrepancies with your department.

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01 / Learn

Read the play as drama

Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* belongs to Unit II of JNVU Semester I Major English, Drama, course 01/ENG/MJR/101 in the curriculum mirror used for this pilot. This original study guide is an undergraduate reading aid; academic review is pending. Read the whole play before using summaries to revise it.

The guide follows R. Farquharson Sharp's English translation, available as Project Gutenberg ebook 2542. Translation matters: names, currency, pet names and the wording of Nora's final speech vary between editions. Sharp calls Mrs Linde "Christine" and the nurse "Anne." Other editions commonly use Kristine and Anne-Marie. Give act references when your class edition has different pagination; never combine quotations from different translations without identifying them.

The central movement is from a seemingly comfortable marriage to a crisis of knowledge. Nora first conceals an action that saved her husband; she finally discovers that the marriage itself has concealed an unequal relationship.

Author and historical setting

Henrik Ibsen and modern theatre

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) was a Norwegian playwright whose dramas helped change European theatre. His experience of theatre work shaped his control of entrances, dialogue, scenery and suspense. In plays of contemporary life, including *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, respectable households become places where public ideals collide with private experience. His characters are neither simple mouthpieces for arguments nor neatly divided heroes and villains.

A Doll's House, originally *Et dukkehjem*, was published on 4 December 1879. Its first performance took place at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen on 21 December 1879. These dates are documented by the University of Oslo's Virtual Ibsen Centre. The play's Norwegian setting should not be described as an English Victorian household, although comparisons with nineteenth-century European middle-class values can be useful.

Why the ending provoked debate

Nora's departure challenged expectations that a wife and mother should remain in her family whatever her personal suffering. Under pressure connected with German performances, Ibsen reluctantly supplied an alternative ending in which she stays. That adaptation does not replace the original ending studied here. The original concludes with departure and an unanswered question about the future.

Feminist readings attend to the play's restrictions on women, financial dependence and unequal marriage. Readings centred on individual selfhood ask how anyone learns to think independently.

These approaches can support each other: Nora's particular struggle as a woman gives concrete form to the problem of becoming a responsible person. Ibsen's later resistance to being treated as a campaign writer does not remove gender from the text.

The dramatic world

The action remains in the Helmers' living room over the Christmas period. Doors connect it to the hall, Torvald's study and other domestic spaces. Comfortable furniture and a warm stove establish apparent security, but people arriving from outside bring economic need, suppressed history and uncomfortable knowledge.

Torvald's appointment as bank manager promises a better income. Nora expects relief from years of repayment. Mrs Linde seeks employment, Krogstad fears losing his position, and Dr Rank anticipates death. Their different forms of insecurity expose the limits of the Helmers' happiness. Much important action happened before the curtain rose: the Italian journey, Nora's borrowing, her father's death, Krogstad's disgrace and Mrs Linde's earlier choice of husband. Dialogue gradually reconstructs this past.

Plot: the three acts

Act I: apparent happiness and the hidden debt

Nora returns with Christmas purchases. Torvald affectionately calls her small animal names, lectures her about spending and gives her money. She secretly eats forbidden macaroons. These exchanges establish intimacy alongside supervision.

Her old friend Mrs Linde arrives, widowed and needing work. Nora reveals that the money for Torvald's life-saving stay in Italy did not come from her father: she obtained it herself. She has saved from her allowance and done copying work to repay the loan. Torvald does not know.

Krogstad, the lender and a bank employee, asks Nora to prevent his dismissal. He identifies a discrepancy in the bond: her father supposedly signed after his death. Nora admits writing her father's name. She believes her loving purpose justifies her action; Krogstad warns that the law will judge the forgery. Torvald's later claim that dishonesty corrupts children frightens her. The act closes with family comfort threatened by moral anxiety.

Act II: delay, performance and approaching exposure

The disordered Christmas tree reflects a changed atmosphere. Nora asks the nurse about her own separation from her child, revealing fear about what departure might mean. Mrs Linde repairs Nora's costume for the tarantella at a party upstairs.

Nora unsuccessfully asks Torvald to retain Krogstad. He resents interference and Krogstad's familiar manner towards him. He sends the dismissal letter. Nora thinks of requesting financial help from Dr Rank, but his declaration of love makes the proposed request unacceptable to her.

Krogstad now demands a route back to influence at the bank and puts an explanatory letter in Torvald's locked letterbox. Nora cannot retrieve it. Mrs Linde goes to contact Krogstad. Nora delays Torvald's reading by demanding help with her dance. The increasingly frantic rehearsal transforms an entertainment into a visible expression of fear. The act ends with Nora counting the time remaining.

Act III: two relationships and the failure of the miracle

Mrs Linde and Krogstad discuss their broken relationship. She had married another man to support her dependent family; now she proposes a shared life with Krogstad and his children. Hope changes his attitude. He offers to recover his letter, but she insists that the Helmers need the truth.

Nora and Torvald return from the party. Dr Rank's cards marked with black crosses announce his final withdrawal towards death. Torvald reads Krogstad's first letter and condemns Nora, fearing damage to his reputation. He intends to keep up appearances while excluding her from responsibility for the children.

A second letter returns the bond and ends the threat. Torvald immediately resumes affection and claims to forgive Nora. His reversal clarifies her discovery: he feared for himself rather than understanding her sacrifice. Nora changes out of her costume and asks for a serious conversation. She describes being treated as a doll by both father and husband. Believing she must educate herself, she leaves. A door shuts below. Neither her later success nor a future reunion is shown.

Characters and relationships

Nora Helmer

Nora is playful, secretive, affectionate and resourceful. Her copying and repayments contradict the picture of a helpless spendthrift. Yet she initially accepts a romantic ideal in which Torvald will nobly take responsibility for her action. Her awakening includes recognising the inadequacy of that ideal. Her final independence is a decision to learn, rather than proof that she already understands every social or moral problem.

She loves her children and experiences distress about leaving them. Her belief that she must first become capable of educating herself creates a difficult conflict between personal development and parental responsibility. An answer should analyse that conflict instead of dismissing her as either entirely selfish or perfectly heroic.

Torvald Helmer

Torvald values respectability, discipline and authority. His affection is real within its limits, but his pet names and instructions make Nora an object of protection and display. His wish to rescue her resembles a flattering fantasy until an actual crisis threatens his public standing. His response to the two letters exposes the conditional nature of his generosity. He may be capable of change, but the play leaves that possibility unproved.

Mrs Linde and Krogstad

Mrs Linde's work and family responsibilities give her practical experience. She challenges Nora's secrecy and chooses to let the truth emerge. Her desire for a useful shared life should not be reduced to the claim that every woman needs a husband. Her specific circumstances shape her choice.

Krogstad uses coercion and threatens Nora, but his fear of disgrace and concern for his children make him more than a conventional villain. His past offence parallels Nora's forgery. The prospect of a relationship with Mrs Linde restores hope. Their frank discussion contrasts with the Helmers' role-playing, though their future happiness remains a possibility rather than a demonstrated fact.

Dr Rank, the nurse and the children

Dr Rank is the family friend whose approaching death interrupts the household's optimism. He offers Nora conversation outside Torvald's possessiveness, but his love complicates that friendship. The characters connect his illness with his father's excesses; the guide treats this as the play's nineteenth-century moral-medical language, not a confirmed modern diagnosis.

Anne gave up caring for her own daughter to earn a living. Her story links motherhood with class and economic compulsion. The children make the cost of separation concrete and reveal how patterns of doll-like play may pass between generations.

Major themes

Marriage, gender and performance

The Helmers' marriage is organised around a provider and a charming dependent. Nora has learned to influence Torvald by performing the femininity he enjoys. This gives her limited room to manoeuvre without creating equality. Her final account of being a doll exposes the difference between a pleasant household and a relationship in which both partners have adult voices.

The play does not declare all marriage impossible. Mrs Linde and Krogstad suggest a different basis: knowledge of the past, acknowledgement of need and willingness to work. Nora's final reference to a genuine marriage imagines mutual transformation, not merely Torvald granting permission.

Law, moral purpose and responsibility

Nora forged a signature; good intentions do not make that event disappear. The dramatic question is why the law, social reputation and family morality cannot readily recognise her life-saving purpose. Krogstad insists on the legal consequence; Nora initially assumes that love must authorise her act. The play stages their disagreement without turning either speaker's statement into a complete textbook account of nineteenth-century law.

By the end, Nora questions inherited rules but accepts the need to investigate them. Independent judgment therefore entails work and uncertainty. It is not simply permission to do anything one wishes.

Money, work and social standing

Money is a source of power, anxiety and hidden labour. Torvald controls the allowance while Nora secretly services a debt. Her pleasure in copying work suggests the satisfaction of earning and acting. Mrs Linde's search for employment and Anne's sacrifice show that women's economic conditions differ by class. Krogstad's job matters because wages and restored reputation affect his children's future.

Torvald's fear of scandal reveals how professional honour can outweigh domestic understanding. The restored bond removes an external financial danger while leaving the underlying marital problem intact.

Selfhood and education

Nora discovers that father and husband have supplied opinions for her. She must learn to distinguish borrowed beliefs from convictions she has examined. Her claim to personhood challenges the assumption that wifehood and motherhood exhaust her identity. The open ending presents education as a beginning whose consequences the audience must consider.

Dramatic form and technique

Realism and the problem play

The play uses a recognisable room, everyday money matters, domestic conversations and psychologically motivated conflict. This is realism: attention to credible social life rather than supernatural intervention or royal heroic action. Realistic drama can still be carefully constructed and symbolic.

The term "problem play" describes drama that places a social or moral issue under examination. Here unequal marriage and conflicting responsibilities become embodied in choices. Calling it a problem play does not mean it supplies a single official solution.

The well-made play, suspense and discussion

A well-made play builds suspense through an earlier secret, controlled revelation, a threatening document and reversals. Ibsen uses these devices in the forged bond, dismissal and letters. Exposition arrives through motivated conversation rather than a narrator. Dramatic irony arises when the audience knows Nora's debt while Torvald praises their freedom from borrowing.

Nora's delaying tactics and the inaccessible letterbox give suspense a physical form. Yet the second letter does not produce a conventional happy ending. It solves the blackmail plot and reveals a deeper crisis. The final discussion becomes the decisive action: Nora names the roles that have structured her life and refuses to resume them.

Objects, movements and symbols

- **The Christmas tree:** initially hidden for festive preparation, it is stripped and disordered in Act II. Its changing appearance supports the loss of Nora's composed domestic world. It remains a stage object as well as a symbol.
- **Macaroons:** the small forbidden pleasure introduces supervision and secret resistance. Do not equate eating sweets morally with forgery; their dramatic link is concealment.
- **The bond and letters:** written evidence carries the past into the present. The two letters expose Torvald's priorities through opposite reactions. Rank's cards bring another kind of irreversible knowledge.
- **The locked letterbox:** Torvald has the key. Nora's inability to control the letter literalises unequal access to household authority.
- **The tarantella and costume:** a dance intended for admiration becomes desperate delay. Torvald directs her movements while she struggles to postpone discovery. Changing into ordinary clothes marks the shift towards serious self-expression.
- **The door:** entrances introduce outside pressures; the final closing makes Nora's decision audible. In Sharp, the stage direction says that a door shuts below. Calling it the famous "door slam" is a customary description, not an exact quotation of that direction.

Language, title and textual evidence

Torvald's diminutives, Nora's early exclamations, evasions and interrupted sentences reveal unequal intimacy and rising pressure. The final conversation is comparatively sustained and direct. Analyse how dialogue changes rather than calling all early speech meaningless chatter. Stage directions supply pace, gesture, clothes and silence; they are evidence in a drama answer.

The title turns a comfortable home into an image of controlled play. Nora identifies herself as her father's doll-child and Torvald's doll-wife, while she has treated her children as dolls. The metaphor therefore includes her participation in inherited patterns as well as her subordination.

Use a small evidence bank: Act I, the hidden copying work and forged signature; Act II, the letterbox and dance rehearsal; Act III, the contrasting letters, change of clothes and departure. A brief verified phrase such as "Duties to myself" (Act III, Sharp) can support analysis, but an accurately explained event is also evidence. Do not invent page numbers.

Vocabulary and answer-building

Exposition supplies necessary earlier information. **Dramatic irony** is a gap between an audience's knowledge and a character's knowledge. A **foil** reveals another character through contrast. **Subtext** is meaning implied beneath the words spoken. **Patriarchy** describes social arrangements privileging male authority. **Agency** is the capacity to choose and act; it can exist under severe constraint. **Denouement** is the unravelling after the crisis, although this play deliberately leaves the future open.

Build an answer around a claim, an act-specific event and its significance. Connect narrative detail to dramatic form and theme. Distinguish what the play shows from your interpretation: it shows Nora leaving; it invites debate about whether departure can produce freedom. It neither records her future employment nor proves that Torvald can never change.

02 / Prepare

Original practice questions. MCQs are for understanding and revision; the site does not claim they mirror JNVU's examination format. Long answers include two complete models and three explicitly labelled essay outlines.

Multiple-choice questions

1. Why did Nora originally obtain money from Krogstad?

- A. To finance Torvald's recovery trip to Italy
- B. To purchase the family's present house
- C. To pay for Mrs Linde's journey
- D. To replace money lost by Dr Rank

Answer: A. The loan financed the stay in Italy recommended for Torvald's health. Nora's loving purpose is crucial to the conflict between her moral understanding and the consequences of forgery.

2. What discrepancy gives Krogstad evidence concerning Nora's bond?

- A. The repayment total exceeds the original loan
- B. Torvald's occupation is incorrectly recorded
- C. Her father's signature is dated after his death
- D. The bond is addressed to Mrs Linde

Answer: C. The signature carries a date three days after Nora's father died. Nora then admits that she wrote his name. The problem concerns the forged signature, not simply an unpaid instalment.

3. Who possesses the key to the letterbox?

- A. Nora
- B. Torvald
- C. Mrs Linde
- D. Anne

Answer: B. Torvald has the key. The locked letterbox is a practical obstacle to Nora's attempt to prevent disclosure and can also support interpretation of unequal household authority.

4. What immediate purpose does Nora's tarantella rehearsal serve in Act II?

- A. It announces her decision to accept Krogstad's demand
- B. It persuades Mrs Linde to stop working
- C. It provides the occasion for Dr Rank's first entrance
- D. It delays Torvald's reading of the letter

Answer: D. Nora uses the rehearsal to occupy Torvald and postpone the discovery. The dance also externalises her anxiety, turning a social entertainment into a desperate performance.

5. Why does Mrs Linde refuse Krogstad's offer to retrieve his first letter?

- A. She believes the Helmers need to confront the truth
- B. She wants Torvald to dismiss every bank employee
- C. She has already destroyed the bond
- D. She believes Nora has never borrowed money

Answer: A. Mrs Linde decides that concealment must end. Her choice helps transform a blackmail plot into an examination of marriage, although the painful outcome cannot be assumed to match all her expectations.

6. What do the black crosses on Dr Rank's cards signify?

- A. His resignation from the bank
- B. His approaching death and final withdrawal
- C. His engagement to Mrs Linde
- D. His discovery of the forged signature

Answer: B. Rank has told Nora that the marked card will announce the beginning of his final decline. The cards introduce mortality at the moment when Torvald still imagines domestic happiness.

7. What does Krogstad send with his second letter?

- A. Nora's tarantella costume
- B. A new bank appointment
- C. The loan bond
- D. Dr Rank's medical notes

Answer: C. He returns the bond, removing the immediate means of coercion. Torvald's rapid return to affectionate language then reveals that ending the threat does not repair the marriage.

8. Which description best defines the play's original ending?

- A. Nora's successful new career is narrated
- B. Nora stays after agreeing never to question Torvald
- C. Torvald leaves while Nora keeps the household
- D. Nora leaves, while her future remains unshown

Answer: D. The stage action ends with Nora's departure and the sound of a door shutting. Her later livelihood, the children's future and any eventual reconciliation are left outside the represented action.

9. Which feature most directly supports describing A Doll's House as realistic drama?

- A. Domestic dialogue and socially credible financial pressures
- B. Intervention by supernatural beings
- C. A royal battle presented on stage
- D. A chorus announcing an unchangeable fate

Answer: A. The recognisable room, daily conversation, employment and debt ground the play in contemporary social experience. Carefully arranged suspense and symbolism are compatible with realism.

10. Which is an example of dramatic irony in Act I?

- A. Nora and Mrs Linde both know they attended school together
- B. The audience knows about Nora's debt while Torvald praises freedom from borrowing
- C. Torvald openly reads Krogstad's second letter
- D. All characters share complete knowledge of the bond

Answer: B. The audience possesses information Torvald lacks. Consequently, his confidence about their debt-free household has a double meaning and reveals the gap between appearance and experience.

11. What does Anne's account contribute to the play?

- A. Proof that Torvald financed the Italian journey
- B. A supernatural explanation of Rank's illness
- C. A link between maternal sacrifice and economic necessity
- D. An account of Nora's future after departure

Answer: C. The nurse had to give up caring for her own daughter to earn a living. Her experience makes class significant to the discussion of motherhood and prevents treating all women's choices as identical.

12. Which action accompanies Nora's move from decorative performance to serious discussion?

- A. She destroys the Christmas tree
- B. She sends Torvald to Italy
- C. She asks Krogstad to teach her the tarantella
- D. She changes from her party costume into ordinary clothes

Answer: D. The change of clothes precedes the final conversation. It gives Nora's movement away from Torvald's preferred performance a concrete theatrical form without requiring a narrator.

13. The doll metaphor in Nora's final explanation applies to which pattern?

- A. Her father and husband controlling her, and her own play with her children
- B. Only the presents purchased for Emmy
- C. Only Mrs Linde's paid employment
- D. An actual miniature house inherited from her father

Answer: A. Nora describes successive doll-like relationships and recognises that she has reproduced the pattern with her children. The title concerns an inherited arrangement of power and play, rather than a literal miniature building.

14. Which pair provides the clearest contrasting relationship to the Helmers in Act III?

- A. Dr Rank and the porter
- B. Mrs Linde and Krogstad
- C. Anne and Torvald
- D. Krogstad and Dr Rank

Answer: B. Mrs Linde and Krogstad openly discuss their past and needs, while the Helmers must confront concealed assumptions. The contrast suggests a different basis for companionship but does not prove the new pair's future happiness.

15. How does Ibsen transform the expected resolution of the secret-document plot?

- A. The first letter is never read
- B. The debt is paid by an unseen royal benefactor

C. The threat ends, but the marital crisis becomes more fundamental

D. The ending reveals that Nora imagined all the events

Answer: C. The second letter offers the mechanical possibility of reconciliation. Nora's recognition prevents that easy ending: the external danger is resolved while the unequal marriage becomes the central unresolved problem.

Very-short-answer questions

1. What loving purpose lies behind Nora's secret loan?

Nora obtained the money to take Torvald to Italy when doctors said a southern stay was necessary for his recovery. Her purpose complicates judgment of the forged signature without cancelling the fact that she forged it.

2. Distinguish Nora's borrowing from the forgery exposed by Krogstad.

The loan creates a debt that Nora has been repaying. The separate act of forgery is her writing her father's name on the bond. Krogstad's threat rests on exposing that act, rather than merely announcing that she borrowed money.

3. Where does the visible action take place, and why is that useful?

The visible action remains in the Helmers' living room during the Christmas period. The enclosed domestic setting concentrates attention on relationships, while doors, visitors and letters bring social and economic pressures into the supposedly secure home.

4. Define dramatic irony using one event in the play.

Dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows something a character does not. Torvald praises freedom from debt while the audience knows Nora has secretly borrowed and repaid money. His confidence therefore exposes his incomplete understanding of their household.

5. What does the nurse's separation from her daughter reveal?

Anne's experience shows that caring for another family may require a working woman to leave her own child. It links maternal sacrifice to class and economic necessity, providing a sobering context for Nora's questions about departure.

6. Why does Dr Rank's declaration of love affect Nora's plan?

Nora has considered asking Rank for financial assistance. Once he declares his love, she cannot treat the request as neutral help from a family friend. The disclosure complicates trust and makes her abandon that proposed way out.

7. Why is Krogstad's bank position more than a source of wages?

Krogstad wants to recover public respectability after an earlier offence and protect his children's prospects. Losing the position threatens this attempted rehabilitation. His motives explain his desperation, although they do not justify coercing Nora.

8. What does Nora initially mean by the expected wonderful thing?

Nora expects Torvald to reject Krogstad's pressure and take responsibility for her action himself. She hopes for his self-sacrificing love while also fearing its cost. His response to the first letter destroys that expectation.

9. What should an answer avoid claiming about Nora's future?

The play does not show Nora obtaining work, becoming wealthy, returning to Torvald or permanently losing contact with her children. It ends at departure. Such possibilities can be discussed as questions, but they cannot be presented as narrated facts.

10. Why should students identify the translation when quoting the play?

English translations differ in names, pet names, currency and the wording of major speeches. Identify your edition and reproduce its wording accurately. Act references remain useful across editions, whereas page numbers and memorised quotations may not transfer.

Short-answer questions

1. How does Act I complicate the idea that Nora is merely frivolous?

Act I first presents Nora through shopping, sweets and playful responses to Torvald. His language encourages the audience to see a charming dependent. Her conversation with Mrs Linde then reveals a different history: she obtained money for the Italian journey, saved from her allowance and undertook copying work to repay it. These actions require effort, secrecy and initiative. Her pride in earning challenges Torvald's description of her as a wasteful child. Nevertheless, the revelation does not make Nora fully knowledgeable about law or relationships. She assumes that her loving purpose must justify the forged signature and still imagines a heroic response from Torvald. Ibsen develops her as a contradictory person whose abilities exceed the role she performs, preparing the final demand for self-education.

2. Analyse the function of Torvald's pet names for Nora.

Torvald's small animal names establish the familiar sound of the Helmers' marriage. On the surface, they communicate affection and playful intimacy. They also position Nora as a pleasing creature who depends on his supervision. His comments about spending and sweets accompany the names, so tenderness becomes connected with instruction and control. Nora often answers within this language and uses the performance to seek money or attention. The dramatic effect changes once the audience learns about her secret labour and borrowing: Torvald's picture becomes visibly inadequate. After the second letter, his return to protective affection shows his wish to restore the same arrangement. The final conversation rejects that restoration. Nora wants to speak as an adult whose judgment matters, rather than resume a charming identity defined by her husband.

3. Explain Mrs Linde's importance beyond serving as Nora's confidante.

Mrs Linde enables retrospective exposition because Nora explains her earlier actions to an old friend. Her years of work also challenge the impression that respectable women encounter only small domestic concerns. She married without love to support dependent relatives, giving sacrifice a different economic form from Nora's borrowing. Her renewed relationship with Krogstad creates a foil to the Helmers: they acknowledge their past and express present needs. Most decisively, she prevents Krogstad from recovering the first letter because she believes secrecy must end. This choice makes truth unavoidable and moves the play towards its final discussion. Mrs Linde's desire for shared responsibility should be read through her particular history, rather than converted into a rule that all women need marriage or must choose as she does.

4. Why is Krogstad an unsuitable character to describe as a simple villain?

Krogstad threatens Nora and uses knowledge of her forgery to protect and later improve his own position. These actions are coercive and cause real fear. Yet the play supplies motives that complicate a purely villainous reading. An earlier offence has damaged his standing, and the bank position offers a way to regain respectability for himself and his children. His offence parallels Nora's, exposing unequal judgments rather than separating an innocent heroine from a uniquely corrupt outsider. His conversation with Mrs Linde reveals emotional loss and capacity for hope. Their proposed shared life changes his conduct, and he returns the bond. Explaining this development does not excuse the blackmail. It shows Ibsen giving a threatening character a social history and the possibility of moral change.

5. Discuss the dramatic significance of the tarantella rehearsal.

In Act II, the tarantella links performance with suspense. Nora needs to delay Torvald's reading of Krogstad's letter, so she asks him to help with her dance. A social entertainment thereby becomes a desperate attempt to control time. Her increasingly wild movements make anxiety visible without an explanatory narrator. Torvald tries to correct and direct her, reproducing his authority within the marriage through bodily instruction. The costume also recalls the Italian journey whose financing lies behind the present danger. Because the audience knows the reason for Nora's behaviour, Torvald's concern with artistic correctness has an ironic limitation. The rehearsal therefore advances the plot, reveals the gap in their knowledge and embodies Nora's struggle within a feminine performance that she will finally abandon.

6. How do the two letters expose Torvald's priorities?

The first letter reveals Nora's forgery and places Torvald under threat of scandal. He responds by condemning her and concentrating on his reputation, while proposing to preserve outward appearances. He does not acknowledge the years of work through which she tried to protect him. The second letter returns the bond and removes Krogstad's leverage. Torvald immediately resumes affectionate language and presents himself as forgiving Nora. The contrast matters more than either response in isolation: his emotional change follows the change in danger to himself. Nora therefore recognises that the supposed reconciliation would restore the same unequal relationship. The letters resolve the external threat but deepen the internal crisis, allowing Ibsen to transform a secret-document plot into an examination of marriage.

7. Explain how the title develops through Nora's final speech.

The title initially suggests the attractive Helmer home, but Nora's final explanation reveals the controlling relationships beneath that appearance. Her father treated her as a doll-child, supplying opinions that she repeated. Torvald continued the pattern by making her a doll-wife who entertained him and adapted to his preferences. Nora also recognises her own participation when she describes treating the children as dolls. The metaphor thus extends beyond accusing one man: it identifies a learned pattern that can move across generations. A doll has an appearance and performs an assigned part without an independent voice. Nora's demand to educate herself opposes that condition. The title condenses the relation between comfort, performance and power, while her departure interrupts the household game rather than simply destroying an actual object.

8. How can the play be both realistic and symbolically constructed?

Realism gives *A Doll's House* a recognisable social world through domestic furniture, conversation, wages, debt and employment. Characters act from credible fears and desires rather than supernatural commands. Symbolic construction adds significance to objects already useful in that world. The Christmas tree is part of festive preparation, while its later disorder supports Nora's changed emotional condition. The letterbox is ordinary household equipment, but Torvald's possession of its key can illuminate unequal access to information. Similarly, the dance is a plausible party entertainment whose rehearsal becomes an image of desperate performance. These meanings arise from concrete action and context. They do not require abandoning realism. A strong answer explains each object's practical dramatic function before developing its possible symbolic implications.

Essay and long-answer questions

1. Trace Nora's development in *A Doll's House*. Does the ending represent a complete achievement of freedom?

Nora's development in *A Doll's House* is a movement from performing an approved domestic identity towards claiming the right to examine her life. Ibsen makes that movement convincing by revealing abilities already concealed beneath her playful behaviour. The ending marks a decisive refusal of dependence, but it leaves the practical achievement of freedom unfinished.

At the beginning, Nora appears to inhabit Torvald's picture of her: she shops, speaks excitedly and answers his affectionate animal names. Their exchanges link tenderness with his authority over money and behaviour. Her secret macaroons show that she can evade his rules while outwardly accepting them. This limited resistance operates within the marriage rather than questioning its structure. The audience must therefore read the opening performance without assuming it is Nora's entire personality.

Her conversation with Mrs Linde supplies the first substantial correction. Nora secretly procured money for the Italian journey that saved Torvald's health. She has reduced personal spending and undertaken copying work to repay the loan. Her pleasure in earning demonstrates resourcefulness and a desire to be taken seriously. However, her account also reveals incomplete understanding. She assumes her loving purpose must justify writing her father's name and believes that repayment should settle Krogstad's objections. Her capacity to act exceeds her grasp of the society in which she acts.

As exposure approaches, Nora continues to rely on strategies learned within her dependent role. She pleads with Torvald, considers appealing to Dr Rank and uses the tarantella rehearsal to delay the first letter's discovery. The frantic dance makes her fear visible while Torvald still thinks he is directing a performance. Her expected miracle remains a romantic fantasy: Torvald will assume responsibility himself. She both hopes for that sacrifice and fears its cost, revealing how deeply her imagined solution depends on his heroic action.

Act III overturns this expectation. After reading the first letter, Torvald concentrates on scandal and condemns her. When the second letter returns the bond, he swiftly resumes his protective

affection. Nora recognises the meaning of this reversal. His relief would restore their old arrangement without understanding her effort or treating her as an equal. The collapse of the fantasy produces a change in the form of her speech. She replaces evasions with a sustained discussion and changes out of the costume associated with decorative performance.

Her doll metaphor connects father, husband and children, acknowledging that she too has reproduced the household pattern. Leaving is therefore more than retaliation against Torvald. She believes she needs education before she can judge inherited rules or fulfil responsibilities intelligently. Her concern about the children makes the decision painful, and the play does not erase that cost.

Nora achieves agency by refusing to continue the role assigned to her. Yet agency is not the same as secure employment, complete knowledge or guaranteed happiness. None of those outcomes is represented. The closing door makes her choice definite while leaving its consequences open. Her freedom begins as a demanding task of learning, giving the ending both force and uncertainty.

2. Discuss *A Doll's House* as realistic drama that uses and transforms the conventions of the well-made play.

A Doll's House combines a credible domestic world with carefully arranged suspense. Ibsen uses the machinery of a well-made play to expose the inadequacy of an apparently happy marriage. The plot appears capable of ending when the threatening document is returned, but the decisive action continues through Nora's recognition and departure.

The realistic setting is essential. A comfortable living room, household purchases, a stove and doors establish an ordinary middle-class environment. Conversations concern allowances, professional advancement, debt and employment. These details make the characters' anxieties socially intelligible. Torvald fears loss of reputation, Krogstad fears the collapse of rehabilitation, and Mrs Linde seeks useful work. Their pressures do not require supernatural causes or heroic public events. The single visible room also concentrates attention on conduct, gesture and language.

Nevertheless, everyday appearance does not mean accidental construction. The well-made play typically arranges suspense around a concealed earlier event, gradual disclosure, a crucial document and changes of fortune. Nora's secret loan and forged signature supply the earlier event. Her conversations with Mrs Linde and Krogstad reconstruct the past through motivated exposition. Each disclosure changes the audience's understanding of the cheerful opening. Dramatic irony develops when Torvald praises their freedom from debt while spectators already know about Nora's borrowing.

The document gives suspense a physical centre. Krogstad's threatened dismissal connects Torvald's professional decision with Nora's secret. Once the first letter enters the locked letterbox, knowledge is present but temporarily inaccessible. Torvald's possession of the key matters practically before it becomes symbolically suggestive. Nora's pleas and dance rehearsal delay the moment of reading, while the audience understands why time has become urgent. The tarantella thus works as action, character revelation and an expression of panic.

Realism also permits symbolism because the objects remain plausible parts of domestic life. The Christmas tree's disorder supports the changing atmosphere. Nora's costume embodies the performance Torvald admires, and her later ordinary clothes accompany a different mode of speech. Rank's marked cards bring mortality into the room. Such details produce meaning through use and placement rather than interrupting the social world with unexplained allegory.

Act III offers what might ordinarily become a restorative ending. Mrs Linde and Krogstad renew their relationship, and Krogstad returns the bond. The practical obstacle to the Helmers' happiness has disappeared. Torvald accordingly tries to resume affection and presents forgiveness as sufficient. Ibsen makes that attempted resolution the evidence of a deeper failure: the husband responds to safety without recognising the unequal relationship that made secrecy necessary.

The final discussion therefore replaces conventional reconciliation. Nora analyses her experience as father's doll and husband's doll, questions received opinions and announces the need for self-education. Words become consequential dramatic acts because they change what the characters can continue to accept. Her departure resolves the decision to leave while withholding the future. Ibsen retains suspense, causality and revelation from the well-made play, but uses them to reach a problem that cannot be neatly settled by restoring a document or removing a villain.

3. Examine the treatment of marriage and gender in *A Doll's House*, with attention to the children and the open ending.

Answer outline

Thesis: argue that Ibsen questions a marriage based on protection, dependence and attractive performance. The play connects gender inequality with the need for adult judgment, while leaving the responsibilities and consequences of separation unresolved.

Opening household: analyse pet names, money and the macaroon prohibition in Act I. Affection and control coexist. Nora can manipulate this arrangement but cannot openly speak about her significant financial action. Avoid claiming that early affection is wholly false.

Hidden contribution: use the loan, economising and copying work. Nora has protected Torvald through labour that their domestic roles do not acknowledge. Connect her forgery to restricted options and conflicting moral judgments; do not suggest that benevolent motives erase the act.

Crisis: compare the two letters in Act III. Torvald's fear of disgrace governs his condemnation; safety governs his return to tenderness. Nora concludes that the reconciliation would reproduce the same relationship. Her expected heroic sacrifice is also a fantasy that must be questioned.

Alternative relationship: Mrs Linde and Krogstad discuss their past and current needs frankly. This contrast permits the possibility of companionship grounded in truth. Their proposed marriage does not prove a universal solution or a guaranteed future.

Children and class: consider Nora's tenderness and distress, her fear about moral corruption, and Anne's economically compelled separation from her daughter. Analyse the tension between

self-education and parental care. Neither dismiss the children nor let their existence end the argument automatically.

Ending: explain ordinary clothes, the sustained conversation and the shutting door. Nora seeks the capacity to think as a person, a demand made concrete through her experience as a woman. Conclude that departure establishes a choice, while livelihood, learning, future care and possible reunion remain questions. Feminist and selfhood readings need not exclude each other.

4. Analyse how Mrs Linde, Krogstad and Dr Rank contribute to the development of the central conflict.

Answer outline

Thesis: present the supporting characters as agents whose histories bring work, social disgrace and mortality into the Helmers' apparently secure home. They enable revelation and comparison while possessing motives beyond helping Nora's story.

Mrs Linde: begin with her arrival in Act I. Her old friendship prompts Nora's account of the Italian journey and secret work, making exposition credible. Her own marriage for family support and subsequent employment introduce economic experience that contrasts with Nora's protected image.

Krogstad: explain the threat to his bank position, desire for rehabilitation and concern for his children. His coercion is wrong, but his earlier offence parallels Nora's forgery. Discuss how this parallel unsettles Torvald's simple division between respectable and corrupt people. Track the first letter as the mechanism that makes disclosure unavoidable.

Renewed relationship: analyse Mrs Linde's and Krogstad's Act III conversation. Their acknowledgement of history and need contrasts with the Helmers' concealed assumptions. Hope produces Krogstad's withdrawal and the return of the bond. Mrs Linde's insistence that the first letter remain shifts the action from rescue to truth. Do not portray her as knowing the exact outcome in advance.

Dr Rank: consider friendship, illness and his declaration of love. The declaration prevents Nora from treating financial help as uncomplicated assistance. His cards announce approaching death and disturb the household's optimistic self-image. Discuss inherited consequences as the characters understand them, while avoiding an asserted modern diagnosis.

Synthesis: show that the supporting characters both move the plot and broaden its social questions. Mrs Linde and Krogstad provide a contrasting possibility of companionship; Rank exposes the fragility of appearances. End by explaining that removal of their external pressures cannot repair the central marriage, because Nora's recognition has revealed a deeper imbalance.

5. Discuss the relationship between stage objects, performance and meaning in A Doll's House.

Answer outline

Thesis: argue that Ibsen develops meaning from ordinary objects and physically staged actions. Explain each detail's practical function before interpreting it; realism and symbolic suggestion operate together.

Christmas tree: locate its festive arrival in Act I and altered condition in Act II. Nora's preparation initially contributes to the image of domestic happiness. The stripped, disordered tree supports the collapse of composure. Avoid claiming that every branch has a fixed allegorical meaning.

Macaroons: discuss the small secret pleasure and Torvald's questioning. The sweet establishes supervision, concealment and limited resistance. Its link to the debt is structural, through secrecy; eating a macaroon is not morally equivalent to forgery.

Documents and letterbox: explain the forged bond as material evidence of earlier action. The first letter brings danger and the second removes it. Compare Torvald's reactions to establish the deeper marital problem. The key and locked box create delay and can suggest his control of information. Rank's cards add a separate, sombre announcement.

Tarantella and costume: trace how entertainment becomes Nora's tactic to postpone reading. Increasingly frantic movement makes anxiety visible. Torvald's direction of the rehearsal reproduces his authority. The Italian costume recalls the journey financed by the debt. Nora's change to ordinary dress accompanies more direct speech.

Doors and sound: consider how entrances carry public pressures into the room and how Torvald's study separates spheres of activity. The final door closing gives separation an audible theatrical form. Note that Sharp's direction reports a shutting door below; a remembered slogan about a slam is not the exact wording.

Conclusion: connect these details to the title's doll metaphor. Objects do not substitute for character analysis; their changing uses reveal the struggle between comfortable appearance, prescribed performance and independent judgment. The ending concludes an action while keeping the consequences open.

03 / Revise

Course and edition reminder

A Doll's House - Henrik Ibsen; Semester I Major English, Drama, 01/ENG/MJR/101, Unit II. This guide follows R. Farquharson Sharp's translation; academic review is pending. Check quotations in your edition. Christine/Kristine and Anne/Anne-Marie are translation variants.

Ten essential points about the work

1. **Publication and premiere:** *Et dukkehjem* appeared on 4 December 1879; the first performance was in Copenhagen on 21 December 1879.
2. **Form:** a three-act prose drama, usually discussed as realistic drama and a problem play.
3. **Place:** the Helmers' living room in a Norwegian setting; events outside are reported or enter through visitors and documents.
4. **Time:** the Christmas period; festive promise becomes emotional and moral crisis.
5. **Earlier action:** Nora financed Torvald's recovery trip to Italy through a secret loan from Krogstad.
6. **Forgery:** she signed her father's name on the bond. The date after his death alerts Krogstad. Repayment does not erase the forged signature.
7. **Labour:** Nora saves from her allowance and undertakes copying work; her apparent frivolity conceals effort and responsibility.
8. **Suspense:** Krogstad's dismissal leads to the first letter; the locked letterbox and tarantella delay its reading.
9. **Reversal:** returning the bond ends the immediate threat, but Torvald's changed reaction exposes the failure of mutual understanding.
10. **Ending:** Nora leaves to educate herself. The shutting door signals separation; her later life and any reunion are unshown.

Five useful points about Ibsen

1. Norwegian playwright, **1828-1906**; write **Henrik**, the author's standard spelling.
2. Theatre experience helped him organise scenery, entrances, performance and dramatic suspense.
3. His contemporary dramas examine the conflict between respectable appearances and difficult private truths.
4. *Pillars of Society* precedes this play; *Ghosts* follows it. Mention other works only when relevant to the question.

5. Ibsen resisted being reduced to a social campaigner. This does not invalidate feminist interpretation of the play's gendered experience.

Characters: recall the complication

| Character | Role and interpretive caution |

| --- | --- |

| Nora | Resourceful borrower and mother; awakens to unequal marriage. Independent decision begins education rather than completes it. |

| Torvald | Husband and new bank manager; affection combines with supervision. His reputation dominates his response to crisis. |

| Mrs Linde | Experienced working widow; chooses truth and renewed companionship. Her choice differs from Nora's because their situations differ. |

| Krogstad | Lender and threatened bank employee; coercive but concerned about disgrace and his children. Hope makes withdrawal possible. |

| Dr Rank | Dying friend who loves Nora; exposes the fragility beneath comfortable appearances. Avoid a definite modern diagnosis. |

| Anne and children | Make economic sacrifice, care and the costs of separation visible. |

Themes with evidence

Unequal marriage: Act I's pet names and allowance prepare Act III's doll metaphor. Nora objects to being treated as a dependent object whose opinions are supplied by others.

Law and moral purpose: Act I's forgery debate sets love against formal rules. Nora has committed the action; the play questions the conditions and judgments surrounding it rather than declaring the signature genuine.

Money and power: the secret repayments, Mrs Linde's job search and Krogstad's threatened dismissal reveal work beneath domestic respectability.

Selfhood: the final conversation distinguishes a person's capacity to judge from inherited roles. Nora accepts uncertainty about what she must learn.

Appearance and truth: costumes, concealment and Torvald's concern for public reputation culminate in the failure of apparent reconciliation.

Sacrifice and class: compare Nora's borrowing, Mrs Linde's earlier marriage and Anne's separation from her daughter. Do not assume all women possess the same choices.

Devices and symbols

| Device or object | Evidence and use |

| --- | --- |

| Dramatic irony | Audience knows about debt while Torvald praises freedom from borrowing. |

| Retrospective exposition | Conversations reconstruct the Italian journey and earlier relationships. |

| Well-made-play suspense | Secret bond, blackmail, letters, delays and reversal structure the action. |

| Christmas tree | Decorative order gives way to disorder in Act II. |

| Tarantella | Public entertainment becomes a frantic private delaying tactic. |

| Letterbox and key | Physical control over information supports unequal household power. |

| Clothes and door | Nora's ordinary dress precedes plain speaking; the closing door makes departure audible. |

Five exam questions to practise

1. Trace Nora's development from her Act I performance to her final decision.
2. How does the play criticise marriage while keeping the possibility of a different relationship open?
3. Explain the dramatic functions of Krogstad and Mrs Linde.
4. Examine the use and transformation of well-made-play techniques.
5. Analyse any three stage objects or performances in relation to a major theme.

These original practice prompts are not verified previous-year questions. The preparation bank contains answers and labelled essay outlines.

Final answer checklist

- Answer the exact question with a claim about the play.
- Use events from more than one act where appropriate.
- Explain what a detail does on stage, not just what it represents.
- Keep plot summary subordinate to argument.
- Identify quotation translation; avoid invented pages or remembered wording.
- Discuss gender and selfhood together where the text supports them.
- Treat legal statements as characters' claims unless separately researched.
- Acknowledge the children and uncertainty when evaluating departure.
- End with a judgment supported by the evidence already discussed.

Sources & review notes

- Academic review is pending. This is an original undergraduate study aid, not an official university guide or an examiner-approved answer key.
- Syllabus alignment uses the 2026-27 institutional copy because a direct JNVU download was unavailable. The display name Henrik Ibsen corrects the source's printed misspelling; the raw wording is retained in the syllabus manifest.
- The primary English text is R. Farquharson Sharp's translation. Class editions may differ in names, currency, pet names, stage directions and quoted wording; act references are used throughout.
- Publication and premiere dates were checked against the indexed University of Oslo Ibsen Centre record; full direct retrieval of that page was unavailable.
- Symbolic, feminist and selfhood readings are presented as interpretations supported by textual events. Nora's future and any eventual reconciliation are not shown.
- The question bank contains original practice only. It invents no previous-year questions, exam marks or official word limits. Two long answers are complete prose models; three are explicitly labelled answer outlines.

References

A Doll's House: R. Farquharson Sharp translation

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2542/pg2542-images.html>

Primary text for act summaries, character analysis, stage directions and the brief quotation. The text identifies Henrik Ibsen as author and R. Farquharson Sharp as translator. Original analysis uses act references because pagination and wording vary between editions. Accessed 4 October 2026.

Project Gutenberg ebook 2542: bibliographic record

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2542>

Verifies author dates 1828-1906, translator identity, original title *Et dukkehjem*, and public-domain status in the United States. This guide does not reproduce the ebook or a modern copyrighted translation. Accessed 4 October 2026.

University of Oslo Virtual Ibsen Centre: *Et dukkehjem* (1879)

<https://www.hf.uio.no/is/tjenester/virtuelle-ibsensenteret/om-ibsens-verk/du/>

The indexed institutional summary records publication on 4 December 1879 in Copenhagen and premiere there on 21 December 1879. Direct page retrieval failed during this review; those limited date facts were verified from the search-readable institutional result. Accessed 4 October 2026.

Gresham College: Theatre and Individualism - Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*

<https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch-now/theatre-and-individualism-henrik-ibsen-dolls-house>

Professor Belinda Jack's 26 January 2016 lecture supports the discussion of individualism, gendered interpretation, theatrical ambiguity and the reluctant alternative ending for German performances. No lecture passages are quoted. Life years are independently verified from the ebook record. Accessed 4 October 2026.

JNVU undergraduate English curriculum, 2026-27: institutional mirror

https://gdmcjodhpur.org/img/download/dl_6a6db3b800c0b9.62671396.pdf

Course alignment supplied by the project's curriculum verification: Semester I Major English, Drama, 01/ENG/MJR/101, Unit II. This is an institutional mirror rather than the university's live download endpoint. The guide uses the author's standard spelling Henrik; source wording is preserved separately by the project. Curriculum alignment and content remain pending academic review.

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