

Before Reading:

Think about the title: **A Doll's House**. What do you associate with a doll's house? What are some positive and negative associations?

As You Read:



1. What is the **atmosphere** Ibsen wishes to present in his set description of the Helmer home? What associations are there with the room he describes and the things in it? (For example, a piano, a rocking chair, a pair of armchairs, a fireplace, etc.)
2. Just in his first 10-12 lines, what is revealed about **Torvald's character**, and his **attitude toward his wife**?
3. Notice how much of the dialogue at the beginning of the play is about **money**—spending it, loaning it, wasting it, etc. What would you say is **Nora's attitude toward money**?
4. Note the little bit about **macaroons**. What was evidently previously said by Torvald about macaroons? Again, what does this say about him and his attitude toward his wife? **How could the macaroons be a symbol or metaphor?**
5. Ibsen is a kind of bridge between older kinds of European drama (artificial tragedies like Shakespeare's about kings and queens and tragic heroes of a lofty kind) and newer, more realistic 20th Century drama. He is often called the Father of Modern Drama; however, his plays also contained elements of the traditional "well-made plays" of his time, including artificially logical plots. **The appearance of Mrs. Linde at this moment, after nearly a decade of separation from Nora, is one such artificiality.** How is her appearance kind of unrealistic?
6. Nora reveals some of her attitude about life as she talks to Mrs. Linde. What kinds of things does Nora say that make her, at this point in the play, seem **a bit clueless**, unaware of others and their lives compared to her own? What things has she said that Christine might be offended by?
7. Pay attention to that trip to Italy. **Why did Nora try so hard to come up with so much money** at that early point in her marriage for a trip to Italy?
8. **Why did Mrs. Linde marry a man she really didn't love?** This play is partly about this idea of marrying for love, vs. marrying for other reasons. **What reasons can you think of for marrying someone?** Think of at least five different reasons.
9. How does Mrs. Linde's comment that **Nora is really just a child** affect Nora? What does Mrs. Linde mean by it?
10. Note the legal point Mrs. Linde brings up, that **a wife can't get a loan without her husband's permission**. In 2011, the US Fed ruled that credit card applications could only ask for an *individual's* income, not a *household's* income. By far most stay-at-home parents are women, and this means they are basically "unemployed" for credit card application purposes...and in fact "can't get credit without their husband's permission," in a way. What's your view? Does that ruling make sense?
11. **Why does Nora think Torvald is attracted to her?** Look in her lines carefully.



12. What does Nora mean when she says taking in work, working late copying, was **almost like being a man**?
13. What is **Nora's immediate reaction when Krogstad enters the room**? As a careful reader, could you predict what Krogstad's role in this act would be?
14. **Dr. Rank is an odd character in the play. It will take some thinking to understand what Ibsen meant by introducing him into the play.** (The other main characters are all actually rather easy to “get”; they all have clear roles to play in Ibsen's theme.) How can you tell even early on that Dr. Rank is dying? What is his attitude toward death?
15. How does Nora treat her children? What did she buy them for Christmas presents? **In her play and games with them, what qualities does Nora display?**
16. Krogstad's return, and his threats to Nora, represent two other **very traditional plot elements in an old-fashioned “well-made play”**—a **“skeleton in the family closet”** that Nora will try to keep hidden, as well as a **clearly-defined villain**. He is clearly the bad guy. Note later how Ibsen will turn both of these elements upside-down, changing the audience's expectation of them.
17. The **Christmas tree** is another thing in the play that is often seen as a **symbol**. Think about a Christmas tree, what it is and how it's decorated. Can you already see some things the tree could be a symbol of? Hint: Notice how, immediately following the decorating of the tree, Nora mentions the costume party and what costume she'll wear. How does this relate to the overall idea that **the Helmer home is a doll house**?
18. What do **Nora's last lines in this act** mean?
19. By the end of this act, **how many lies has Nora told**?
20. In this act, what does the word **“wonderful”** (and “tremendous” and “delightful”) almost always refer to?



Photos from the LaGrange College Theater Arts 2008 production of *A Doll's House*.