



ENDLESS
POSSIBILITIES
on every
stage.



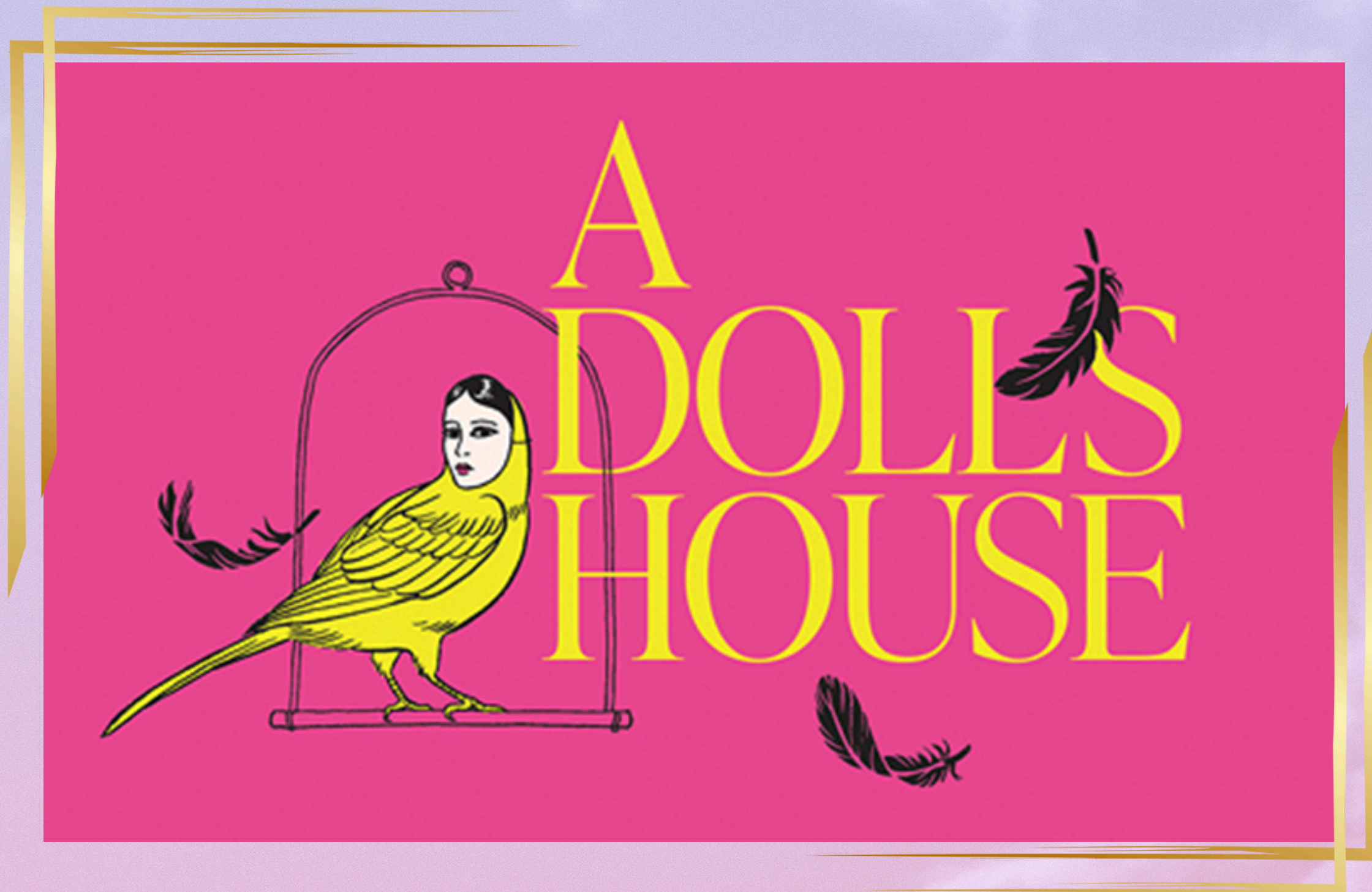
TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE

A Doll's House

By Henrik Ibsen

A New Version by Amy Herzog

Presented in Partnership with Theatre Calgary



2025.2026 Season

Stanley Stage

September 4 – October 5, 2025

This show is proudly sponsored by



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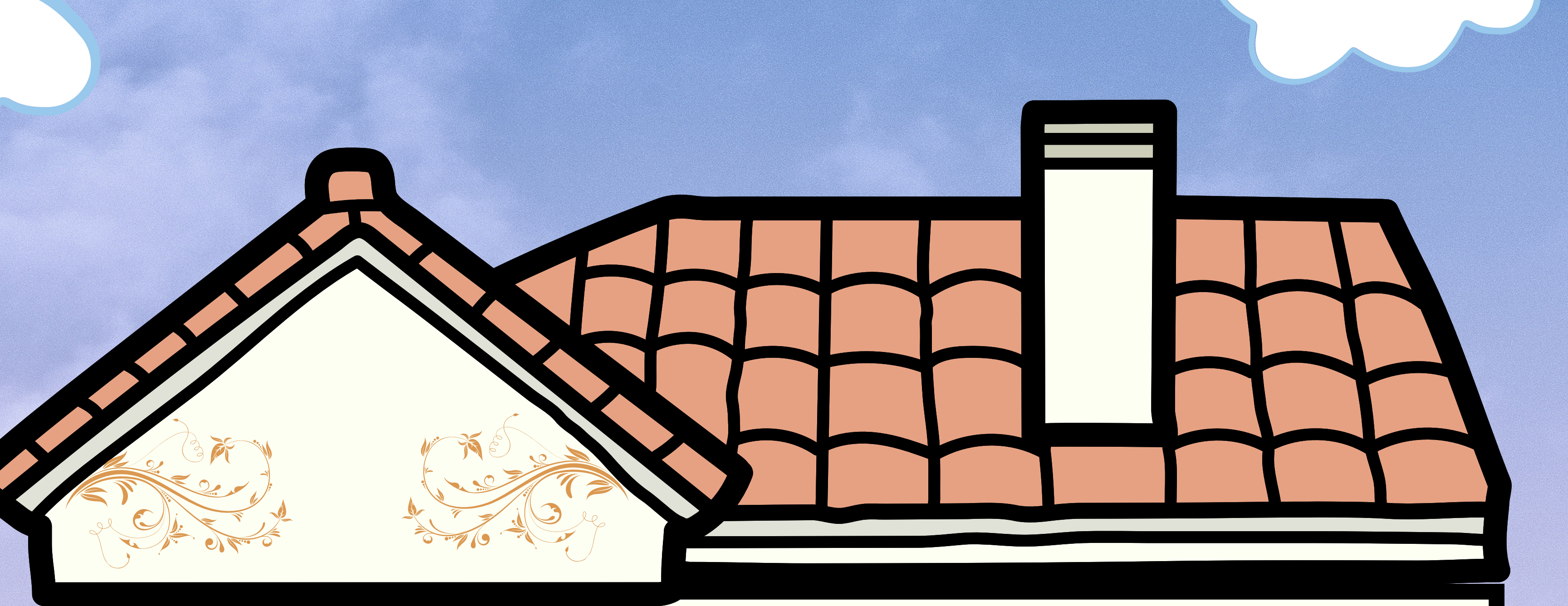
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WELCOME

This guide was created for teachers and students. It contains an overview of the play's story as well as informative resources and activities for teachers and students. The guide aims to provide background knowledge and critical perspectives on the musical that will yield fruitful discussion and foster an understanding and appreciation of theatre arts.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for the guide, please contact our Education & Community Engagement Coordinator, Mikenzie Page, mpage@artsclub.com.

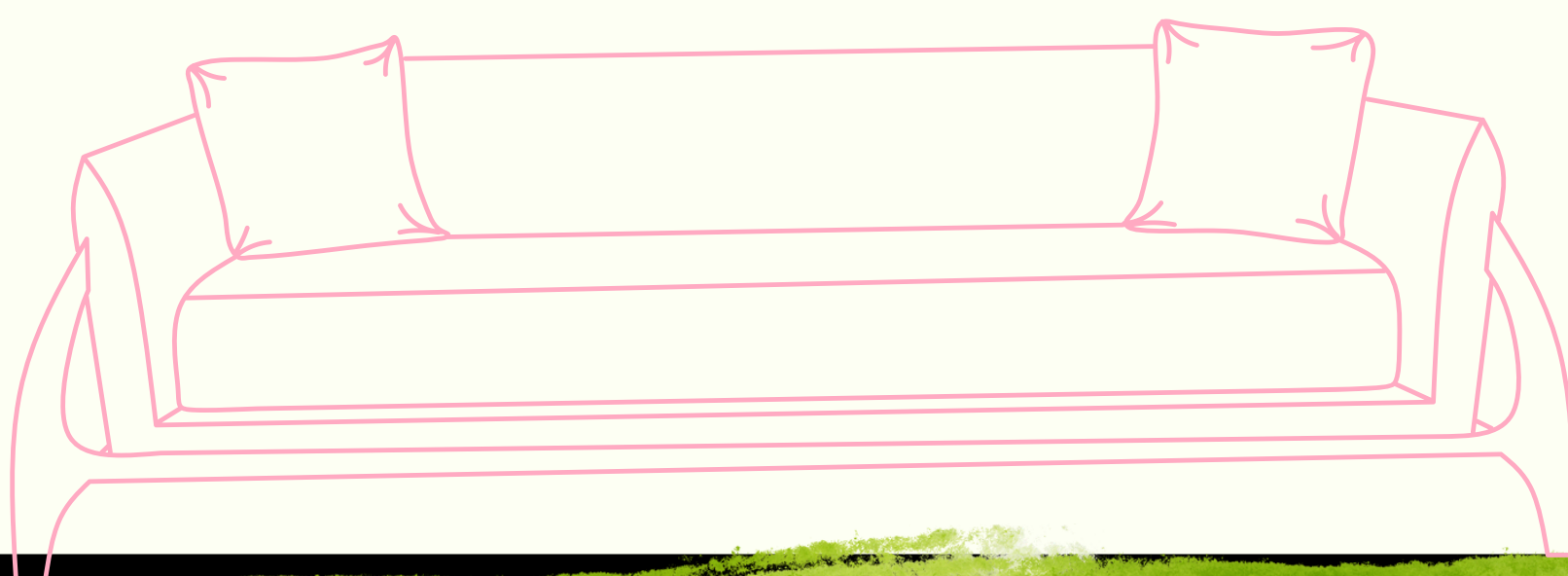
This study guide was written by Natalie Warner, Sophie McNeilly, Kevan Ellis, and Mikenzie Page.



ABOUT THE ARTS CLUB THEATRE COMPANY

The Arts Club of Vancouver was founded in 1958 as a private club for artists, musicians, and actors. It became the Arts Club Theatre in 1964 when the company opened its first stage in a converted gospel hall at Seymour and Davie Streets. Now in its 62nd season of producing professional live theatre in Vancouver, the Arts Club Theatre Company is a non-profit charitable organization that operates three theatres: the Granville Island Stage, the Stanley Stage, and the Olympic Village Stage at the BMO Theatre Centre. Its popular productions range from musicals and contemporary comedies to new works and classics.

Learn more about the Arts Club Theatre Company at artsclub.com.



Ćəsnaʔəm: The Story of this Land

The Stanley Industrial Alliance Theatre stands on the ancestral territory of the xʷməθkʷə́yəm Nation, and the former city of Ćəsnaʔəm, which was located at the mouth of the Fraser River. The city of Ćəsnaʔəm is an important historical site for xʷməθkʷə́yəm (Musqueam). It symbolizes the nation's resilience and its connection to the land. We honour the history of this land as a step towards recognition and respect to the xʷməθkʷə́yəm (Musqueam) people. Just as xʷməθkʷə́yəm (Musqueam) was named for the blooming flower məθkʷə́y, we hope to grow our connection with the land and its people.

The Arts Club Theatre Company would like to acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷə́yəm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliwətaʔ Nations, the original stewards of this land on which we operate. We would like to ask those visiting or living here to share their thanks by supporting local Indigenous artists and communities. Acknowledging is always a start to supporting; as we step forward, we wish to be better partners, healers, and helpers to our Indigenous neighbours.

For further reading, click below to read more about xʷməθkʷə́yəm (Musqueam's) Story from the Musqueam Indian Band website:

[Musqueam's Story](https://www.musqueam.bc.ca/our-story/)

<https://www.musqueam.bc.ca/our-story/>

Attending the Show

Arriving at the Theatre



Please arrive at the theatre with 30 minutes before the show to pick up and distribute tickets. Buses may unload passengers in the loading zone in front of the theatre, but engines must be turned off while doing so. They will have to find alternate parking for the duration of the show.

Theatre Etiquette



In order to ensure an enjoyable show for all audience members, please share these general theatre etiquette guidelines with students.


- Please turn off mobile phones and other electronic devices for the duration of the show. If you are concerned about missing an emergency call, please leave your name or device and seat location with an usher and they will alert you.
- No outside food or drink is allowed in the theatre.
- Please be modest with your use of fragrances so that audience members with allergies can also enjoy the performance.
- If you need to leave the theatre during the performance, you will be seated again at the intermission or another appropriate interval.
- Reactions are welcome and the best part of live theatre! We do ask that you please respect your fellow audience members and the performers by refraining from talking during the performance.
- If you have a complaint about another guest, please tell an usher or the Audience Services Manager rather than approaching the person yourself. They will be happy to address your concerns.





Learning Objectives:

After viewing A Doll's House and working through the following activities, students will:

- 
- Engage critically with theatre performance, including acting choices, direction, sound, stage and lighting design.
 - Explore the concept of finding oneself and coming into one's own identity.
 - Reflect on choices made in life and how/who it may impact one's own self, and others around them.



Connection to BC Curriculum:

Drama II/I2

Big Ideas

- Drama offers dynamic ways to express our identity and sense of belonging
- Growth as an artist requires perseverance, resilience, and reflection
- Aesthetic experiences have the power to transform our perspective

Curriculum Competencies

- Reason and Reflect
 - Describe, analyse, and evaluate ways in which props, technologies, and environments are used in drama, using discipline-specific language
 - Reflect on dramatic works and make connections with personal experiences

Connection to BC Curriculum:

- Connect and Expand
 - Demonstrate respect for self, others and audience
 - Explore educational, personal, and professional opportunities in the performing arts
 - Examine the impacts of dramatic works on culture and society
 - Make connections through drama with family and community on local, national, and global scales

New Media 11/12

Big Ideas

- The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others and the world
- People understand text differently depending on their worldviews and perspectives
- Language shapes ideas and influences others

Curriculum Competencies

- Select and apply appropriate strategies in a variety of contexts to comprehend written, oral, visual and multimodal texts, to guide inquiry and to transform thinking
- Identify and understand the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values and perspectives in text
- Evaluate how literary elements as well as specific new media techniques and devices enhance and shape meaning and impact



Spoken Language 11/12

Big Ideas

- The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world
- People understand text differently depending on their worldviews and perspectives
- Language shapes ideas and influences others
- Voice is powerful and evocative

Curricular Competencies

- Understand and appreciate how different forms, formats, structures, and features of texts reflect a variety of purposes, audiences, and messages
- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to analyse ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- Appreciate and understand how language constructs personal, social, and cultural identities
- Evaluate how techniques and devices enhance and shape meaning and impact



Show Content:

Genre: Play; Period Drama

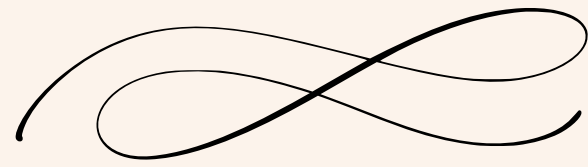
Dates: September 4 – October 5, 2025

Age Range: Grades 10–12

Venue: Stanley Stage

Content Advisory:

This production MAY contain flashing lights and water-based haze and fog. Please contact our box office for more information (604) 687-1644



Alcohol/Drugs:



Depictions of onstage drinking. Dr. Rank and Torvald are both depicted and described as “wasted” in the final scenes of the play, after a large party.

Strong Language:



Some suggestive language. Torvald uses the b-word as an insult towards Nora at the end of the play.

Sexual Content



Some suggestive and flirty language is used, along with implied sexuality. Discussions and suggestions of infidelity.

Depictions of sexual coercion, which ends once Nora firmly says “Stop.”

Death:



Discussions of parental death and grief. Dr. Rank receives news of his own impending death which is shared through a different form later to Nora and Torvald.

Suicidal Ideation:



Nora often experiences suicidal thoughts as an escape from her situation, a sentiment which is shared by Krogstad. Although suicidal thoughts experienced and discussed, suicide does not occur during the play. although it

Abuse:



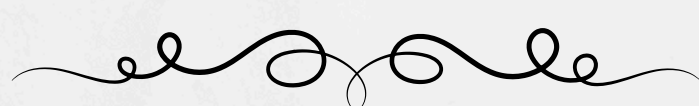
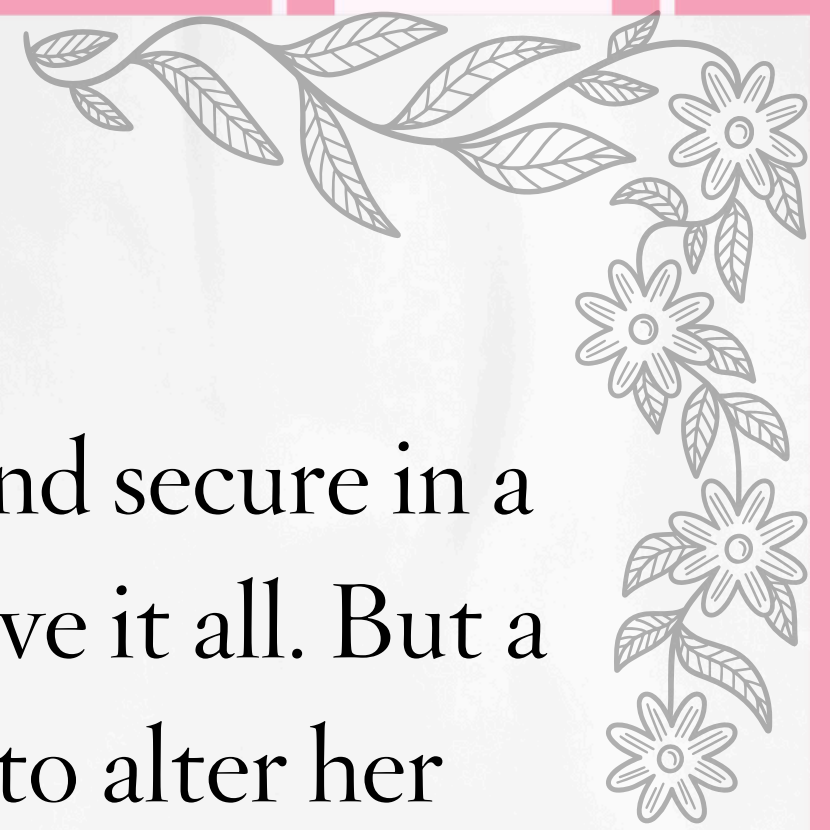
Torvald and Nora get into an argument that leads Torvald yelling and accusing his wife of harsh actions then shifting to manipulation when the situation shifts. Depictions of misogyny, financial abuse, and emotional/verbal abuse.

Brief Synopsis:

With happy children, a pristine house, and a husband secure in a lucrative job, beautiful Nora Helmer appears to have it all. But a secret is bubbling under the surface that threatens to alter her reality. Without enough money to travel to save her husband, Torvald's, life, Nora deals in a tricky situation with a family friend, Krogstad, who is a colleague of Torvald. This all takes place before *A Doll's House* begins.

Between borrowing money, forging documents from her late father, and reconnecting with her childhood friend, Nora attempts to hide her secret throughout the play. That is until Krogstad threatens to expose her after losing his job. Krogstad's hope is to blackmail Nora into convincing Torvald to give him back his job at the bank. Nora begins to spiral as she attempts to find other ways of paying off Krogstad's loan, but she is unable to keep her secret hidden.

When the secret is finally revealed, Torvald is quick to escalate the situation, and shame Nora for her actions. Once Torvald calms down and realizes his social influence is no longer in jeopardy, he expects his life to go back to normal. However, during his outburst, Nora realises that she's been a doll in his game of life. While not an easy decision, she uproots herself from the doll house, leaving behind Torvald, her children, and her old life to begin again.



Detailed Synopsis:

Act One

The play begins with Nora and Torvald Helmer, a happily married couple with two young children, preparing for the Christmas season. Nora is described as an avid spender by her husband, but luckily, he's just been hired as a Bank Manager. This job has elevated their family's finances and status, especially with the holiday season underway. Torvald teases Nora by saying that she should not spend the money they do not have since his new job does not start until the new year — and something could happen to him in that time. Nora denies this could ever happen and forces Torvald to take it back, before changing the subject.

In her excitement, Nora tells her husband of all the wonderful gifts she has gotten for the children and that he will have to wait and see for his Christmas surprise. She mentions that even after buying all these things for her family, that she did not get anything for herself. All she wanted was more money to save up for what she really needed.

Torvald jokingly claims that Nora could not save if her life depended on it. Nora reflects on her life, thinking about her late father and wishing to be more like him.

Torvald notices the change of his wife's mood and comforts her by trying to change the subject. His strict rules around the house are subtly revealed with a comment towards her possibly eating sweets and "unhealthily" while he was away. The two continue talking about past holidays until the doorbell interrupts them.

To their surprise, Kristine, an old friend of Nora's, is standing in their doorway. Nora welcomes in her old friend and the two catch up after almost 10 years of being apart. Kristine is now a widow, and has been for the last 3 years, and Nora mentions Torvald's new job. Nora and Kristine continue discussing their lives until Nora reveals a daunting secret that has forced her to lie to Torvald for a long while.

Years ago, Torvald fell ill, and the only way he could recover was to travel to a doctor far away, but the family could not afford it. Nora knew something needed to be done quickly to keep her husband alive, but they could not afford the trip. As a woman, she'd need her husband's consent to take a loan, which she knew he would refuse. Instead, she borrowed the money from someone she knew. She has never told her husband, which shocks Kristine.

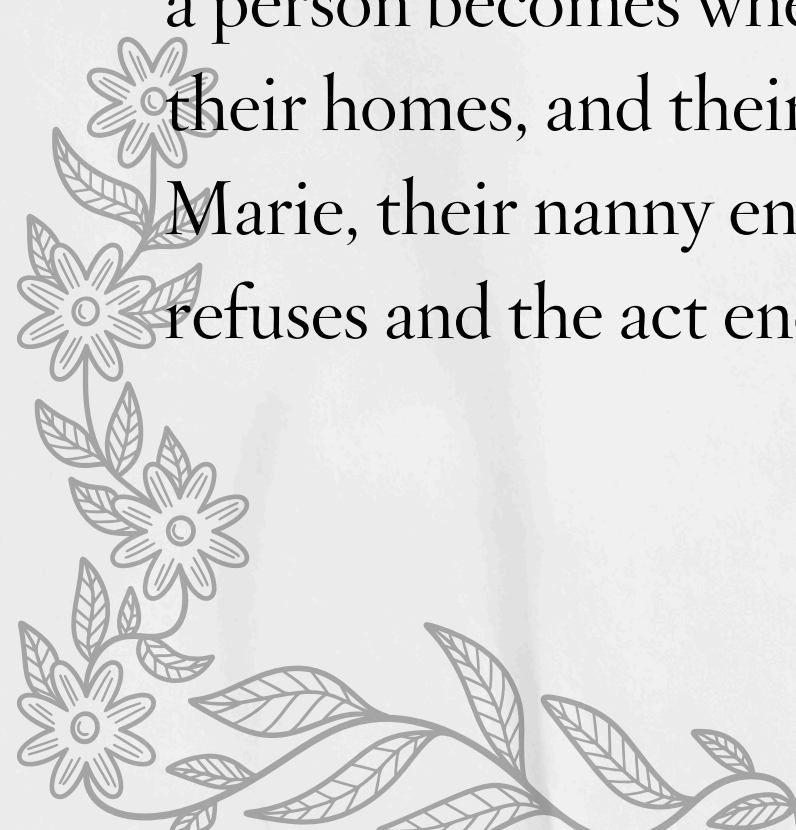
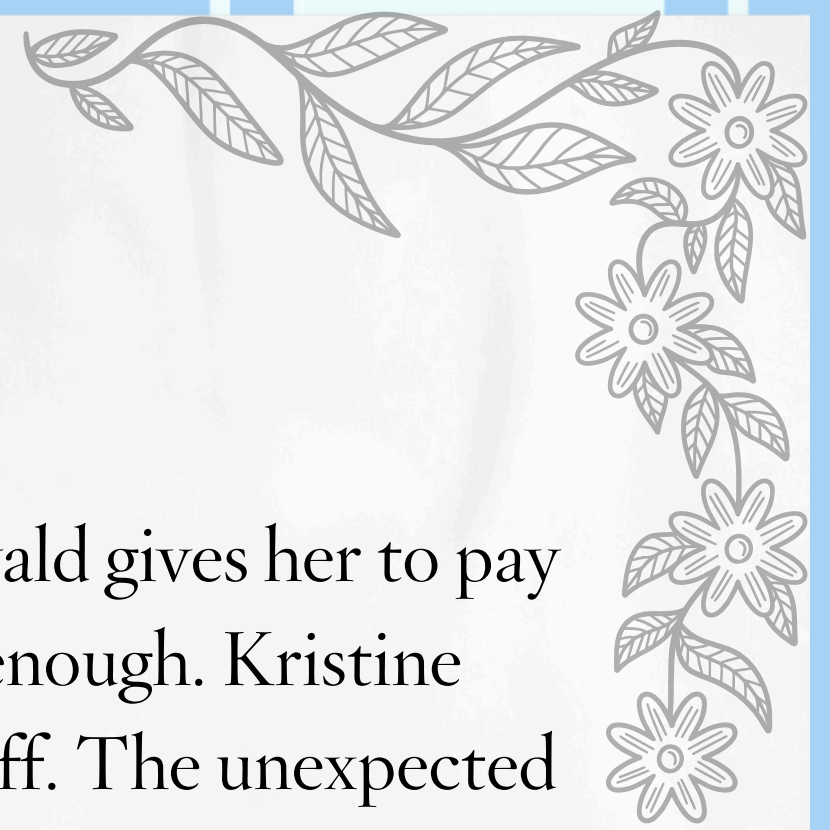


Detailed Synopsis:

Nora explains that she has been slowly using the allowance that Torvald gives her to pay off the debt, as well as working on little sewing jobs when that is not enough. Kristine continues to ask Nora for more details until the doorbell cuts them off. The unexpected guest, Mr. Krogstad, and Kristine share a moment before he is swept away into Torvald's office. Dr. Rank, a friend of Torvald and Nora's, exits the office. Dr. Rank greets Nora and Kristine and finds out that Kristine is in town to find a job. Dr. Rank jokes about wanted to be done with work, and life, and the three chat about Kristine's potentially working for Torvald at the bank. Torvald welcomes Kristine to the team, as they both exit. Nora is left alone with the nanny and her children.

Nora and her children begin playing hide and seek until they are again cut off by Mr. Krogstad. Seeing that Kristine and Torvald are down the road, Krogstad comes to question Nora about her friend and her new occupation. He is worried about his role in the bank with a fresh face keen to take his place. Krogstad reveals he is the one Nora owes money to and threatens to expose her secret unless she convinces her husband not to fire him. He knows that if all is revealed, it will destroy Nora's marriage. Krogstad also reveals that he could get Nora into legal trouble, and he claims she falsified the loan records with her late father's forged signature. Nora admits this, leaving her life in the hands of Krogstad.

Krogstad exits, leaving Nora overwhelmed and upset just as Torvald comes home. Torvald asks Nora if Krogstad was only there to persuade Nora into putting in a good word for Krogstad's job. Changing the subject, Nora tells her husband that she is looking forward to their event later that week and teases him with a 'surprise'. Seemingly distracted, the two discuss the party until Nora spots the mountains of paperwork in Torvald's office. She finds out why Krogstad is being fired, as he has also been forging signatures. This leads to Torvald ranting angrily about the concept of trust, and how dirty a person becomes when they succumb to lies. He insinuates liars are criminals who poison their homes, and their children. After his rant, he exits, leaving Nora alone onstage. Anne-Marie, their nanny enters and attempts to get Nora to spend time with her children. Nora refuses and the act ends.



Detailed Synopsis:

Act Two

Nora and Anne-Marie stand in the house, while Nora frantically keeps checks on the mail. She is worried that Krogstad has left the letter outing her crimes in the mailbox. Anne-Marie tells her that Christmas day is not the time to be looking for letters, and that she should be more worried about her costume for the party. They discuss the children, both Nora's and Anne-Marie's, whom the nanny has not seen in a long time. Both women seem saddened by being away from their children so much, but Nora continues with her endeavours, seeking Kristine to fix her costume.

Kristine arrives at the Helmers' house and the two discuss the dinner party, the costume, and Dr. Rank. Kristine asks why Dr. Rank knew who she was, but Torvald seemed to have no idea. Nora confesses that her husband is a jealous man and does not like to share his things (e.g. Nora). However, Kristine catches on that Dr. Rank knows more about Nora than she is revealing and suggests that he is the one Nora owes the money too. Nora denies this and tries to move the conversation forward, but Kristine keeps coming back to the question of who loaned Nora the money. Nora hears Torvald coming and shoos Kristine away. Kristine exits as Torvald enters, excited to see the costume his wife has planned.

Torvald tries to leave, but Nora stops him trying once again to convince him to keep Krogstad on. This greatly upsets Torvald, but Nora attempts to sway him with claims that Krogstad may blackmail them or spread nasty rumours. Torvald believes that he would look like an unfit leader at the bank if he went back on his decision, so he stands firm and says no. Nora begs him to reconsider and says he is making a mistake that will ruin him. Torvald switches from mad to forgiving, trying to comfort his wife after this intense altercation. He promises her that "Whatever happens, I'll do anything for you."

Nora contemplates all her choices and realizes she would never let Torvald take the fall for her. She needs a way out. Dr. Rank returns as Nora snaps out of her daze, and the two of them discuss the terminal nature of his illness. They confide in each other about their days, and the two find comfort in one another. Nora considers asking Dr. Rank for help with the loan and money she owes but when she begins to broach the subject, Dr. Rank confesses that he too would do anything for her, revealing his romantic feelings toward her. Nora shuts him down immediately and tells him a lie about why she needed his help. She asks him to go distract Torvald to which he obliges, leaving her alone on stage.



Detailed Synopsis:

Krogstad bursts through the door, upset that he has officially been fired from his job at the bank by Torvald. Nora reveals she has not told her husband about the situation yet, and the pair argue, until Krogstad shows her a letter he has written to Torvald. The letter reveals everything about their deal, the loan, and Nora's forging of signatures. Krogstad tells Nora he plans to blackmail Torvald and her, to get his life and status back. As he leaves, he drops the letter in the mailbox (to which only Torvald has the key).

Kristine re-enters, with Nora's costume, and attempts to comfort her as Nora is visibly upset about what had just occurred. Nora confesses everything to Kristine and begins to panic. Kristine attempting to help, insists that Nora just tell Torvald everything. Nora refuses, fearing his reaction and the fallout on her family, and instead begs Kristine to make sure that if she were to run away or 'disappear', Kristine would ensure that everyone knows Nora acted alone. Fearing for her friend, Kristine offers to go talk to Krogstad about retracting his letter. She reveals that she and Krogstad were once in love, and she may be able to sway his opinion.

As the two plan, Torvald knocks on the door. Kristine tells Nora to keep Torvald away from the mailbox for as long as she can. Kristine exits and Nora unlocks the door, letting Torvald and Dr. Rank back into the room. To keep Torvald from checking the mailbox, Nora begins to act hysterical and claim she has completely forgotten her dance and needs Torvald's help for the rest of the evening and the next day. She distracts him and begins to dance, more and more violently and explosively until eventually Torvald grabs her and holds Nora to subdue her. After her "performance", Torvald agrees to help Nora as she clearly needs the rehearsal. He also promises her not to work or check the mail until after the party, the next evening. Nora takes a moment away from him and looks at her watch. She states she has "thirty-one hours to live", until Torvald checks the mail the next day. She takes a breath and rejoins Torvald.

Act Three

The third act opens on Kristine, alone onstage. Krogstad joins her and she invites him in. It is tense as the pair begin to talk, with Krogstad revealing Kristine left him for another "offer". Kristine defends herself, explaining her circumstances at the time, and why she had to break her promise to him. She attempts to apologize for taking Krogstad's job at the bank and the two begin to connect

Detailed Synopsis:

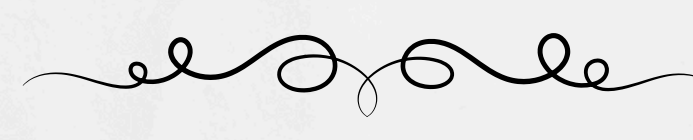
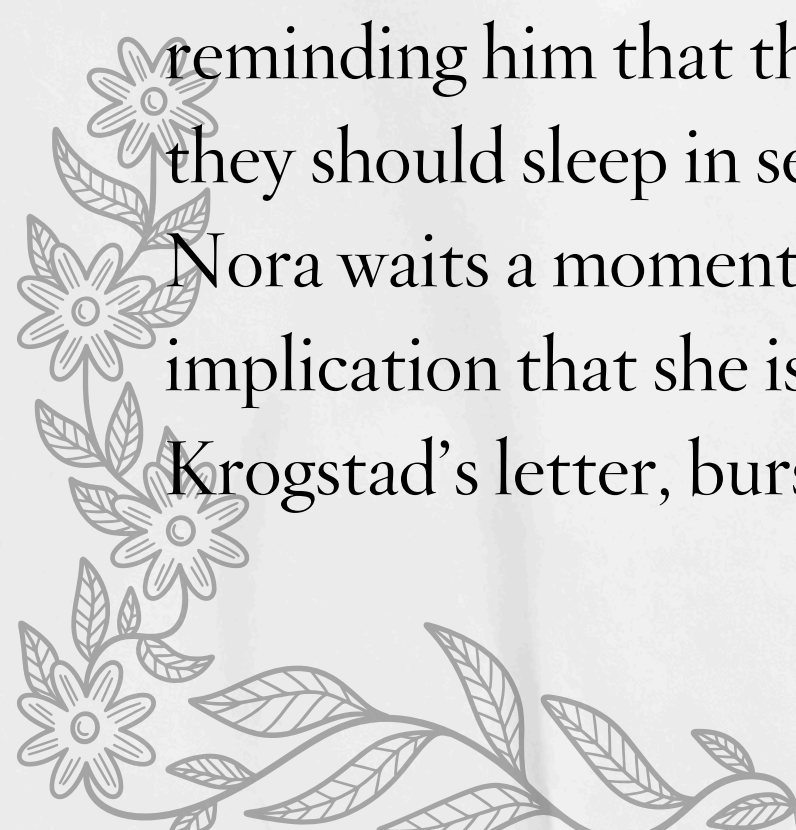
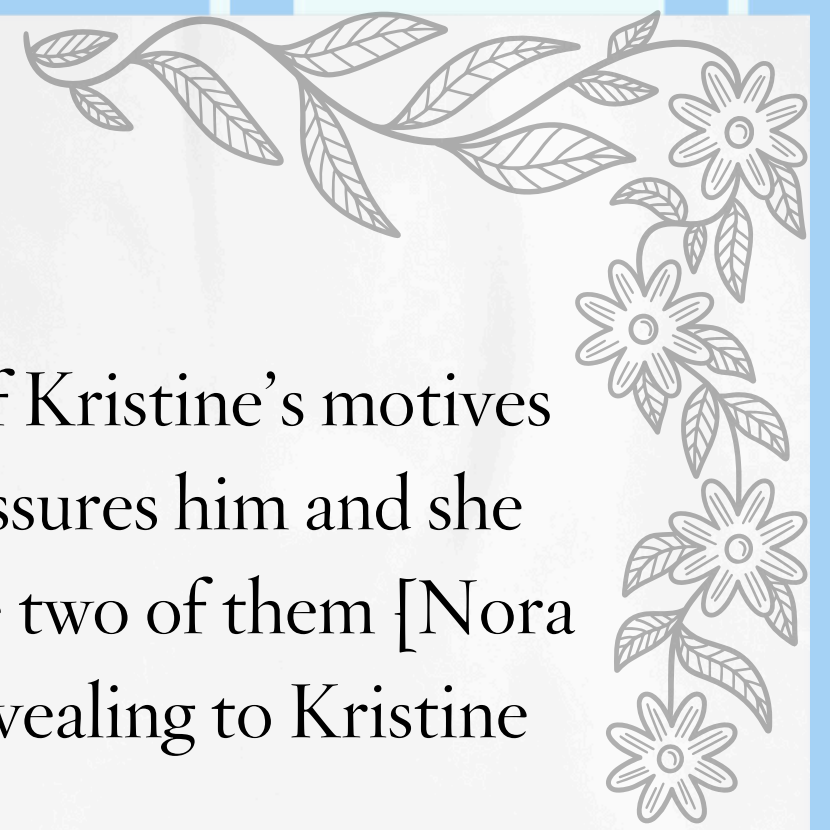
Krogstad, while hopeful about this reconciliation, is still suspicious of Kristine's motives and of her opinion of him once she learns about his past. Kristine reassures him and she even tells him to leave the incriminating letter. She explains that "the two of them [Nora and Torvald] have to reach a full understanding..." Krogstad exits, revealing to Kristine that he has never been this happy.

As Kristine is about to exit, Torvald and Nora enter, arriving back from the party early. Torvald is drunk from the festivities and leads Nora into the room, where they are both surprised to see Kristine. Torvald reveals Nora was the star of the party, while simultaneously criticizing her "wild" dancing. He leaves for a moment and Kristine explains to Nora while Krogstad will not be following through on his threats, she still needs to tell Torvald the truth. Torvald re-enters and wishes Kristine a good night, pushing her to leave. Once Kristine exits, Torvald begins to compliment and attempt to seduce Nora. Nora, overwhelmed, is resistant to his advances and stops him. Torvald begins to question her as Dr. Rank enters.

Dr. Rank apologizes for interrupting and the trio chat about the party. Through coded language to Nora, he explains that he received a positive result on his medical test, and his death is imminent. Torvald is oblivious as Nora and Rank offer each other veiled goodbyes. Dr. Rank requests a cigar from Torvald and departs, thanking Nora for "the light".

The scene continues as Torvald leaves to grab the mail. As he struggles to get the mailbox open, it is revealed one of Nora's hairpins have been jammed into the lock. Nora blames it on the children, while Torvald opens the mailbox and retrieves the mail. It is revealed Dr. Rank left two of his business cards in their mailbox, with a black X on his name, announcing his death to Nora and Torvald. The two hold each other for comfort as Torvald, again, tries to seduce Nora. She tells him he should go read the letters now; however, Torvald tells her it can wait as tonight he wants to be with her. Nora stops him, reminding him that they just found out their friend is dying. Torvald agrees and suggests they should sleep in separate rooms that night. He wishes Nora a good night and leaves.

Nora waits a moment and then says goodbye to her children and home with the implication that she is planning to commit suicide. Suddenly, Torvald, having read Krogstad's letter, bursts back into the room to confront her.



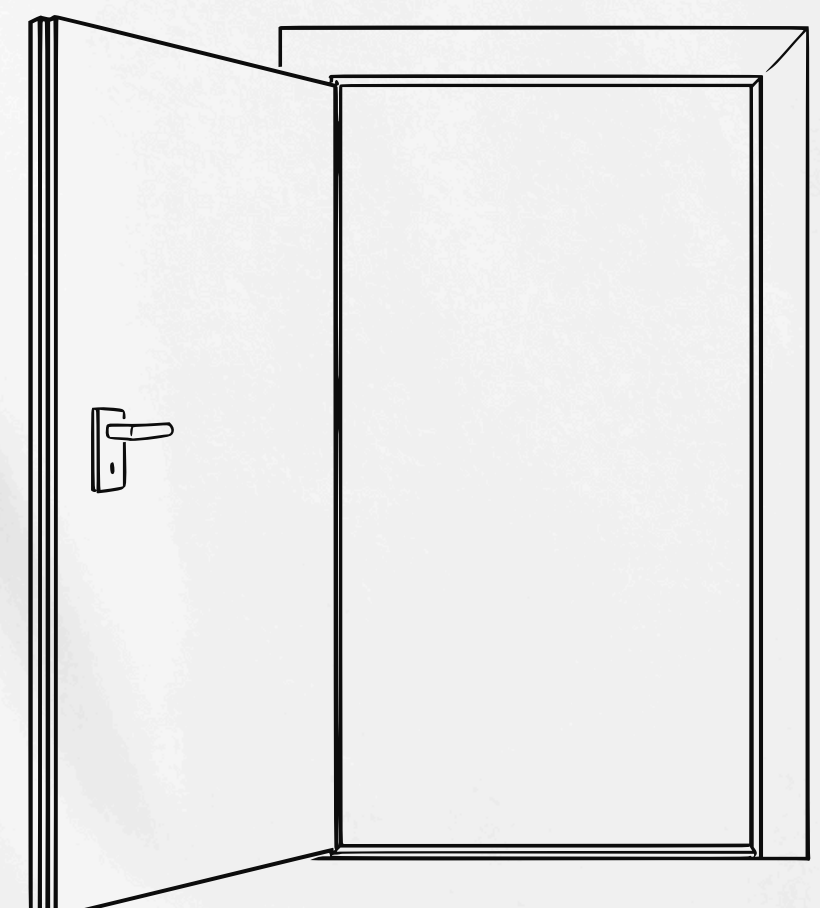
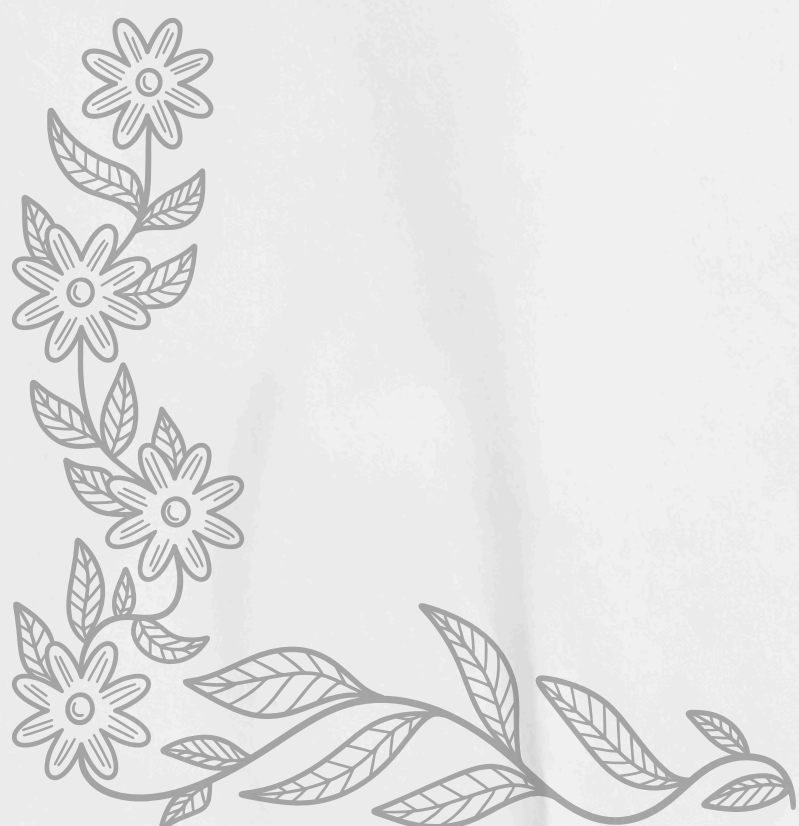
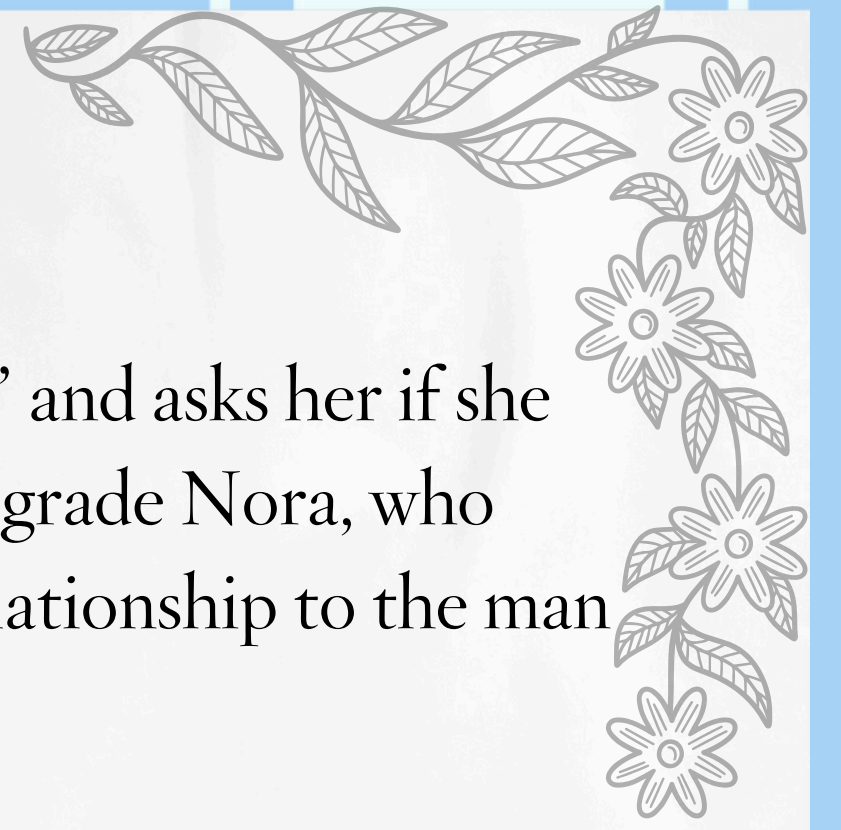
Detailed Synopsis:

Torvald, in a rage, begins insulting Nora. He calls her a “stupid bitch” and asks her if she understands what she has done to him. He continues to blame and degrade Nora, who remains calm as she begins to grasp the reality of her situation and relationship to the man she married.

The doorbell rings and it's Krogstad dropping off another letter. Torvald runs to go and read the letter. He pauses before opening it and reading. As he reads, Torvald lets out a cry of joy and begins to celebrate, repeating “I'm saved! Nora, I'm saved!” Torvald reveals that Krogstad has returned the contract and regrets his actions. He begins to realize the battle Nora has been fighting and tells her they never have to speak of this again. Torvald tells Nora he forgives her because she did what she did out of love for him. Nora thanks him and exits, saying she is going to change. Torvald remains onstage and speaks to his wife from off-stage, debriefing his feelings about the conflict they just had. When Nora re-enters, she is fully dressed and explains she that is leaving Torvald.

Torvald begs Nora not to go. He attempts to question, reason with, insult, and warn her of the consequences of her decision but Nora remains firm, eventually admitting that she doesn't love Torvald anymore. Nora tells him that seeing his reaction, made her realize she doesn't know the person she married. In fact, she doesn't know anything about herself and the real world, which is why she must leave and discover it. Torvald asks if he will ever not be a stranger to Nora. She tells him that “the most beautiful thing of all” would have to happen: being that they both change so much that their relationship could become a real marriage. Nora exits, leaving Torvald onstage. As he waits for her to come back, we hear a door slam.

END OF PLAY



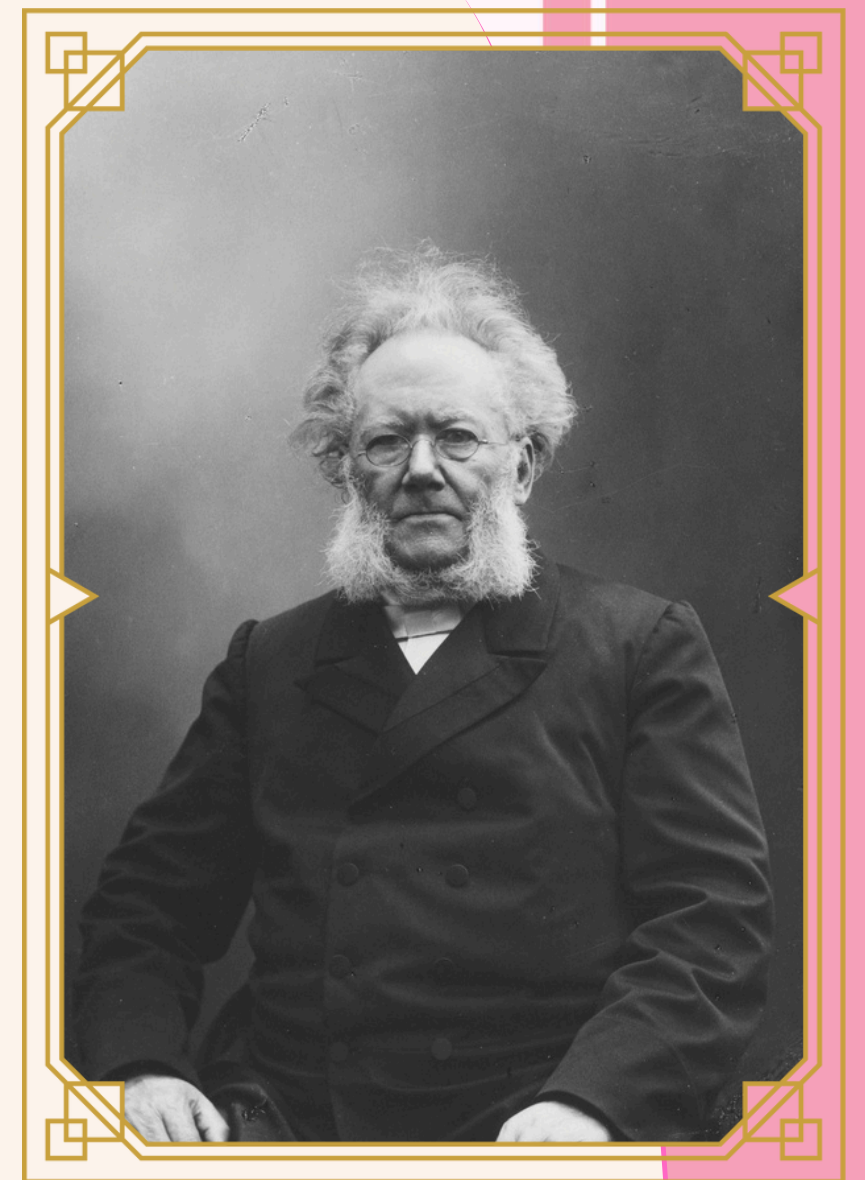
About the Author:

Henrik Ibsen (Playwright)

Born in 1828, Henrik Ibsen was an influential Norwegian playwright and poet, best known for introducing theatrical realism and pioneering modern drama. His naturalistic dialogue, rich character development and interrogation of social issues, are part of his lasting influence (and what made him controversial at the time!).

Ibsen was born into a merchant family and grew up in the upper class of Skien, Telemark, Norway. His family faced economic troubles in his youth and many scholars theorize his plays are reminiscent of his upbringing and influenced by the struggles of those around him. Ibsen supported himself as an apothecary's apprentice while saving for university and wrote his first play at the age of fifteen. Several of his works were considered scandalous, as they examined the realities that lay behind the façade of the strict models of family, morality, and life that were standard of European theatre at the time. Ibsen's work was considered uncomfortable and disquieting to his contemporaries at the time, but now he is regarded as one of the most influential playwrights of the nineteenth century.

His work with *A Doll's House* was highly criticized when it was first presented as it depicts a woman leaving her husband on her own accord. However, it is now considered a classic and is performed all over the world, both professionally and in schools.

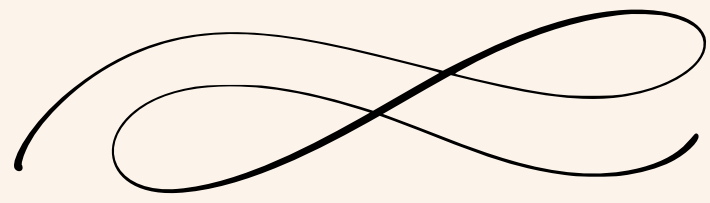


Amy Herzog (Adaptation)

An American playwright, Amy Herzog is a well-versed thespian whose work delves into the complexities of the human experience. Her plays include *Mary Jane* (Best Play, New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, 2018); *The Great God Pan*; *Belleville* (finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize); *4000 Miles* (Pulitzer Prize finalist; Obie Award for the Best New American Play) and *After the Revolution*. She is a recipient of the Whiting Writers' Award, the Benjamin H. Danks Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Helen Merrill Award, the Joan and Joseph F. Cullman Award for Extraordinary Creativity and The New York Times Outstanding Playwright Award.

Setting:

A Doll's House takes place in the Helmers' home in nineteenth century Norway .



Characters:

Nora Helmer: A wife and mother. Playful, sharp, witty, calculating and alive. Small acts of rebellion indicate she is not as happy as she appears. She plays different versions of herself depending on who she is with and what she needs. As the story develops, Nora grows in self-awareness, and defiance.

Torvald Helmer: Nora's husband and a lawyer. Newly promoted to manager at a local bank. Torvald has a traditional view of his wife, marriage, and the world. He is concerned with appearances and status and is driven by the ideal of protecting and guiding his wife.

Doctor Rank: A very ill doctor who is a family friend of Nora and Torvald. He visits the family often and sees both Nora and Torvald clearly. More attentive to Nora than her own husband. Not at peace, but resigned to his condition

Kristine Linde: Nora's friend and confidant. A widow who returns to Nora's life to find work. Sensible, level-headed, opportunistic and able to make strong choices. Values honesty. Krogstad's former lover.

Nils Krogstad: Kristine's former lover and one of Torvald's employees. Krogstad is eager to reestablish himself as a respected man in society. Willing to fight for what he wants but not ruthless.

Ivar, Bob and Emmy: Nora and Torvald's young children. They spend much of their time with the nanny, Anne-Marie.

Anne-Marie: Nora and Torvald's nanny, who takes care of the children as her own. Anne-Marie was Nora's nursemaid and had to leave her own child to take the position. Very amenable to her employer's family needs and loves Nora and the children.

Context: The Victorian Era

(Death, Womens Rights, and Mortality, Oh My!

Today, when referring to the Victorian era, many people will think of elaborate mourning rituals, a morbid fascination with death, and post-mortem photography. However, the Victorian era was a much more complex and layered period of global growth, industrialization, and social reform within a rigid, class-based society. This is where *A Doll's House* takes place!

The Victoria era in England is characterized as roughly the period of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901). The British economy expanded due to industrialization, the middle class began to grow, and scientific advancements (such as the theory of evolution) began to be developed. Underneath this economic growth however, the sinister reality of the times lurked, waiting just under the surface and seeping into the Victorian consciousness. This time was marked by a strong emphasis on social conformity, strict moral codes, and rigid social norms that were deeply influenced by the Church of England and dictated by one's social class. For example, regardless of financial need, women who had jobs outside the home were considered "less moral and desirable" and were less likely to be able to get married, "leaving them with no choice but to stay in the undesirable situation that made them undesirable" initially (Barrett, 2013).

**"WHATEVER THEIR SOCIAL RANK,
IN THE EYES OF THE LAW WOMEN
WERE SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS"
(GALLAGHER, 57)**

Society during this era made it impossible for women to have any advancement. Victorian society was extremely hierarchical and mainly organized by gender and class. Victorian gender ideology was based on the "doctrine of separate spheres" and treated gender as determinative of the entirety of an individual's personality, role, potential, and character. Deviation from this ideology was unacceptable, considered "against nature", and could lead to the moral decline of the individual and those around them.

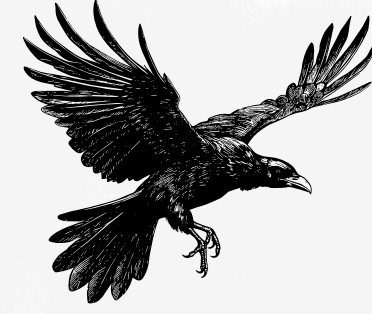


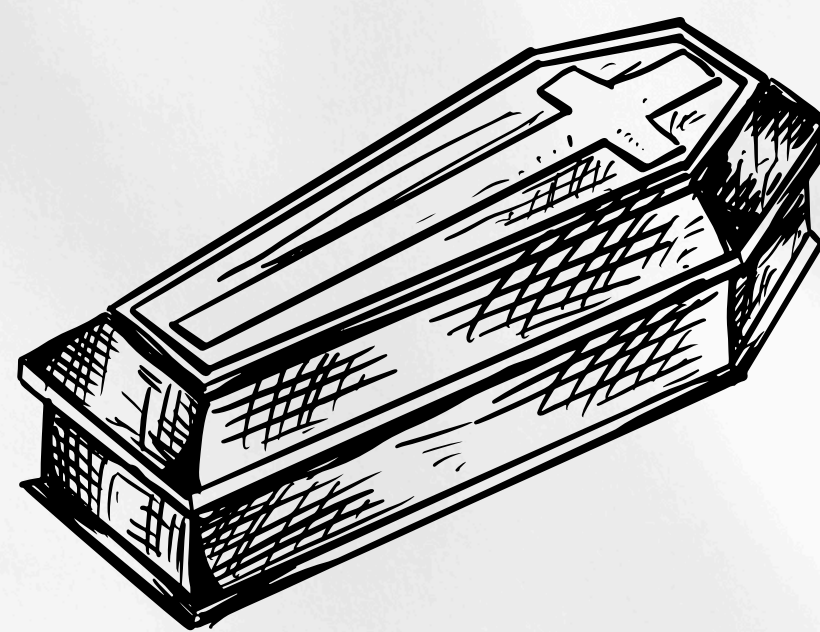
Image description: A photograph of a magician re-enacting a Victorian séance to reveal it's tricks. Four people sit around a round table, with their hands on the table.



Within this doctrine, men were meant to participate in the public sphere such as politics and paid work, while women belonged in the private sphere, in the home. For men, sex was considered central while women were assumed to be free of sexual desire and submitted only for reproduction and their husbands' pleasure. It was a point of pride for women to never talk about sex and have a lack of knowledge about their own bodies, childbirth, and sexual autonomy. Ignorance was equated with purity and innocence, regardless of the cost and contradictory construct of Victorian morality.

These high standards did not accurately reflect the reality of life for most people in the Victorian era. Victorian society contained prostitution, rampant venereal disease, women with sexual desires, members of the LGBTQIA+ communities, and other multifaceted groups which did not fit the mold of the time. Living by Victorian moral standards meant ignoring these realities, and so many Victorians did. The cost? Widespread syphilis became a public health crisis, and thousands unknowing women, wives, and sex workers were infected. While society offered sympathy to men with venereal disease, sex workers and women with venereal disease would be subject to legislation, confined to special medical institutions, and accused of perpetuating a greater social evil.

But why did morality matter so much to the Victorians? Victorians believed in the Christian afterlife and that one's eternal life would be decided in the final hours on Earth. The goal for many was to secure a "good and decent" burial and not end up in a pauper's grave. Death was not unfamiliar to the people of the Victorian era. Grief from loss was common and one of the only socially acceptable emotions to display in public. Mortality rates for children were so high that it is estimated 57% of children born did not survive past the age of five. Many scholars theorize that, with death so present in their everyday lives, the Victorians created such elaborate mourning rituals, funeral proceedings, and other superstitions, to cope with the intensity of loss that was prevalent at the time.



Context: Adaptation

In theatre and the arts, adaptation is the process of transforming or altering a story from one medium to another (e.g. a book to a film to a staged adaptation, like *The Outsiders*) while still preserving the essence of the original inspiration. A story can be taken from a piece of visual art, literature, newspaper article, and be transformed into an opera, ballet, play, or even feature film (or vice versa!)

Adaptation can also involve updating scripts to be more suitable to modern audiences or to focus on relevant cultural issues.

*The possibilities when it comes to adaptation are endless! Why do you think people return to one story (in this case, *A Doll's House*) repeatedly?*

Context: Controversy

A Doll's House premiered at the Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen, Denmark on December 21st, 1879 to immediate controversy. The slam of the door as Nora left her husband would later be described by critics as “the slammed door that reverberated across the roof of the world.”

While *A Doll's House* has become known for one of the most iconic images of gender politics in world literature, at the time this was a scandalous choice that criticized society's ideas of marriage and women's place in the world. The original performance's run sold out and all 8,000 published copies of the play were sold out within a month. Audiences were shocked, intrigued, and outraged by Ibsen's intense social critiques and the idea that a woman could leave her family to find herself. An Ibsen biographer (M. Meyer) remarked, “No play had ever before contributed so momentously to the social debate or been so widely and furiously discussed among people who were not normally interested in theatrical or even artistic matter.”

Not everyone was a fan. In Germany, actress Hedwig Raabe would refuse to perform the piece, declaring she “would never leave [her] children!” Protests ensued and some social invitations of the time would even be sent with the instruction, “You are requested not to mention Ibsen's Doll's House!” Since playwrights' wishes were not protected by copyright at this time, Ibsen eventually wrote an alternative ending in which Nora does not leave but instead sees her children and falls to her knees, crying. Ibsen considered this a “barbaric outrage” on his play and only wrote another ending to prevent a “lesser dramatist” from attempting to. Today, this version is rarely, if ever, performed. Although the controversy would eventually fade in the 20th century as the fight for women's rights and liberation progressed, *A Doll's House* started a theatrical revolution, as audiences and playwrights entered a new world of realistic drama.

Ibsen often claimed he never wrote a “poem or play to further a social purpose”, and that he was interested in the study of human beings and the description of humanity. Regardless of his intent, for many audiences at this time, *A Doll's House* was the first play to centre a female character wrestling with the extreme cost and responsibility of individual freedom and autonomy. And each time this rich, complex woman shut the door on her marriage and family, walls were rattled in a thousand homes. By exploring the ugly truths that linger beneath a conventionally, respectable marriage, and the idea a woman could leave her home and family to find her authentic self, Ibsen had created a character who would become “a symbol throughout the world, for women fighting for liberation and equality”.



Before writing *A Doll's House*, Ibsen penned "*Notes for a Modern Tragedy*" which would eventually become the framework for the previously mentioned play.

"There are two kinds of spiritual law, two kinds of conscience, one in man and another, altogether different, in woman. They do not understand each other; but in practical life the woman is judged by man's law, as though she were not a woman but a man."

The wife in the play ends by having no idea of what is right or wrong; natural feeling on the one hand and belief in authority on the other have altogether bewildered her.

A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view."

-Henrik Ibsen, *Notes for A Modern Tragedy*, 1878

Pre-Show Discussion Questions

All these questions can be used for any class, but we have separated them by subject for your convenience!

General Discussion

Questions:

- How has the role of women changed over the course of history? (e.g. a women's role socially, financially, politically, etc.)
- What do you know about *A Doll's House*? Have you ever heard of it before?
- What do trust and respect mean to you?
 - What does establishing trust mean to you?

Social Studies:

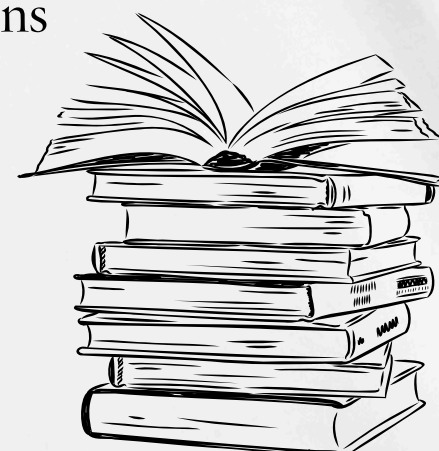
- What do you know about nineteenth-century Europe and Victorian England? (e.g. socially, politically, culturally, etc.)
 - What do you know about gender roles during this period? How did these gender roles affect families?
- Where is there value in understanding different legal situations from present day, and the past?
- How has society's views of "ethical policy and legislation" changed from the 1800s to now?

Drama:

- To what extent does a director have creative freedom when presenting a piece?
 - Is it a challenge to direct such a well-known play? Why or why not?
- What do you know about adaptations? Have you ever seen an adapted play before?
- What do you know about realism in theatre?
 - How do you think realism differs from other genres?

English:

- What makes a piece of literature "iconic" or "influential"?
 - Why do you think *A Doll's House* remains such a popular piece? (It's Ibsen's most frequently staged play!)
- How are writers, playwrights, and authors effected by the accepted social practices of their time? How does it affect their work?
- Can you think of other literature/media that has challenged the status quo?
 - How does that work translate to today?
- When characters in a story feel trapped, what factors (environmental, physical or emotional) lead them into decision making?



Post-Show Discussion Questions

General Discussion

Questions:

- How did your opinion of Nora and Torvald change throughout the show?
- Why do you think the play would be considered controversial, today and in the past?

Social Studies:

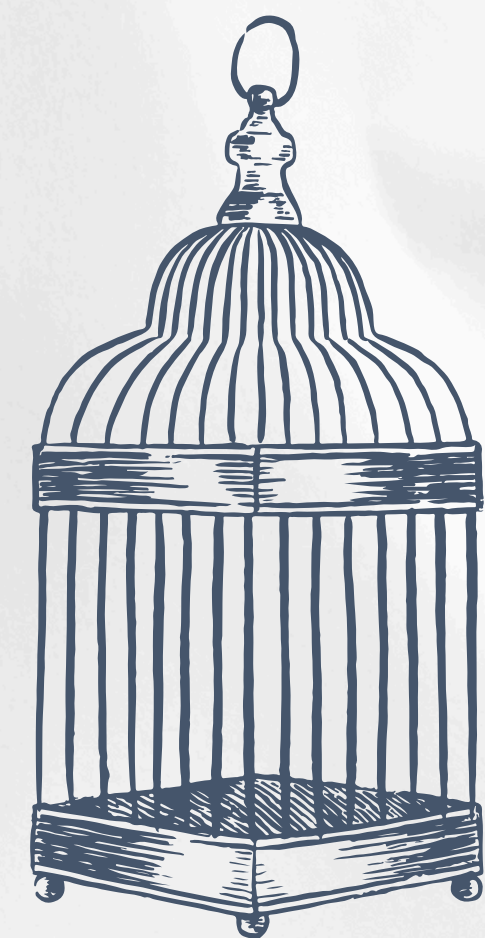
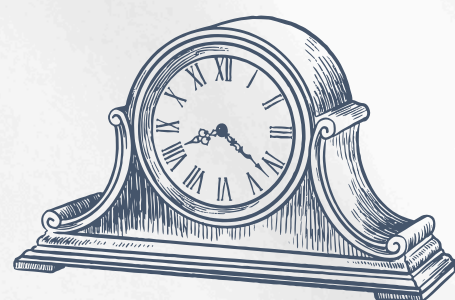
- What does *A Doll's House* say about society's expectations for people in the 19th century? What does it say about the expectations for women at that time?
 - Does this adaptation speak to women's issues of today? How so?
- Who decides what "ethical judgement" is?
 - Have the deciding perspectives changed from the 1800s to now? How have they changed?

Drama:

- What sort of roles do Krogstad, Dr. Rank, and Kristine play throughout the piece?
 - How do these characters enhance the narrative?
- How does the status of each character change throughout the play? How are these power dynamics influenced by their gender roles?
- How do the production elements (e.g. lighting, sound design, set, and costumes) contribute to the piece?
 - What would you do differently?

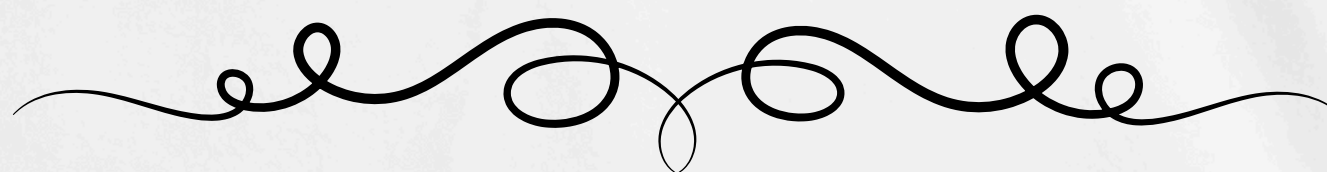
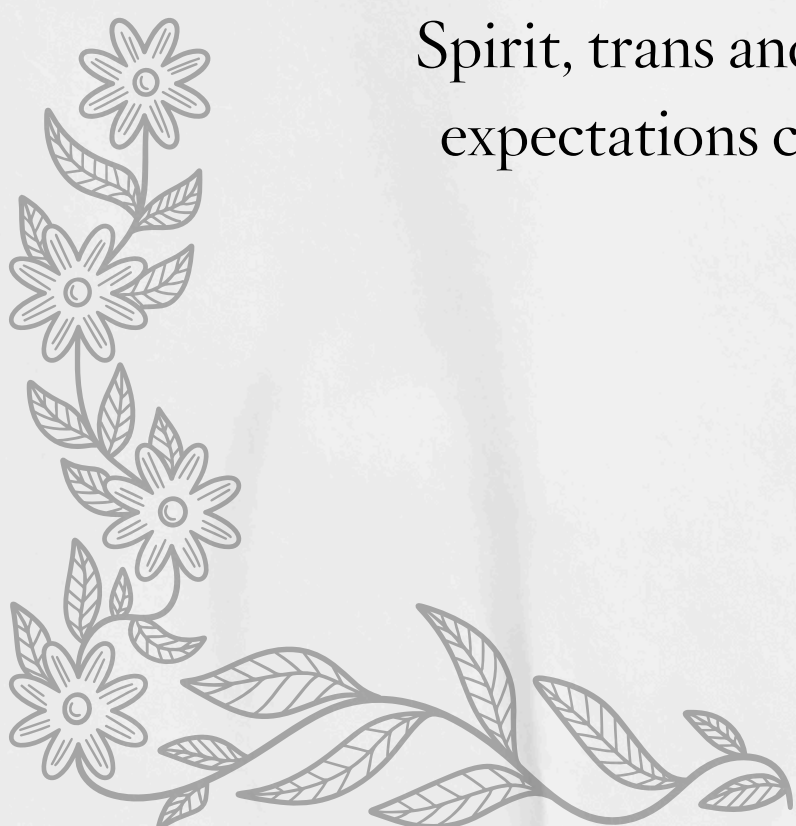
English:

- Why did Amy Herzog, only adapt some of Ibsen's text?
 - What lines (if any!) do you think were changed and/or added to the script?
- Ibsen considered *A Doll's House* "a modern tragedy". Do you agree? Why or why not?
 - What makes a modern tragedy today?
- Was Torvald a villain, a victim or something else for his time?



Post-Show Context: Domestic Violence

The United Nations defines "Domestic violence" or "Domestic abuse" as any pattern of behaviour that is used to gain or maintain power over an intimate partner. Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological. **Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith, or class.** *A Doll's House* specifically delves into gender-based violence, which is type of abuse experienced by women, girls, and Two-Spirit, trans and non-binary people. However, *A Doll's House* also interrogates how societal expectations can also harm men and boys and prevent healthier relationships regardless of gender.





The inside of the wheel is subtler, continual behaviours that often take place over a longer period.

The outside of the wheel represents physical and sexual violence.

Gender-based violence in Canada is a complex issue which often causes shame, guilt, and isolation for survivors. More than 4 in 10 women in Canada have experienced some form of intimate partner violence during their lifetime. Despite its severe impacts, it is estimated 80% of people who experience domestic violence will not report it.

It's easy to simply question survivors about why they "didn't just leave". The Canadian Women's Foundation offers the following reasons a survivor may not leave...

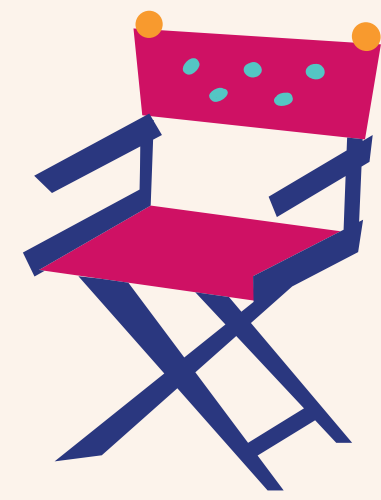
- **The most dangerous time for an abuse survivor is when they attempt to leave their abuser.** Women are six times more likely to be killed by an ex-partner and many women report violence escalates following the breakup.
- 60% of police reported violence happens after the relationship has ended.
- **Domestic abuse can carry over into the workplace, threatening women's ability to maintain economic independence, separate of their partner.** This results in survivors being financially dependent on their partners.
 - 1.5 million women in Canada live on low-income.
 - 1 in 5 single mothers in Canada live on a low income
- Their immigration status may be dependent on their abuser, or their first language is not English, so reaching out for help becomes more challenging.
- Women may stay if they grew up in a family where abuse was normal, making it more challenging to identify an abusive relationship.

Everyone has the right to be safe and free from violence. If you or someone you know has experienced gender-based violence, abuse in an intimate relationship, or domestic violence, see our resources on page 24.

Post Show Activities

Activity #1: Change the Scene!

Suggested for Drama, New Media, and English classes

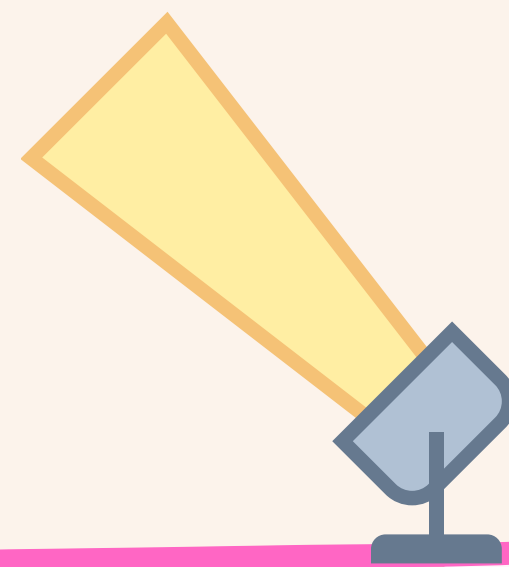


Goal: Encourage students to explore making their own artistic choices in staging a show or scene. As the adapted text has very little stage directions, the director (Anita Rochon) had to create a show with very little dictated directions. Now it's your students turn!

Instructions: Provide your students with excerpts from the show and have them act out the scene in a different way than the Arts Club did! Students can work in groups of 2-3 and pick from a variety of scenes from the show. Students will perform 1-2 scenes or create some other sort of media to display their artistic choices.

While this is not Herzog's version of the show, it will still work for this assignment. Students are also invited to modernize one line of their "adaptation" to put themselves into the brain of the playwright.

A Doll's House: Act I. | SparkNotes



Criteria:

Students will be graded on the following

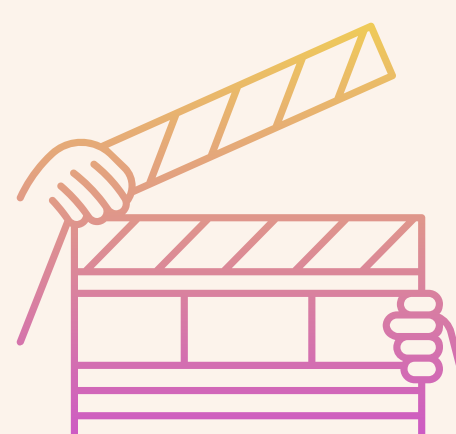
1. Ability to change the scene without changing the dialogue
2. Using props, staging, and different emphasis on words to set each new scene



Accessibly Alterations:

Students who are uncomfortable presenting have an alternative option to just complete Activity 2, or just present to the teacher, or only hand in the written-out stage directions for the scene. Alternatively, students are welcome to explore other forms of media such as...

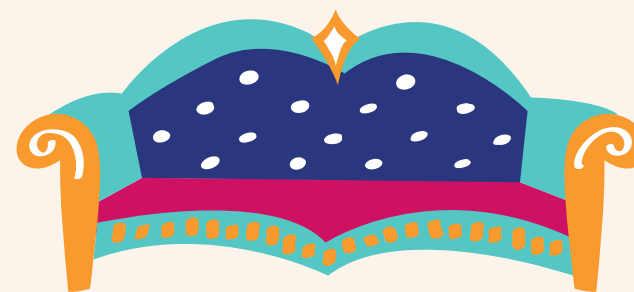
- Comics
- A short film/animation
- Stop motion picture
- Production design for their version of A Doll's House (e.g. set, lighting, sound, and costume)
- Voice-over recording



SCRIPT

Activity #2: Alternate Ending

Suggested for English, Creative Writing, Social Studies, and Film classes



Goal: Expand students' imagination and creativity while improving their writing skills. This also includes expanding their understanding of one's interpersonal relationships and greater perception and empathy for different life trajectories.

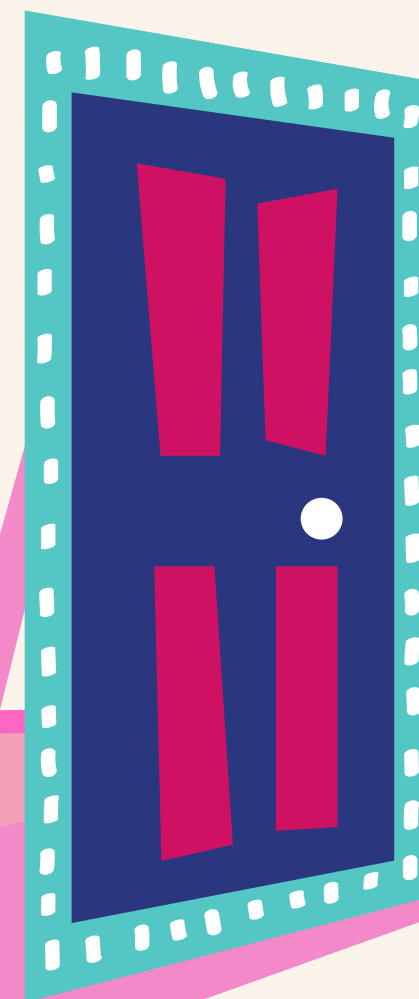
Instructions: Working in tandem with Activity 1, students will write alternate endings for the show. Students will be tasked to watch their fellow classmates' presentations of their scenes. While they are observing, they should be thinking back on the ending of the show and how this new scene may change the ending. Using evidence from other groups performances, students will need to write a 1–2-page assignment on how this new scene will alter the remainder of the show.

This activity is meant to draw on their creative thinking abilities and expand their use of evidence to prove their argument.

Criteria:

Students will be graded on the following

1. Ability to use evidence to make their prediction stronger
2. Creating a realistic ending for the alternative scene
3. Creativity in exploring the form of adaptation



Accessibly Alterations:

Students can have the option to draw out their story endings if writing in the abstract is difficult to communicate. They can also re-write on their own scenes for consistency, if needed!

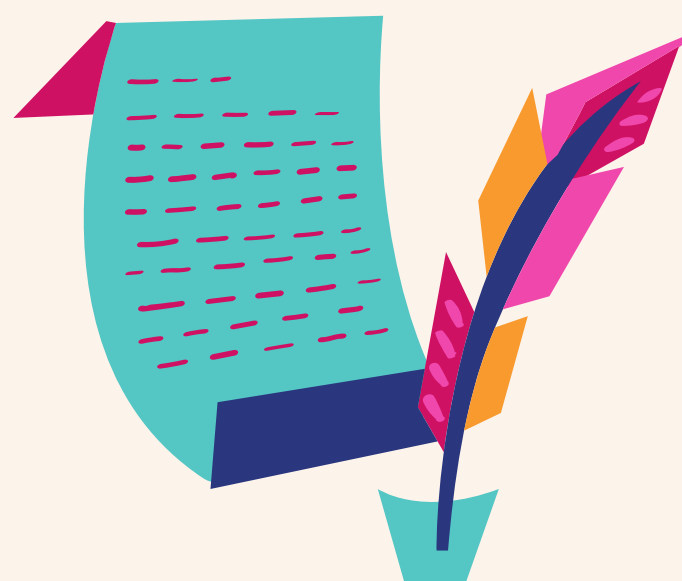
Reflection:

Reflect on the following questions:

1. What pieces from the new show can change how the ending plays out?
2. Who will be affected? Will the story still hold the same message?
3. Was their presentation historically accurate to the time, or set in modern day?
Does this change anything?



SCRIPT



Glossary:

Stage directions: An instruction in the text of a play, especially one indicating the movement, position, or tone of an actor, or the sound effects and lighting.

Blocking: The specific stage movements and positioning of actors, set pieces, props, etc. during a performance.

Promissory note: A written promise to repay borrowed money, acting as a legal IOU between a borrower and a lender.

Guarantor: A person or organization that provides a guarantee in legal matters.

Resources:

Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre

Salal provides immediate crisis assistance and emotional support, information, and referrals 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The crisis line is free and confidential. Salal SVSC's 24-Hour Crisis & Information Line is the official Gender-Based Violence Crisis Line of BC.

24 hour crisis and information line:

Lower Mainland: 604-255-6344

National Toll Free: 1-877-392-7583

Salal Connect

Salal connect is a text and online chat support tool that allows survivors sexualized violence to receive accessible and confidential crisis support. This service is an extension of our crisis line and we are able to provide emotional support, referrals to community resources, and information on Salal's services. Our text and online chat service is available Monday-Friday 9am to 5pm.

Texting: (604)-245-2425

Website: <https://www.salalsvsc.ca/connect/>

Indigenous Support/Counselling:

Salal's no cost Indigenous Counselling Program provides short to mid-term one-to-one counselling for Indigenous people of marginalized genders. Including trans and cis women, trans men, non-binary, and Two Spirit individuals (peoples) seeking health, safety, and wellbeing.

Indigenous Survivors can access free counselling by calling Salal at **604-255-6344** or toll free at **1-877-392-7583**.

Website: <https://www.salalsvsc.ca/indigenous-support-programs/>

Resources:

VictimLink BC

VictimLink BC provides information and referral services to all victims of crime and immediate crisis support to victims of family and sexual violence, including victims of human trafficking exploited for labour or sexual services.

VictimLinkBC staff can connect you to a network of community, social, health, justice and government resources, including victim services, transition houses and counselling resources. They also provide information on the justice system, relevant federal and provincial legislation and programs, crime prevention, safety planning, protection order registry and other resources as needed.

Call or text: 1-800-563-0808

Email: VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca

Website: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/victimlinkbc>

Battered Women's Support Services

BWSS offers immediate, short-term help to survivors of violence in intimate relationships, childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual assault.

Crisis + intake line: 1-855-687-1868

Email: intake@bwss.org

Website: <https://www.bwss.org/support/crisis-support/>

DISTRESS HELPLINES

If you are in a crisis, distress, or having thoughts of suicide, help is available. If there is an urgent safety concern, please call 9-1-1 or go to the emergency room at your nearest hospital.

9-8-8 National Suicide Crisis Helpline

Anywhere in BC 1-800-SUICIDE: 1-800-784-2433

Mental Health Support Line: 310-6789

Vancouver Coastal Regional Distress Line: 604-872-3311

Additional and External Resources

-YWCA Violence Prevention Programs

WorkSafe BC Domestic Violence Resources

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DOLL HOUSE INSPIRATION

