

## Worksheet 6 – A Slamming Door: The Play’s Ending

### Review: Lecture 5

In the last lecture, Dr Duncan discussed the themes of illness and law in *A Doll’s House*.

- ✓ How did Krogstad and Nora’s attitudes to the idea of law differ?

### Recall: Lecture 6

**Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.**

1. What reasons does Nora give Torvald for wanting to leave home?
  - a) She feels guilt at deceiving him and cannot bear to stay.
  - b) She wants to find herself as a person and gain her independence.
  - c) She is disappointed that their marriage wasn’t the ideal she had hoped for.
2. Ibsen wrote an alternative ending to *A Doll’s House* where Nora doesn’t leave home. Why did he do this?
  - a) He was worried about the harsh criticism his play received and wanted to make it more popular with audiences.
  - b) He had been threatened with legal action by Laura Kieler if he did not change the end of the play.
  - c) He heard someone else was going to write an alternative ending, and decided he wanted to do it himself.
3. According to literary critic Toril Moi, what makes Nora ‘an Hegelian woman’?
  - a) She leaves home to begin a struggle with the outside world that will ultimately change her as a person.
  - b) She is determined to get an education and explore philosophy.
  - c) She becomes a fully resolved and fulfilled character by the end of the play.

### Analysis

4. Ibsen chooses to end the play with a stage direction, rather than a line from a character. Why do you think he chose to do this? What impact does it have on the audience?

TORVALD (*Sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands*). Nora! Nora!  
(*Looks round, and rises.*) Empty. She is gone. (*A hope flashes across his mind.*)  
The most wonderful thing of all --?

(*The sound of a door slamming is heard from below.*)

5. Write a scene that takes place after the sound of the door slamming. You might explore:
  - where Nora goes after she leaves home.
  - what Torvald does after he hears the door slam.
  - the reactions of friends and family to Nora’s departure.
6. Dr Duncan mentions that some audience members struggle to understand Nora’s decision to leave her children. For instance, the author A.S. Byatt wrote in 2009 that ‘every time I read the

play I find myself judging Nora with less and less sympathy'. Do you feel sympathy towards Nora as a character at the end of the play? Why/ why not?

## Evaluation

7. You are going to write an essay, bringing together your learning from this lecture series. Choose one of the essay questions below to focus on. Follow these steps to write the essay:
- Mind map your initial ideas, checking back through your work from previous worksheets to help you.
  - Create an essay plan, deciding on the order of your points and your overarching argument.
  - Write your essay out in full, remembering to use formal language. Challenge: incorporate some of the vocabulary from the **Glossary** section of each worksheet into your essay.

## Essay questions:

- Explore the symbolic significance of hereditary disease in *A Doll's House*.
- 'Torvald is just as much a victim of nineteenth-century societal norms as Nora.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?
- How does Ibsen use dramatic devices to explore the relationships between characters in *A Doll's House*?  
You might discuss:
  - the musical set piece when Nora dances the tarantella;
  - the letter hitting the mailbox;
  - the slamming door at the end of the play.
- In Act 3 both Torvald and Nora use the term "human being":
  - When Nora submits to Torvald, he replies, 'Now my little lark's talking like a human being'.
  - When Nora explains to Torvald that she wants to leave home she says: 'Before all else, I'm a human being'.Compare and contrast Torvald's and Nora's definitions of "human being" in the play.

**Extension:** Dr Duncan suggests that Ibsen's play *Ghosts* can provide a useful comparison to *A Doll's House*. Read *Ghosts* and make a mind map of the connections between the two plays. You might focus on: hereditary illness; gender inequality; Ibsen's interest in naturalism.

A free copy can be read online at Project Gutenberg: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8121/8121-h/8121-h.htm>

## Glossary

- Denouement** – the final unravelling of the complications of a plot in a drama, novel, etc.; the final solution or issue of a complication, difficulty, or mystery.
- Reciprocal** – given and received mutually.
- Conciliatory** – bringing things into harmony and peace.
- Anathema** – something or someone who is extremely disliked.

- **Hegelian** – relating to the theories of German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831).