

# WU?@therep

## A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2

BY LUCAS HNATH

DIRECTED BY TIMOTHY NEAR

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**The Rep** REPERTORY  
THEATRE  
ST. LOUIS

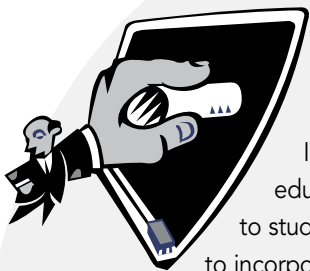


# the 11

At The Rep, we know that life moves fast—okay, really fast. But we also know that some things are worth slowing down

for. We believe that live theatre is one of those pit stops worth making and are excited that you are going to stop by for a show. To help you get the most bang for your buck, we have put together WU? @ THE REP—an IM guide that will give you everything you need to know to get at the top of your theatergoing game—fast. You'll find character descriptions (A/S/L), a plot summary (FYI), biographical information (F2F), historical context (B4U), and other bits and pieces (HTH). Most importantly, we'll have some ideas about what this all means IRL, anyway.

## CU@therep!



### The Teacher's Lounge

In an effort to make our educational materials accessible to students and easy for educators to incorporate into the classroom, our study guide is written in a student-oriented format. We hope that you will circulate this guide among your students in the weeks preceding your visit to The Rep, encouraging them to browse it before and after class and as time allows, using it as a launch point for both pre- and post-performance discussions. You may also want to visit our website, [www.repstl.org](http://www.repstl.org), for additional information including activity suggestions and behind-the-scenes information. Any materials, either from this guide or from our website may be reproduced for use in the classroom.

**NEATO!**

As always, we appreciate your making live theatre a part of your classroom experience and welcome your feedback and questions.

## HOW TO BE THE BEST AUDIENCE EVER!

### TAKE YOUR SEAT

An usher will seat your class as a group, and often we have a full house with no seats to spare, so be sure to stick with your school until you have been shown your section in the theatre.

### SILENCE IS GOLDEN

Before the performance begins, be sure to turn off your cell phone and watch alarms. If you need to talk or text during intermission, don't forget to click off before the show resumes.

### BREAK TIME

This performance includes an intermission, at which time you can visit the restrooms in the lobby. Intermission is only 15 minutes though, so hurry back to your seat.

### SNACK TIME

There is no food or drink permitted inside the theatre, so make sure you finish your snacks in the lobby before you enter the house.

### NOW HEAR THIS

Just as you can see and hear the actors, they can see and hear you. Any talking, even whispering, can be heard by those around you and those onstage, so please wait until the show is over to chat.

### NO PAPARAZZI PLEASE

The theatre is a camera-free zone. Flash photography interrupts the action onstage and is prohibited by Actors' Equity Association rules. You can sneak a peek at production photos on The Rep's website at [repstl.org](http://repstl.org).

### TAKE A BOW

Let the actors know you respect their work by responding to the curtain call at the end of the performance. Show your appreciation for a job well done through applause.

### THANKS FOR BEING A GREAT AUDIENCE!

#### REP EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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# A/S/L

After leaving her husband, children, and home 15 years earlier, **NORA** returns to finalize some arrangements with her family.

Her husband, **TORVALD**, who has struggled in Nora's absence, finds her presence unnerving and complicated.

**ANNE MARIE**, the maid of the house, was forced to raise Nora's children when she left, which has led to some unresolved resentment.

Torvald and Nora's daughter, **EMMY**, is not interested in having her mother's life and seeks to follow her own path.

# H

**DESTITUTE:** without the basic necessities of life; poor

**PSEUDONYM:** a false name, typically used by authors to publish work anonymously

**CONSUMPTION:** an outdated term used to describe tuberculosis, a disease which affects the lungs and leads to difficulty breathing and possibly death

**EPIPHANY:** a moment of sudden realization or insight

**AGGRANDIZE:** the increase a person's power or status, without justification

**SANITARIUM:** a medical facility for long-term illnesses, such as tuberculosis

**FJORD:** a long narrow inlet of sea between very high cliffs, typically formed by a glacier

**PONTIFICATE:** to express an opinion in an annoyingly pompous or preachy manner



## SPOILER ALERT!

This synopsis contains spoilers about the story of the show. If you wish to be completely surprised by what you see on stage, you may want to wait until after the play to read this article.



Pictured: Michael James Reed as Torvald and Caralyn Kozlowski as Nora. Photo by Patrick Lanham.

### **At the top of Act One, there is a knock on the door of the home of Torvald Helmer.**

Anne Marie, the nanny, opens it to reveal Nora Helmer. Fifteen years ago, Nora decided to leave her husband and children; she walked out the door, closing it completely on everyone that she left behind. They greet each other and settle in to talk, Anne Marie commenting that Nora has not really communicated with anyone since she left. Nora is on edge, not wanting to see Torvald, but Anne Marie assures her that he's at work and asks about Nora's life since leaving. Nora reveals that she is an author of books about women who make similar choices to her own. This leads to Anne Marie and Nora disagreeing about marriage. Nora is very much against the idea of marriage, seeing it as a kind of "closed door" that changes people and causes them to resent each other. Her books have inspired a lot of women to leave their husbands.

Nora then reveals why she has returned after 15 years: a judge, whose wife left him after reading Nora's books, has blackmailed her. He discovered that she is still married to Torvald, and is therefore lying about everything she has written in her books. She has also acted in a way that society does not allow married women to behave, making decisions without her husband's consent and having affairs with other men. Nora was under the impression that Torvald had filed the divorce papers, and has returned to ask him to do so. She wants Anne Marie's help in getting Torvald to cooperate. Before they can really discuss it, Torvald enters the room. He doesn't recognize Nora at first, but is quite shocked to see her when he finally does. Anne Marie leaves the two of them alone.

Torvald struggles to speak, in complete shock that Nora has returned. After a long moment of silence, Nora asks Torvald to sign the divorce

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papers and the conversation quickly becomes intense. They begin to discuss problems that they each had with their marriage, and it becomes very harsh and critical for both of them, leading Torvald to deny Nora her request for a divorce. Anne Marie returns and Torvald leaves.

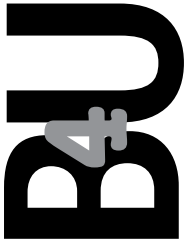
Once he is gone, Nora begins to work up a plan to finalize her divorce. As a woman, she has limited options—making Torvald look like a monster is one, and giving in to the judge's blackmail is another—so she requests Anne Marie's help. However, Anne Marie wants nothing to do with it, as she too resents Nora for leaving. She tells Nora to leave, but Nora refuses. They enter into a discussion about parenting, and Nora refuses to be blamed for leaving her children, as she left them with Torvald. However, Anne Marie was forced to raise them, and Nora comes off as ungrateful. She makes an attempt to pay Anne Marie for her help, but Anne Marie refuses. Instead, she gives Nora another option, telling her to meet with her daughter.

After a period of time, Nora and Torvald's daughter Emmy enters the house. She has been very excited to meet her mother, curious about a woman that she has never really known. Emmy reveals that she thought Nora was dead for the longest time, but when she discovered there was no death certificate, she knew the truth. She tells Nora that she's happy and believes that she's better off since Nora left. Without Nora, she had a lot more responsibility growing up and learned a lot of hard truths about the world. Nora asks Emmy for her help in finalizing her divorce, and plots the entire plan out, telling Emmy exactly how to approach the subject.

Emmy reveals to her that Torvald led everyone to believe that Nora was dead, and finalizing a divorce would bring Torvald nothing but trouble now. Also, it could ruin

Emmy's reputation and her impending marriage to a banker. Nora does not react well to Emmy getting married, but her daughter reminds her that they are not the same person. Emmy reveals a fourth option for Nora, one that would work, in some way, for everyone's benefit: using her connections, Emmy wants to file an official death certificate so that Torvald's lie has the evidence it needs to avoid scandal. After arguing about whether Emmy should get married, Nora decides that she can't ask for anyone's help in solving her problems. The entire point of her leaving 15 years ago is that she wouldn't have to rely on Torvald to solve her problems, that she would be an independent person. She begins to leave, but Anne Marie and Torvald enter, with Torvald bleeding from the head. He asks Emmy and Anne Marie to leave, and he is once again alone with Nora.

Torvald reveals that he read Nora's first book, the one that is essentially an autobiography. He believes that she has unfairly painted him as a monster and, in an attempt to get her to write a more favorable image about him, has agreed to file for divorce. However, when he went to sign the paperwork, there was confusion since everyone thinks Nora is dead. The clerk even made an attempt to file an official death certificate when Torvald revealed there wouldn't be one on file, but Torvald stopped him before he could do so. Instead, the clerk gave him a divorce, which Torvald attempts to give to Nora, but she refuses to take it. The two of them end up screaming at each other, calling each other selfish. Once they settle, Nora reveals that she is better off alone, that it took her a long time to figure out who she is by herself. Finally, she is ready to leave, and she walks the door once again, closing it behind her as she did 15 years before.



# BALANCING ACT: GENDER POLITICS IN VICTORIAN SOCIETY

In *A Doll's House, Part 2*, Nora Helmer is a woman who is very much ahead of her time. Even in Ibsen's original play, *A Doll's House*, the character of Nora makes a major decision that would have been extremely rare for a woman in Victorian society; in this sequel to that work, Nora reveals even more modern sensibilities. However, to truly understand how revolutionary Nora's actions are, it is important to understand how women were expected to behave in the late 1800s. Take a look at some of the defining characteristics of the period and how they are limiting to both men and women in search of independence.

## **"SEPARATE SPHERES"**

Men and women of the Victorian period were almost completely separated. On an average day, a married couple might see each other for breakfast and then again at dinner; everything in-between would be done separately. Men would go off to work, and women would stay home. At this time, women were restricted to the home to attend to domestic issues, taking care of children and fostering a moral purity that could not be found in public. In fact, society painted men as a sacrifice of sorts; they were the ones who had to go out into the corrupt and terrible world to labor, and women were given the honor of staying at home where it was safe and pleasant.

## **MARRIAGE AND EDUCATION**

In Victorian society, every action and accomplishment of a woman was related to how desirable she could be to men. Women were educated to be graceful and feminine, in order to balance men's masculinity and intellectual drive. The following accomplishments were expected of women seeking an advantageous marriage: knowledge of music, dancing, drawing and languages, as well as correct tone of voice and manner of walking. Victorian women could not appear too knowledgeable, for a woman with too much knowledge would threaten the masculinity of a man with too little.

While women were expected to be as desirable as possible, all for the hope of a good marriage, they were also taught not to seek out the company of men. Women were not allowed to outwardly desire men; rather, marriage was to be entirely for producing children and raising future generations. Men, however, were able to desire women if they would like. In Victorian society, unmarried women were not allowed to speak to men without another woman present. All of this was done to keep women as pure as possible in order to balance out a man's more immoral ways.

## **EXPECTATIONS OF MEN**

As alluded to above, Victorian women were deemed weak and in need of protection. They were innocent, pure, feminine and angelic. This was all due to the expectation that they would balance out the men of Victorian society. The more restricted women were, the more unrestricted men could be. Men were expected to be masculine (to balance a woman's femininity), protective (to balance a woman's weakness) and aggressive (to balance a woman's shyness). Men were expected to be strong, brave and hard-working. They were providers and laborers. Men were allowed to have relations with women outside of marriage; it was not strongly encouraged in public society, but it was also not punishable the way that it was for women.

## WOMAN'S RIGHTS.

THE right to be a comforter,  
When other comforts fail ;  
The right to cheer the drooping heart  
When troubles most assail.

The right to train the infant mind,  
To think of Heaven and God ;  
The right to guide the tiny feet  
The path our Saviour trod.

The right to solace the distressed,  
To wipe the mourner's tear ;  
The right to shelter the oppressed,  
And gently chide each fear.

The right to be a bright sunbeam,  
In high or lowly home ;  
The right to smile with loving gleam,  
And point to joys to come.

The right to fan the fevered brow,  
To ease the troubled mind,  
And gently tell in accents low,  
"All those who seek shall find."

Such are the noblest woman's rights,  
The rights which God hath given,  
The right to comfort man on earth  
And smooth his path to heaven.

M.C.M.R.

# TODAY'S FIGHT FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Though Lucas Hnath's play takes place in the late 1800s, right before the turn of the century, he writes in contemporary language, using modern-day vernacular for Victorian characters. Not only does this significantly separate his play from Ibsen's original work, but it also forces the audience to draw strong parallels between the society depicted onstage and the society that we currently live in. The conversations Nora has with Anne Marie, Torvald and Emmy are conversations that you might hear in a coffee shop or in your school cafeteria.

The past few years have been privy to a number of protests for social change, and one of the most prominent fights is for gender rights and equality. Though progress has been made since the 1850s, women are still fighting for respect in the workplace and in society at large. On average, women make less than men who work in the same career with the same qualifications. Women are still expected to want to get married and have children, and society questions those who choose to walk a different path. Like Victorian "spheres," women are still labelled as nurturers and caregivers, while men are expected to be tough and unemotional. Boys are still taught that "crying is only for girls" and that they should have more interest in sports than in arts.

Society's pressure on conforming to gender expectations is constrictive for both men and women. For women, it can feel like a constant fight to be heard, respected and seen as an individual. For men, it can cause them to internalize all of their emotions in an effort to appear masculine, which can lead to violently aggressive and dangerous behavior, oftentimes towards women. In many ways, it feels as though men and women are at war with one another in an effort to maintain the balancing act that was so prevalent in Victorian society. Back then, it was believed that a women's quiet/shy/innocent behavior worked to balance a man's tough/hard-working/dominant nature. But now, as women push to step outside of such a limited mold of who they can be, men work to find a way to balance the new status quo. However, instead of working to become less domineering and on an equal level with women, societal expectations push men to be more dominant. This once again leads to a complete lack of balance and an excess of domineering behavior that goes unresolved and has, in very recent years, reached a boiling point.

- **As a teenager, how do you feel society is pressuring you to behave in order to fit into a mold?**
- **Do you feel that you personally push against these expectations? How?**
- **Like Emmy and Nora, do you feel that you have a different perspective of gender politics than your parents, or even your grandparents? How are you different? How are you the same?**
- **Think about ways in which society has molded you, and ways in which society is currently molding children younger than you. What are some of the major differences? Do you feel like there is a balance within a small group such as your class?**
- **How can you personally work towards gender equality?**



# HENRIK IBSEN, THE “FATHER OF REALISM”



**Henrik Ibsen has the distinction of having written the “slamming door that shocked the world.”** In his 1879 play *A Doll’s House*, Ibsen created a powder keg of harsh truths about marriage and happiness that had, before that time, been completely ignored in public. A reflection of Ibsen’s life and career reveals that the Norwegian playwright oftentimes refused to live “by the book,” finding ways to expose and explore the seedy underbelly of the restrictive Victorian society in which he lived.

Ibsen was born in 1828 into a well-off family of merchants who had strong connections to just about every major family in the port town of Skien, Norway. However, by the time Henrik was 8, his father found himself in debt, and the family was forced to move out of the city. Ibsen’s education left a lot to be desired, as he was forced to

leave school at 15 and did not receive high enough scores on his entrance exams to attend college. However, he was determined to become a playwright and set his focus on writing. When he moved to Norway’s capital city, he began work at a theatre with very little initial success. Following his marriage in 1858, Ibsen exiled himself from Norway due to his poor financial circumstances. He moved to Italy in 1864 and did not return to his homeland for 27 years.

Ibsen’s first real successes came with his play *Brand* in 1865 and *Peer Gynt* in 1867. Armed with a new confidence in his abilities, Ibsen began to introduce his personal opinions and judgments into his work; this led to him becoming a very controversial playwright. He moved to Germany in 1868 and began what was deemed his Golden Age of playwriting. His first contemporary realist dramas *The Pillars of Society* and *A Doll’s House* saw great success while also being a controversial criticism of society at the time of their writing.

As “the father of realism,” Ibsen became known for holding an unflinching mirror up to society and forcing people to notice and react to the world around them. *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll’s House* both contain intense feminist perspectives that critique the restrictive nature of Victorian expectations, while other plays like *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck* explore the previously undiscussed moral illness of society, with mentions of sex and disease. Following his death in 1906, Ibsen has become the most-produced playwright in the world, second only to William Shakespeare.

## A short list of Henrik Ibsen’s most controversial and noteworthy works:

*Hedda Gabler*  
*Ghosts*  
*Pillars of Society*

*A Doll’s House*  
*The Wild Duck*  
*An Enemy of the People*

# BW

*A Doll's House, Part 2* is based on a theatre classic by Henrik Ibsen. His play, *A Doll's House*, gives us a look at the marriage of Nora and Torvald, 15 years before the events of Lucas Hnath's new work.

Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play *A Doll's House* begins with Nora Helmer returning home after a day of Christmas shopping. Her husband, Torvald, admonishes her for wasting his money, but Nora justifies her actions, saying that now that Torvald has been promoted at work, they can spend more. Torvald disagrees, but chalks her behavior up to her being an uninformed woman. Mrs. Christine Linde arrives, back in town after a time away.

Nora discovers that Christine is widowed, and in their discussion, Nora reveals that Torvald fell ill many years ago and they had to go away on a trip that cost 250 pounds. In doing so, Nora shares her greatest secret with Christine: when Torvald was ill, they did not get the money for the trip from Nora's father as everyone believes, instead Nora borrowed the money from an unknown man and signed her father's name to it.

Krogstad, a lawyer who works at the bank, arrives, wishing to speak to Torvald and Christine reveals that she has met him before. Later that day, Nora's playtime with her children is interrupted when Krogstad arrives, this time to speak with Nora. He is the man who lent Nora the money years ago and now that he is about to lose his position at the bank, he blackmails her to appeal to Torvald. Krogstad has proof that Nora committed a criminal act by forging her father's name. Torvald comes home and correctly assumes that Krogstad is trying to use Nora to keep his job. Torvald reveals that Krogstad once forged a person's name and never took his punishment, so Torvald plans to fire him.

In Act Two, Nora begs Torvald to let Krogstad keep his position at the bank, but Torvald refuses and sends a termination letter to Krogstad. Later that day, Krogstad arrives to make good on his promise of blackmail. He leaves a letter for Torvald in the letterbox. Nora tells Christine of this and Christine, having a history with Krogstad, decides to help Nora by speaking with him.

As the final Act begins, Christine is alone in the Helmer home while Nora and Torvald are upstairs at a dinner party. Krogstad enters and Christine tells him that although she once wanted to marry him, she had to marry a man who could provide for her family. Now, however, she is a widow and free to marry as she wants. Overcome with happiness, Krogstad decides not to blackmail Nora. However, Christine tells him to keep his letter in the letterbox for Torvald to find; she believes that Nora's secret needs to come out, or the Helmer marriage will fall apart because of it.

Before going to bed, Torvald gets the letters from the box. Almost immediately, he finds the note from Krogstad. He is angry and calls Nora a liar and a hypocrite. He thinks only of himself and what this news does to his reputation. Torvald forbids Nora to raise the children, telling her that she will stay in the house, but they will be married in name only. Shortly after his outburst, another letter from Krogstad arrives, this time relieving Nora from blackmail and returning all evidence of her crime. Instantly, Torvald changes his attitude and forgives Nora, but she has shut down completely. She goes into her room to change from the party clothes.

Through the door, Torvald tells Nora that he will take care of her and make all decisions for her, and she will never have to worry again. When Nora re-enters, she tells Torvald that she is leaving him, that she has never been happy in their marriage and that she does not love him anymore. Nora feels that she does not know herself, as she went from being in the possession of her father to being in Torvald's possession. She wants to find out who she is on her own. Torvald's reaction to Krogstad's blackmail changed the way she looked at him, and proved that he doesn't see their relationship as a partnership, so she cannot be with him. She leaves the house, closing the door behind her.

# RBTL

## SOCIETY VS. SELF

The majority of the dramatic tension in *A Doll's House, Part 2* is built on Nora's complete rejection of the expectations of women by Victorian society. It is what has forced her to come back to the home that she hoped to never return to, and it is imbedded in every conversation that she has with the other characters in the play. Nora is a woman who seeks to be a individual without any need of another person; she finds that she is better off alone, and she wants to be able to act without the permission of anyone else. However, this is completely at odds with the society in which she lives, a society that demands she is attached to a man, and that a man make all of her decisions for her. Without these expectations, Nora would not have been able to write the books that she does, and she would also not be blackmailed by the judge. The play relies on Nora's push against the mold fitted for her, and how she works to escape the one she is already in. **Is Nora's fight one that you agree with? Imagine yourself as a person in Victorian society at the time of this play. How do you think you would react to Nora's opinions? Now imagine that the setting of this play was 2018. Would this dramatic conflict still work? Why or why not?**

## FAMILY DYNAMICS & GENDER

While Nora's primary conflict is against society at large and finding her place in it, she also experiences secondary conflicts with the characters around her. One of the key components of this is her role within the Helmer family. Not only does society have an opinion on Nora's role within the household as a caregiver and nurturer, but Torvald, Anne Marie and Emmy also have similar expectations of her due to society's influence on the issue. Anne Marie

criticizes Nora for leaving her children alone and forcing Anne Marie to raise them; however, Nora rejects the concept that she left them alone when she actually left the children with their father. Emmy has learned to fend for herself without her mother but reveals that the gap left by Nora was filled with a need to take responsibility for herself. Torvald resents that Nora left him but also attempts to use the children as a way to further guilt her for leaving the home. **What does all of this imply about Victorian society's view of women in relationship to the family? Would you say that society has changed its views significantly since then? How has it changed and how has it stayed the same?**

## GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Though it is more subtle than the play's other themes and ideas, Lucas Hnath's new play also explores the juxtaposition of different generations of women in Victorian society. Not only are Nora's views on women and gender equality far ahead of her time, but they are also far ahead of women both older and younger than she is. While it makes sense that Nora's views would be a little more progressive than Anne Marie's, as younger generations are usually more progressive than those that came before them, it may be surprising that Emmy's expectations fall more in line with Anne Marie's than they do with Nora's. Instead of showing a progression of liberal ideas throughout the generations, Hnath breaks the chain in order to really compare and contrast the warring opinions of the three female characters. **As you watch the play, focus on the stances of the three women. Where are their major differences? Where do they find commonalities? What might we learn about the playwright's personal views on the issue of gender equality by examining these three different perspectives?**