

EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE



A Doll's HOUSE

www.seattleshakespeare.org/education

206-733-8228 ext. 212 or education@seattleshakespeare.org

SEATTLE SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

Dear Educators,

This winter, Seattle Shakespeare Company is putting on the Ibsen play, *A Doll's House*. This is a small play with big things behind it. It is a small-cast play with only five main characters and a couple extras in the background. It is played on a small set, in our smaller theater. There is no epic story, just the personal tensions in a marriage and between friends.

But at the same time, this is a strong, big-themed show. It is a dream for our director to put on this play. It is our first time doing Ibsen at Seattle Shakespeare Company. This is not only a classic, but a new work — it is newly translated for Seattle Shakespeare Company by Sean Taylor. And of course, this is a play that is both personal as well as universal, addressing the ideas of women's rights and self-determination through the story of one young wife leaving her family behind.

In this study guide, you'll find a lot of big ideas to discuss with your students, but also some personal reflection to guide students through this play. We hope that you enjoy the small details of *A Doll's House* as much as the big ideas, and that they work together to weave a story worth hearing again and again.

Best,



Michelle Burce
Education Director

Sponsors:

THE PAUL G. ALLEN
FAMILY FOUNDATION

TUXEDOS AND TENNIS SHOES
CATERING AND EVENTS



ARTSFUND

KUOW
94.9
kuow.org
npr

STUDY GUIDE CONTENTS

<i>A Doll's House</i> Synopsis	1
A summary of the plot.	
Dramatis Personae	1
A description of the characters in <i>A Doll's House</i> .	
Henrik Ibsen Biography	2
A biography of one of the world's most performed playwrights.	
The Art of Translation	3
Translator Sean Taylor gives some insight into the process of translating a classic.	
Gender, Marriage, and Family	4
Some historical background on the social conditions and gender roles that were prevalent in Ibsen's day.	
The Real Nora	6
Ibsen's character of Nora was inspired by a real woman.	
Torvald	6
The antagonist of the play acts as Nora's foil, but is not quite a villain.	
Reflection and Discussion Questions	7
Students consider themes in pre-show reflection questions, and are challenged to think about the production in post-show discussion questions.	
Placing the Production	8–9
Our director and design team give a preview of the upcoming production.	
Pre-Show Activity: Alligator River	10
A simple story opens the doors for students to discuss their ideas of right and wrong.	
Post-Show Activity: Relationship Tableaus	11
Students consider the relationships between the main characters and create a visual representation of those relationships.	

SYNOPSIS

Act One

It is Christmas and Nora Helmer returns home from Christmas shopping. Her husband, Torvald, is about to receive a promotion and become vice-president of the bank, but he still chides her for spending too much and expresses his horror of debt. Nora is visited by her childhood friend, Christine, who has been working to support herself since the death of her penniless husband. Nora confides to Christine that she borrowed money from a lawyer, Krogstad, to save Torvald's life when he was very ill and has not told him to spare his pride. Nora is then visited by Krogstad, who is fearful of losing his position at the bank and is willing to do anything to keep it. He then reveals that he knows that Nora forged her dead father's signature to get the loan. Krogstad threatens to expose Nora if she does not help him and he loses his job.

Act Two

As they prepare to go to a holiday party, Nora pleads with Torvald to keep Krogstad in his position, but he refuses. Dr. Rank, a friend of Torvald and Nora's, comes to visit. Nora, about to ask him for help, is taken aback by Rank's revelation that he is dying from tuberculosis and further disturbed by his declaration of love to her. She rejects him. Krogstad, who by now has been fired by Torvald, arrives with a letter detailing Nora's crimes. He puts it in Torvald's mailbox and leaves. Nora reveals everything to Christine, who confides that she and Krogstad had been in love and will try to convince him to relent. Panicked, Nora does everything she can to distract Torvald from reading his mail. Eventually they leave for the party.

Act Three

Krogstad and Christine meet and eventually reconcile. Krogstad is about to take back his letter, but Christine decides Torvald must know the truth. Torvald and Nora return from the party; Nora is still doing all she can to prevent Torvald from opening his mail. Rank arrives to bid Nora a final farewell. Torvald finds Krogstad's letter and confronts Nora with it. Enraged, he berates her, calling her unfit as a wife and mother. He is interrupted by the maid delivering a new letter from Krogstad, who has released Torvald and Nora from his blackmail. Torvald is relieved and takes back his harsh words to Nora, but Nora tells him that she cannot be his wife anymore. Torvald pleads with her, but Nora is determined to find out who she is outside of her life with Torvald. Nora leaves him and her children, slamming the door behind her.

CHARACTER LIST



NORA HELMER:

The "doll" of the title and the central character of the play, Nora is married to Torvald. Her playful nature masks secrets that threaten to be revealed.



TORVALD HELMER:

Nora's husband and manager of the bank. He is about to receive a large promotion which ensures his and his family's security.



KRISTINE LINDE:

An old childhood friend of Nora's, Kristine has recently become a widower, and she has come to town looking for a job.



NILS KROGSTAD:

A lawyer and co-worker of Torvald's, whose position at the bank has become shaky. He is willing to do anything to keep his position.



DR. RANK:

A family friend of the Helmers'; he has been sick for some time.



ANNE-MARIE:

The Helmer's nanny.



HELEN:

The Helmer's maid.

EMMY and CATHRINE:

Nora and Torvald's children

HENRIK IBSEN



Henrik Ibsen by Eilif Peterssen. 1895

Henrik Ibsen was born on March 20th, 1828, in the town of Skien, Norway. The son of a prosperous merchant, Ibsen enjoyed a happy childhood until his father encountered financial woes and was forced to sell most of the family possessions. The family never recovered; Ibsen's happy family life quickly became dysfunctional as his father took up drinking and accusing Ibsen's mother of infidelity. He subsequently spoke little of his family life, but it is important to note that many aspects of Ibsen's life growing up cropped up in his work.

Ibsen resolved as a young man to become a doctor and quickly began working as an apprentice to an apothecary, but a number of events began to distract Ibsen from a medical career. His beliefs in atheism as well as criticism of the institutions of marriage and religion made him decidedly unpopular, as did his fathering an illegitimate child. In order to help make ends meet, Ibsen began working for theaters in town, where he became steeped in writing, directing, and many other duties.

Writing became a primary focus in Ibsen's theatrical activities. Fueled by interests in social and political reform, his first few plays were deemed unfit for the theatre. Despite this, writing and directing in the theatre soon became Ibsen's passion, distracting him enough to fail his medical exams and abandon a career in medicine altogether. His plays were rejected time and time again which became a source of great contention for Ibsen. He eventually found the state of Norwegian theatre so restrictive that he picked up stakes and left the country, taking with him his wife and his family.

Ibsen moved his family to Italy, where he continued to write and discovered much more success than he had in his home country. Plays like *Peer Gynt* and *Brand* soon gave Ibsen both financial stability and critical acclaim. Ibsen's early plays were written in verse. His subject matter was certainly more poetical than realistic, and it was tied to Norwegian folklore. These early works were very well-received in Europe, but Ibsen was far from satisfied. He was able to provide for his family and had the freedom to choose what direction his playwriting career could go. Rather than continue writing poetic epic plays like *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen began to write prose works which reflected the world he saw around him and the issues he saw as needing to be addressed.

In 1869, Ibsen decided to move to Germany, where he wrote plays which were much more realistic in tone. What drove Ibsen's work at this point was the hypocrisy he observed around him. He examined modern society and the lies that lay beneath a calm and pleasant exterior. He also focused on the right of each individual, man or woman, to live a life of their own choosing and saw society's rules as detrimental to that right. To him, poetic language was not the appropriate medium to explore these issues; it had to be in everyday language. *A Doll's House* was the one of the first plays Ibsen wrote in this fashion and it changed both his career and his life. Inspired by personal events in his life and those around him, Ibsen soon created a story unlike any he had written before.

The play caused uproar throughout Europe. Audiences were shocked by the actions of the central character and near riots occurred at performances. One theatre in Germany demanded Ibsen change the ending. However, many critics and fellow writers, among them George Bernard Shaw, applauded Ibsen for his courage, and for the spare, simple prose in which he wrote the play. Ibsen's reputation soared.

Fired by the success of *A Doll's House*, Ibsen split his time between Italy and Germany, continuing to write and continuing to perfect the prose work he had begun with *A Doll's House*. Controversy always seemed to follow Ibsen, as he was unafraid to weave such subject matter as sexual disease, mental illness, and incest into his plays. In the works that followed, *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder*, Ibsen's masterful use of prose and symbolism soon gained him the prestige of being of the greatest playwrights of his time. Ibsen biographer Michael Meyer called him "a great negative voice in a negative age, which tries in vain, by shrieking in falsetto and thundering in the deepest bass, to convince itself that it is positive."

After years of success Ibsen returned to Norway in 1891, settling in Oslo. He died in 1906 after suffering a series of strokes. While lying ill, Ibsen heard his nurse tell a visitor he was doing much better. "On the contrary!" he said. He died the next day and was buried in Oslo.

THE ART OF TRANSLATION

By Sean Patrick Taylor, translator of *A Doll's House*

The art of translation, taken back to its Latin roots, involves a carrying-over. But what does one carry over?

Translators like to maintain their devotion to retaining the “original meaning” of the text (and I have been just as guilty of this in the past as any). If by “meaning” we mean “what the author really said,” the endeavor is futile. The author has already said what he wanted to say, in a language probably incomprehensible to the audience the translator wishes to reach. So we become less audacious, and say that we want to preserve the “sense” of the original. But this, too, is no mean task. Language is not a transparent medium, in which meaning is easily transferable from one tongue to another. That we regularly misunderstand those speaking in the same language as ours testifies to this truth.

Many of the more daunting obstacles I’ve faced as a translator have been removed in my approach to *A Doll's House*: the work is a relatively recent one (for a medievalist such as myself, anyway); the characters do not speak in verse; the bourgeois setting involves concerns familiar to one raised in such surroundings. The problems that remain are the ones that always attend the project of translation: how to represent words from a different language and time in a manner by which the characters retain their individual voices (if the author has been careful enough to provide them), and the manner and mood of the scenes, insofar as they are created by language, are upheld.

With *A Doll's House*, the major challenge was to mitigate the tendency in Scandinavian languages toward prolixity (tedious wordiness). Ibsen’s dialect, Dano-Norwegian, retains

the fondness for subordinate clauses common to Germanic languages. Carrying this kind of syntax into English results in a style that strikes the modern ear as rather stilted or overly formal. I’ve retained some of that kind of diction where appropriate, notably for Dr. Rank, whose macabre sense of humor is well-served by it, or for Helmer in his more priggish moments. Whereas for Nora, I’ve tried to combine clauses, even truncate them, in order to give her speech a sense of breathlessness, of headlong motion. In two scenes in Act 3—that between Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, and the final scene between Nora and Helmer—I’ve extended this practice of consolidation, compressing exchanges between characters by removing superfluous responses or recapitulations.

On the level of diction, I’ve tried to adopt a style appropriate to middle class individuals of the late nineteenth century, interpreted into an American idiom rather than a British one. At times the natural reticence of the Scandinavian character provides challenges in this regard. When Nora tells us she dearly wants to say something rude that Helmer will hear, her outburst might be translated literally as “death and torment!” Here, as elsewhere, I have taken liberties in translation to compensate for the paucity of hyperbolic expression available in Nordic languages.

I hope, as always, that my labors on this translation will provide the audience with as much pleasure as it has to me. The great reward of the translator’s work is that it obliges him to slow down, and listen very carefully. It’s in this deliberation I often find the true pleasure of the text.

A TIME-TRAVELING STORY

Like Shakespeare, Ibsen has been lauded as a great playwright for the timelessness of his work. More than 130 years after its premier, *A Doll's House* forces us to face universal themes such as trust, respect, reputation, and deceit. These issues continue to be relevant to American audiences, but other conflicts in the story require a history lesson to justify.

Though still never articulated at a federal level, all state governments granted women full to partial rights to own property by 1900. In the United States, women earned their right to vote in 1920. Even as late as 1940, twelve states had not granted married women the right to enter legal contracts independently.

While these dates may seem uncomfortably recent, the broader battle for gender equality as a human right is still underway in much of the world today, and the story of *A Doll's House* is relevant in a much more specific way.

In 1992, an Iranian film adaptation set Ibsen’s story in a modern setting and, in 2013, an American film will set the story in contemporary Ohio in the context of our current economic recession.



Niki Karimi in the 1992 Iranian film *Sara*.

GENDER, MARRIAGE, AND FAMILY

“A head almost too small for intellect and just big enough for love.”

— 19th century medical text on women

Nora walking out on her husband and family at the end of *A Doll's House* caused a vehement uproar when the play premiered in 1879. Her actions may seem reasonable to a modern audience but they undermined what were, at the time, two of the most sacred units in society — marriage and the nuclear family.

The cultural ideals of marriage and family that emerged during the 19th century may seem traditional to us now, but they were in many ways unprecedented in North American and European history. The 1800s came on the heels of radical power shifts throughout society. The Protestant Reformation followed by the European Enlightenment challenged the inherent privilege of monarchs to rule over the population and of the clergy over spiritual life. As women joined the efforts of revolutions, the earliest wave of European feminism challenged the inherent right of men to rule over women.

However, in the newly formed United States and across Europe, new legislation formed a backlash that specifically limited newly expanded rights to men. A concept of separate but equal gender roles was established to rationalize women's exclusion from public life. Women were now portrayed as asexual, nurturing, mentally child-like, and emotion-based while men excelled in bravery and intellect but lacked inherent morals. Neither was considered fit to navigate life without the other.

Before the 1800s, wives had typically played a large role in their husbands' professions. Many guilds would not grant memberships for men who did not have a wife to help run their trade. Even domestic work had economic value within the barter economy. Professionals could be paid in goods and services produced by wives, and many items that would later be purchased with currency were manufactured in the home. When capitalism and industrial jobs expanded, barter became largely obsolete and women's contributions were devalued. Middle class women depended entirely on husbands or male relatives. Lower class women still worked outside the home to keep families afloat financially, but this practice carried a negative stigma.

In a transformed workplace men were now employed by companies rather than family businesses or long-term employment in another household. A new focus on marriage and the nuclear family replaced wider social networks. Community-based activities dwindled. Holidays that had traditionally been celebrated between colleagues, neighbors, and friends became small family affairs. Honeymoons shifted from a tour of friends and relatives to couples retreating on private vacations. As the extended family and geographic community played a smaller role in people's lives, the public realm also became increasingly impersonal and competitive. A sense of isolation and nostalgia is reflected in men's writing during this period.

Family was, for the first time, lauded as the backbone of society. The ideal of the Home became a popular subject of writing and



THE MOTHER'S TREASURE.

art. Presided over by a nurturing and morally upstanding woman, the domestic sphere was a warm and gentle sanctuary from the harsh outside world. Just as women were dependent on men to shelter them from the public sphere, men depended on women to inspire kindness and deter their naturally selfish behavior. It was reasoned that women's kindness and moral superiority could only be maintained by separation from the outside world. Medical science reinforced the values of the time: exposure to the harsh realities of the public sphere and even academic pursuits could damage the fragile female mind and cause serious illness.

Ultimately, this limited and narrowly defined concept of gender was not sustainable. Removing the responsibility of middle class women to work outside the home combined with a cultural belief in their moral superiority created perfect conditions for women's groups to organize on the behalf of humanitarian causes. By the late 1800s, the all-female organizations that first invested their efforts to abolish slavery and earn legislative protection for vulnerable populations had turned their focus to achieving political equality for their own gender.

While the severe ideas about gender and family formed in the 19th century did not last, they have altered cultural norms about family and gender to this day.

Source:

Coontz, Stephanie. *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.

THE REAL NORA

Henrick Ibsen's *A Doll's House* was a play loosely based on a real story and on people Ibsen actually knew. The character of Nora was modeled after Ibsen's friend Laura Kieler. Her story parallels Nora's almost exactly. Her husband, Victor, fell ill with tuberculosis and his doctors strongly advised a move to a southerly climate. Laura, like Nora, forged her husband's signature on the loan to help make this happen, and Victor eventually recovered his health. Her deception and forgery were eventually discovered by her husband, but here is where the actual story differs from *A Doll's House*. Upon discovering what his wife had done, Victor divorced Laura and took their children away from her. The strain upon her proved too much and she suffered a complete nervous breakdown. Her husband had her committed to an asylum for two years.

Ibsen was writing *A Doll's House* when his friend's forgery was discovered, and he was deeply troubled by his friend's plight. The story goes that Laura had approached him at a crucial point for help, and Ibsen was either unable or unsure how to help. To what degree these real events shaped the play, people can only speculate. It can also only be guessed how much of Victor and Laura Kieler's personalities and marriage were reflected in the characters of Nora and Torvald. Ibsen's friendship with Laura certainly explains why the play was such a personal one for him and why he fought to keep the story as he saw it.

Laura eventually was released from the asylum, returned to her husband and family, and soon enjoyed a successful career as a writer. Ibsen himself became greatly successful and a subject of controversy himself because of *A Doll's House*. Laura Kieler and



Laura Kieler

Ibsen remained friends for the rest of their lives, yet the scandal forever affected their relationship. Laura resented being known as "Ibsen's Nora" and Ibsen's role in her life story kept a degree of tension between them that was never to go away.

TORVALD

The character of Torvald is often overlooked in any discussion of *A Doll's House*. It would be easy enough to view Torvald in black and white terms; Nora as the heroine and Torvald as the villain. But Ibsen is not creating characters that are so simplistic. In as much as Nora's journey becomes crucial to the story, it would not have been as effective if Torvald himself had been without dimension. *A Doll's House* can be viewed as the story of a marriage, and Torvald's character is an essential piece in that.

At the beginning of the play, Torvald is very much the ideal husband as it was accepted in Ibsen's time. Nora defers to him consistently and Torvald coddles Nora, calls her his "little bird" and other diminutive terms. Certainly some 21st Century audiences hear Torvald's terms of affection as belittling to Nora, but this would have been commonplace in Ibsen's time. Torvald was written to be an average, successful member of society who was very much in love with his wife.

As the play progresses, Ibsen begins to peel away the layers of not just Nora, but Torvald as well. One begins to see his hard sense of morality, and how unwilling he is to compromise that for anything, even his wife. Torvald reveals his unforgiving nature in how he talks of Nora's father and how he deals with Krogstad.

In many ways, it is Torvald's inflexibility and lack of compassion which prompts much of the action of the play. If more compassion had been shown by Torvald, Krogstad might have kept his job. Nora might not even have felt compelled to hide her secrets from him.

Near the end of the play, Nora, facing her worst fears, sees Torvald clearly for the first time. She finally has the strength to leave Torvald, and she becomes the dominant individual of the two, but does this without the same aggressiveness Torvald has toward her. Her simple rejection of the life she's had with Torvald leaves him at a loss. Whereas the woman who leaves the stage is one who looks forward for an uncertain future, we are left onstage with a man who has lost everything and cannot understand why. The play began with a seemingly happy couple and ends with a divorce.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE: These questions are open-ended and have no 'right' answer. Examples of possible answers accompany each question.

What do you know about Henrik Ibsen?

- Ibsen was a Norwegian playwright in the 1800's.
- He is best known for *A Doll's House*, a play about a woman breaking free of her husband
- He also wrote other plays, including *Hedda Gabler* and *Peer Gynt*.

Which is more important, having a happy family life or standing against them for something you believe is right? What might be some factors to consider as you choose between these?

- Answers may vary according to student opinion
- Some factors may include whether students can live independent of their family, how well they get along with their family, prior disputes with family, or how important the decision is.

Have you ever lied to someone "for their own good"? Have you ever kept a secret from someone so that they would not be angry or disappointed with you? How did it make you feel? Did the lie or secret ever get more complicated over time? Did the other person ever find out?

- Answers may vary according to student experience — students may want to discuss with a partner instead of the whole class.

A Doll's House was written in 1879. What do you imagine the role of women were during that time? Consider what you know about women's rights in the U.S.

- Women were expected to be good wives and mothers
- Women were ruled by their fathers or husbands
- Women could not vote or make contracts

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE: These questions are open-ended and have no 'right' answer. Examples of possible answers accompany each question.

Did Nora make the right choice in her decision to leave? Why or why not?

- Yes, she did. She had to find who she was as an individual. She realized she could not live the lie she had been living for years, and her marriage with Torvald would never be the same after his outburst.
- No, she didn't. Her desire to pursue her own self-worth is a noble and important one, but she also had a commitment to her husband and children. Besides, she will have a very hard time getting along by herself out in the world.

Do you think the play is outdated in any way? If so, how? If not, how?

- A lot of it has become outdated. Women have many more rights than they did in Ibsen's time, so the conflicts about signing a contract and making money no longer apply today.
- Much of the play still rings true. Women still have to fight to be seen as equals to men in the workplace, in the home, and in society. They are constrained by gender roles, even when they have the potential to break that mold.

Is there a villain in the play? If so, who is it?

- Torvald is the closest to a villain. He is self-serving and only cares about appearances. He doesn't see Nora as an equal at all, and is willing to disown her if she ruins his reputation.
- It is Krogstad. None of Nora's troubles would have happened if he hadn't blackmailed her.
- It is Nora herself. She broke the law by taking out a loan, and all of her troubles came about because she wasn't honest with her husband.
- It is Nora's friend Christine. Krogstad wanted to take back the letter, but Christine convinced him to let the conflict unfold between Nora and Torvald.

Compare and contrast Nora's character at the beginning of the play and the end. How has she changed? How has she not?

- Nora has become stronger and more independent, and she wants to leave Torvald despite the difficulties she will face.
- Nora discovered that she no longer knows who she is as an independent woman, since she has always lived with her father or husband.
- Nora has always had a rebellious streak, since she was willing to go behind her husband's back in the first place.
- Nora was never really dedicated to her life with Torvald, it just took a major conflict to convince her to finally leave.

PLACING THE PRODUCTION



Directing *A Doll's House* has been a dream project for director Russ Banham. It has been a play he has always loved, but has always been disappointed by. The play can easily be played as a flat museum-piece classic, with stock characters, predictable plot maneuvers, and with Torvald played as a villain to Nora's hero. This is not the play Banham sees when he looks at *A Doll's House*. His version is one with a full cast of sympathetic characters, all trying to do the best they can. It's a show full of suspense that keep the audience on edge during all three acts. But his vision for *A Doll's House* is also somewhat of a classic one — it is set in the original time and place noted in the script.

The set for this production will be, rather fittingly, based on the idea of an actual doll house. But it is Torvald's doll house, so it will be a cool shade of blue. This blue can start off looking happy and cute, but quickly begins to feel cold and stark as the play progresses. The playing space will be a tight confined space, something that holds Nora in and has no breathing room for her. It will be a unit set, with just the one room of the house that Ibsen describes for all of the action. There are hallways and doors that lead to other places, but Nora is held in that single room shown on the set.



A DOLL'S HOUSE
Seattle Shakespeare Company, January 2013
Russ Banham Director | Pete Rush Designer



The Maid and Nursemaid



A DOLL'S HOUSE
Seattle Shakespeare Company, January 2013
Russ Banham Director | Pete Rush Designer



Dr. Rank, Torvald, Krogstad

Of course, the set will shift for her when she finally leaves Torvald at the end of the show. The narrow confines of the doll house will give way to a much broader horizon, and the cold blue of the set will be offset by the warmth of the future that Nora can see for herself.

Costumes and sound design will combine to ground us firmly in the late 19th century Norway. It's the end of the Edwardian period, so women are in slim dresses and men are wearing an early version of the modern suit. It is also winter, so characters will be bundled up in their heavy wintery outfits. The music used in

the show will be mostly Debussy and Ravel, French composers who were contemporary to the 1890's, whom Nora might have listened to.

Finally, the Christmas tree will be very traditional, in that the ornaments on it will be made by the children of the family. In fact, our child actors will actually be helping to construct these ornaments!

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY: ALLIGATOR RIVER

"Alligator River" is a classic story that opens up a discussion for students to talk about their ideas of morality, what is right and wrong. In this story, all five characters do something objectionable, but students get to decide who did the worst thing, and who might be justified. This is a good introduction

to the central conflict in *A Doll's House*, wherein each character is somewhat responsible for the events that unfold, but each of them has a different failing or dishonorable action that pushes the story along.

Instructions:

In this activity, students should read the following story to themselves, then rate each character in terms of how honorable they are. After deciding their own opinion, they should get together with a partner to discuss, then bring the whole class together into a discussion.

Once upon a time there was a woman named Abigail who was in love with a man named Gregory. Gregory was an upstanding man who lived on the shore of a river. The river, which separated the two lovers, was teeming with man-eating alligators. Abigail wanted to cross the river to be with Gregory.

Unfortunately, the bridge had been recently washed out. So she went to ask Sinbad, a riverboat captain, to take her across. He said he would be glad to if she would consent to deliver illegal drugs to his teenage clients on the other side of the river. She promptly refused and went to a friend named Ivan to explain her plight. Ivan did not want to be involved at all in the situation, so he sent Abigail away and refused to help her. Abigail felt her only alternative was to accept Sinbad's terms and smuggle the drugs for him. Sinbad fulfilled his promise to Abigail and delivered her into the arms of Gregory.

When she told Gregory about her law-breaking endeavor in order to cross the river, Gregory cast her aside with disdain, saying he did not want his reputation to be ruined by Abigail's actions. Heartsick and dejected, Abigail turned to Slug with her tale of woe. Slug, feeling compassion for Abigail, sought out Gregory and beat him brutally. Abigail was satisfied at the sight of Gregory getting his due.

Rate each character (Abigail, Gregory, Sinbad, Ivan, and Slug) according to how dishonorable they are in this story:

1. _____ (*most dishonorable*)
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____ (*least dishonorable*)

Compare your list with a partner's list, and answer the following questions:

1. Do your lists look the same? Where do they differ?
2. What qualities did you find worst in characters? Which qualities were you willing to overlook?
3. Is it ever ok to do something immoral to achieve a good end?

Then talk with the whole class about the following questions:

1. Which characters were generally considered the most dishonorable by the class?
2. Based on how you judged these characters, which qualities are needed for a person to be virtuous?
3. In talking with your partners, did you change your opinion of any of the characters?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITY: RELATIONSHIP TABLEAUS

A Doll's House is a play intensely focused on relationships between the five main characters. This importance is reflected in the Seattle Shakespeare Company's poster for the play, shown on

the front cover of this study guide. In this activity, students take what they know about the play and create their own tableau showing relationships between the characters.

Instructions:

Begin this activity by discussing the characters of *A Doll's House* as your students remember them. Write the name of each main character on the board — Nora, Torvald, Krogstad, Dr. Rank, and Christine — and have students suggest descriptions of each character, focusing on their relationships to the other characters. For example, your finished list may end up looking something like this (*although responses may vary*).

Nora: Married to Torvald, took out a loan from Krogstad, lied to Torvald, friends with Christine, worried about her marriage, secretive, leaves Torvald.

Torvald: Married to Nora, treats Nora like a pet, thinks Krogstad is morally corrupt, fell ill sometime in the past, hires Christine at his bank, gets treatment from Dr. Rank, refuses to stand with Nora.

Krogstad: Poor, works at Torvald's bank, is laid off, made a loan to Nora, is in love with Christine, threatens to blackmail Torvald, forgives Nora's debt.

Dr. Rank: Treats Torvald, has syphilis, is dying, is in love with Nora, tries to flirt with Nora behind Torvald's back, departs from Nora and Torvald to go die.

Christine: A widow, was in love with Krogstad, rejected Krogstad for a man with more money, friends with Nora, hired at Torvald's bank, decides that Torvald needs to know about Nora's deception.

Once the class has identified the important relationships between characters, divide the class into groups of five — one for each character. (If your class does not divide evenly into fives, one or two groups can be one person larger and add a child character, or they can be one person smaller and delete one character of their choosing.)

Each class will be asked to create a tableau to show the most important relationships between the characters. A tableau is a frozen stage picture that students will create with their bodies, like a snapshot. The characters can be in any positions showing any imagined scene, as long as they are relating to those around them.

The importance of each relationship is up to the opinion of each group. **When constructing their tableaux, encourage students to think about the following questions:**

- Who is the main character, and where should he/she be in the picture?
- Is Nora and Torvald's marriage more or less important to the story than Nora and Krogstad's debtor relationship? What about Nora and Christine's friendship?
- How does each character feel about the others?
- How well do each of the characters know each other?

Once each group has settled on their tableau (about 5-8 minutes of working), have each group show their frozen tableau to the rest of the class. While showing their tableau, the group members are not allowed to talk or give any description of what they are showing. **Ask the rest of the class, based on looking at the tableau, how they think that group answered these four questions:**

- Who did this group identify as the main character?
- What is/are the central relationships shown between characters?
- What character is each student representing?
- How do these characters feel about the others around them?

Once the class has answered these questions, the group has an opportunity to explain anything about their tableau that the class did not identify. Repeat this process for each group.

At the end of this activity, discuss as a class the following questions:

- How were the tableaux similar to each other?
- What were the biggest differences between the tableaux?
- What was the biggest challenge your group faced in trying to create a comprehensive tableau or snapshot?
- Were any of the scenes created by students similar to scenes from the play *A Doll's House* seen at Seattle Shakespeare Company?

COMING THIS SPRING:

Love’s Labour’s Lost

By William Shakespeare | Directed by Jon Kretzu

In this exuberant romantic comedy, youthful idealism gets derailed by love. The King of Navarre and his buddies have plans to immerse themselves in their studies swearing off less civilized pursuits — namely girls. After the Princess of France arrives with her ladies on a diplomatic mission, the young men’s hearts melt along with their brainy resolve. Playful pranks, witty wordplay and moony wooing give way to more serious matters that reveal the cost of real love.

Tues	Weds	Thurs
(Mar 19)	Mar 20	
	(Mar 27)	Mar 28
(Apr 2)	Apr 3	

Performed at Center Theatre.

Romeo and Juliet (tour)

By William Shakespeare

In the midst of an historical bitter feud, passionate young love emerges. Defying their parents, Romeo and Juliet marry and plot to run away together, only to be thwarted at every turn. This classic play is a swashbuckling drama and the greatest love story ever told.

Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri
Mar 26			Mar 29

Performed at Center Theatre.

Julius Caesar (tour)

By William Shakespeare | Directed by Kelly Kitchens

Shakespeare’s great political thriller portrays the life-and-death struggle for power in Rome. Envious of the charismatic Caesar and his ambitions, a faction of politicians plot his assassination. After Caesar is killed, chaos consumes Rome. Julius Caesar investigates the turbulent nature of power and the ethics of those who wield it.

Thurs
Mar 21

Performed at Center Theatre.

The Taming of the Shrew

By William Shakespeare | Directed by Aimée Bruneau

An indoor revival of our popular Wooden O trailer park Shrew! Brought up in a rough and forgotten corner of backwoods America, the tempestuous and sharp-tongued Kate bows down to no man. But then Petruchio swaggers in to town with a plan to steal Kate’s guarded heart. Through bickering and brawling, their comic courtship is a no-holds-barred battle of the sexes that results in a love and understanding that neither one imagined.

Tues	Weds	Thurs
Apr 30	May 1	
	May 8	May 9

Performed at the Playhouse (formerly Intiman).

All titles, dates and artists subject to change. Dates in parentheses are tentative matinees.

JOIN US FOR FREE TEACHER PREVIEWS:



Managing Director, John Bradshaw, and Artistic Director, George Mount, talk with educators during the Antony and Cleopatra teacher preview.

Love’s Labour’s Lost, Tues, March 12 • **The Taming of the Shrew**, Weds, April 24

Let Seattle Shakespeare Company treat you and one guest to a night at the theatre! Come meet and mingle before the show at a private reception for educators, enjoy complementary refreshments, and hear about what’s new in our education programs. **To RSVP, please email caseyb@seattleshakespeare.org**