**A Doll’s House – Henrik Ibsen**

**General Vision and Viewpoint**

*A Doll’s House* paints a mixed view of life. Immediately we are struck by the title; it captures a sense of Nora’s imprisonment in the suffocating confines of the Helmers’ apartment.

*A Doll’s House* asserts the power of the individual. Relationships are not viewed positively. Helmer’s relationship with Nora – confining, narrow and unequal – is pivotal. Nora’s attitude undergoes change during the play.

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Initially, Nora’s childlike excitability is underlined by her verbal and non-verbal responses. She listens at Helmer’s study door and furtively eats some macaroons (Act 1).

Re-read the key moment entitled *Nora’s Relationship with her Husband Helmer*. They delight in each other’s company, but Helmer puts constraints on his wife. Helmer and Nora adopt different attitudes to life. Nora is more open and optimistic while Helmer is anxious to avoid calamity.

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Helmer warns Nora that a “home that is founded on debts and borrowing can never be a place of freedom and beauty.” He is proud of his achievements and his social position. “Yes, it is a wonderful thing to know that one’s position is assures and that one has an ample income.” He is content that Nora does not have to make flowers over Christmas. He claims that the previous Christmas was boring. Nora insists that she “didn’t find it boring” (Act 1) This exchange illustrates the difference between Helmer and Nora.

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Dr. Rank’s negative view of life is not supported by other characters. Mrs Linde finds fulfilment in work: “I must work if I’m to find life worth living.” She calls it her “only joy.”

She also finds happiness with Krogstad. Her delight is barely concealed when she exclaims, “What a change! Someone to work for – to live for! A home to bring joy into! I won’t let this chance of happiness slip through my fingers.” (Act 3)

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Sophisticated Norwegian society gas a veneer of respectability. Krogstad represents the corrupt underworld.

He realises that Nora has committed a transgression and blackmails her. He delights in the prospect of Helmer being subject to him. He further tries to distress Nora by painting a frightening and graphic image of those who have drowned in the “cold, black water” (Act 2).

These images of death and destruction convey to the audience a pessimistic view of life.

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Constant references are made to miracles throughout. Nora anticipates a miracle on many occasions. The word “miracle” is the very last word of the play. A miracle has religious overtones. It is an amazing, unexpected event.

Nora anticipates that Helmer will sacrifice himself for her even though she would refuse to accept. This outcome fails to materialise, and Nora is forced to re-examine her relationship with Helmer.

Re-read the key moment entitled “Time is running out”. Notice the way Nora is anxious and tense in this scene. She is trapped, unable to move or exert any influence over her future.

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By the end of the play, this has changed. Nora has found her own voice and engages in her first adult-to-adult conversation with her husband. Re-read the key moment entitled “A new Nora?” the moment she takes off her fancy dress is symbolic of the shedding of her past imprisonment, where old societal roles are accepted.

Helmer’s inability to cope becomes more obvious. He says he will protect her “like a hunter dove” from the “claws of a falcon” (Act 3). The claws of the falcon represent the horrors of life, but Nora is reluctant to be protected in this way again and, symbolically as well as literally, slams the door on their relationship.

Notice that Nora is no longer “prepared to accept what people say.” She is no longer going to be passively guided by others or conditioned by society.

While Helmer comes across as a tragic character who loses what he loves most, Nora emerges as a stronger woman who is committed to making firm choices about her future.

This suggests that people have the freedom to create a type of life they desire.

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The closing scene can be viewed positively or negatively. In a pessimistic vein, Nora’s relationship with Helmer is in tatters. Helmer is forced to acknowledge the need for change, but his change comes too late.

He is left disconsolate, repeating Nora’s words “miracle of miracles”, to himself. The fleeting hope that she might return is dashed when he hears her slam the door behind her. The closing scene presents a negative view of marriage and of relationships.

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However, Nora is determined to create a new life for herself, to become more familiar with the ways of the world and no longer be cocooned in the fairy tale world of playthings.

While her survival is not certain, the text re-asserts the qualities of courage and individuality. *A Doll’s House* presents a mixed view of life.