**A Doll’s House – Henrik Ibsen**

**Theme or Issue – Isolation**

Isolation means separation from others, either through choice or without one’s consent. People can become segregated from others for a range of reasons, which can have social, political or emotional causes. The key idea is being set apart, or setting oneself apart, from one’s family, friends and the wider community.

The way the story is told in each of our chosen comparative texts evokes a sense of alienation from the social community. *Some of the central character are pariah figures while others make efforts to find their voice in what are often lonely worlds. (Will choose film with pariah figure)*

**Isolation in A Doll’s House**

The play opens with Nora as the central character. The apartment is a hive of activity. However, all is not as it might at first appear.

*Re-read the key moment entitled “Nora’s relationship with her husband, Helmer”*. The tenor of communication between them is like that between an adult and child. Notice how Helmer describes Nora as “squander-bird” and “skylark”.

She behaves accordingly, accepting her pet names, often sulking and playing with her coat buttons.

Nora and Helmer appear unites, albeit superficially. Nora, however, has a secret, which she relates to Mrs Linde; she borrowed money in order to save her husband’s life but claimed the money had been given to her in her father’s will.

Soon it becomes clear to the audience that Nora and Helmer inhabit different worlds. Helmer is socially conscious and financially cautious. Nora is generous and self- effacing.

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Nora’s isolation deepens as the play progresses. The villainous Krogstad defeats her at every level. In the *Key Moment – Krogstad’s Menace,* Nora is at the heart of the family home playing with her children, but when Krogstad appears in the doorway she becomes unsettles and quickly ushers the children away.

Krogstad adopts a courtroom-style approach, which isolates Nora in her own home. In the cross-examination, she discloses that her father died on the twenty-ninth of September. This is a dangerous admission as Krogstad realises that he could not have signed the IOU because it is dated three days later.

Nora is overwhelmed by the situation. She acts defensively, but Krogstad cruelly interjects that the law does not concern itself with motives. She is so totally dejected and bewilded that she cannot continue the game she had been playing with her children. Nora’s growing isolation is a triumph for Krogstad.

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Nora and Helmer are separated from each other at this point. She cannot disclose to him her deception and Krogstad’s bribery.

This heightens the tension further. *Key Moment – Nora’s Monologue*. This is a dark time for Nora. She is made anxious by Helmer’s comments about the corruption of the young. Helmer is determined to blame mothers for all of society’s ills.

Nora is deeply unsettled by his words, and takes them to heart. In this key moment, Nora’s isolation reaches a new pitch.

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Greater problems emerge during Krogstad’s second visit. *Key Moment- Nora’s Worst Fears are Realised.* Here, Krogstad’s authority is shown. Initially, Krogstad feigns good will, giving Nora a false sense of security. His dark motive becomes clear when he produces a letter for Helmer.

He is triumphant at the thought of Helmer being subject to him: “I’ve got him in my pocket.” (Act 2)

To add to Nora’s isolation, he paints a frightening and graphic image of those who have drowned in the “cold, black water.” Suicide is the most isolating moment of all. Nora admits she has had suicidal thoughts, suggesting her increasing isolation.

The gravity of the situation becomes apparent when Krogstad drops the letter for Helmer in the box.

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Nora is not the only isolated figure in this play. Mrs Linde’s and Krogstad’s isolation becomes apparent in the middle of the play. *Key Moment – Krogstad’s and Mrs Linde’s Isolation.* Krogstad has lived a lonely life and aptly describes his isolation with the powerful image of a “shipwrecked man, clinging to a spar.”

Mrs Linde explains her unhappiness in her marriage, her concern to support her mother and brothers. She is childless and expresses a hope that “two shipwrecked souls could join hands.” (Act 3)

She first appears as an isolated figure, but has now found a place at the heart of Krogstad’s life and home.

Nora is to find herself on a different journey.

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At this moment, Nora and Helmer’s marriage is about to fall apart. In the *Key Moment- Helmer’s horror at Nora’s deception*, Helmer’s actions effectively isolate him from his wife. He admonishes her in a derogatory fashion and declares their relationship is in shreds except for mere public appearances.

His pride is strung at the thought of Krogstad having power over him. The illusion is gone; Nora sees her husband in a new light. By word and action, he has distanced himself from his wife.

*Key Moment- A New Nora*. In this key moment Nora takes off her fancy dress and emerges in her ordinary clothes. She launches into her first adult-to-adult conversation with her husband in eight years of marriage.

Nora, resolute, explains she is leaving Helmer and tells him he has no responsibility for her once she leaves the family home. They exchange rings and Helmer is left disconsolate. It is a deeply isolating moment for the status-conscious Helmer. He is defeated.

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Nora’s act of leaving him will bring shame on the family. She argues that too much divides them, and that she needs to find an independent role for herself in the world.

Her future survival is not certain but it is clear that her isolation is self-imposed.

Helmer, distraught, tries in vain to salvahge the situation by trying to convince Nora of his ability to change. He fails. Krogstad’s meddling highlights that there has never really been a point of connection between Nora and Helmer.

Despite his faults, Helmer loves Nora. He communicates his defeat by sinking down into the chair and burying his face in his hands. A fleeting hope strikes him bit then he hears the front door slam. It is the point of no return.

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The theme of isolation is intrinsic to *A Doll’s House*. At the beginning of the play, Helmer and Nora appear to be a loving couple. As the play unfolds, they become different people.

At first, Nora grapples with her secret which she fears will be exposed by Krogstad. This isolates her from her family. Her inner turmoil is conveyed by the playwright.

A horrified Helmer isolates his wife by his melodramatic and selfish response to Krogstad’s letter. This enables Nora to see her husband in a new light and reassess their relationship.

The most isolating moment of all comes at the very end. Helmer faces the future without his wife while Nora struggles to find her identity, which is a lonely experience.

Isolation is well explored in the play, which highlights the primary importance of the individual over the family.