*A Doll(’s) House* by Henrik Isben  
Independent Reading Assignment  
Turn in ONE completed Word Document to TEAMS on the due date.



*Complete the following assignments. All except the pre-reading research will be due at the end of the play. This will be a test grade. When you finish, please correct formatting before submitting so that there are no overlapping components, large spaces, etc.*

Part I: Pre-reading Research\*\* This is due BEFORE we finish the play. See calendar.

*Choose one of the following and create a short 1-3 minute visual presentation for the class. You will present this assignment BEFORE the final due date for your as you read project. You will sign up for your topic so that we have an even distribution of topics throughout the class and that all topics are presented. You may be assigned a topic if necessary.*

1. Henrik Ibsen

2. 19th century Norway

3. Realistic drama

4. Tarantella dance

5. 19th century women’s roles in the West

Part II: Gender Roles Research

*Read “The Story of an Hour,” the short story written by American realist Kate Chopin in 1894 and answer the following:*

1. How does Chopin depict a high-class marriage at the turn of the nineteenth century?  
   <Type answer here>

2. How does Chopin illustrate the role of women in nineteenth century Western Civilization?   
<Type answer here>

3. To what does Mrs. Mallard refer when she thinks to herself, “Free! Body and soul free!”?  
<Type answer here>

4. Discuss the irony in the story’s last line: “She had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.”  
<Type answer here>

“The Story of an Hour”  
Kate Chopin

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.. All

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: "free, free, free!" The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial. She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome. There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself.

There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

"Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door."

"Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Someoone was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife. But Richards was too late.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.

Part III: The Art of Advertisement

*Find a magazine, Internet, or television ad that can be perceived as gender specific or sexist. Consider commercials for cleaning products, food, cars, and alcohol. Attach the ad (do this digitally by inserting it after question number 5), and analyze the following:*

1. Describe your advertisement in one paragraph. If print, start from the most obvious image and move to the details. If video, describe in sequential order.   
<Type answer here>

2. What, if anything, about the advertisement makes it gender specific or sexist?  
<Type answer here>

3. Is the ad appealing? Why or why not? What is your group’s reaction?  
<Type answer here>

4. What is the intended effect of the advertisement on the consumer?  
<Type answer here>

5. Is the company justified in portraying its product in this fashion? Why or why not?  
<Type answer here>

Part IV: Pet Names

In *A Doll House,* Nora is referred to by a number of nicknames such as, “little lark,” “squirrel,” “spendthrift,” and “sweet tooth.” Nora refers to her husband as “darling” and “dear.” Consider the language that will be used in the play to represent gender stereotypes.

Brainstorm nicknames or pet names currently used when talking about men and women.

<Type answer here>

* Are the nicknames used for one gender more condescending than the other? Which ones? Why? Explain.
  + <Type answer here>
* Are some more physically oriented? Explain.
  + <Type answer here>
* Are some names more comparable to children? Or are both sets equal? Explain.
  + <Type answer here>

Part V: Connections to Mythology  
*Read the myth below, and answer the reader response questions that follow. Read the questions before reading the myth.*

Arachne

A long time ago in a place called Lydia lived a young spinner and weaver called Arachne. Lydia had a reputation for producing splendid textiles and had some of the finest spinners and weavers in the world. No spinner or weaver was more talented or gifted than Arachne.  
  
Arachne wove all sorts of beautiful pictures into her cloth. Often the scenes were so life like that people felt they could almost touch and feel what was going on. Visitors travelled many miles to see her beautiful work. Not only were her finished products beautiful to look at, but just watching her weave was a sight to behold. Even the nymphs of the forest would stop their play and look on in wonder.  
  
Arachne was rightly very proud of her work but she was also very arrogant. So remarkable were her works that observers often commented that she must have been trained by Athena, the goddess of wisdom and crafts, also known for her ability to spin and weave beautiful pictures. Arachne was scornful of this. Why she said, should she, with all her talent, be placed in an inferior place to the goddess? She would tell visitors that the Goddess herself could not produce work any better.  
  
When news of Arachne's bold claim reached Athena she was very angry, but she decided to give the young woman a chance to redeem herself. So one day she disguised herself as an old peasant woman and went to visit Arachne. She gently warned her to be careful not to offend the gods by comparing her talents to those of an immortal.  
  
But Arachne told the old woman to save her breath. She boasted that she welcomed a contest with Athena, and, if she lost, would suffer whatever punishment the goddess decided.  
  
At this Athena revealed her true form. The visitors who had come to watch Arachne's weaving were very afraid, but Arachne stood her ground. She had made a claim, and she would prove it.  
  
It was decided they would compete by each creating a tapestry. The two of them set up their looms in the same room and the contest began, the mortal Arachne at her loom and the goddess Athena at hers. They wove from early in the morning until it got too dark to see. The next day they compared what they had done.  
  
Athena had woven a stunning cloth showing the gods and goddesses together on Mount Olympus doing good deeds for people. A beautiful scene had developed from the threads. Those witnessing the competition marveled at the work produced by the goddess. Arachne, however, had woven a cloth that made fun of the gods and goddesses. It showed them getting drunk and behaving very badly. Nevertheless, so exquisite was the mortal's work that the characters in the scene were lifelike.  
  
When Athena saw it she was even angrier than she had been before. She was forced to admit that Arachne's work was flawless but the disrespectful choice of subject made her finally lose her temper. Athena destroyed Arachne's tapestry and loom. Then she touched her forehead, making sure that she felt guilt for her actions.  
  
Arachne was ashamed but the guilt was so overwhelming it was far too deep for a mortal to bear. Realizing her folly Arachne was crushed with shame. Terrified and in turmoil she ran into a nearby wood and hanged herself from a tree.   
  
Athena had not expected Arachne to take her own life and took pity on her.  
  
Sprinkling Arachne with the juices of the aconite plant, Athena loosened the rope, which became a cobweb; then she said gently, "Spin if you wish to spin". At this Arachne slowly came back to life but not in human form, for as Athena spoke her words Arachne's nose and ears disappeared, her arms and legs became long and slender and new legs grew beside them, then her whole body shrank until she was just a tiny little spider.  
  
For the rest of her life Arachne was to hang from a thread and to be a great weaver and the descendants of Arachne still weave their magic webs all over the earth today.

Greek Myth Response Journals

In response journals, examine Sir Walter Scott’s line from *Marmion:*

***“Oh what a tangled web we weave, When first we practice to deceive!”***

1. How is the metaphor of a web effective for the topic of deceit?
   1. <Type answer here>
2. Write about a time you found yourself spinning such a web. What were the results?
   1. <Type answer here>

Examine Shakespeare’s *As You Like It:*

***“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.”***

1. Is human existence simply a matter of playing parts? Explain.
   1. <Type answer here>
2. The world’s stage is Shakespeare’s metaphor. Can you think of another appropriate metaphor for life today? Elaborate.
   1. <Type answer here>

Examine the myth more closely:

1. In what “web” of her own design does Arachne ensnare herself? Examine the question literally and symbolically.
   1. <Type answer here>

6. Why does Athena choose the spider for Arachne’s new form? How is this choice appropriate on more than one level?

a. <Type answer here>

Part VI: Problem Situation

*Read the following story and rank the characters as explained in the instructions below. Ranking should be in your final assignment; discussion questions do not have to be written. You may work independently or in pairs and share as a class afterwards.*

Alligator River

There lived a woman named Abigail who was in love with a socially important man named Gregory. Gregory lived on the shore of a river. Abigail lived on the opposite shore of the same river. The river that separated the two lovers was teeming with dangerous alligators. Abigail wanted to cross the river to be with Gregory.

Unfortunately, the bridge had been washed out by a heavy flood the previous week. 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 a teenage dealer on the other side. She promptly refused and went to a friend named Ivan to explain her plight. Ivan did not want to get involved at all in the situation. Abigail felt her only alternative was to accept Sinbad’s terms and deliver the drugs. Sinbad fulfilled his promise to Abigail and delivered her into the arms of Gregory.

When Abigail told Gregory about her illegal escapade in order to cross the river, Gregory cast her aside because he thought that his reputation would be damaged when people heard what his fiancé had done. Heartsick and rejected, Abigail turned to Slug with her tale of woe. Slug, feeling compassion for Abigail, sought out Gregory and beat him brutally. Abigail was happy at the sight of Gregory getting his due. As the sun set on the horizon, people could hear Abigail laughing at Gregory.

\*Source of original story Simon, S. B, Howe, L. W., & Kirschenbaum, H.

*Instructions: After reading the story, rank the five (5) characters in the story beginning with the one whom you consider as the “most morally offensive” and end with the one whom you consider the “least objectionable.” That is, the character who seems to be the most dishonorable to you should be entered first in the list following the story, then the second most dishonorable, and so on, with the least dishonorable or objectionable being entered fifth. Very briefly note why you rank them in the order that you do.*

**Characters:** Abigail, Gregory, Ivan, Sinbad, Slug

1. <Type answer here> (most dishonorable)

2. <Type answer here>

3. <Type answer here>

4. <Type answer here>

5. <Type answer here> (least dishonorable)

Be prepared to discuss the following questions. Jot down your discussion points below.

1. On what basis did you judge the morality or immorality of the characters?

a. <Type answer here>

2. Is it ever right to do something wrong to achieve a good end?

a. <Type answer here>

3. What is virtue? How do we judge it?

* 1. <Type answer here>

4. Is there absolute good or evil? Or are there degrees of good and evil?

a. <Type answer here>

Part VII: Play Discussion Questions:   
*Answer the following questions after you finish each act of the play.*

**Act I**

1. From the beginning of Act I, Torvald calls Nora several pet names. What do these names suggest about Torvald’s perception of his wife and his marriage?
   1. Type answer here>
2. Compare Nora and Kristine’s lives since marriage. Who is better off? Explain.
   1. Type answer here>
3. What might be the link between Nora’s “contraband” macaroons and her “huge desire to say- to hell and be damned?”
   1. Type answer here>
4. What crime has Nora committed?
   1. Type answer here>
5. Do Nora’s motives for committing the crime excuse her in some way?
   1. Type answer here>
6. What does Nora’s tree decorating and chattering at the end of Act I reveal about her character? What could the tree symbolize?
   1. Type answer here>

**Act II**

1. When Nora sees the box of masquerade clothes, she wants to “rip them in a million pieces!” What does Ibsen symbolize with this characterization?  
<Type answer here>

2. Discuss the foreshadowing in Nora’s conversation with Anne-Marie.  
<Type answer here>

3. Why does Torvald make such a decisive show of mailing the letter firing Krogstad against Nora’s pleas?  
<Type answer here>

4. After Dr. Rank professes his love, Nora demands the lamp be brought in. Why? Is this light real or artificial? What might Ibsen be suggesting about truth and light in the Helmer’s household?  
<Type answer here>

5. Some histories of the tarantella dance explain that it is used to fight off the venomous effects of a spider bite. Other interpretations suggest it represents a woman’s frustration in oppression. Which of these explanations best fits Nora’s violent practice at the end of Act II? Might both apply? Explain.  
<Type answer here>

**Act III**

1. Why is Kristine willing to “risk everything” for Krogstad?  
<Type answer here>

2. Why does Kristine encourage Krogstad to let Torvald read the letter revealing Nora’s deception?  
<Type answer here>

3. Dr. Rank suggests Nora should go to the next masquerade dressed as “Charmed Life,” and that she should dress “just as she looks every day.” What is the implication about Nora’s daily life? Is it charmed? Or is the charm a masquerade? Explain.  
<Type answer here>

4. Discuss the irony in Torvald’s accusation that Nora has played with him “like a puppet.”  
<Type answer here>

5. Helmer’s pronouncement that “before all else, (Nora is) a wife and mother” is contradicted by Nora’s “before all else, I’m a human being.” Is this issue significant today, or is it only a sign of Ibsen’s time? Explain.  
<Type answer here>

6. Discuss Nora’s decision to leave her family. Is it truly the only way she can reclaim her identity and humanity?  
<Type answer here>

7. The last sound the audience hears is the door slamming shut after Nora’s departure. Examine the theatrical, literary, and historical significance of this stage device.  
<Type answer here>

Part VIII: Character Sketch (written version)

*Character sketches are often used in drama classes to encourage actors’ understanding of the parts they portray. However, character sketches are very useful in literature classes, too, as an examination of a character’s history, motivation, and thinking.* ***Write*** *a character sketch for a character of your choosing, based on the following questions. Note: You don’t have to answer the questions, just use them as fodder for thought!*

The Character Sketch asks:

1. What does this character look like? How does he/she carry himself/herself? How does he/she dress?

2. How does this character speak? Does he/she have any identifiable speech patterns?

3. Where was this character born? How was he/she raised?

4. Describe the time period in which this character lives. How do the times affect this character’s thinking and actions?

5. What is this character’s main motivation? Why?

6. Describe any redeeming qualities this character may have.

7. Analyze the character’s personality flaws. From what do they stem? How do they affect the choices he/she makes?

8. Choose an object this character holds or would hold dear. Explain the connection.

9. Does this character have any secrets? If so, explain.

10. Who would be this character’s contemporary counterpart? Explain your choice.

Write Character Sketch here:

<Type answer here>