A doll’s house: potential points of exploration

* Nora and Mrs. Linde explore different forms of emancipation: Nora is younger, married with kids contrasted with Linde who is older, widowed and poor.
* **Macaroons** as a motif of disobedience (emancipation) in their marriage. She hides the macaroons and also eats them. Macaroons a symbol of Torvald’s strictness and Nora’s disobedience and deceit. Nora’s desire to say “damn” suggests she wants the freedom to disobey both Torvald and the rules of society
* **Nature of Torvald’s and Nora’s marriage:** unequal, more of a parent child dynamic? Torvald not trusting Nora with money to buy her own presents demonstrates imbalance. Not based on love.
* Assumptions of Nora- she is not intelligent to be financially responsible.
* Vehicle of **money** and its significance: Nora feels free when she is able to spend money and Torvald rewards Nora for her obedience; his control of the money gives him power in the marriage.
* Nora is very happy about Torvald’s promotion to bank manager which will allow them to live a better life. N believes money leads to freedom and happiness. Is this real emancipation? Or perceived emancipation as it is her husband’s money.
* Money affords freedom and comfort but is also the things that saved Torvald’s life despite it being borrowed.
* Although Nora’s **obedience** allows her to manipulate him. She has already borrowed money, so her obedience is somewhat shallow, more of a role than something she believes in.
* Their happiness revolves around money; earlier Christmases Nora had to make the decorations herself. Happiness expressed through material.
* Nora buys into traditional gender roles: toys for the children and doesn’t know what she wants for herself, fulfil role of serving someone else eg. Her family.
* Nora’s happiness in the last eight years has left her remaining girlishly innocent and naïve, contrasted with Mrs. Linde.
* Unusual for women to travel alone and Nora’s admiration for her ‘courage’ suggests a desire for independence.
* Nora’s is more responsible than others think? The fact that she worked as it was a rare at the time for middle class women to work. The ‘other things’ are suspicious- she borrowed money.
* Story of father’s death: she put others before her including Torvald and her son whilst she was pregnant, treating her marriage as a priority.
* **Significance of money also reiterated through Mrs. Linde**, who was forced to marry a man for financial support and after her husband’s death her struggle to support her family highlights the obstacles women faced in earning a reasonable income. Emphasis put on the need for financial support of a man.
* Both Nora’s and Linde’s attempts to earn money were confined to work deemed appropriate for women- embroidery, working in a school etc.
* Both Nora and Linde’s lives show that women were supposed to find a **sense of purpose in serving others.** Without a husband and family to take care of, Linde feels empty and worries about being selfish. She hopes for working in an office shows a desire for independence not normally afforded to women. Nora’s comment that this would be exhausting suggests that such work is not appropriate for women.
* **Both Nora and Linde find joy in being able to provide for their families; both an adherence to the traditional role of women as selfless nurturers and a rejection of the notion that women shouldn’t have financial independence.**
* **Nora’ revelation of the truth of how she got the money is a crucial turning point in the play.**
* Linde says it can’t be possible for Nora to have borrowed money because a woman can’t do that without her husband’s consent. Nora hints that if a woman has a ‘sense for business’ it might be possible but also says she may or may not have borrowed it
* Nora says that considering how attractive she is, an admirer could have given it to her.
* Linde’s guesses as to how she may have got the money show the limited options there were for women who wished to earn money independently from their husbands.
* Mrs. Linde replies that, regardless of circumstances, acting behind her husband’s back is a rash move- Mrs. Linde’s adamant condemnation of any deceit between husband and wife, no matter the circumstances, reflects society’s inflexible rules regarding marriage and gender roles. From Nora’s perspective, her deceit was justified, as it saved Torvald’s life. Her difficulty in getting Torvald to agree to the trip suggests he does not trust her intelligence and ability to make rational decisions.
* Nora has mixed feelings about her decision to borrow money. On the one hand, she tells Mrs. Linde about how much she has suffered and the stress of finding secret ways of paying it back; on the other, she is very proud of her own resourcefulness and enjoys earning her own money. She seems to envy the independence that men have.
* Dr Rank asks if she has come to town for holiday, but she is here to work- Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde’s conversation reveals tensions to do with class and gender between them. Like Nora, Dr. Rank believes that Mrs. Linde should be taking a holiday. They fail to realize that it is necessary for her to work in order to survive, a situation woman were not supposed to find themselves in.
* The fact that Torvald checks if Mrs. Linde is a widow reminds us that only unmarried or widowed women are allowed independence of being able to work in an office.
* Nora boasts that she influenced the decision on Torvald giving Linde a job, arguing that just because she is a woman doesn’t mean that she doesn’t have influence
* Her contradictory statements about whether or not she has “influence” highlight the ambiguous status of married women at the time; even Nora is not sure to what extent she can affect Torvald’s decisions.
* **In order to save Torvald’s life she had to act beyond the restriction imposed on women and even had to pretend to be a man in order to secure her loan- highlights powerlessness of women in society at the time.**
* **Society:** In this passage, the central moral dilemma of the play is put forward: was Nora right to lie and commit forgery if it saved her husband’s life? Nora certainly believes that in this instance, the ends justified the means. However, as Krogstad points out, the law and the opinion of society are inflexible. At this point, Krogstad is certainly the antagonist of the play, manipulating and threatening Nora with the same unforgiving attitude of the rest of society. However, his motivation for doing so is that he has also been punished for committing fraud—showing that society’s harsh judgment causes people to turn against each other.
* Nora in her distress retreats into the role of the beautiful and submissive wife. By assuring Torvald how helpless she is and how she depends on him for everything, she ensures that she is in his good favor.
* It is worth noting that Torvald talks about the children of corrupt mothers in particular, even though he is referring to Krogstad, a man. This shows the extent to which the responsibility of being a good parent lay far more on women than men.