

# A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2

STUDY GUIDE



BY **LUCAS HNATH**

DIRECTED BY **TONY ESTRELLA**

**GAMM**  
EDUCATION 

**GAM**  
theatre

**SEASON 35**  
2019 - 2020

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*This study guide was prepared by Beth Pollard, Kate Hanson, Susie Schutt, and Jon Del Sesto*

# ACT I

# WELCOME

Dear Educator,

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our production of *A Doll's House, Part 2* by Lucan Hnath. In this guide you will find background information about the play and playwright, an inside look at our production, as well as activities for your classroom and questions for discussion. We recommend using this study guide before your visit to The Gamm, as well as after to debrief with your students.

We would like to offer a pre-show visit with your classroom/school before your visit to help prepare your students for the play. This will whet students' appetites for the performance and encourage them to question and explore the themes of the play. This visit will last about a half an hour and is offered to your classroom free of charge. Most student matinees are followed by a talkback with the production team and offer students the opportunity to debrief the performance immediately and ask questions of the actors, director, designers or playwright. Talkbacks range in length but we encourage you to stay and participate in the dynamic discussion.

We also offer longer workshops that will get students out of their seats and up on their feet engaging in the motifs and the language of the play. Kinesthetic engagement with language and literature ensures students deep comprehension and text-to-self connection that encourages students to invest in reading and literacy-learning.

Attending a production addresses several Common Core Standards in Theatre Arts Standards in Aesthetic Judgment, Cultural Contexts, and Communication, as well as many of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. Below, we have included a list of standards that align with attending a performance and using our study guide.

We would love to hear from you about your experiences using this study guide. It is a great help to us as we build on our education program from year to year. We look forward to seeing you at The Gamm!

**Susie Schutt,**

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# THEATRE AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

What is so exciting about attending the theatre - especially in a smaller space such as The Gamm - is that it is live! Live theatre is different from other forms of entertainment; unlike film and television you are encouraged to pay close attention and actively engage your imagination.

You, the audience, are mere feet (and sometimes inches!) away from the actors; therefore, you play an active role in the experience. **The actors can see and hear any distracting behavior such as talking, text messaging, unwrapping candy, the ringing of cell phones, etc.** This can affect the actor's concentration, disrupt the performance, and ruin the experience for other audience members. So we ask that you refrain from talking or making any noise during a performance. *Thank you!*

## TIP:

*Discuss with your students the particular demands and benefits of attending a live performance. Perhaps have them brainstorm how theatre is different from film, television and sporting events.*

## COMMON CORE GUIDE . . . . .

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2] *See Themes and Questions for Discussion*

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3] *See Themes and Questions for Discussion*

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4] *See our Activity for the Classroom*

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7] *See examples throughout our study guide.*

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9] *See our Resident Scholar's essay.*

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3] *See our Activity for the Classroom*

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1] *See Themes and Questions for Discussion*

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2] *See examples throughout our study guide.*

# ACT II

## PLAY & PLAYWRIGHT



### ABOUT LUCAS HNATH

Lucas Hnath's plays include *A Doll's House, Part 2*, *Hillary and Clinton*, *Red Speedo*, *The Christians*, *A Public Reading of an Unproduced Screenplay About the Death of Walt Disney*, *Isaac's Eye*, and *Death Tax*. His work has been produced at Actors Theatre of Louisville/Humana Festival of New Plays, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Gate Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, New York Theatre Workshop, Playwrights Horizons, Royal Court Theatre, Soho Rep, Traverse Theatre, and Victory Gardens. He has been a resident playwright at New Dramatists since 2011. He is a member of Ensemble Studio Theatre and a New York

Theatre Workshop Usual Suspect. Lucas holds a B.F.A. and an M.F.A. from New York University's Department of Dramatic Writing. He has received the Kesselring Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Whiting Award, two Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award Citations, an Outer Critics Circle Award for Best New Play, and an Obie.

### ABOUT "A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2"

*A Doll's House Part 2* was written by Lucas Hnath in 2017, commissioned by the South Coast Repertory Theatre. While Henrik Ibsen's work is famous worldwide, Lucas Hnath wanted to write his own epilogue to the story, and began writing *A Doll's House Part 2* on the back of an envelope on a train. The play found major success and moved to Broadway, winning multiple awards for both actors and playwright for its political relevance, and its contributions to the cannon of Western theatre.

In the play, it's been 15 years since Norwegian house wife Nora Helmer slammed the door on her husband, three children and the rest of married life in Ibsen's sober 19th-century drama. Now she's back in Hnath's darkly comic Broadway darling. In her new life as an incendiary feminist writer, Nora is being blackmailed by a judge and needs her estranged husband's help. But her family has a few grievances they want to air first. With razor-sharp dialogue, *A Doll's House, Part 2* imagines the aftermath of Nora's infamous exit—provoking questions about marriage, gender inequality, and the meaning of liberation in often hilarious and insightful ways.

"A triumph! Smart, funny and utterly engrossing!" New York Times

"A worthy successor to the Ibsen original . . . clearly stands on its own strong foundation." Herald-Tribune

"A brisk and brainy sequel." The Guardian

# ACT III

# OUR PRODUCTION

directed by **FRED SULLIVAN, JR.**

SET DESIGN  
**Patrick Lynch**

COSTUME DESIGN  
**David T. Howard**

LIGHTING DESIGN  
**Jeff Adelberg**

STAGE MANAGEMENT  
**James Kane**

## THE COMPANY

Nora **Jeanine Kane**  
Torvald **Steve Kidd**  
Anne Marie **Debra Wise**  
Emmy **Alison Russo**

## CREATIVE TEAM

Technical Director **Max Ramirez**  
Technical Production Supervisor **DJ Potter**  
Assistant Stage Manager **Jessica Corsentino, Jessica Chace**  
Electricians **Mike Cline, Alex Landers, Patrick Boutwell**  
Construction Crew **Justin Carroll, Alex Eizenberg,  
Christine Redihan, Cody Reed**

## TIP:

*Before coming to the theater, discuss with your students the various professions in the theater. It takes more than just actors! When they arrive, ask them to notice evidence of those professions at work.*





# DIRECTOR'S NOTES

BY FRED SULLIVAN, JR.

When a play ends, we have only our imagination to fill in the rest of the characters' lives. We are left with questions and that's a very good thing, because without asking "what if?" there is no art. We know Blanche goes mad, Willy Loman dies and Mary Tyrone has relapsed. But what happens to Biff and Stella? If the playwrights wanted us to know they would have told us. Inevitably, when the curtain falls and nothing but discarded programs litter the auditorium, some characters still haunt us—and perhaps none more in the history of the theater than Nora Helmer, the heroine of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

Written in 1879, Ibsen's masterpiece aimed to confront and challenge his audience rather than validate and comfort them. Ibsen is called "the father of modern drama" for burrowing beneath the surface of polite societal norms to unearth the deeper things that shock, distress, and startle us. He makes us see ourselves for who we really are. Without him, we would never have the long list of playwrights who have since challenged our norms and changed our culture and conversation, from Arthur Miller to Tony Kushner and now Lucas Hnath. Almost 140 years after the premiere of *A Doll's House*, the prolific 37-year-old American playwright doodled on a scrap of paper the words "Doll's House part 2." It was an absurd, funny and daring idea that became a thrilling work of art, answering the question of what happened to Nora after her famous exit and "the door slam heard 'round the world." Hnath's work explores profound questions about how we live today. How much have we actually changed? Have our culture, sexual politics, and ideas about equality truly evolved? What about our definition of marriage?

*A Doll's House, Part 2* reunites myself as director with longtime collaborators Patrick Lynch designing the set, and Jeanine Kane and Steve Kidd reprising their roles as Nora and Torvald from our 2011 staging of the Ibsen classic. The setting for that was adapted from Victorian Norway to late 1950s America at the onset of the equal and civil rights movements. In "part 2" we revisit Norway in the late 19th century but with the stunningly contemporary syntax of 21st-century America. The conflict between Nora and Torvald is both of its time and for all time.

Ever since Antigone went toe-to-toe with Creon, great plays have held up debates in which both sides are "right." Art holds the mirror up and prompts us to sit forward and make up our own minds. In the times we live in now, divisiveness, outrage and entitlement seem to block so many ears. Great theater reminds us to listen to each other.

I am grateful to Lucas Hnath (like Tom Stoppard before him) for taking familiar historical and fictional characters and shedding new light on them as archetypes and three-dimensional human beings in his wonderful writing. His plays have brought Isaac Newton and Walt Disney back to life, as well as a doping Olympic athlete, Hillary and Clinton, and the Helmers. He writes them all with fullness, complexity, nuance and, perhaps most importantly, impressive wit. And I'm thankful to The Gamm—one of my favorite artistic homes over decades—for the unique opportunity to take on this "sequel" almost a decade after our production of Ibsen's original.

Enjoy.

# DRAMATURGICAL NOTES

BY RACHEL WALSH



Henrik Ibsen's turn-of-the-century *A Doll's House* so rattled the pretensions of the playwright's bourgeois audience that it changed the course of theater forever. In Ibsen's transformative drama, Nora Helmer, a retiring wife to her overbearing husband, Torvald, surreptitiously borrows a great sum of money from the bank to cover debts that her husband has incurred. Torvald's disgruntled employee, Krogstad, learns of Nora's deceit and threatens to expose her unless she is able to save him from being fired—which Torvald intends to do. When Nora fails to meet the terms of the blackmail, her secret is revealed to her husband following a Christmas party. Torvald mercilessly accuses his wife of destroying his happiness and bars her from seeing their three small children. In a surprise twist, a letter from Krogstad arrives, clearing the Helmers' loan. (Krogstad has suddenly made a happy and lucrative love match and has paid the debts.) Torvald quickly reverses course. Expressing remorse for his behavior, he begs Nora for her forgiveness. But in the final shocking scene, Nora decides to leave her marriage and her children—an unthinkable act for a woman of her time and stature. Her decision attacked the very existential nature of marriage:

**Nora:** Goodbye Torvald. I won't see the little ones. I know they are in better hands than mine. As I am now, I can be of no use to them.

**Torvald:** But some day—Nora—some day?

**Nora:** How can I tell? I have no idea what is to become of me.

(Act III, *A Doll's House*)

And thus generations of future theatregoers were left to wonder: What ever became of Nora Helmer?

Crediting Nora as a proto-feminist, scholars have long characterized Ibsen's play as a radical commentary on the fundamental inequities of the marriage contract and the pitiful fate of women in its trap. *A Doll's House* changed everything about how we watch plays and how we watch women.

But Lucas Hnath in his mischievous sequel *A Doll's House, Part 2*—dubbed “a naughty imposition on a classic” by New Yorker critic Hilton Als—refuses to consign Nora Helmer to a poster child for women's lib. Ibsen's stifling portrait of marriage is viewed largely through the lens of his heroine. Hnath widens his shot, giving audiences access to more rooms in this doll's house than the one from which Nora ran.

It's been 15 years since that fateful night, and the prodigal Nora has returned. We are introduced to the key players: Anne Marie (the maid left to care for the Helmer children), Torvald (a shell of his former self), and Emmy (Nora's now grown daughter). Significantly, Hnath focuses on the loyal domestic servant and the abandoned daughter who are mere minor characters in Ibsen's original play. These characters now have many years' worth of objections to air.

By inviting audiences into the barbed conversations between the one who ran and the ones who were left behind, Hnath (like Ibsen before him) challenges audiences to examine their assumptions about women, marriage, and the true price of self-actualization. Is one person's liberation another's demise? Is one woman's cage another's safe harbor? Is the “doll house” a trap or a nest? A whole 140 years later, we're about to find out.

# ACT IV

## THEMES AND QUESTIONS

### TIP:

Assign these questions for homework or in-class writing and then discuss your students' answers before and after the show.

### THEMES AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITING

1. How did the set design aid in the telling of the story? What would you change and why?
2. What sort of atmosphere was created with the lighting, sound, and music?
3. What does the Gamm poster (also the cover of this study guide) tell you about the play? What sort of poster would you design for this play and why?
4. Why do you think the playwright chose this title? How does the title relate to the story?
5. Our essential question for our 35th season is: What is my civic responsibility?

Before coming to the theatre, pose this question to your students and ask them about how they are engaged with their community and what they believe is their civic duty. This can include their school community, groups they belong to, their town, state, and country. After seeing the play, ask them to reflect back on this question. What were the expectations put on the characters by their community and how did they live up to their duty?

### TRANSLATION THROUGH LANGUAGE AND TIME

One of the first questions you might be asking after hearing the title for the Gamm Theatre's season 35 opening play, *A Doll's House Part 2*, is: "What about part 1?". Most people do not want to attend the sequel of a play they've never seen before, but thankfully, the playwright of *A Doll's House Part 2*, Lucas Hnath, has written this original play such that, if done correctly, no previous context is necessary. *A Doll's House* was originally written in 1879 in Norway by the famous playwright, Henrik Ibsen, who left his audience hooked on the dynamic characters and plot of a crumbling family. *A Doll's House* ends with Nora Helmer, an unhappy housewife, leaving her husband, Torvald, and her three children. Over a hundred years later, the cliffhangers remained unresolved. So, Lucas Hnath wrote the second part as a commissioned "fan-fiction" sequel, taking Ibsen's famous characters and giving them a new voice in modern 2017 American English.

### Questions

- The Gamm produced Ibsen's original play of *A Doll's House* nine years ago (with the same two actors playing Nora and Torvald!). For that production, they set the play in the 1950s, but this season they will present the sequel in its intended 19th century setting. Do you think that the stories we tell can be separated from the contexts in which they were written? Can they be separated from the contexts in which they are fictionally set?

(Questions continued on page 10)

- After seeing The Gamm's *A Doll's House Part 2*, why do you think they could not set it in the 1950's, as they did with *A Doll's House* nine years ago?
- Though many of us have wanted to write a new ending to our favorite stories, very few of us will go so far as to publish, present, and perform our fan-fiction. What might be some of the challenges that Lucas Hnath faced when writing the continuation of a plot and characters which he did not create himself? What might have been some technical or logistic problems he faced in taking their voices from 19th century Norwegian to 21st century English? What might have been his moral hesitations?
- Both part one and part two of *A Doll's House* take place in Norway. Do you think that this cultural setting is of central importance to the plot? The play is filled with political commentary and cultural critiques, but do you think that they are specific to Norwegian culture? To American culture? To a greater human nature? Defend your answers using examples of elements from within the play.

## MARRIAGE

Nora clearly believes that love and marriage are not at all the same thing, yet these two concepts are strongly linked together in our society. Nora and anthropologists all over the world have noted that monogamy, the notion that an individual may only maintain a romantic and sexual relationship with one other person for their entire life, is not programmed into our biology. Still, marriage is an undoubtedly deeply engrained institution that first came into existence in order to contractually control reproduction, property rights, and inheritance. Nora knows very well that, at least during her lifetime in Norway, many of such legal elements of marriage are biased against women's independence. She stipulates that, as women grow more independent, marriage itself will become an extinct practice. In examining and questioning the social role of marriage, as this play does, the audience is encouraged to think critically about our own cultural values and the structural evolution of our society.

### A Brief History of Marriage

Sociologists have theorized that the contract of marriage emerged as a sociological structure in order to control reproduction. Marriage, underwritten by sexual fidelity, guaranteed one's biological children inheritance rights, therefore creating intergenerational bonds between families and their property. Of course, marriage as an institution has evolved throughout our history, especially 200 years ago, during the enlightenment and global spread of the free market economy. During this time, more opportunities for financial self-sustainability were available to everyone, so marriage shifted "to be about love and emotional commitment. [However], since then the very things that have strengthened marriage as a personal relationship have steadily weakened it as a social institution" (Stephanie Coontz; *Marriage, a History*). This means that since marriage shifted to prioritize one's romantic partner over one's economic/family ties, "love-based" marriages have held more of a private, intimate, and personal value instead of a legal, public, and economic value.

**(Questions on page 11)**

## Questions

- What do you think the values of a marriage in American culture are today? Why do people get married? Think about the emotional, sexual, and practical elements of marriage.
- In 2012, divorce rates within the first ten years of marriage in America stood at 29% of all marriages. While the rate has dropped somewhat since then, divorce still remains common, with 70% of heterosexual divorces being filed by women. Considering the growth in divorce rates over the past century, why would a theatre produce *A Doll's House Part 2* in America today?
- While marriage originally existed for the sake of contractual and reliable reproduction rights, gender roles in our society have changed since then. With feminist and LGBTQ movements around the world, marriage is no longer always about reproduction or economic stability. In *A Doll's House Part 2*, what gender roles within the legal and social realms of marriage can you identify? What did Nora and Torvald expect from each other as husband and wife? The play is set in the 19th century, but have some expectations of gender roles within marriage stayed the same? How have they been challenged?
- Nora believes that in 20-30 years, marriage will be a thing of the past. Do you agree? Why or why not? If Nora thought so in 1879, would she think the same today?

## AGING AND EXPECTATIONS

As the play begins, with Nora meeting Anne Marie, the family nanny, again for the first time in fifteen years, it is clear that time has changed them both. However, their first interactions illustrate key themes within the play about aging, changing, and most importantly, how we see others. Nora and Anne Marie begin the conversation talking about each others' health and the physical differences that have occurred over fifteen years, then the discussion moves to elements of the house that have changed, and how Torvald and their children have developed in the absence of Nora. While both Anne Marie and Nora are curious about each others' situations, it is clear that they have each developed expectations about how the other has been living all these years. Throughout the play, each character is confronted with people from their earlier lives who have changed in unexpected ways. It makes us think about how much we truly understand the important people in our lives, and how even the idea of a person can leave a lasting legacy long after they have gone and changed.

## Questions

- While seeing children grow into adults can be inspiring and heartwarming, aging into one's elder years is not often seen as so uplifting. Why do you think that is? What is the difference between aging and growing? Is there a certain point at which we expect our lives to become static?
- In your experience, when people are no longer a part of your personal life, how do you picture them? Are they the same as the moment you lost contact? Have they grown into someone you admire or despise? Why is it necessary that you see them as such?

**(Questions continued on page 12)**

- Put yourself in Nora's daughter's shoes and ask yourself why you would want to meet Nora? Why wouldn't Nora want to meet Emmy?
- Between Torvald, Anne Marie, and Emmy, each character created their own image and expectations of who Nora was. How are their pictures of Nora different from each other? How accurate are their images of Nora in comparison to the Nora we see in the play?
- Nora also expected Torvald and their children to develop in a certain way after she left. How did she assume her leaving would affect them? What does that show about her self-image?
- Torvald criticizes Nora for the way she left. The way he sees it, fifteen years ago Nora never communicated her anxieties and frustrations within the marriage, and once she brought them up, instead of trying to solve their problems, she immediately left. Nora expected Torvald to dislike the person she felt that she truly was underneath the inauthentic layers of wifely femininity which she presented. Do you think her expectation was justified?



*A Doll's House, Part 2* features Steve Kidd and Jeanine Kane reprising their roles as Torvald and Nora from our 2011 production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Photo by Peter Goldberg.

# ACT V

## ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

### ACTIVITY 1: BE A SET DESIGNER

While the Gamm's production situates the play in the 19th century, the set design for this play won't necessarily tell us that. The set designer, Pat Lynch, found that a "white box" style would be a meaningful theatrical setting for the play. In theatre, a white box (or black box) style theatre is a minimalist style that seeks to create the most neutral performance space possible, in which the performance is given a certain timelessness and indeterminate location. As such, the additional elements that the set and costume designers do provide must be carefully selected, as the audience will use this information to fill in the blanks of the play's context.

For this activity, you will be creating your own minimalist set design for *A Doll's House Part 2*. You can either write out design points in bullet list form, or better yet create a sketch of your set design vision. Below are some points to consider when creating the set:

- Do you want your design to be a white box or black box theatre? How does the color that you choose to be the neutral backdrop inform the rest of your design? What does it tell the audience about the play?
- What shape do you want for the stage? The great thing about white/black box theatre is that you can choose any set-up you wish. Look up the following theatre terms to make your decision: proscenium theatre, thrust stage, circular stage, and traverse stage. How does positioning the audience change their viewing experience?
- The playwright only specifically requests one set element to be included in the production: a door from the inside to the outside of the house. What size, style, and positioning on stage would you choose for this door? Think about what the door represents to the characters in the show.



## ACTIVITY 2: BE A PLAYWRIGHT!

As was mentioned in the Themes and Questions (p.9-10), the playwright, Lucas Hnath wrote *A Doll's House Part 2* because we all wanted to know what happened after *A Doll's House* (Part 1). Choose one of your favorite stories (it could be a book, movie, video game, etc.) and write a summary of what you think could have happened to those characters after the original story has ended.

If you are having trouble getting started, use the questions below to guide you:

- How long after the original story is your story taking place?
- Will the new story take place in the same or different location?
- Which characters will you include?
- What conflicts and obstacles do the characters encounter?
- Will the characters reach a resolution or will it end with another cliffhanger?

After completing your story, share it with a group! Use the questions below to begin a discussion about your work.

- How did the characters change? How did they stay the same?
- What surprised you about where they ended up?
- What was the reasoning for setting the story in that chosen time and place?
- How much did the original story inform the reboot?



# ACT VI

# EPILOGUE



## THANK YOU!

Thank you for joining us for *A Doll's House, Part 2* and for working with this Study Guide to ensure the best, most comprehensive theatrical and educational experience. Please be in touch if you would like us to visit your classroom before or after you attend *A Doll's House, Part 2*.

Our Education Department provides classes for students of various grade levels, as well as a month-long Gamm Summer Intensive for summer time theatre fun. We hope you will join us for more student matinees at The Gamm!

To book a matinee, contact Drew at [drew@gammtheatre.org](mailto:drew@gammtheatre.org) or 401-723-4266 ext. 112. To learn more about Gamm Education, find us on the web at [www.gammtheatre.org](http://www.gammtheatre.org) or reach Susie Schutt at 401- 723- 4266 ext. 121.

## STILL TO COME

*JAQ*: October 25

*It's A Wonderful Life*: December 13

*Admissions*: January 17

*Assassins*: March 6

*Mary Jane*: April 24



COMING NEXT

OCT 24 - NOV 17



BY AARON POSNER  
DIRECTED BY TONY ESTRELLA

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Complicated and passionate, **John Quincy Adams** was a brilliant diplomat, ineffectual one-term president, and congressman known for his eloquence, arrogance, and integrity. This award-winning play imagines key confrontations between some of America's most dynamic figures. **Provocative and witty**, *JQA* challenges how we think about our country, our government and ourselves.

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