



**A DOLL'S HOUSE,
PART 2**
BY LUCAS HNATH

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY
— EDUCATION PACK PART A —

11 AUGUST — 15 SEPTEMBER
SOUTHBANK THEATRE, THE SUMNER

MTC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

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Southbank Theatre, The Summer. Photo by Benjamin Heatley

— MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY —

MTC is Melbourne's home of live storytelling, producing an annual mainstage season of up to 12 plays, an annual Education production and diverse learning program, play readings, and more. MTC is one of the major performing arts companies in Australia, and one of the largest theatre companies in the English-speaking world. Founded in 1953, MTC is also the oldest professional theatre company in Australia, and currently exists as a semi-autonomous department of the University of Melbourne.

As Australia changed, MTC has changed with it. We like to think that we have frequently been at the forefront of Australian culture, introducing new ideas and new ways of looking at our lives, our society and the world; helping to explain a swiftly evolving landscape as we moved through it. Today, with Southbank Theatre as our performance home and our headquarters in Sturt Street, Southbank, MTC strives to present Melbourne audiences with the best drama from Australia and overseas to the highest standards.

Our Vision: To enrich lives with understanding and empathy through the storytelling power of the finest theatre imaginable.

Our Artistic Purpose: To produce classic and contemporary Australian and international theatre with style, passion and excellence in order to entertain, challenge and enrich audiences.

— INTRODUCTION —

These pre-show notes are designed to help you better understand the play's structure, characters, context and performance styles, so that you're primed to take in every detail at the theatre. After your excursion, download Part B of the Education Pack for production photos, interviews, curriculum links and activities to help you analyse and evaluate *A Doll's House, Part 2*.

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Yalukit Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the Traditional Owners of the land on which Southbank Theatre and MTC HQ stand, and we pay our respects to Melbourne's First Peoples, to their ancestors and Elders, and to our shared future.

— THEATRE STUDIES UNIT 4 —

AREA OF STUDY 3 – OUTCOME 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and evaluate acting in a production. To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

KEY KNOWLEDGE

- the character/s in the production including status, motivation and characteristics
- interpretation by actor/s of a playscript in performance
- expressive skills including facial expression, voice, gesture, movement, stillness and silence used by the actor/s to realise character/s
- the use of focus and the acting space
- the use of language to convey the intended meanings of the play
- the interrelationships between acting, direction and design
- the establishment and maintenance of the actor–audience relationship
- the interrelationships between acting and theatrical style/s utilised in the production
- understanding of theatrical terminology and expressions to analyse and evaluate a theatrical production.

KEY SKILLS

- analyse the character/s in the production including status, motivation and characteristics
- analyse and evaluate interpretation by actor/s of a playscript in performance, including the acting skills used by actor/s to realise character/s, the use of focus and the acting space and the interrelationships between acting, direction and design
- analyse the use of language to convey the intended meanings of the play
- analyse and evaluate the establishment and maintenance of the actor–audience relationship
- analyse the ways that actor/s work within the theatrical style/s utilised in the production
- use theatre terminology and expression appropriately



Marta Dusseldorp and Greg Stone in rehearsal.

— CAST AND CREATIVES —



Marta Dusseldorp
Nora



Deidre Rubenstein
Anne Marie



Greg Stone
Torvald



Zoe Terakes
Emmy



Sarah Goodes
Director



Tracy Grant Lord
Set & Costume
Designer



Niklas Pajanti
Lighting Designer



Chris Williams
Composer /
Sound Designer



Josh Burns
Video Designer

— CHARACTERS —

NORA

Nora walked out on her marriage and family 15 years ago, and has since become a successful feminist novelist. The play begins with her returning to the Helmer house.

ANNE MARIE

The Helmer's nanny of many years. Anne Marie gave up her own daughter in order to work for the Helmer family. Anne Marie raised Nora, and has raised Nora's children in her absence.

TORVALD

Torvald Helmer is Nora's husband and a bank manager. Torvald didn't treat Nora as his equal. Torvald's status in society is important to him.

EMMY

Nora and Torvald's daughter, the youngest of three children. Her siblings Bob and Iver are mentioned in the play, but do not appear. Emmy barely remembers her mother from her childhood.



Status

Based on the character summaries above, make predictions about the status hierarchy in the play, and if it will shift during the course of the play.

— HENRIK IBSEN'S *A DOLL'S HOUSE* —



Henrik Ibsen.
Photo by Gustav Borgen.

Lucas Hnath's *A Doll's House, Part 2* has been described as a sequel-of-sorts, and takes place fifteen years after Henrik Ibsen's original. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is about the unravelling of a family, and was hugely controversial when first performed in Copenhagen in 1879. Married couple Nora and Torvald Helmer appear to be the model family with three young children, and with Torvald's recent promotion to bank manager, their money worries are over. However, Nora has a secret debt, and with her husband's new power comes the threat of blackmail.

Over three acts, life in the Helmer household unravels, and the play culminates in a spectacular scene between the couple as Nora's lie is exposed. Nora recognises the truth of her situation and abandons Torvald, accusing him of having used her as a 'doll'. She declares herself unfit to be a wife or mother until she has learned to be herself, and leaves closing the door behind her. Hnath's play takes place fifteen years after Ibsen's original, and imagines what has happened since.

Unsurprisingly, feminist contemporaries of Ibsen welcomed Ibsen's play. The first German production notoriously altered the ending so that Nora did not leave home; when leading actor refused to act the part as written (Ibsen later described the alteration as 'a barbaric outrage'). In the century and more since, the play and the role of Nora have taken on iconic status; Unesco's Memory of the World register calls Nora 'a symbol throughout the world, for women fighting for liberation and equality'.

Source: Rustin, S. (2013) *Why A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen is more relevant than ever* on theguardian.com; UNESCO (2018) *Henrik Ibsen: A Doll's House* on unesco.org

— LUCAS HNATH'S *A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2* —



Lucas Hnath

Hnath's play takes four characters from the original and imagines what happened after the most famous door slam in theatre history. When writing the play, Hnath asked his friends what they thought happened to Nora after she left, and many guessed she had fared badly – an educated guess, given the state of women's rights in Norway at the time. However, at the start of *Part 2*, we discover that Nora is actually doing great. In fact, she is quite wealthy. Nora has become a successful feminist novelist, and has returned to finalise a divorce from her husband Torvald.

Source: Kelly, J. (2017) *Lucas Hnath, the Playwright of That Daring Ibsen Sequel* on vanityfair.com



Part 1 Posters

Research marketing images and poster designs for Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. What symbols do you see? What clues does this give you about the themes of the play? How might Hnath's script echo or depart from these themes?



Part 2 Predictions

Based on the summary of *Part 2* above, what do you think will happen in the play?
Will Nora get what she has come for?

— CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION —

The world of *A Doll's House* (Norway 1879) was the world Ibsen lived in. Social class was important in late 19th century Norway, and there were certain expectations of the upper-middle class: a stable patriarchal family with good morals and no debt. A woman was expected to be a housewife, and serve her husband and children. Norwegians at the time were very aware and obsessed with money due to the recent economic boom. The country became an independent nation in 1814 and was rapidly becoming industrialised, bringing more money and jobs and a larger middle-class. Unlike the aristocracy, who were born into wealth, the Helmers' position in the upper-middle-class is dependent on wealth earned through hard work and education. Much of the tension in Ibsen's original play comes from financial concerns – a debt, a raise, a loan. Given the expectations of women in the late 1800s, Nora's choice to leave her family was unacceptable in upper-middle-class Norwegian society.



Sarah Goodes (Director)

'The front door is so important in the piece. Many quotes refer to how the first time Nora walked out of that door in the original *A Doll's House* its reverberation could be heard around the world. The play arrived at such a crucial time in the women's movement and Nora slamming that door on her way out became a powerful symbol of women's rights or lack of them.'



The door

Consider what a door symbolises, and its importance in Nora's story. What other plays or literature include significant doors or doorways? Make predictions about what the door (or doors) in *Part 2* will look like on stage.



Marta Dusseldorp and Greg Stone in rehearsal.



Zoe Terakes and Marta Dusseldorp in rehearsal.

Lucas Hnath has set *Part 2* in mostly the same context, but has taken some artistic liberties. It is highly unlikely that Nora, having abandoned her husband and children, would have found success as a writer in Norway in this period – especially as a proponent of feminism. However, Hnath has audaciously imagined that she did. Director Sarah Goodes says it is important to remember that, in the original play once Nora left through that door, she walked out of all of her rights. ‘She had no right to property, to work, or even to her children,’ says Goodes. ‘The assumption was, probably very accurately, that Nora would face a life of poverty and possible death with very little opportunities to be able to earn a living for herself.’

Hnath has invented two devices for his play to work: Nora’s success as a feminist writer could be considered unlikely and almost ahistorical, and he introduces the plot device where Torvald never signed the divorce papers.

Part 2 is a meeting of period and modern. Ostensibly, Hnath seduces us into thinking this is a play about 1800s Norway, but instead says something critical about outspoken women in

contemporary society. Nora has defied the odds to become a successful feminist writer, but is about to be undone by her husband’s failure to finalise their divorce. This technicality puts her in a dangerous position: ‘*I’ve behaved as an unmarried woman,*’ says Nora in Hnath’s script. ‘*I have conducted business that married women are not allowed to conduct without the consent of their husbands, signed contracts that are now void, I could be prosecuted and put in prison.*’



Sarah Goodes (Director)

‘The period is very important in order to contextualise the social mores of the time in particular the rights of women. These details provide the scaffolding for the moral world of the play, however what fills this space is very modern.’



Research Norway late 19th Century

Research online to find six interesting facts about Norway in the late 1800s that would assist you as an actor, director or designer in understanding and creating this world on stage.

Actor Marta Dusseldorp plays Nora in the MTC production of *A Doll’s House, Part 2*. She draws parallels between Ibsen and Hnath’s relative theatrical rebellion, noting that Ibsen came from a traditional Norwegian merchant family and lived a traditional life before upending societal expectations on stage. ‘What motivated [Ibsen] to do that 150 years ago, we’ll never know,’ says Dusseldorp, ‘but it’s in the same way Lucas Hnath – who is only 37 years old – 138 years later, decides he’s also going to create an irresponsible act, which is the imposition of a classic.’



Marta Dusseldorp

Go to mtc.com.au/backstage to watch a video with Marta Dusseldorp about *A Doll’s House, Part 2*.



Where freedom sparks

Go to mtc.com.au/backstage to read an article with Marta Dusseldorp about her character in *A Doll’s House, Part 2*.

— STRUCTURE —

The play is divided into sections of roughly equal length by titles: NORA; TORVALD; ANNE MARIE; EMMY; and finally NORA & TORVALD. You might imagine that the titles describe which character's perspective is being explored at that point in the play. At the commencement of rehearsal, the creative team were planning to project these titles on stage. Most of the play is written as duologues. The entire play takes place in one room in the Helmer house, and is performed without an interval.



Titles

Make predictions about what these titles will look like on stage. Will they be projected onto the actors, or onto a screen? Will they be in colour? What font might be used and why? How else could you incorporate the titles?



Greg Stone and Marta Dusseldorp in rehearsal.

— SETTING —

Ibsen's original play was written and set in 1879, so *Part 2* takes place in 1894. In Hnath's script, he offers the following notes:

WHERE

Norway. Inside the Helmer house.

WHEN

15 years since Nora left Torvald.

THE SPACE

The play takes place in a room. It's quite spare. Some chairs, maybe a table, not much else. It ought to feel a touch like a forum. I wouldn't be sad at all if the play were played in the round.

And it's crucial there be a door. A very prominent door to the outside.

Director Sarah Goodes says 'the front door is so important in the piece'. She also elaborates on the forum-like quality of the space:



Sarah Goodes (Director)

'This forum-like quality to the piece is very important – that the audience is witnessing a battle between four people, each able to fight for their corner with as much passion and resolve as the other is important – there is a clarity to the language of the piece that requires a 'platform' as such, with very minimal props and set pieces giving the characters nowhere to hide.'



Roman Forums

Research Roman Forums to see what these spaces look like. What were they used for? Why might Hnath have included this description in his script? Link your research with Goodes' discussion above.

— THE PLAYWRIGHT —

American playwright Lucas Hnath grew up in Orlando, Florida, and developed his self-described 'penchant for theatricality' from visits to Disney World. Hnath attended New York University, initially to study medicine, but switched to study playwriting after discovering the plays of Sam Shepherd, Edward Albee and Caryl Churchill. His first professional success was a black comedy about death and taxes called *Death Tax*, and has since become known for writing wildly original plays. These include *Red Speedo* (about doping), *The Christians* (about a mega-church), and *Hillary and Clinton* (a twist on the 2008 election). *A Doll's House, Part 2* was his Broadway debut.



Research Hnath's plays

Research Hnath's other plays described above. What do they have in common? How would you describe Hnath's style?

Hnath first came across Ibsen's original play in high school, and say 'I think I rather liked it'. He describes an avant-garde production he saw years later (where Nora was played by several different actors possibly wearing lizard tails) as 'kind of a hot mess', but noted that the play held its own and the story worked. Hnath's *Part 2* came out of a love and appreciation for Ibsen's play – he found a badly translated version of the script and started rewriting it in his own words.

Sources: Green, A. (2017) *How Rock Star Playwright Lucas Hnath Brought A Doll's House, Part 2 to Broadway* on [vogue.com](#); Kelly, J. (2017) *Lucas Hnath, the Playwright of That Daring Ibsen Sequel* on [vanityfair.com](#)



Zoe Terakes, Greg Stone and Deidre Rubenstein in rehearsal.

— THEATRICAL STYLES —

A Doll's House, Part 2 will be performed in a mostly naturalistic style, perhaps most closely associated with Stanislavski and realism. Dialogue is mostly naturalistic, with some contemporary colloquial and coarse language. This is not the language these characters would have used in 1894, even though their costumes do reflect Norwegian garments of that time.

There are also non-naturalistic elements at work, which echo conventions seen in Brecht's Epic Theatre. These include:

- Projected titles
- Video footage
- Moving set pieces
- Highly theatrical lighting
- Visible technical equipment



Sarah Goodes (Director)

'The world of this play is a dance between classic and modern.'



Discuss 'a dance'

Discuss what Goodes might mean by the comment above, and connect this idea of a dance to what you know about the theatrical styles in the play.



Sarah Goodes in rehearsal.

— DIRECTION —

A Doll's House, Part 2 is being directed by MTC Associate Director Sarah Goodes. She describes the world of the play as 'a dance between classic and modern'.



Sarah Goodes (Director)

'The language of the piece is very contemporary, and the ideas embedded in the play are loaded with modern day relevance about the institution of marriage, how we manage conflict within relationships, betrayal, expectation, what is freedom and relationships between mothers and daughters.'

Goodes describes her approach to directing *Part 2* as 'forensic', by focusing nearly entirely on the language and the rhythm embedded in the writing.



Sarah Goodes (Director)

'Lucas lays his text out so specifically that is very much like a piece of music – some sections are like circles, others like upward ladders, others like jagged lines. By this I mean that is how I break the piece down to heighten the embedded rhythms of the piece. The joy will be unlocking these rhythms physically on the floor and making the obstacles meaty enough to make the actors really get their teeth stuck into it. Nora has to really roll her sleeves up to fight for what she believes in.'



Discuss circles, ladders, jagged lines

Discuss Goodes' comments above about the text being like a piece of music. What do these descriptions of the text evoke in your mind? How might an actor annotate their script to heighten these embedded rhythms?



Music and text

Look at the script excerpts later in this resource and find sections of music that you think complement the text. Write a list of adjectives that describe the music, and see if they also apply to the text.

'I felt early on that the whole piece feels like a journey towards "stillness",' says Goodes. 'Nora bursts through the front door filled with the passion and energy of someone exhilarated by hard-fought freedom, and then the piece throws obstacles at her until she is finally able to be still before the play's conclusion.'



Sarah Goodes (Director)

'We wanted everything in the space from the middle down to be a part of the *A Doll's House* 'Part One' world, and anything from the middle up to the world of the modern language of the piece. We loved the idea of using video projection to capture Nora before she enters the world to be magnified – she is a giant in the outside world and has to peer into the miniature Dolls House where she once lived.'

MTC Associate Director Sarah Goodes last directed *The Children* for MTC, following her critically acclaimed direction of *John* and *Switzerland*. Sarah's reputation as a leading director of new Australian and international work has been built on widespread praise and multiple award nominations. Formerly Resident Director at Sydney Theatre Company, Sarah directed *The Hanging*, *Disgraced*, *Orlando*, *Battle of Waterloo*, *The Effect*, *Vere (Faith)*, *The Splinter*, and *Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness*. Her other directing credits include *Elling*, *Black Milk*, *The Sweetest Thing*, and *The Small Things* (B Sharp Belvoir); *The Colour of Panic* (Sydney Opera House); *Vertigo and the Virginia*, *The Schelling Point*, *Hilt*, and *What Happened Was* (Old Fitz Theatre); and *The Unscrupulous Murderer Hasse Karlson Reveals the Gruesome Truth about the Woman Who Froze to Death on a Railway Bridge* (Darlinghurst Theatre Company). In 2015 she was the recipient of the Gloria Payten Travel Scholarship.



Deidre Rubenstein, Greg Stone and Marta Dusseldorp in rehearsal.

— REVIEWS —

'Keeps you hanging on each turn of argument and twist of knife. It's dynamite.'

TIME OUT NEW YORK, ADAM FELDMAN

'I want to do nothing but talk about *A Doll's House, Part 2* for the rest of my life.'

THE WASHINGTON POST, PETER MARKS

'*A Doll's House, Part 2*, Hnath's invigorating ninety-minute, intermissionless work, is an irresponsible act—a kind of naughty imposition on a classic, which, in addition to investing Ibsen's signature play with the humor that the nineteenth-century artist lacked, raises a number of questions, such as What constitutes an individual achievement in this age of the simulacrum, when everything owes something to something else?'

THE NEW YORKER, HILTON ALS

'Like most critics, I thought *A Doll's House, Part 2*, the what-if sequel to Ibsen by Lucas Hnath, was already great when it opened in April. But a play's true greatness may hinge on how well it absorbs, or reshapes itself around, the succession of casts that enact it.'

THE NEW YORK TIMES, JESSE GREEN

'The year's best play.'

LOS ANGELES TIMES, CHARLES MCNULTY

'Provocatively, the play functions as both homage and riposte, casting a critical eye on Nora's choices and trying to wrestle with their consequences.'

THE GUARDIAN, ALEXIS SOLOSKI

'This taut, 90-minute single act is as much an ingenious elaboration and deconstruction of *A Doll's House* as a sequel, and it stands perfectly well on its own ... Anyone who has seen Ibsen's masterwork has probably wondered what the future held for Nora, a woman infantilized her whole life, who bucked against a society built around the constricting laws and judgments of men. In Hnath's conception of her, she's done very well, thank you.'

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER, DAVID ROONEY



Discuss Reviews

Discuss the reviews above, and what clues they give you about the play you will see. What is consistent among these reviews?



Read more

Research the reviews online to read more about past productions of *A Doll's House, Part 2*. How do you think the MTC production might differ?

— SCRIPT EXCERPTS —

The following excerpts from Lucas Hnath’s script offer you ways to interact with the text before seeing the production. The excerpts are accompanied by activities and prompt questions, which will assist you to better understand these moments in the play.

ANNE MARIE: *But what about you, tell me about you,
what’s happened to you?*

NORA: *I’ll tell you what: I’m not the same person
who left through that door.
I’m a very different person*



Not the same person

Who was Nora when she left the Helmer house at the end of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*? Research the events of the original play. How might Nora have changed in 15 years?

TORVALD: *I did so much for you.
I loved you.
And you threw it away.*

NORA: *But who did you love really?
Because who I was when I was last here—that wasn’t me.
You like that, but what I was doing—that was just for show.*



You threw it away

What is Torvald claiming Nora threw away? How does Nora see the situation differently? How do you imagine the actors delivering these lines? Calmly/angrily/urgently/patiently?

EMMY: *I actually think in a lot of ways
things turned out better because you weren’t around.*

NORA: ...

EMMY: *I think I’m better at life because of it.*



You weren’t around

What do you think the ellipsis (...) indicates for the actor playing Nora? The playwright has deliberately included this absence of words, suggesting that the audience can understand the scene from contextual clues. What might these unspoken words be?

— ATTENDANCE INFORMATION —



Zoe Terakes and Greg Stone in rehearsal.



When you visit Southbank Theatre, share your experience on Twitter and Instagram with the hashtag **#mtcDollsHouse2** and tag **@melbtheatreco**



Like MTC Education on Facebook for behind-the-scenes information about our Education Program and discover ways for you to get involved with MTC. **facebook.com/MTCEdu**

CONTENT

This production contains coarse language and sexual references. For detailed information, visit our website at mtc.com.au/production-content-guide

Approximately 1hr 30mins, no interval.

Part B of this Education Pack will be available once the production opens. To read more about visiting with school groups visit mtc.com.au/education.

SCHOOL BOOKINGS

Email schools@mtc.com.au or phone 03 8688 0963.

GENERAL ENQUIRIES

Email education@mtc.com.au or contact our Education Coordinator 03 8688 0974