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SONS OF NORWAY

HERITAGE PROGRAMS

IdeaBank#57

"THE ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE"

A play based on the work of Henrik Ibsen

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"THE ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE"
HENRIK IBSEN

A readers theater for a narrator, a female reader, and a male reader.

Narrator: Who is this man we have so often heard of as the most famous Norwegian? What was he like as a person? What were his plays about? How were they received? What do we really know about him?

We need to know about the time in which he lived and understand Norway of the 1900s. As Ibsen said himself:

Male: "Anyone who wishes to understand me fully must know Norway. The spectacular but severe landscape which people have around them in the north, and the lonely, shut-off life– the houses often lie miles from each other–force them not to bother about other people, but only their concerns, so that they become reflective and serious, they brood and doubt and often despair. In Norway every second man is a philosopher. And those dark winters, with the thick mists outside–ah, they long for the sun."

Narrator: So much of Ibsen is found in his plays: the people and places of his background,and his beliefs. We can learn much about him by reading his work.

Ibsen was born in 1928 in a small coastal town in Southern Norway called Skien. At the time of his birth, Norway was still a primitive country. (Of course the Territory of Montana didn't even exist yet. Many of the houses in remote areas didn't have windows, with only a hole in the roof to let out the smoke.

Ibsen's father was a prosperous merchant, and Ibsen had a happy early childhood. When Ibsen was seven, his father went bankrupt. They had to move to a small farm house, and sometimes there was nothing to eat except potatoes. His father became a bitter, sarcastic man who could not accept his new position in life. He could not bear the fact that no one looked up to him any longer. He attacked people verbally, especially when he had something to drink. And he took out his frustrations on his family. He never found the dignity to start again, and blamed others for his problems. Ibsen's mother changed from a lively, young woman with a passion for theatre to a sad recluse.

Ibsen himself was humiliated by their poverty. At the same time, rumors spread through the town that he was the illegitimate child of another man, which was most likely not true because he looked just like his father. But the rumors further alienated the young Ibsen, and illegitimate children appear in many of his plays.

The young Ibsen would often shut himself in a closet to read, paint or play with puppets but occasionally he presented a puppet theatre and magic acts to the neighbors. Ibsen rarely spent time with other children. He could not bring himself to think of them as his equals. But he did get along better with girls than boys:

Female: "His fellows didn't care much for him; they thought he was pompous. And I think came and asked us to dance, we regarded it as a great honor. We were highly flattered. He loved dancing, and was good fun at parties. Occasionally he joined in the other boys' games, as when they went round the houses dressed up at Christmas, and then he cut the best figure of them all. He liked to dress up grand."

Narrator: At the age of 16, he left home to become an apprentice to a pharmacist in Grimstad. There he spent his free time reading, painting, and writing poetry. Apparently he also spent time with one of the kitchen maids because she became pregnant with his child when he was 18. She left town, and Ibsen never saw that son until the end of his life.

As Ibsen began to make friends, the appothecary became a popular meeting place for lively political discussions. Ibsen developed radical views and was excited by the revolution in France in 1848. He made fiery speeches against tyrants and kings. He joined a secret revolutionary party which was soon dissolved when the government arrested its leaders and put them in prison.

At 21 he wrote his first play, "Catiline," which was set in ancient Rome. A friend paid for its printing. Only 40 copies sold the first year. Before the play was printed, a poem was his first writing to appear in print. A friend had sent it to the newspaper:

Male: "I was very-impatient for evening to come, when the shop would be quiet and I could show Ibsen the newspaper. Enthusiastically, and with a certain triumph at my friend's success, I displayed to him his first "poem in print." At first Ibsen turned quite pale with emotion, but soon a flush of joy streamed over his face."

Narrator: In 1850 Ibsen went to Christiania (Oslo) to study at the University. He stopped in his hometown on the way but he had an argument with his family over religion, and he never saw his parents again. Two of his brothers had emigrated to America; he never saw them again.

During his first year at the University, he was a typical starving student. He sold most of the copies of his first play for scrap paper to have money for food, but he kept on writing. His second play was performed at the Christiania Theatre the next fall, and was well-received but was not accepted for printing. It was not very good, but Norway was eager at that time to establish its own culture separate from that of Denmark. Ibsen's play was the first written by a Norwegian in seven years.

The next year Ole Bull was developing a Norwegian national theatre company in Bergeb and hired Ibsen, who gave up school. He spent six years there, not only writing, but directing,

designing costumes and sets, and running the business side. he was sent on a trip to Germany and Denmark to study theatre where he met Hans Christian Anderson at the theatre in Copenhagen.

The theatre then was not what we know now. We would consider it very old-fashioned, and Norway was 50 years behind other theatres.

Female: Our stage had no sets, only canvas backdrops with all the scenery painted on. Windows, doors and even furniture were just painted on the canvas. The same canvas sets were used over and over for every play. There was a canvas for "a street," "a park," "winter," etc. The lighting was by candles or oil lamps, so all the actors faced the front of the stage when speaking. When Ibsen directed actors to actually look at each other when speaking, it was a radical change for provincial Norway. The plays were melodramas, farces, or great tragedies involving kings and people of the highest classes. The acting consisted of grand orations and spectacular outbursts, like opera without the music.

Narrator: Ibsen was an unusual director. He was too shy to give may direct orders to the actors, and mostly skulked around in the wings. Actress Lucie Wold Wrote:

Female: (Wolf): 'T remember him as a silent, surprisingly shy man, who I always found kept himself very remote from us, and whose personality in no way encouraged one to speak privately or confidentially with him. He was always amiable and courteous, but...there was no question of his ever giving us instruction. I, at any rate, was afraid of him. He always went around wrapped in a great cloak, and if one approached him he shrank back and hid himself like a snail in its shell. His great brain was boiling and seething; his powerful spirit could find no place among us and all the pettinesses we had to battle with when everything was just beginning. That mighty world-shaker could not but feel crushed and bound by the monotonous daily routine of narrow Bergen."

Narrator: Ibsen produced three of his own plays; all were flops with the Bergen audience. They only wanted to see simple shows like melodrama and farces. He directed a Shakespeare play. It was a flop, too. The tastes were pretty low. Ibsen became depressed by the failures and by having to produce a string of inferior plays so the audience would like them. He then wrote "The Feast at Solhaug" which some have called the worst play he ever wrote. That play was a hit! Ibsen recalled:

Male: (Ibsen): "The performance ended with repeated calls for the author and cast. Later that evening the orchestra, accompanied by a large part of the audience, serenaded me outside my windows. I felt profoundly happy. It was the only really happy day I ever spent in Bergen."

Narrator: The play was later printed and performed in Christiania. The success of the play had another impact on Ibsen. In the audience in Bergen was a writer who invited him to an evening at her home. There he met her daughter, Suzannah Thoresen, and the two were immediately attracted to each other. She was interested in drama, was an avid reader, and had radical views. He did not have a job which would support a family, though, so they were not

married until 21/2 years later.

After six years in Bergen, Ibsen was offered the job of artistic director of the Norwegian Theatre of Christiania. It was a new theatre which was formed with the new nationalism in Norway. It was in reaction to the Christiania Theatre which was still completely Danish using the Danish language, Danish actors, and Danish plays as well as some French and German plays. Young patriots formed the new theatre to perform Norwegian works and used the Norwegian dialects. They were happy to find a Norwegian playwright to be artistic director.

It was not an easy goal to fulfill, however. The upper class citizens preferred the Danish influence and had contempt for the less educated Norwegians. The government offered no help. The theatre was in a bad part of town and attracted the working class. The workers still only wanted the same kinds of plays Ibsen had been forced to do in Bergen: the melodramas and farces. When good, new actors came to the Norwegian theatre, the Danish Theatre tried to lure them away with higher salaries. So when Ibsen came, the theatre's reputation was very low and the founders had almost given up.

Ibsen tried to make money for the theatre by presenting popular plays, the foreign melodramas and farces. But he was intensely criticized in the newspapers for going against the goal of the theatre which was to present Norwegian plays. After a few years, he tried introducing challenging Norwegian plays, but the public stopped coming. The theatre went bankrupt, and Ibsen was out of a job, more bitter than ever. During this time, he drank heavily and was found on more than one occasion passed out in the gutter.

LOVE'S COMEDY

Narrator: While unemployed he wrote "Love's Comedy," a satire which poked fun at the incompatibility between romantic love and marriage. The play raised a storm of criticism from people who said the play was an offense against human decency because it made fun of both love and marriage. He never forgot the abuse he took over the play.

THE PRETENDERS

Narrator: His next play, "The Pretenders,w was a Norwegian historical drama which lasted five hours. It was very well received because it fit well into the National Romanticism that was popular in the country, the appreciation of Norwegian art and literature which came from the time before the Danish took over. That reception and some positive reviews gave him confidence.

But in 1863, Ibsen reached a turning point. Prussia invaded Denmark. The King of Sweden and Norway had repeatedly promised he would support Denmark if it went to war; but when Denmark was attacked, the isolationists won out and Norway and Sweden refused to help the Danes. Ibsen could not believe that the rest of Scandinavia would betray Denmark in time of war. He published a furious statement against his fellow countrymen and left Norway. On the way through Germany he saw Prussian soldiers parade a Danish cannon through town while

people spat on it. He felt in time history would spit in the eyes of Sweden and Norway for abandoning their Scandinavian neighbor. He lived in exile for the next 27 years. This famous Norwegian actually spent most of his productive life outside of Norway, and most of his plays criticized the life and country he left behind.

First he moved to Italy. After he crossed the Alps, the train went through a tunnel and at the end of it he suddenly found himself in a warm and bright country. He stayed with a friend on his first night in Italy:

Male: "I found him quite another person than the withdrawn and bitter man I had left three years earlier. He had, of course, been deeply shaken by the latest events in Scandinavia, and expressed himself with burning indignation of the deceitful policies which had been adopted toward Denmark. But at the same time, it was as though on his arrival into (Italy) he had put all this behind him, and now wished only to live as intensively as possible for his writing. Now he was able to laugh at all the dust which "Love's Comedy" had raised, and which had embittered his life in Norway. Now he was able doubly to rejoice in the ten full houses which "The Pretenders" had achieved before he had left. And when the sun went down and we felt the gentle air of the Italian evening shimmer through the little garden where we sat beneath the vine leaves, we were two young men happy in the certainty that life was rich and beautiful and that its finest fruits were beckoning to us from the future. We built our dream castles in the little garden, and when night fell, we wandered home in the soft Mediterranean moonlight."

Narrator: In Italy, he joined a Scandinavian group, and became good friends with a religious young man named Christopher Bruun. On a visit to the Sistine Chapel, he found himself immensely inspired and immediately began writing his first truly great work, an epic poem called "Brand." The character of Brand was based partly on Christopher Bruun, but also revealed much of Ibsen's own feeling.

BRAND

Narrator: Brand is a Norwegian priest who has deep religious convictions but a distrust of the established church. He has a special contempt for compromise and continually demands "All or Nothing." Brand, like Bruun, burned with an inner passion, but he appeared hard and cold and demanding. He couldn't find the right combination between love and perfection. He suffered for his lack of love, but his iron will would not let him compromise enough to find it.

When Brand's mother lay dying, he told her he would only come to her (both as a son and as a priest) if she made atonement for her sins by giving away all her worldly goods, possessions she had devoted her life to getting. She asked him to come and offered to give away half. In the end she offered to give all but ten percent. But he still demanded "all" and she died without him.

In this scene a messenger comes to Brand with the message from his mother to come to her death bed:

Female: (the messenger) You must come now priest!

Male: (Brand) Instantly! What message?

Female: A mysterious one.
Sitting in bed she forward bent,
And said, "Get the priest here: begone!
My half-goods for the sacrament."

Male: (starts back) Her half-goods! No! Say no!

Female: (shaking her head) My word
Would then not utter what I heard.

Male: Half! Half! It was the whole she meant!

Female: Maybe, but she spoke loud and high;
And I don't easily forget.

Male: (siezes her arm) Before God's judgment, will you yet
Dare to attest she spoke it?

Female:: Aye.

Male: (firmly) Go, tell her, this reply was sent:
"Nor priest shall come, nor sacrament."

Female: (Looking at him doubtfully) You surely have not understood:
It is your mother that appeals.

Male: She knows the call,
To offer nothing, or else all.

Female: The scourge you send her I will lay
As gently on her as I may.
She has this comfort left her, too.
God is not quite so hard as you!

Narrator: Ibsen and the character of Brand were critical of all the people in the country, including the clergy, who only practiced their faith part time.

The character of the church official (who of course is also a State official) says it this way:

Male: But life and faith hold such dissent.
They only thrive, when kept apart.
Six days for toiling hands are meant.
The seventh, for stirring of the heart.
If all the week we preached and prayed,
The Sabbath had in vain been made.
God's incense, rightly to be used,
Must not be lavishly diffused.
Worship, like art, was not created
To be in perfume dissipated.

Narrator: To Brand, Christianity must be strict and austere without moral compromise. Ibsen also used the play to mock the Norwegians who would not join the war on behalf of Denmark because of their self-interest. In the play the crowd is being asked to make a sacrifice, but the people think only of themselves:

(slightly whining)

Male: Hark, priest, will it be warm, this fight?

Female: And Bloody? And will it last till night?

Male: I trust there is no risk of dying?

Female: Priest, must we really face the fire?

Male: What is my portion of the hire?

Female: You're sure I shall not lose my son?

Male: By Tuesday will the field be won?

Narrator: Brand is astonished by their attitude. He, of course, tells them they must give all to gain their soul. The crowd turns on him and says he has betrayed them.

Female: You promised us the victor's prize; And now it turns to sacrifice.'

Narrator: Ibsen also adds some sarcasm for politicians and bureaucrats which would probably be popular today. At one point, the Mayor says:

Male: That was, I need not say, a lie. I just let loose
At the first fancy that came by;
Is it a sin such means to use
In such a cause?

Female: God bless me, no. Need is an adequate excuse.

Male: And then, tomorrow, when the glow of agitation's dead, or dying. What will it matter if the end was gained by telling the truth, or lying?

Narrator: Part of the National Romanticism was to be critical of all government agents, including clergy and schoolteachers, because they were all Danish or trained in Denmark.

The character of Brand never compromises. His church and house are in the bottom of a fjord where no sunlight ever reaches. The doctor tells him lie must move or his son will die, He starts to hurry to pack, and then someone points out he will be compromising his duty to the congregation if he leaves. They throw the "all or nothing" back at him. He decides to stay and give all and allows his son to die. Then when his wife is grieving, he forces her to give away all the baby's clothing to a beggar.

His wife then dies. Brand attempts to lead the villagers on a pilgrimage up into the mountains to find God to prove they are willing to give all. The townspeople turn on him when they realize he is asking them to sacrifice, and stone him. He goes on alone believing he has now given his all. He alone holds the right beliefs and acts upon them. He goes into the mountains where he is killed in a avalanche. His iron will causes his downfall.

It is a bleak but powerful tragic story. Ibsen said of his writing:

Male: I was... so indescribably happy. I felt such a crusading joy within me, that I do not know the thing I would have lacked the courage to tilt at. At the time I was writing "Brand" I had on my table a scorpion in an empty beer glass. From time to time the brute would ail; then I would throw a piece of ripe fruit in to it, on which it would cast itself in a rage and eject its poison into it; then it was well again.

Narrator: Tbsen put both his crusading happiness and anger into the play.

"Brand" was an immediate hit throughout Scandinavia. The play established Ibsen as the pioneer of revolt against tradition and authority and the narrow minds of parochial countries. The book, of course, was also criticized and caused a great debate. That pleased Ibsen because he said his goal was to get people to "think greatly." The book also finally brought security to Ibsen as the book sold well, and the government then recognized his worth and gave him a pension for life.

PEER GYNT

Narrator: Also living in Italy was Edvard Grieg, and he and Ibsen became friends. Ibsen's next play was also part of the National Romanticism. He used Norwegian folk tales to create "Peer Gynt." Peer was the opposite of Brand–a lazy, selfish character who completely wasted his life by giving nothing and only taking. He was a man of no principles. He liked to pretend he was royalty and things were good when they were not.

In his travels he meets the troll king's daughter and gets into a bragging contest:

Female: Are you a King's son?

Male: (Peer): Yes.

Female: My father's the King ofRonde.

Male: Is he? Well, that makes us two of a kind.

Female: My father's palace is inside the mountain.

Male: My mother's is bigger, believe you me.

Female: Do YOU know my father? His name is King Brose.

Male: Do you know my mother: Her name is Queen Aase.

Female: When my father is angry, the mountains crack.

Male: They shake when my mother opens her mouth.

Female: When my father dances, he kicks the stars.

Male: My mother can ride through rivers in flood.

Female: Have you any other clothes beside those rags?

Male: Oh, you should see my in me Sunday suit!

Female: I always wear gold and silks.

Male: They look to me more like tow and straw.

Female: Well, there's one thing you must remember.
That is the way of the mountian people.
Everything there has another meaning.
If you come to my father's house, you may easily think
You're just in an ugly heap of stones.

Male: Well now, it's exactly the same with us.
Our gold may seen scrapt to you.
You may think each crystal window pane
Is just a fistful of socks and rags.

Female: Black seems white and ugly seems fair.

Male: Great seems little and foul seems clean.

Female: O, Peer! I see it! We were made for each other! Bridal steed! Bridal steed! Come,my bridal steed!

(A pig runs in with a rope for a bridle, and an old sack as a saddle, they ride off on it.)

Narrator: Ibsen was using this irresponisble character to again chide Norwegians for their attitudes and behaviors. The story is filled with satire and provided some digs at those who were taking the nationalism too seriously.

The first performance was in 1876 at Chrisdania, with the famous music by Edvard Grieg.

Who can name anything else that Grieg composed? We think of "Peer Gynt" as his most famous work. But this is what he had to say about it:

Male: (Grieg) I can't but admire the way from start to finish it splutters with wit and venom; but it will never win my sympathy. Though I think it the best thing Ibsen has written. Am I not right? But you don't imagine I had a free choice in the matter! I got the offer from Ibsen last year, and naturally balked at the prospect of putting music to this most unmusical of subjects. But I thought of the 200 (crowns) and of the voyage, and made the sacrifice. The whole thing sits on me like a nightmare.

It's a dreadfully intractable subject except for certain passages (e.g. the part where Solveig sings) I've done thai all right. And I've made something of the Old Man's palace in the mountains, which I literally can't bear to listen to, it stinks so of cow dung and Norwegian insularity and self-sufficiency! But I think people will see the irony behind it.

Narrator: The public liked the combination of the play and music, and the production was very popular. Unfortunately, the satire has tended to disappear, and beginning with that first production with Grieg's music it has been turned into more of a lively fairy tale.

REALISM

Narrator: After "Peer Gynt", Ibsen finished an historical drama from the Middle Ages, "Emperor and Galilean," which had taken him ten years to write. It came at the end of the Romantic era, at the age of realism was about to be born. Ibsen wrote "The League of Youth," a light comedy about politics, poking fun at a left-wing candidate. He wrote it in prose in a more realistic manner.

In 1874, he nude a trip home to Norway at the urging of his wife. He was honored and cheered by the public at performances of "Love's Comedy" and "The League of Youth." But Ibsen still did not feel comfortable in Norway.

Male: (Ibsen): "On my journey up the fjord, I felt my chest tighten with sickness and unease. I had the same sensation during the whole of my stay there; I was no longer myself with all those cold and uncomprehending Norwegian eyes staring at me from the windows and pavements."

Narrator: Some hard things remained to be said, and he preferred to do it from a distance. He move his wife and son to Germany. He was feeling restless.

After several years of trying to find himself, he led the theatre in a new direction and began to write the plays which brought him the most fame. His new style of realistic stories about everyday people on realistic sets were a drastic change from the flamboyant oratory and poetry of the old theatre. The term "Ibsenite" has come to refer to plays which work for reform by exposing hypocrisy that stands in the way. His next four plays are good examples of the term.

PILLARS OF SOCIETY

Narrator: The first was "Pillars of Society." This play attacks on two forms.

In one theme, he criticizes the rich businessmen of the time for their practices, which still sound familiar in modern times. His businessman is Karsten Bernick who owns a shipyard in a small seaport. Bernick purposely sends a ship to sea with a full crew knowing it is unseaworthy and will sink, but sends it anyway to meet a deadline.

Also the businessman has been pushing to bring a railroad to the town, pretending he is doing it for the good of the people. He had, however, secretly bought up all the land on the proposed route so that he will make a fortune.

Ibsen also has him bringing in new machinery to the docks which will put many of his workers out of work, but we see he doesn't care about their future. He justifies his behavior because it benefits the whole community.

In a second theme, Ibsen criticizes the hypocrisy of the leaders of society. Bernick is the town's leading citizen, but we find that he was involved in a scandal. Fifteen years earlier, he had an affair with a married actress while he was engaged. He let his future brother-in-law, Johann, take the blame for him because Johann was leaving for America. In the play Johann returns and falls in love with the actress' daughter, Dina, who has been shunned because of her mother's adultery. She wants to go to America with Johann. Johann threatens to tell everyone that it really was Bernick who had the affair. Johann is on the unsafe ship, and Bernick hopes the ship will sink and kill Johann. At the last minute, Bernick finds out his only son is a stowaway on the ship. The foreman stops the ship at the last moment as he knows it is unsafe, and in his relief Bernick stands before the citizens and confesses.

It is not just the behavior of the leaders that Ibsen writes about. He has us laughing at all the self-righteous people of the town and comments on the pettiness of provincial life, one of the things he hated most about Norway.

Dina talks with Johann about going to America:

Female: You mustn't go out with me.

Male: But why not?

Female: Well, I must tell you that I am not like the other young girls here. There is something– something or other about me. That is why you mustn't.

Male: But I do not understand anything about it. You have not done anything wrong?

Female: No, not I, but– No, I am not going to talk any more about it now. You will hear about it from the others, sure enough. But there is something else I want very much to ask you.

Male: What is it?

Female: I suppose it is easy to make a position for oneself over in America?

Male: No, it is not always easy; at first, you often have to rough it and work very hard.

Female: I should be quite ready to do that.

Male: You?

Female: I can work now; I am strong and healthy, and Aunt Martha taught me a lot.

Male: Well, hang it, come back with us!

Female: Ah, now you are only making fun of me; you said that to Olaf, too. But what I wanted 10 know is if people are so very–so very moral over there?

Male: Moral?

Female: Yes; I mean are they as–as proper and as well-behaved as they are here?

Male: Well, at all events they are not so bad as people here make out. You need not be afraid on that score.

Female: You don't understand me. What I want to hear is just that they are not so proper and so moral.

Male: Not? Why would you wish them to be then?

Female: I would wish them to be natural.

Male: Well, I believe that is just what they are.

Female: Because in that case, I should get on if I went there.

Male: You would, for certain! And that is why you must come back with us.

Female: No, I don't want to g-o with you; you must go alone. Oh. I should make something of my life: I would get on.

Narrator: As an interesting sidelight, Ibsen helped fuel America fever with these comments of the girl's Aunt Martha encouraging her to go to America:

Female: Never! Promise me, Dina, Never to come back! Now go to your happiness, my dear child –across the sea. How often, in my schoolroom, I have yearned to be over there! It must be beautiful; the skies are loftier than here– a freer air plays about your head.

Narrator: In a weak, rather corny ending, the businessman confesses most of his sins, he is forgiven, and everyone is happy.

Male: And we–we have a long earnest day of work ahead of us; I most of all. But let it come; only keep close round me, vou true, loyal women. I have learnt this, too, in these last few days; it is you women that are the pillars of society.

Narrator: The play dealt with two topics which were very controversial at the time–the rights of women and the "floating coffins," unsafe ships being sent to sea. The play was an immediate and wide-spread success, particularly enjo) 'cd by the left and the young. Not only was the drama about topics which were current and urgent, but the characterization, psychological insight, and the ability to expose the respected people and institutions for their hypocrisy were revolutionary. Ibsen was changing theatre in a major way.

A DOLL'S HOUSE

Narrator: Pillars of Society" was criticized for a weak ending, but Ibsen was certainly never guilty of that again. The rest of his plays had shocking endings, beginning with "A Doll's House." When the play ends, Nora walks out and leaves her husband and children to find her own life and personality. Torvald, her husband, has given her a bitter disappointment by failing to stand by her when it is revealed that long ago, she forged a check to get money to help him. The ending is one of his best known scenes:

Male: (Helmer): Nora, what is this?–this cold, set face?

Female: (Nora): Sit down: It will take some time; I have a lot to talk over with you.

Male: You alarm me, Nora! –and I don't understand you.

Female: No, that is just it. You don't understand me, and I have never understood you either, before tonight. No, you mustn't interrupt me. You must simply listen to what I say. Torvald, this is a settling of accounts.

Male: What do you mean by that?

Female: (After a short silence). Isn't there one thing that strikes you as strange in our sitting here like this?

Male: What is that?

Female: We have been married now eight years. Does it not occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation?

Male: What do you mean by serious?

Female: In all these eight years, longer than that, from the very beginning of our acquaintance, we have never exchanged a word on a serious subject.

Male: Was it likely that I would be continually and forever telling you about worries that you could not help me to bear?

Female: I am not speaking about business matters. I say that we have never sat down in earnest together to try and get at the bottom of anything.

Male: But, dearest Nora, would it have been any good to you?

Female: That is just it; you never understood me. I have been greatly wronged, Torvald, first by Papa and then greatly by you.

Male: What! By us two,– buy us two, who have loved you better than anyone else in he world?

Female: (shaking her head) You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me.

Male: Nora, what do I hear you saying?

Female: It is perfectly true, Torvald. When I was at home with papa, he told me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same opinions; and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because he would not have liked it. He called me his doll-child, and he played with me just as I used to play with my dolls. And when I came to live with you...

Male: What sort of expression is that to use about our marriage?

Female: (undisturbed) I mean that I was simply transferred from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you. When I look back on it, it seems to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman–just from hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life.

Male: How unreasonable and how ungrateful you are, Nora! Have you not been happy here?

Female: No, I have never been happy. I thought I was, but it has never really been so.

Male: Not–not happy!

Female: No, only merry. And you have always been so kind to me. But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been, Torvald. And that is why I am going to leave you now.

Male: (springing up). What do you say?

Female: I must stand quite alone, if I am to understand myself and everything about me. It is for that reason that I cannot remain with you any longer.

Male: Nora! Nora!

Female: I am going away from here now, at once. I am sure Christine will take me in for the night.

Male: You are out of your mind! I won't allow it! I forbid you!

Female: It is no use forbidding me anything any longer. I will take with me what belongs to myself. I will take nothing from you, either now or later.

Male: To desert your home, your husband, and your children! And you don't consider what people will say!

Female: I cannot consider that at all. I only know that it is necessary for me.

Male: It's shocking. This is how you would neglect your most sacred duties.

Female: What do you consider my most sacred dudes?

Male: Do I need to tell you that? Are they not your dudes to your husband and your children?

Female: I have odier dudes just as sacred.

Male: That you have not. What dudes could diose be.

Female: Duties to myself.

Male: Before all else, you are a wife and modier.

Female: I don't believe that any longer. I believe before all else I an a reasonable human being'just as you are, or, at all events, that I must try and become one.

Male: You are ill, Nora; you are delirious; I almost diink you are out of your mind.

Female: :I have never felt my mind so clear and certain as tonight.

Male: And it is with a clear and certain mind diat you forsake your husband and your children?

Female: Yes, it is.

Male: Then there is only one possible explanation.

Female: What is that?

Male: You do not love me anymore.

Female: Now, that is just it. It gives me great pain, Torvald, for you have always been so kind to me, but I cannot help it, I do not love you any more.

Male: (regaining his composure) Is that a clear and certain conviction, too?

Female: Yes, absolutely clear and certain. That is the reason why I will not stay here any longer.

Male: (sadly) I see, I see. An abyss has opened between us–there is no denying it. But, Nora, would it not be possible to fill it up?

Female: As I am now, I am no wife for you.

Male: I have it in me to become a different man.

Female: Perhaps–if your doll is taken away from you.

Male: But Nora! To part from you! No, no, Nora, I can't understand that idea.

Female: That makes ii all the more certain that it must be done.

Male: Nora, Nora, not now! Wait 'till tomorrow.

Female: I cannot spend the night in a strange man's room. Good-bye, 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.

Male: But some day, Nora–some day?

Female: How can I tell? I have no idea what is going to become of me. I have put the keys here. The maids know all about everything in the house–better than I do. I know I shall often think of you and the children and this house.

Male: May I write you, Nora? Let me help you if you are in want.

Female: No. I can receive nothing from a stranger.

Male: Nora, can I ever be anything more than a stranger to you?

Female: (taking her bag) Ah, Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen.

Male: Tell me what that would be?

Female: Both you and I would have to be so changed that–Oh, Torvald, I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening.

Male: But I will believe in it. Tell me? So changed that–?

Female: That our life together would be a real wedlock. Good-bye. (she goes out)

Male: (sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands) Nora! Nora! (looks round, and rises) Empty. She is gone. (A hope flashes across his mind) The most wonderful thing of all–?

(The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.)

Narrator: It was said that the shutting of that door echoed across Scandinavia. "A Doll's House" exploded like a bomb. People saw it as attacking marriage and morals. In that terrible moment when the front door slams offstage and the audience realizes that is the ending, it comes as a shock to realize Nora would actually leave him. Ibsen became the hero of those pushing for women's rights, though he never accepted that role as he meant to be pushing for the freedom of all people from traditional roles. It caused a tremendous amount of debate. That, of course, is what Ibsen enjoyed–causing people to think.

Ibsen said that each time one of his books came out it brought a batde, but to him battle was a joy and peace a breathing space until he could take up a new struggle.

GHOSTS

Narrator: If he wanted controversy, he certainty found it in "Ghosts."

It is the story of a woman who leaves her philandering husband, is persuaded by the pastor to return home, does so, and bears a son who turns out to have inherited his father's syphilis. It referred to venereal disease, defended free love, and suggested that under certain circumstances even incest might be justified. And talk about shocking endings: in this ending the son hands his

mother some poison and asks her to kill him when it is clear he is going insane from the disease. At the last moment we see the mother standing in front of the son trying to decide whether or not to kill him–we don't know if she does or not.

Ibsen was writing about his standard themes: individual freedom, leaving the past behind, the evils of narrow minds, the hollowness of great reputations. Ghosts has been called the first great tragedy written about middle class people. Later it was seen as a masterpiece, but at the time it was not seen as anything but pornography. The reviews;

Male: The play is one of the filthiest things ever written in Scandinavia.

Female: "Ghosts" is a repulsive pathological phenomenon which by undermining the morality of our social order, threatens its foundations.

Male: Complete silence would, in our opinion, be the most fitting reception for such a work.

Female: The most unpleasant book we have read for a long while.

Male: It is as though Ibsen had taken enjoyment in saying all the worst things he knew, and in saying them in the most outrageous way he could conceive."

Narrator: In fact, the book did not sell, and book stores sent thousands of them back to the publisher. All Scandinavian theatres refused to put the play on. It was nine years before a Swedish theatre company brought the play to Christiania, and almost 20 years before a Norwegian theatre company produced it. To show you times haven't changed, the young people tried 10 sneak copies of this dirty book.

So what theatre would be first to show such a play? The world premier was in, of all places, Chicago where it was presented in Norwegian to the Scandinavian community and then toured the Midwest. It was the first play of Ibsen's that Americans saw!

Ibsen's response to the critics:

Male: (Ibsen) It may well be that in certain respects this play is some what audacious. But I thought the time had come when a few boundary marks had to be shifted. And it was much easier for me, as an elder writer, to do this than for the many younger writers who might want to do something of the kind. I was prepared for a storm to break over me; but one can't run away from such things. That would have been cowardice. What has most depressed me has been not the attacks themselves, but the lack of guts which has been revealed in the ranks of so-called liberals in Norway.

AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

Narrator: In fact, Ibsen was so disgusted by the liberals and the liberal press, that he aimed his next book at them.

The play tells the story of a doctor at a small spa who discovers that the water of the baths are contaminated and must be shut down. He sees himself as a great hero for saving the people from certain illness and death. But because most of the people's incomes depend on the spa, the public turns against him and calls him an enemy of the people. The liberal newspapermen and the leader of the workers who first supported him lost their courage in the face of the mob and when they learned money might come out to their pockets to pay for cleaning up the baths. In the fourth act, Ibsen has the doctor expressing his own frustrations about the blind ignorance of the common people and the politicians who lead them astray:

Male: (Dr. Stockman): I can't stand politicians! I've had all I can take of them! They're like billy-goats in a plantation of young trees! They destroy everthing! They stand in a free man's way, whichever way he turns, and what I should like best would be to see them exterminated like any other vermin.

The most dangerous enemies of truth and freedom are the majority! Yes, the solid, liberal, bloody majority–they are the ones we have to fear! Who form the majority in any country? The wise, or the fools? I think we'd all have to agree that the fools are in a terrifying, overwhelming majority all over the world! But in the name of God it can't be right that the fools should rule the wise! Yes, yes, you can shout me down. But you can't say I'm wrong! The majority has the power, unfortunately–but the majority is not right! The ones who are right are a few isolated individuals like me. The minority is always right!

Narrator: The doctor's landlord throws him out, his patients refuse to come, and the mob breaks the windows in his house. In a town meeting, they vote to declare him AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE. He is tempted to run to America, but decides to stay and fight. He wants to teach his sons to grow into honest, intelligent men who will take up the fight when he is gone. In the ending he talks with his wife:

Male: (Dr. Stockmann): Then, my boys, you'll chase all those damned politicians into the Atlantic Ocean!

Female: (Mrs. Stockmann): Let's hope it wouln't be the politicians who'll chase you out, Thomas.

Male: Are you out of your mind, Catherine? Chase me out? Now, when I am the strongest man in town?

Female: The stongest–now?

Male: Yes! I'll go further! I am one of the stongest men in the whole world. Hush! You mustn't talk about it yet. But I've made a great discovery!

Female: Not again!

Male: Yes–yes! The fact is, you see, that the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone.

Narrator: Of course he is also referring to himself, standing alone in exile in Germany, criticizing his coutrymen in Norway.

This play insulted all the people in any party. The cartoon on the back of your program came out after the book was published showing that in "The League of Youth" he insulted the left and the right enjoyed it, in "Pillars of Society" he insulted the right, and the left applauded. In "An Enemy of the People" he insulted everyone. But theatres were eager to put in on, even though Ibsen had also been insulting theatre managers for their cowardice in refusing to produce "Ghosts." The play with its speeches against authority and demand for the truth was extremely popular in coutries which were undergoing revolutionary changes. One audience in Russia stormed the stage to shake Dr. Stockmann's hand.

The theme of all four of these plays is how important it is to discover who you really are and to try to become that person in spite of the restrictions of society.

PHSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMAS

Narrator: After these plays were finished came the era ofSigmund Freud, and Ibsen became interested in the ideas of hypnosis and other psychological theories being proposed at the time. He also made another return trip to Norway and was again disappointed by the politics he found there. He began to lose interest in politics altogether and concentrated more on individual people. Instead of brave heros of the social plays, these plays explored human weaknesses.

His last eight plays were psychological dramas. They showed real people with serious flaws and complex characters, which was a big change for the audiences of the time. They expected to be entertained and uplifted by plays. These last plays are accepted by modern audiences because we are much more used to this type of play or movie. We have grown up with movies like "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe, and "Midnight Cowboy" and are used to entertainment showing us the seamy sides of life. But it was a shock to the people of the 1800s.

The first of these plays was "The Wild Duck." It is actually a comedy, though it was one of the first plays to combine comedy and tragedy. In other words–real life. It is considered by many to be his best play and is popular with theatre companies. The characters are so real, and we can laugh at them and care for them at the same time. Ibsen himself felt close to the characters:

Male: (Ibsen): For the last four months I have worked at it every day; it is not without a certain feeling of regret that I part from it. Long, daily associadon with persons in this play has endeared them to me, in spite of their manifold failings; I am not without hope that they may find good and kind friends among the great reading public.

Narrator: The play does show Ibsen's contempt for some people, pardcularly this time an interfering idealist who was destroying the lives of others. This idealist wanted all marriages to be laid on the foundation of truth, so he told the husband his wife had had an affair with another and that her daughter was not his. This idealist is confronted by a doctor who sees the harm he is doing. (The two voices would actually be two men):

Female: (Dr. Rolling): You're a sick man, you see.

Male: (gregers): You're right about that, at least.

Female: Yes. Yours is a complicated case. First you've got that blasted Integrity-Fever to contend with; then, what's worse, you live in a constant delirium of hero worship; it's absolutely necessary for you to look up to and adore something outside yourself.

Male: It would inevitably have to be something outside myself.

Female: But you make such riduculous mistakes about these imaginary paragons of yours! Why do you persist in presenting your Claim of the Ideal to people who are totally insolvent?

Male: Why do you spend so much time with Hjalmar Ekdal, if this is your opinion of him?

Female: I'm a doctor of sorts, you know–God help me! I feel obliged to look after the sick people who live under the same roof with me.

Male: So you think Hjalmar Ekdal is sick, too?

Female: Most people are sick, unfortuately.

Male: May I ask you what cure you're using in Hjalmar's case?

Female: My usual one. I try to discover the Basic Lie–the pet illusion– that makes life possible; and then I foster it.

Male: The basic lie? Surely I misunderstood.

Female: No, no, that's what I said: the Basic Lie that makes life possible. And my method is infallible; I've used it on Molvik too; I've convinced him he's demonic–that did the trick for him.

Male: You mean he's not demonic?

Female: What the Hell does it mean: to be demonic? It's a lot of nonsense I invented to make life possible for him. Without that, the poor, harmless wretch would have gone under years ago–in agony of despair and self-contempt.

Male: He's gone a long way from the ideals of his youth.

Female: I wish you'd stop using that foreign work ideals. We have a perfiectly good one of our own: lies.

Male: You seem to think the two things are related!

Female: They are: they're as alike as typhoid and malignant fever.

Male: I shall never give up until I've rescued Hjalmar from your clutches, Dr. Relling.

Female: So much the worse for him. Rob the average man of his basic lie and you rob him of his happiness as well.

Narrator: When Hjalmar learns that their daughter is not really his child, he rejects her and tells her to get away from him. She doesn't understand what has happened except her father hates her, and in the end she kills herself. The critics of the day were disgusted by the gloomy outcome and couldn't understand why Ibsen was writing these things. Some have suggested that the was writing about himself: The uncompromising idealist who brings unhappiness to those he loves most.

The rest of the plays were dark, tragic and hard to understand. Part of the reason audiences of the times had difficulty understanding them was that Ibsen used a new technique of doing away with long speeches and relied instead on conversation among characters. People had to figure out things that had happened in the past and inner thoughts just by the conversation.

His next play was "Hedda Gabler" about a woman with a large ego and need for power. She uses that power to destroy the people around her. When someone finally gets power over her, she can't stand it and kills herself.

At this time, Ibsen was becoming known all over Europe, and some Norwegians were embarrassed that the first plays some people saw coming from Norway were so gloomy.

By 1891, at the age of 63, Ibsen was longing for the ocean. For 27 years he had lived in furnished rented rooms which were never meant to be a home. He came back to Norway for a visit. He took a tour up the west coast and was sometimes found just staring for hours out on the ocean. This time he was so famous that everyone recognized his value to Norway, and he was well recieved. He was an honored guest at many celebrations. He saw a performance of Hedda Gabler at the Christiania Theatre which was well received. He decided to stay.

So his last four plays were written in Norway and they were more and more about himself.

In "The Master Builder", the theme of the play is an old man's fear of, and yearning for, youth.

Male: "Unhappy love is when two people who love each other get married and feel they don't suit each other and cannot live happily together."

Narrator: Older man and young woman. It is believed the lead character was a self portrait, a ruthless old man who despised the world and neglected his wife:

Male: He was a man somewhat akin to me–arrogant and ruthless, ready to sacrifice the happiness of those close to me in order to further my ambition, and with a longing for and fear of youth. I was a master builder of art

Narrator: One of his friends with whom he fought bitterly was the famous actor, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson– the man they almost named Sons of Norway after. He was the first to mention Ibsen in America. It came to pass that Ibsen's son married Bjørnson's daughter and the families were joined. Ibsen's son campaigned for the separation of Norway from Sweden and antagonized the conservative Swedish government so had difficutly finding a job. Once again an Ibsen was ahead of his time and was a trouble maker.

His final play, "When We Dead Awaken," is the final accounting of himself. The character of Arnold Rubek is a self-portriate at the age of 71. The aging artist is restless in his marriedlife, restless in the homeland to which he had returned after a long time abroad, restless inhis art, and shocked to finally realize that to reject love is to reject life.

His plays were translated into many languages and he was honored with parades and banquets all over Europe. As the rest of Europe were seeing the plays for the first time, the same reactions came out. The young and the intellectuals loved him; the critics and much of the public was shocked and disgusted. Actresses loved his plays for the strong female roles.

The plays were seen as gloomy because he was writing about people with faults and offered no redemption at the end. He still had contempt for the masses as well as for the hypocrisy of leaders. He knew he was one of the greatest men living and few were equal to him. He knew he was often thought of as "An Enemy of the People", but he knew he was right.

Male: Ibsen suffered a stroke in 1900. He lived six more years as an invalid cared for by his loyal wife. He mellowed out and enjoyed the few visitors his wife allowed in. He died in May of 1906 at the age of 78.

Narrator: In these few minutes tonight we cannot even scratch the surface of this fascinating man and the times in which he lived. I would highly recommend the biography on the program from which I took most of the hisotrical materials, IBSEN: a Biography, by Michael Meyer. You can read for yourselves about his complex personality–his petty fights with friends, how he seemed to get along much better with women, and in fact was very fond of young women in his later years, about his huge need to have his ego stroked after his humble beginning, about his having to be carried home by his friends after many nights of drinking, about his isolation from people, about how cowardly he was in the face of physical danger, but also what a genius he was.

And before you get too defensive about how he treated our homeland, think about what fun he could have with modern America. Think of the satire he would have written about everything from our politicians to the freemen to the average American sitting in front of TV sit-coms. I wish he were still here. He would have a lot of fun stirring things up, making people think.