

Heredity in a doll's house

[Science](#), [Genetics](#)



One major topic incorporated in Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll House* is the influence of heredity on a person. Ibsen seems to think that heredity is responsible for all faults in a person's existence. Even what modern-day scientists would classify as environmental factors are considered heredity in Ibsen's play. The first discussion of inherited traits comes barely a dozen pages into the play. Helmer is telling Nora how she is a spendthrift: HELMER. You're an odd little one. Exactly the way your father was. . . . It's deep in your blood. Yes, those things are hereditary, Nora. Most of the discussions having to do with heredity seem to be accusing the person of inheriting an ill-suited trait. This could be because in general people want to appear as though everything good that happens to them is a direct result of something they themselves did. Anything bad that happens is always someone else's fault. Also, characters in the story place such credence upon the concept of heredity that one does not want to give his sons a bad start in life due to his bad "genes." Krogstad is an example: "My boys are growing up. For their sakes, I'll have to win back as much respect as possible here in town." Helmer, perhaps more than any other character, puts much faith into this system. He remarks, "Because that kind of atmosphere of lies infects the whole life of a home. Every breath the children take in is filled with the germs of something degenerate." Further, "Oh, I've seen it often enough as a lawyer. Almost everyone who goes bad early in life has a mother who's a chronic liar." Heredity plays a large part in setting up the belief systems of the characters such that the background provided in the first act carries through to its eventual conclusion in the final act. The power of heredity to shape the play is shown by the last line of the first act, uttered by Nora: "

Hurt my children-! Poison my home? That's not true. Never. Never in all the world."