

# Women's suffrage in literature



Throughout history during the suffrage movement women were treated as unequals of men. The suffrage movement was as quoted, was the struggle for the right of women to vote and run for office and is part of the overall women's rights movement. In other words it was a time where women wanted to speak out and go against the social norms of society and wanted to have the same opportunities and rights as men did during this time period.

This movement began officially in 1848 when a woman's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York. The author Henrik Ibsen, who wrote the very popular title *A Doll's House* was one of the first men during the time period of the suffrage movement to really bring the issue of women being treated unequally to the general public. In this book he showed that women were being treated as unequals and that they will eventually learn to speak out and go against the social norms of society. He tried to show this through his characters in the book, but he mostly shows this through Nora, Kristine Linde, and Nora's husband Torvald. He used these specific characters because throughout the whole book, Nora was treated very badly, and unequal to Torvald and Ibsen shows how she started in a bad place, where she was mistreated, and trapped to in the end where she gains the courage to stand up for herself and walk away from the miserable marriage she was in. Moreover, in this book Ibsen is showing an accurate portrayal of how women were treated as unequals during the suffrage movement.

Nora Helmer who was married to Torvald Helmer was the main character of *A Doll's House*. Nora was treated as most of the other married women during the suffrage movement were treated. She was treated as unequal, to her

husband and she was constantly made upset and was reprimanded for pretty much everything she was doing. For example, Nora was treated very poorly throughout the whole play always having to be afraid and back down from the way she actually feels and Ibsen uses her to represent how a women in this time period were portrayed by being constantly treated as if she is an unequal to Torvald and having him treat her as a pet and name call etc. He does this when, You are talking like a child. You understand nothing about the society you live in. (Direct Quote pg 83 speech four Torvald). This quote shows that he is telling Nora she doesn't understand anything, and that she deserves to be treated this way basically saying that it was a very normal thing. Also Ibsen uses Nora to show that women were treated as unequals because in the early 1800s, women were second-class citizens. Women were not encouraged to obtain a real education or pursue a professional career. After marriage, women did not have the right to own their own property, keep their own wages, or sign a contract. In addition, all women were denied the right to vote. Women were thought of as secondary citizens and they did not have the same rights or abilities as men did in a society and Ibsen uses Nora to expose this idea throughout the book.

Ibsen uses Torvald to show the stereotypical husband during the suffrage era. Torvald was the typical husband during the era of suffrage, and he treated Nora as less than him as if they aren't equal at all. He calls her all of these demeaning names that make her feel as if she was a child compared to him. An example of this was, What do we call my pretty little pet when it runs away with all the money. (pg 4) This quote is important to the point that Ibsen is trying to show because he is referring to her as an animal, and this is

how most men during this time period treated women and showed an accurate way that they were talked to. Ibsen uses Torvald to expose what was going on during this time period and painted a accurate picture of a husbands roles during this time period and those were to make the decisions and make the money.

Ms Linde was put into the book to show what living was like for an independent woman during this time period, how they were and what they eventually could have been without a man ruling their lives. Ibsen used her character the way he did to show contrast between how she lived and how Nora lived. She shows a contrast because she goes against the social norms of society solely by being an independent woman. For example, Ms Linde goes out and gets a job at the bank, instead of dependending on a husband's income which was very uncommon. This was uncommon because women had to run everything by their husband before they did it like Nora always had to before she did everything as if she needed permission. Kristine evaluates Nora and her relationship and learns that Nora and Torvald hide everything from each other and Torvald only uses Nora for looks, and that he only loved the idea of being married and having someone. In contrast, Kristine decides to be the opposite of that, showing that she can last in a society on her own, and she doesn't need to rely on anyone else for anything and that she can make it through on her own. She took care of her sick mother and two brothers with no man making any money to help, she did it all on her own. An example of this is, My mother was still alive; she was bedridden and helpless. And then I had my two young brothers to look after as well. I didn't think I would be justified in refusing them.(pg 11 Linde). This

shows that Ms Linde did what she had to do in life to set priorities to work and take care of her family before loving someone else, and having them make decisions for her.

In conclusion Ibsen shows the accurate portrayal of women during the suffrage era through his characters. They all represented the different roles in society. Nora plays the role of a wife who is controlled by her husband in the beginning of the story, and evolves and decided that she needed to walk away from her family in order to be free. Torvald is the controlling husband of the time period who wouldnt let his wife make any of her own decisions and controled everything in her life. Mrs. Linde shows what every woman wants to be, free and independent to make their own decisions about what they wanted to do. This is why Ibsen used these characters to represent an accurate portreyal about how women were treated unfairly during the suffrage movement.