

## The opening stage directions

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Read through the following which are the stage directions at the beginning of the play and then answer the questions that follow, after discussing them with a partner:

### ACT ONE

A large, attractively furnished drawing room, decorated in dark colours. In the rear wall, a wide doorway with curtains drawn back. The doorway opens into a smaller room in the same style as the drawing-room. In the right wall of the front room, a folding door that leads to the hall. In the left wall opposite, a glass door, with curtains similarly drawn back.

Through the panes one can see part of an overhanging verandah and trees in autumn colours. In the foreground is an oval table, with tablecloth and chairs around it. By the right wall, a wide, dark porcelain stove, a high-backed armchair, a cushioned footstool, and two taborets. In the right-hand corner, a settee with a small round table in front. Nearer, on the left and slightly out from the wall, a piano. On either side of the doorway in back, étagères with terra-cotta and majolica ornaments. Against the back wall of the inner room, a sofa, a table, and a couple of chairs can be seen. Above this sofa hangs a portrait of a handsome, elderly man in a general's uniform. Over the table, a hanging lamp with an opalescent glass shade. A number of bouquets of flowers are placed about the drawing room in vases and glasses. Others lie on the tables. The floors in both rooms are covered with thick carpets. Morning light. The sun shines in through the glass door.

When answering the questions think carefully and do not make comments such as, 'Because Ibsen felt like it,' or 'Because autumn is pretty.' Think about what props and settings might represent. If you can, consider different interpretations of the play; for example, think about how the props might be read by a feminist critic or by a social historical critic.

1. What are your first impressions of the stage?
2. Why do you think Ibsen specifies that the drawing room is decorated in dark colours?
3. Why do you think there are so many spaces (the drawing room, a smaller room, a hallway, doors out to a verandah) shown on the stage?
4. What might the glass doors looking out on to the garden represent?
5. Why is the play set in the autumn?
6. The stage seems cluttered with furniture; why might this be?
7. What could the portrait of the General represent?
8. The stage has a number of bouquets set out on it; what sort of impression does this give?
9. Why do you think the stage has thick carpets?
10. Why does the play open in the morning?