

Sensory Guide for *Hedda Gabler*

Play Summary

Act 1

A morning in September, 1890

At the beginning of Act 1, **Jorgen Tesman** and **Hedda** have just moved into their new home post-honeymoon. **Aunt Julle** welcomes them home and brings news that her sister Aunt Rina continues to be in very poor health. **Mrs. Elvsted** arrives, bringing news that Tesman's old academic rival, **Eilert Lovborg**, is back in town and has just published a successful book, which she helped him write. She has fallen in love with Lovborg and is worried that he will relapse into alcoholism because he is back in the city. Hedda gets Mrs. Elvsted to confess that she left her husband up north to follow Lovborg. Tesman writes a letter inviting Lovborg over that evening. **Judge Brack** arrives and announces that Lovborg will likely be a candidate for the university professorship Tesman is expecting for himself.

Act 2

Late afternoon on the same day

While Tesman is out buying books—including Lovborg's—Judge Brack visits with Hedda as he waits for Tesman. After Hedda confesses her boredom with her honeymoon and situation, Brack proposes that, perhaps, they have an affair. Lovborg arrives anxious to read his manuscript to Tesman. Judge Brack invites Lovborg to a party at his home that evening. Lovborg declines, preferring to have tea with Hedda and Mrs. Elvsted. While Brack and Tesman have a drink before leaving, Lovborg and Hedda converse over a photo album. Lovborg questions Hedda's marriage and confronts her about the nature of their own intimate friendship in the past. Hedda encourages Lovborg to attend the party after all so that he can prove he has control over his alcoholism. Lovborg, Tesman, and Brack leave for a party. Mrs. Elvsted is very upset, but Lovborg promises to return in a few hours to escort her home.

Intermission

Act 3

The next morning

Act 3 begins at dawn with Mrs. Elvsted and Hedda waiting for Lovborg to return. Hedda encourages Mrs. Elvsted to lay down in her bedroom until the men arrive. Tesman arrives and tells his wife that he has possession of Lovborg's manuscript, which Lovborg dropped while walking home drunk. Tesman receives word from Aunt Julle that Aunt Rina is at death's door; he leaves to see his aunts and Hedda hides the manuscript. Lovborg arrives and tells Mrs. Elvsted that he has destroyed the manuscript, and can no longer be with her. She leaves immediately. Then, Lovborg confesses to Hedda that he has lost the manuscript and that he wants to kill himself. Hedda

Sensory Guide for *Hedda Gabler*

does not tell him she has the manuscript and gives him one of her pistols with orders to “make it beautiful.” He leaves, and she burns the manuscript.

Act 4

That evening

At the beginning of Act 4, Hedda is dressed in black, and Aunt Julle comes to bring word of Aunt Rina’s death. Tesman arrives, bewildered and anxious. After Aunt Julle leaves, he confesses to Hedda that he’s worried about Lovborg. Hedda confesses that she burned the manuscript. Hedda says she did it for the sake of Tesman’s career. Mrs. Elvsted arrives worried that something horrible has happened to Lovborg as she cannot find him and has heard horrible rumors. Judge Brack brings news that Lovborg is near death at the hospital. He reports that Lovborg shot himself. Hedda exclaims that there is beauty in Lovborg’s death because he settled accounts with himself. Tesman and Mrs. Elvsted immediately sit down to try to reconstruct his manuscript in honor of his death. In private, Brack tells Hedda that it was actually an ugly death, and that the wound was not self-inflicted. He confronts Hedda about the pistol that Lovborg had, and the scandal that might ensure for Hedda. Judge Brack asserts that it will all be okay if he keeps quiet, and Hedda understands that she will be at his mercy forever. Hedda leaves the room and, after playing the piano wildly for some moments, shoots herself.

Sensory Guide for *Hedda Gabler*

Characters



Mrs. Hedda Tesman

A newlywed woman from a military family who is deeply unhappy and bored with her marriage to Jorgen Tesman



Miss Juliane Tesman

Jorgen's aunt, a kind woman who raised Jorgen along with her sister Rina. She puts up her pension as collateral for the newlywed's new furnishings.



Judge Brack A respected Judge and family friend who arranges the Tesman's finances and desires an intimate friendship with Hedda.



Mrs. Thea Elvsted

A woman who was once in a relationship with Jorgen and was a schoolmate of Hedda's. She is married to an older man but has fallen in love with Eilert Lovborg, who tutored her stepchildren.

Sensory Guide for *Hedda Gabler*

Characters



Jorgen Tesman

Hedda's husband, a respected scholar of cultural history in the Middle Ages, who is more interested in his research than in his wife.



Berte

A dedicated maid to the Tesman family who has been in their service for many years. She is now maid to Hedda and Jorgen in their new home



Eilert Lovborg

A brilliant, but self-destructive visionary and the rival of Jorgen. He is working to rebuild his reputation, with the help of Mrs. Elvsted, after struggling with alcoholism and has been sober for two years.

Sensory Guide for *Hedda Gabler*

Things to be aware of

- Long periods of **reverberating noise** before each Act.
- One (1) **gunshot** from a pistol onstage, with a **small amount of smoke** emitting from it. This happens shortly after the pause in the middle of the first act. (Approximately 45 minutes into the performance.)
- Two (2) **herbal cigarettes that emit smoke** are lit with a match on stage. They are able to be smelled from the audience in Act II
- **Theatrical smoke** emitting from a gas lamp.
- One (1) **herbal cigarette** that emits smoke is smoked onstage in Act IV
- Discussion of **self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide**
- One (1) **gunshot** heard from behind a curtain on stage. This is at the very end of the play.
- **Blood splatter** on furniture upstage in the last moments of Act IV.
- **Please ask an usher** (people in black clothing with a red “Yale Rep” nametag) if you have any questions about moments in the play.

