

UNIT 9

The Doll's House

Katherine Mansfield



Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit, the students will be able to:

- Engage in extended discussions and critiques considering other speakers' viewpoints and presenting one's own with clarity and coherence.
- Evaluate the particular elements of a story or drama (e.g., how the setting shapes the characters or plot).
- Identify rhyme schemes and figurative language in poems.
- Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.
- Identify and use compound prepositions and prepositional phrases in writing.
- Apply skills and strategies for idea generation, selection, development, organization and revision for a variety of writing purposes and text types.



Pre-reading:

- What do you think a doll's house could symbolize in a story about children?
- How might social status or family background influence friendships in a school setting?

When dear old Mrs. Hay went back to town after staying with the Burnells she sent the children a doll's house. It was so big that the carter and Pat carried it into the courtyard, and there it stayed, **propped** up on two wooden boxes beside the feed-room door. No harm could come to it; it was summer. And perhaps the smell of paint would have gone off by the time it had to be taken in. For, really, the smell of paint coming from that doll's house ("Sweet of old Mrs. Hay, of course; most sweet and generous!") — but the smell of paint was quite enough to make any one seriously ill, in Aunt Beryl's opinion. Even before the sacking was taken off. And when it was...

There stood the doll's house, a dark, oily, spinach green, picked out with bright yellow. Its two solid little chimneys, glued on to the roof, were painted red and white, and the door, gleaming with yellow **varnish**, was like a little slab of toffee. Four windows, real windows, were divided into panes by a broad streak of green. There was actually a tiny porch, too, painted yellow, with big lumps of **congealed** paint hanging along the edge.



While-reading

Why do you think the writer describes the doll's house in such a detailed and vivid language?

But perfect, perfect little house! Who could possibly mind the smell? It was part of the joy, part of the newness.

"Open it quickly, some one!"

The hook at the side was stuck fast. Pat prized it open with his penknife, and the whole house-front swung back, and---there you were, gazing at one and the same moment into the drawing-room and dining-room, the kitchen and two bedrooms. That is the way for a house to open! Why don't all houses open like that? How much more exciting than peering through the slit of a door into a mean little hall with a hat-stand and two umbrellas! That is-Isn't it? -what you long to know about a house when you put your hand on the knocker. Perhaps it is the way God opens houses at dead of night when He is taking a quiet turn with an angel...

"O-oh!" The Burnell children sounded as though they were in despair. It was too marvellous; it was too much for them. They had never seen anything like it in their lives. All the rooms were papered. There were pictures on the walls, painted on the paper, with gold frames complete. Red carpet covered all the floors except the kitchen; red plush chairs in the drawing-room, green in the dining-room; tables, beds with real bedclothes, a cradle, a stove, a dresser with tiny plates and one big jug. But what Kezia liked more than anything, what she liked frightfully, was the lamp. It stood in the middle of the dining-room table, an **exquisite** little amber lamp with a white globe. It was even filled all ready for lighting, though, of course, you couldn't light it. But there was something inside that looked like oil, and that moved when you shook it.



While-reading

Why might the little lamp be more meaningful to Kezia than the rest of the house's luxurious features?

The father and mother dolls, who sprawled very stiff as though they had fainted in the drawing-room, and their two little children asleep upstairs, were really too big for the doll's house. They didn't look as though they belonged. But the lamp was perfect. It seemed to smile at Kezia, to say, "I live here." The lamp was real.

The Burnell children could hardly walk to school fast enough the next morning. They burned to tell everybody, to describe, to—well—to **boast** about their doll's house before the school-bell rang.

"I'm to tell," said Isabel, "because I'm the eldest. And you two can join after. But I'm to tell first."

There was nothing to answer. Isabel was bossy, but she was always right, and Lottie and Kezia knew too well the powers that went with being eldest. They brushed through the thick buttercups at the road edge and said nothing.



While-reading

Do you think being bossy and being a leader are the same? Why or why not?

"And I'm to choose who's to come and see it first. Mother said I might."

For it had been arranged that while the doll's house stood in the courtyard they might ask the girls at school, two at a time, to come and look. Not to stay to tea, of course, or to come traipsing through the house. But just to stand quietly in the courtyard while Isabel pointed out the beauties, and Lottie and Kezia looked pleased...

But hurry as they might, by the time they had reached the tarred palings of the boys' playground the bell had begun to jangle. They only just had time to whip off their hats and fall into line before the roll was called. Never mind. Isabel tried to make up for it by looking very important and mysterious and by whispering behind her hand to the girls near her, "Got something to tell you at playtime."

Playtime came and Isabel was surrounded. The girls of her class nearly fought to put their arms round her, to walk away with her, to beam flatteringly, to be her special friend. She held quite a court under the huge pine trees at the side of the playground. Nudging, giggling together, the little girls pressed up close. And the only two who stayed outside the ring were the two who were always outside, the little Kelveys. They knew better than to come anywhere near the Burnells.

For the fact was, the school the Burnell children went to was not at all the kind of a place their parents would have chosen if there had been any choice. But there was none. It was the only school for miles. And the consequence was all the children in the neighbourhood, the Judge's little girls, the doctor's daughters, the storekeeper's children, the milkman's were forced to mix together. Not to speak of there being equal number of rude, rough little boys as well. But the line had to be drawn somewhere. It was drawn at the Kelveys. Many of the children, including the Burnells, were not allowed even to speak to them. They walked past the Kelveys with their heads in the air, and as they set the fashion in all matters of behaviour, the Kelveys were **shunned** by everybody. Even the teacher had a special voice for them, and a special smile for the other children when Lil Kelvey came up to her desk with a bunch of dreadfully common looking flowers.

They were the daughters of a spry, hardworking little washerwoman, who went about from house to house by the day. This was awful enough. But where was Mr. Kelvey? Nobody knew for certain. But everybody said he was in prison. So, they were the daughters of a washerwoman and a gaolbird. Very nice company for other people's children! And they looked it. Why Mrs. Kelvey made them so conspicuous was hard to understand. The truth was they were dressed in "bits" given to her by the people for whom she worked. Lil, for instance, who



While-reading

How does the narrator show that social discrimination was not just practised by the children but also by adults, including the teacher? What effect do you think this has on the Kelvey sisters?



While-reading

What does this description of the Kelvey sisters' clothing tell us about their social status?

was a stout, plain child, with big freckles, came to school in a dress made from a green art-serge table-cloth of the Burnell's, with red plush sleeves from the Logan's curtain. Her hat, perched on top of her high forehead, was a grown-up woman's hat, once the property of Miss. Lecky, the postmistress. It was turned up at the back and trimmed with a large scarlet quilt. What a little guy she looked! It was impossible not to laugh. And her little sister, our Else, wore a long white dress, rather like a nightgown, and a pair of little boy's boots. But whatever our Else wore she would have looked strange. She was a tiny wishbone of a child, with cropped hair and enormous solemn eyes—a little white owl. Nobody had ever seen her smile; she scarcely ever spoke. She went through life holding on to Lil, with a piece of Lil's skirt screwed up in her hand. Where Lil went our Else followed. In the playground, on the road going to and from school, there was Lil marching in front and our Else holding on behind. Only when she wanted anything, or when she was out of breath, our Else gave Lil a tug, a twitch, and Lil stopped and turned round. The Kelveys never failed to understand each other.

Now they hovered at the edge; you couldn't stop them listening. When the little girls turned round and sneered, Lil, as usual, gave her silly, shamefaced smile, but our Else only looked.

And Isabel's voice, so very proud, went on telling. The carpet made a great sensation, but so did the beds with real bedclothes, and the stove with an oven door.

When she finished Kezia broke in. "You've forgotten the lamp, Isabel."

"Oh, yes," said Isabel, "and there's a teeny little lamp, all made of yellow glass, with a white globe that stands on the dining-room table. You couldn't tell it from a real one."

"The lamp's best of all," cried Kezia. She thought Isabel wasn't making half enough of the little lamp. But nobody paid any attention. Isabel was choosing the two who were to come back with them that afternoon and see it. She chose Emmie Cole and Lena Logan. But when the others knew they were all to have a chance, they couldn't be nice enough to Isabel. One by one they put their arms round Isabel's waist and walked her off. They had something to whisper to her, a secret. "Isabel's my friend."

Only the little Kelveys moved away forgotten; there was nothing more for them to hear. Days passed, and as more children saw the doll's house, the fame of it spread. It became the one subject, the rage. The one question was, "Have you seen Burnell's doll's house? Oh, ain't it lovely!" "Haven't you seen it? Oh, I say!"

Even the dinner hour was given up to talking about it. The little girls sat under the pines eating their thick mutton sandwiches and big slabs of johnny cake spread with butter. While always, as near as they could get, sat the Kelveys, our Else holding on to Lil,



While-reading

How does the writer use contrast between the Burnell children and the Kelveys sisters during the lunch scene to highlight the theme of social exclusion?

listening too, while they chewed their jam sandwiches out of a newspaper soaked with large red blobs...

"Mother," said Kezia, "can't I ask the Kelveys just once?"

"Certainly not, Kezia."

"But why not?"

"Run away, Kezia; you know quite well why not."

At last, everybody had seen it except them. On that day the subject rather lagged. It was the dinner hour. The children stood together under the pine trees, and suddenly, as they looked at the Kelveys eating out of their paper, always by themselves, always listening, they wanted to be horrid to them. Emmie Cole started the whisper.

"Lil Kelvey's going to be a servant when she grows up."

"O-oh, how awful!" said Isabel Burnell, and she made eyes at Emmie. Emmie swallowed in a very meaning way and nodded to Isabel as she'd seen her mother do on those occasions.

"It's true--it's true--it's true," she said.

Then Lena Logan's little eyes snapped. "Shall I ask her?" she whispered.

"Bet you don't," said Jessie May.

"Pooh, I'm not frightened," said Lena. Suddenly she gave a little squeal and danced in front of the other girls. "Watch! Watch me! Watch me now!" said Lena. And sliding, gliding, dragging one foot, giggling behind her hand, Lena went over to the Kelveys. Lil looked up from her dinner. She wrapped the rest quickly away. Our Else stopped chewing. What was coming now?

"Is it true you're going to be a servant when you grow up, Lil Kelvey?" shrilled Lena. Dead silence. But instead of answering, Lil only gave her silly, shamefaced smile. She didn't seem to mind the question at all. What a sell for Lena! The girls began to titter.

Lena couldn't stand that. She put her hands on her hips; she shot forward. "Yah, yer father's in prison!" she hissed, spitefully.

This was such a marvellous thing to have said that the little girls rushed away in a body, deeply, deeply excited, wild with joy. Someone found a long rope, and they began skipping. And never did they skip so high, run in and out so fast, or do such daring things as on that morning.

In the afternoon Pat called for the Burnell children with the buggy and they drove home. There were visitors. Isabel and Lottie, who liked visitors, went upstairs to change their pinafores. But Kezia thieved out at the back. Nobody was about; she began to swing on the big white gates of the courtyard. Presently, looking along the road, she saw two little dots. They grew bigger, they were coming towards her. Now she could see that one was in front and one close behind. Now she could see that they were the



While-reading

Why do you think the other girls became so excited after Lena insulted Lil Kelvey?

Kelveys. Kezia stopped swinging. She slipped off the gate as if she was going to run away. Then she hesitated. The Kelveys came nearer, and beside them walked their shadows, very long, stretching right across the road with their heads in the buttercups. Kezia clambered back on the gate; she had made up her mind; she swung out.

"Hullo," she said to the passing Kelveys.

They were so **astounded** that they stopped. Lil gave her silly smile. Our Else stared.

"You can come and see our doll's house if you want to," said Kezia, and she dragged one toe on the ground. But at that Lil turned red and shook her head quickly.

"Why not?" asked Kezia.



While-reading

What emotions might Kezia be feeling right now?

Lil gasped, then she said, "Your ma told our ma you wasn't to speak to us."

"Oh, well," said Kezia. She didn't know what to reply. "It doesn't matter. You can come and see our doll's house all the same. Come on. Nobody's looking."

But Lil shook her head still harder.

"Don't you want to?" asked Kezia.

Suddenly there was a twitch, a tug at Lil's skirt. She turned round. Our Else was looking at her with big, **imploring** eyes; she was frowning; she wanted to go. For a moment Lil looked at our Else very doubtfully. But then our Else witched her skirt again. She started forward. Kezia led the way. Like two little stray cats they followed across the courtyard to where the doll's house stood.

"There it is," said Kezia.

There was a pause, Lil breathed loudly, almost snorted; our Else was still as a stone.

"I'll open it for you," said Kezia kindly. She undid the hook and they looked inside.

"There's the drawing-room and the dining-room, and that's the ----"

"Kezia!"

Oh, what a start they gave!

"Kezia!"

It was Aunt Beryl's voice. They turned round. At the back door stood Aunt Beryl, staring as if she couldn't believe what she saw.

"How dare you ask the little Kelveys into the courtyard?" said her cold, furious voice.

"You know as well as I do, you're not allowed to talk to them. Run away, children, run away at once. And don't come back again," said Aunt Beryl. And she stepped into the yard and shooed them out as if they were chickens.

"Off you go immediately!" she called, cold and proud.

They did not need telling twice. Burning with shame, shrinking together, Lil huddling along like her mother, our Else dazed, somehow they crossed the big courtyard and squeezed through the white gate.

"**Wicked**, disobedient little girl", said Aunt Beryl bitterly to Kezia, and she slammed the doll's house too.

The afternoon had been awful. A letter had come from Willie Brent, a terrifying, threatening letter, saying if she did not meet him that evening in Pulman's Bush, he'd come to the front door and ask the reason why! But now that she had frightened those little rats of the Kelveys and given Kezia a good scolding, her heart felt lighter. That ghastly pressure was gone. She went back to the house humming.

When the Kelveys were well out of sight of Burnells', they sat down to rest on a big red drain-pipe by the side of the road. Lil's cheeks were still burning; she took off the hat with the quill and held it on her knee. Dreamily they looked over the hay paddocks, past the creek, to the group of wattles where Logan's cows stood waiting to be milked. What were their thoughts?

Presently our Else nudged up close to her sister. But now she had forgotten the cross lady. She put out a finger and stroked her sister's quill; she smiled her rare smile.

"I seen the little lamp," she said, softly.
Then both were silent once more.



While-reading

Why does Aunt Beryl call Kezia wicked?



While-reading

Why do you think Else focuses on the lamp, just like Kezia?

Theme

The theme of *The Doll's House* by Katherine Mansfield is social class discrimination and the cruelty of prejudice in society. The story shows how children and adults treat others differently based on their social status and wealth. The Burnell sisters enjoy their privilege, while the Kelvey children are excluded and humiliated because of their lower class. Through the symbol of the beautiful doll's house, Mansfield highlights how material wealth creates division and injustice. Ultimately, the story teaches that kindness and equality are more important than social status.

About the author

Katherine Mansfield was a famous modernist short story writer born in 1888 in Wellington, New Zealand. She is well known for her innovative writing style that focuses on human emotions and everyday life. Mansfield spent much of her life in Europe, especially in England and France, where she became part of the literary modernist movement. Her stories often highlight themes such as class differences, childhood experiences, and social inequalities. Some of her well-known works include *The Garden Party and Other Stories* and *Bliss and Other Stories*.



Glossary

Words	Meanings
astounded	Shocked or greatly surprised
boast	to talk with excessive pride and self-satisfaction
congealed	changed from a fluid to a solid or semi-solid state
exquisite	extremely beautiful, delicate, and carefully made
imploring	making an earnest, passionate, and pleading request
propped	supported or held up by placing something underneath or against it
shunned	persistently avoided, ignored, or rejected out of dislike or disapproval
varnish	a hard, clear, glossy liquid applied to wood
wicked	evil or morally wrong



Reading and Critical Thinking

A. Answer the following questions:

1. Find and explain the meaning of the phrase "the smell of paint was strong" in the context of the story. What might it symbolically suggest?
2. Katherine Mansfield never openly criticizes society in direct statements. How does she subtly expose social cruelty through children's behaviour?
3. In what way is 'The Doll's House' itself a miniature model of the class society and social injustice?
4. Silence plays an important role in the story (especially the Kelvey sisters' silence). How does silence become a symbol of oppression?
5. Compare and contrast Kezia Burnell and Aunt Beryl. How do their actions reflect different values?
6. If you were Kezia, what would you say to your parents about letting Lil and Else Kelvey see the doll's house? Write a short dialogue.
7. Was Kezia right in letting the Kelveys see the doll's house without permission? Justify your answer with reasons.
8. Aunt Beryl's anger seems excessive when she drives the Kelvey sisters away. What personal insecurity or hidden fear might be motivating her behaviour?
9. Is the story more about childhood innocence or inherited prejudice? Justify your answer with evidence.
10. If the story were set in today's society, what form would social discrimination take? Would the message still remain powerful? Explain.

B. Choose the correct option.

1. Why might the author describe the doll's house as having a "dark, oily, spinach green" colour with "lumps of congealed paint"?

- a) to show that old Mrs. Hay had poor taste in gifts
- b) to suggest the house is slightly ugly and artificial, yet still prized by children who value novelty over beauty
- c) to indicate the paint was still wet and stinky
- d) to prove that the Burnells usually received better quality presents

2. How does Isabel's declaration "I'm to tell, because I'm the eldest" function within the family and social structure?

- a) It demonstrates her natural leadership abilities.
- b) It shows how age-based hierarchies are used to justify power and control over others.
- c) It proves she is her mother's favourite child.
- d) It reveals her insecurity about being forgotten.

3. Why does Kezia insist that "The lamp's best of all" when Isabel is showing off the doll's house?

- a) because the lamp is the most expensive item in the house
- b) because Kezia instinctively values warmth, light over mere material display
- c) because she wants to contradict Isabel and assert herself
- d) because the lamp was a separate gift just for her

4. Why do the other girls become "wild with joy" after Lena insults Lil about her father being in prison?

- a) They genuinely believe Lena has said something brave and clever.
- b) The cruelty reinforces their own social superiority and group solidarity against an outsider.
- c) They are relieved that Lena didn't target any of them instead.
- d) They think Lil will finally fight back and provide entertainment.

5. How does the teacher's treatment of Lil Kelvey—using a "special voice" for her—reinforce the story's larger themes?

- a) It shows that teachers must be strict to maintain classroom order.
- b) It demonstrates how adults formally sanction and model social exclusion for children.
- c) It proves Lil was not a very good student.
- d) It reveals the teacher's personal dislike of flowers.



Vocabulary and Grammar

Spot the Error:

1. Good night Rafia, I am happy to see you.
2. A snake stung Razzak in the leg.
3. Jameela gave me a page.
4. I, you and Fatima are friends.
5. I am yours' sincerely.
6. Shaheen is very better than Amjad.
7. Irha saw worth seeing sights in Murree.
8. Nighat is a miser girl.
9. Kiran opened the book at page 10.
10. Munawar made Bushra to stand.
11. Being naughty, the teacher punished Kinza badly.
12. Bilal is blind of an eye.
13. Although Zeeshaan is poor yet he is honest.
14. Neither Zaheer comes nor Bano.
15. Minha prefers to stand over sit.

KEY	evening	bit	paper	You, Fatima and I	yours	much	sights, worth-seeing
miserly	on	to	Kinza was beaten	in	yet	Neither does	standing to sitting



Oral Communication Skills



Activity 1: Role-Play Discussion (Group Activity)

Instructions for Students:

1. Divide the class into groups of five and each student will take one role:
 - i. Kezia
 - ii. Isabel
 - iii. Else Kelvey
 - iv. Aunt Beryl
 - v. a Narrator
2. Discuss the following situation:

"Day after the Kelvey sisters were driven away, the teacher asks each child to explain what happened."

3. Each student must speak for 1 to 2 minutes about character, explaining:
 1. how they felt.
 2. why they acted the way they did.
 3. whether they think it was right or wrong.



Writing Skills



Activity 1: Reimagining the Narrative — The Untold Story of the Kelvey Sisters

Activity Steps:

1. Close Reading & Evidence Gathering: Before writing, the students will revisit the story to collect "evidence" about the Kelvey sisters. In small groups, they should find quotes and details that describe:

- Their physical appearance and clothing e.g., the "pale pink" dress made from a tablecloth.
- Their actions and behaviour at school e.g., sitting apart, Lil's "shamefaced smile," Else's wide eyes.
- How other characters speak to and about them.
- The one moment of connection: Kezia showing them the lamp.

2. Creative Writing Task: The students will write a one-page diary entry. The challenge is to stay true to the character's voice and the story's events while creatively imagining their internal reactions. They must subtly integrate the evidence gathered in step 1 into their writing. For instance, Lil might write about the shame of her sandwich wrapped in newspaper, or Else might describe the lamp as a "warm, quiet friend".