

Facing Death

by August Strindberg

Exercise, Notes, Summary, Questions and Answers

(Exam focused Questions)

Class 12 English

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Summary

Facing Death is a one-act play by August Strindberg. The play takes place in the dining room of Monsieur Durand's boarding house. Durand is a widower and a former railway worker who has become bankrupt. To earn a living, he turns his house into a boarding house. He lives there with his three daughters, Theresa, Mary and Adele.

Durand's relationship with his daughters is painful. They despise him, blame him for the family's poverty and treat him cruelly. They believe that he is responsible for their miserable condition. Despite their behaviour, Durand continues to love and care for them.

The family's financial condition has become desperate. Durand has debts that he cannot repay, and the grocery, the baker and the butcher have sent their final bills. They refuse to provide more goods until the

outstanding payments are settled. The family cannot even afford basic food, and Durand is reduced to eating rat food.

Despite this poverty, Durand spends his last coins on candles to commemorate the death anniversary of his young son, Rene. His decision shows that he still carries deep grief over his son's death.

As the play develops, the audience learns more about the family's financial downfall. According to the supplied notes, Mrs. Durand was responsible for losing the family's inherited wealth through reckless gambling and speculation. However, she had taught her daughters to hate their father and blame him for their difficulties. After her death, Durand continues to protect her reputation by keeping the truth from his daughters. He accepts the blame rather than allowing them to think badly of their mother.

Durand's past also includes his decision to conceal his birthplace. The supplied notes connect this lie with his personal history, his marriage and his wish to protect his family's reputation. They also mention his connection with Switzerland and his past conflict with his homeland.

Durand's financial problems eventually reach a point where he sees no way to provide for his daughters. He has paid for fire insurance and plans to set fire to the house so that his daughters can receive 5,000 francs in compensation. He also intends to end his own life by drinking poison. He believes that the insurance money will help his daughters survive after his death.

At the end of the play, Durand drinks poison and sets the house on fire. His actions bring the play to a tragic conclusion. Although his daughters

have treated him with hatred and disrespect, he sacrifices his life in the hope of securing their future.

The play presents the suffering of a poor father whose love for his family continues despite financial hardship, grief and rejection. It also explores the effects of poverty on family relationships and the tragic consequences of long-standing resentment and misunderstanding.

2. Important themes

2.1 Parental love and sacrifice

Durand continues to love his daughters even though they despise and mistreat him. His final plan is intended to provide them with money after his death. His actions show the extent of his concern for their future.

2.2 Poverty and financial hardship

Poverty shapes almost every aspect of the Durand family's life. The family has lost its inherited wealth, accumulated debts and struggled to obtain basic food. Durand's inability to provide for his daughters contributes to the tension within the household.

2.3 Money and family relationships

The lack of money damages relationships between family members. Durand's daughters blame him for their poverty, while creditors refuse to provide further goods because of unpaid bills. Financial problems become a source of resentment, humiliation and conflict.

2.4 Hatred and misunderstanding

Durand's daughters believe that their father is responsible for the family's suffering. Their attitude is influenced by their mother's teaching. Durand keeps silent about his wife's role in the financial downfall because he wants to protect her reputation. This silence allows the misunderstanding to continue.

2.5 The influence of the past

Events that occurred before the main action of the play continue to affect the family. Mrs. Durand's financial decisions, her influence over the daughters and Durand's concealed personal history help explain the family's present condition.

2.6 Tragedy and hopelessness

Durand faces financial ruin, hunger, debt and rejection by his own children. He sees no way to improve the family's circumstances and chooses a tragic course of action. The ending presents the destructive effects of prolonged suffering and hopelessness.

3. Character information

3.1 Monsieur Durand

Monsieur Durand is the central character of the play. He is a widower, a former railway worker and the owner of a boarding house. After losing his financial security, he turns his home into a place where people can stay to earn a living.

Durand is a loving and protective father, although his relationship with his daughters is deeply troubled. They blame him for their poverty and treat him without affection. Nevertheless, he continues to worry about their future.

He also carries grief over the death of his son, Rene. His decision to spend money on candles for the anniversary of Rene's death shows that he has not forgotten his child despite his desperate financial condition.

Durand keeps quiet about his wife's responsibility for the family's financial downfall because he wants to protect her reputation. This decision contributes to his daughters' continued resentment toward him.

His final plan reveals the depth of his concern for his daughters. He intends to sacrifice his life and set fire to the house so that the insurance compensation will provide them with money. His character is shaped by love, suffering, secrecy and financial desperation.

3.2 Theresa

Theresa is one of Durand's three daughters. The supplied notes portray her as especially influenced by her mother and particularly cruel toward her father.

She treats Durand disrespectfully. For example, she throws away the matches when he tries to light his tobacco and snatches the glass of milk from him. These actions illustrate the hostility within the household.

Theresa's behaviour also demonstrates how her mother's influence

continues after the mother's death.

3.3 Mary and Adele

Mary and Adele are Durand's other two daughters. They live with him in the boarding house. According to the supplied notes, the daughters collectively blame their father for the family's financial difficulties and despise him.

The source provides fewer individual details about Mary and Adele than it does about Theresa, so their personalities cannot be described in the same depth without additional material.

3.4 Mrs. Durand

Mrs. Durand is dead before the main action of the play, but her influence remains important. According to the supplied notes, she lost the family's inherited wealth through reckless gambling and speculation.

She also taught her daughters to blame and hate their father. Durand conceals her responsibility because he wants to protect her reputation and prevent his daughters from questioning their mother's goodness.

Her past actions help explain the financial crisis and the hostility between Durand and his daughters.

3.5 Rene

Rene is Durand's son, who died during childhood. Although he is no longer alive, his memory remains important to Durand. Durand spends

his last coins on candles to commemorate the anniversary of Rene's death. This detail reveals his continuing grief and emotional attachment to his son.

4. Important events

Durand's financial downfall: He becomes bankrupt and turns his house into a boarding house to earn a living.

The family's growing debt: The grocery, baker and butcher demand payment and refuse to provide further goods.

The family's hunger: Durand's household cannot afford basic food, and he is reduced to eating rat food.

The remembrance of Rene: Durand spends his last coins on candles for his deceased son's death anniversary.

The truth about Mrs. Durand: The notes reveal that she lost the family's inherited wealth through gambling and speculation.

The daughters' hostility: Durand's daughters continue to blame and mistreat him.

Durand's insurance plan: He plans to set fire to the house so his daughters can receive 5,000 francs.

The tragic ending: Durand drinks poison and sets fire to the house in the hope of helping his daughters financially.

5. Difficult vocabulary

Word or phrase : Meaning in the context of the play

Widower : A man whose wife has died.

Bankruptcy : A condition in which a person is unable to pay their debts.

Boarding house : A house where people pay to live, often with meals provided.

Inheritance : Money or property received from someone who has died.

Recklessness : Acting without enough care or thought about the consequences.

Speculation : Taking financial risks in the hope of making a profit.

Creditor : A person or organization to whom money is owed.

Compensation : Money or something else given to make up for a loss, injury, or damage.

Financial hardship : Difficulty caused by a lack of money.

Starvation : Severe suffering or death caused by a lack of food.

Sacrifice : Giving up something valuable for the sake of another person or purpose.

Tragedy : A serious or painful event, often involving suffering or death.

Despise : To regard someone with strong dislike or contempt.

Reputation : The opinion or impression that others have of a person.

Humiliation : The experience of feeling ashamed, embarrassed, or inferior.

6. Key message and main idea

The play shows how poverty, family conflict and misunderstanding can cause deep suffering. Durand's daughters blame him for their financial problems, while he hides the truth about their mother's actions to protect her reputation. Despite their cruelty, he remains concerned about their future.

His final sacrifice demonstrates his continuing love for his children, but it also reveals the tragic consequences of a situation in which he sees no other way to help them. The play examines the relationship between money and family life, the influence of the past and the suffering of an individual trapped in financial and emotional difficulties.

7. Understanding the text

a. Where does the play take place?

The play takes place in the dining room of Monsieur Durand's boarding house. Durand is a widower and a former railway worker who has turned his home into a boarding house to earn a living. He lives there with his three daughters, Theresa, Mary and Adele.

b. Why do the grocery, the baker and the butcher send their bills to the Durand household?

The grocery, the baker and the butcher send their bills because Durand has failed to pay them for a long time. His family is facing serious financial difficulties, and he cannot settle the outstanding debts. As a result, the shopkeepers refuse to provide further goods until the bills are paid.

c. Why does Monsieur Durand spend money on candles when he doesn't have money to buy even bread?

Monsieur Durand spends money on candles to commemorate the death anniversary of his beloved son, Rene, who died during childhood.

Although his family is facing extreme poverty and cannot afford even bread, Durand still wants to remember his deceased son. His decision reveals his continuing grief and emotional attachment to Rene.

d. Why did Monsieur Durand sell his life insurance?

According to the supplied notes, Monsieur Durand sold his life insurance to repay a loan to his creditor. He was in a desperate financial condition, and the creditor was angry because Durand had failed to return the borrowed money. Selling the life insurance was his attempt to deal with this debt.

e. Why has Monsieur Durand paid fire insurance?

Monsieur Durand has paid for fire insurance because he wants to provide financial support for his daughters. He plans to set fire to his house so that the insurance company will pay compensation. He hopes that the money will help his daughters overcome their financial difficulties after his death.

f. How did Monsieur Durand and Mrs. Durand run out of their inheritances from both the sides?

According to the supplied notes, Monsieur Durand and Mrs. Durand lost their inherited wealth because of Mrs. Durand's recklessness, gambling and speculation. Their financial decisions resulted in the loss of property inherited from both sides of the family, leaving them in severe financial difficulty.

g. Why does Monsieur Durand tell a lie about his birthplace?

According to the supplied notes, Monsieur Durand lies about his birthplace to conceal his personal history and protect his and his wife's reputation. The notes explain that he had loved a woman before marriage, left his hometown and migrated to Switzerland to marry her. They also mention that he had fought against his homeland on the Swiss side and wanted to conceal the humiliation associated with his past.

h. What business is Monsieur Durand running to make a living?

Monsieur Durand runs a boarding house to earn a living. He turns his

own home into a place where visitors can stay and obtain accommodation. This business is his attempt to support himself and his three daughters after the family loses its financial security.

i. What plan does Monsieur Duran have to help his daughters with money?

Monsieur Durand plans to set fire to his house and end his own life so that his daughters can receive insurance compensation. He has paid for fire insurance and hopes that the house's destruction will result in a payment of 5,000 francs. He intends to sacrifice his life because he believes the money will help his daughters survive.

j. How does Monsieur Duran die?

At the end of the play, Monsieur Durand drinks poison and sets fire to his own house. He takes these actions as part of his plan to obtain fire insurance compensation for his daughters. He hopes that the money will help them overcome their financial difficulties after his death.

8. Reference to the context

a. Sketch the character of Monsieur Duran.

Monsieur Durand is the leading character in the one-act play *Facing Death*, written by August Strindberg. He is a widower, a former railway worker and the owner of a boarding house. He lives with his three daughters, Theresa, Mary and Adele, and turns his home into a boarding house to earn a living.

Durand is financially weak and faces serious difficulties because the family has lost its inherited wealth and accumulated debts. His daughters despise him and blame him for their miserable condition. As a result, he receives little affection or respect from them.

Despite their hatred, Durand continues to love and care for his daughters. His actions show that he remains concerned about their well-being even when they treat him cruelly. He also carries deep grief over the death of his son, Rene, and spends his last coins on candles to commemorate the anniversary of the child's death.

Durand also protects his wife's reputation by keeping quiet about her role in the family's financial downfall. He allows his daughters to blame him rather than reveal the truth about their mother.

At the end of the play, Durand plans to set fire to his house and drink poison so that his daughters can receive insurance compensation. His decision illustrates the depth of his concern for their future and the desperate condition in which he finds himself. He is presented as a tragic figure whose love for his children continues despite poverty, rejection and emotional suffering.

b. How do we know that the Duran family has reached a de ad end?

We know that the Durand family has reached a dead end by examining its financial condition, family relationships and lack of hope for the future.

The family has become bankrupt and lost its inherited property. Durand has turned his home into a boarding house to earn money, but this has

not solved his financial problems. The household has accumulated debts over many years, and Durand cannot pay the bills sent by the grocery, baker and butcher.

The family's condition is so desperate that it struggles to obtain basic food. Durand is reduced to eating rat food, while his creditors continue to demand payment. These circumstances show the severity of the family's poverty.

The relationship between Durand and his daughters is also deeply troubled. They blame him for their financial difficulties and treat him with hatred. Their attitude is influenced by their mother's earlier teaching, while Durand keeps quiet about her responsibility for the family's losses.

The situation becomes even more hopeless when Durand decides to end his life and set fire to the house. He believes that the insurance compensation will provide his daughters with money after his death. His plan indicates that he can see no other way to help them. The combination of poverty, hunger, debt, family conflict and Durand's desperate decision shows that the family has reached a dead end.

c. 'The mother, though already dead, seems to have had a great influence on the daughters, especially Theresa.' Do you agree?

Yes, I agree with the statement because Mrs. Durand continues to influence her daughters even after her death. According to the supplied notes, she taught them to hate their father and repeatedly blamed him for the family's problems while she was alive.

After her death, Durand remains silent about her responsibility for the family's financial downfall. He does not want his daughters to question their mother's goodness, so he allows them to continue believing that he is responsible for their poverty.

Theresa is presented as particularly influenced by her mother. She behaves cruelly toward Durand and shows little respect for him. For example, she throws away the matches when he tries to light his tobacco. She also snatches the glass of milk from him. These actions demonstrate her hostility toward her father.

The mother's influence therefore continues through the daughters' attitudes and behaviour. Although she is no longer alive, the resentment she encouraged remains part of the family's daily life. Theresa's treatment of Durand provides a clear example of this continuing influence.

d. Discuss the relationship between Monsieur Durand and his wife.

The relationship between Monsieur Durand and his wife was troubled by financial problems, blame and hostility. According to the supplied notes, Mrs. Durand was responsible for losing the family's inherited wealth through reckless gambling and speculation. She also spent family money on lottery tickets, which contributed to their financial difficulties.

Despite her own role in the family's losses, Mrs. Durand blamed her husband. The notes also state that she threatened to become a prostitute for money after being beaten. This detail reflects the troubled circumstances described in the source.

Mrs. Durand also influenced the relationship between Durand and their daughters. She taught the girls to hate their father and encouraged them to blame him for the family's problems.

After her death, Durand continues to protect her reputation by concealing her responsibility for the family's financial downfall. His silence allows the daughters to maintain their negative view of him.

Their relationship is therefore presented through financial conflict, blame and the lasting consequences of Mrs. Durand's influence. The information in the supplied notes also shows that the conflict between the parents continues to affect the daughters and shapes the family's present suffering.

e. 'Money determines the relationship between characters in this play.' Elaborate this statement with examples from the play.

Money plays an important role in the relationships between the characters in *Facing Death*. The financial difficulties of the Durand family affect their living conditions, create conflict and contribute to the hostility between family members.

Monsieur Durand's family has lost its inherited wealth and accumulated debts. He turns his home into a boarding house to earn a living, but the family continues to struggle. They cannot afford basic necessities, and Durand is reduced to eating rat food. The grocery, baker and butcher refuse to provide further goods because their bills remain unpaid.

These circumstances affect Durand's relationship with his daughters. Instead of understanding his difficulties, they blame him for the

family's poverty and treat him disrespectfully. Theresa's actions, including throwing away the matches and snatching the glass of milk from him, demonstrate this hostility.

Money also plays a role in the troubled relationship between Durand and his wife. According to the supplied notes, Mrs. Durand lost the family's inherited wealth through gambling and speculation but blamed her husband for their problems. Her influence encouraged the daughters to direct their resentment toward him.

Durand's final plan also shows the importance of money in the play. He intends to set fire to his house and end his life so that his daughters can receive 5,000 francs in insurance compensation. He believes that this money will help them survive after his death.

Thus, money affects the characters' living conditions, increases resentment and shapes their relationships. The play shows how financial hardship can contribute to family conflict and push an already suffering person toward a tragic decision.

f. Monsieur Durand kills himself so that his daughters would get 5000 francs as the compensation from the insurance company. What does his plan tell us about him?

Monsieur Durand's plan shows that he is a loving, caring and concerned father. Although his daughters hate him and blame him for their financial difficulties, he continues to think about their future.

Durand has spent much of his life facing poverty, debt and family conflict. His daughters do not understand his suffering and treat him

without affection. Nevertheless, he does not abandon his concern for them.

He believes that the insurance compensation will provide his daughters with financial support. His plan is to set fire to the house and end his life so that they can receive 5,000 francs. He sees this as a way to help them when he believes that he can no longer support them through ordinary means.

His decision also reveals the depth of his desperation. He feels trapped by the family's financial condition and sees no other solution to their problems. His final actions therefore express both his love for his daughters and the hopelessness of his circumstances.

Durand is presented as a tragic father who is prepared to sacrifice his life for his children's future, even though they have not shown him the same love and understanding.

g. Discuss *Facing Death* as a modern tragedy.

Modern tragedy often presents the suffering of ordinary people who face serious personal, social and economic problems. Rather than concentrating only on powerful or royal figures, it may portray the downfall of a common person whose life is shaped by difficult circumstances. Realism and naturalism are also associated with modern tragedy.

Facing Death can be discussed as a modern tragedy because it presents the suffering of Monsieur Durand, an ordinary man facing financial hardship and family conflict. He is a former railway worker who becomes

bankrupt and turns his home into a boarding house to earn a living.

Durand's life is filled with difficulties. His family has lost its inherited wealth, accumulated debts and struggled to obtain basic necessities. He cannot afford even bread, and his creditors refuse to provide further goods until he pays his bills.

His relationship with his wife was troubled, and his daughters now despise him and blame him for the family's condition. Although he continues to love them, he receives little affection or understanding in return. His suffering is therefore both financial and emotional.

At the end of the play, Durand decides to drink poison and set fire to his house in the hope that his daughters will receive insurance compensation. His death forms the tragic conclusion of the play.

The play focuses on an ordinary person's financial difficulties, family problems, isolation and suffering. Through Durand's downfall and tragic ending, *Facing Death* presents the painful consequences of the circumstances surrounding his life and can be understood as a modern tragedy.

9. Important points for exam preparation

Facing Death is a one-act play written by August Strindberg.

Monsieur Durand is the central character.

Durand is a widower and a former railway worker who runs a boarding house.

His three daughters are Theresa, Mary and Adele.

Rene is Durand's son, who died during childhood.

The family faces bankruptcy, unpaid bills, hunger and serious financial hardship.

The supplied notes identify Mrs. Durand's gambling and speculation as the cause of the family's financial downfall.

Mrs. Durand's influence continues through the daughters' hostility toward their father.

Theresa is particularly disrespectful toward Durand.

Durand spends his last coins on candles to commemorate Rene's death anniversary.

Durand plans to set fire to his house so his daughters can receive 5,000 francs in insurance compensation.

The play explores parental love, sacrifice, poverty, money, family conflict and tragedy.

Durand's death provides the tragic ending of the play.

10. Commonly confusing points

1. Who is responsible for the family's financial downfall?

The supplied notes identify Mrs. Durand's reckless gambling and speculation as the cause of the loss of the family's inherited wealth. However, Durand's daughters blame their father.

2. Why does Durand continue to protect his wife after her death?

According to the notes, he does not want his daughters to question their mother's goodness. He keeps quiet about her role in the family's financial downfall.

3. Why does Durand spend money on candles when the family is starving?

He wants to commemorate the death anniversary of his son, Rene, who died during childhood.

4. Why does Durand pay for fire insurance?

He hopes that the insurance company will compensate his daughters after the house is destroyed by fire.

5. What is the purpose of Durand's final plan?

He intends to provide financial support for his daughters through the insurance compensation, even though he believes he must sacrifice his own life to do so.

6. Why is the play described as a modern tragedy?

The supplied notes focus on Durand's suffering as an ordinary person

facing poverty, family conflict and a tragic ending.

II. Quick revision

Monsieur Durand is a bankrupt widower who runs a boarding house with his three daughters, Theresa, Mary and Adele. The family suffers from debt, hunger and hostility. Although the daughters blame their father for their poverty, the supplied notes explain that their mother lost the family's inherited wealth through gambling and speculation. Durand conceals the truth to protect her reputation.

Durand continues to love his daughters despite their cruelty. He also remembers his deceased son, Rene, and spends his last coins on candles for the anniversary of the child's death. When he sees no way to provide for his daughters, he plans to set fire to his house and end his life so they can receive 5,000 francs in insurance compensation. The play ends with his death and explores poverty, family conflict, parental love, sacrifice and tragedy.

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