

An Enemy of the People

by Henrik Ibsen
adapted by Arthur Miller



Ask students to get into pairs and work on the scenes. First, read the scenes for meaning. What are the characters talking about? What happens in the scenes? Then go back and try to find the subtext. What do the characters reveal about themselves and their feelings even if they don't say it outright? Read the scenes again, keeping the subtext in mind. As a group discuss ways that actors use the subtext to play subtle, realistic characters during performance.

Peter Stockmann, the Mayor, enters. He is a bachelor, nearing sixty. He has always been one of those men who make it their life work to stand in the center of the ship to keep it from overturning. He probably envies the family life and warmth of this house, but when he comes, he never wants to admit he came and often sits with his coat on.

MRS. STOCKMANN: Peter! Well, this is a surprise!

PETER STOCKMANN: I was just passing by ... *He sees Kiil and smiles, amused.*

Mr. Kiil! KIIL, *sarcastically*: Your Honor! He bites into his apple and exits.

MRS. STOCKMANN: You musn't mind him, Peter, he's getting terribly old. Would you like a bite to eat? PETER STOCKMANN: No, no thanks. *He sees Billing now, and Billing nods to him from the dining room.*

MRS. STOCKMANN, *embarrassed*: He just happened to drop in.

PETER STOCKMANN: That's all right. I can't take hot food in the evening. Now with my stomach. MRS. STOCKMANN: Can't I ever get you to eat anything in this house?

PETER STOCKMANN: Bless you, I stick to my tea and toast. Much healthier and more economical. MRS. STOCKMANN, *smiling*: You sound as though Tom and I throw money out the window.

PETER STOCKMANN: Not you, Catherine. He wouldn't be home, would he? MRS. STOCKMANN: He went for a little walk with the boys.

PETER STOCKMANN: You don't think that's dangerous, right after dinner? *There is a loud knocking at the front door. That sounds like my brother.*

MRS. STOCKMANN: I doubt it, so soon. Come in, please.

Hovstad enters. He is in his early thirties, a graduate of the peasantry struggling with a terrible conflict. For while he hates authority and wealth, he cannot bring himself to cast off a certain desire to partake of them. Perhaps he is dangerous because he wants more than anything to belong, and in a radical that is a withering wish, not easily to be borne.

MRS. STOCKMANN: Mr. Hovstad--

HOVSTAD: Sorry I'm late. I was held up at the printing shop. *Surprised*: Good evening, Your Honor. PETER STOCKMANN, *rather stiffly*: Hovstad. On business, no doubt.

HOVSTAD: Partly. It's about an article for the paper--

PETER STOCKMANN, *sarcastically*: Ha! I don't doubt it. I understand my bother has become a prolific contributor to—what do you call it?—the *People's Daily Liberator*?
HOVSTAD, *laughing, but hold his ground*: The *People's Daily Messenger*, sir. The Doctor sometimes honors the Messenger when he wants to uncover the real truth of some subject.

PETER STOCKMANN: The truth! Oh, yes, I see.

MRS. STOCKMANN, *nervously to Hovstad*: Would like to...*She points to the dining room.*

PETER STOCKMANN: I don't want you to think I blame the Doctor for using your paper. After all, every performer goes for the audience that applauds him most. It's really not your paper I have anything against, Mr. Hovstad.

HOVSTAD: I really didn't think so, Your Honor.

PETER STOCKMANN: As a matter of fact, I happen to admire the spirit of tolerance in our town. It's magnificent. Just don't forget that we have it because we all believe in the same thing; it brings us together.

HOVSTAD: Kirsten Springs, you mean.

PETER STOCKMANN: The springs, Mr. Hovstad, our wonderful new springs. They've changed the soul of this town. Mark my words, Kirsten Springs are going to put us on the map, and there is no question about it.

MRS. STOCKMANN: That's what Tom says too.

PETER STOCKMANN: Everything is shooting ahead—real estate going up, money changing hands every hour, business humming--

HOVSTAD: And no more unemployment.

PETER STOCKMANN: Right. Give us a really good summer, and sick people will be coming here in carloads. The springs will turn into a regular fad, a new Carlsbad. And for once the well-to-do people won't be the only ones paying taxes in this town.

Later in the opening act Dr. Stockmann receives an important letter. Read the scene and discuss how Dr. Stockmann's discovery is relevant to today. How do you think his brother, Peter Stockmann, will react when he is informed? Why? How will this affect the town and its people? How do you think they will react? Why?

Dr. Stockmann enters from his study, an open letter in his hand. He is like a sleepwalker, astonished, engrossed. He walks toward the front door.

Mrs. STOCKMANN: Tom!

He turns, suddenly aware of them.

DR. STOCKMANN: Boys, there is going to be news in this town!
BILLING: News?

MRS. STOCKMANN: What kind of news?

DR. STOCKMANN: A terrific discovery, Catherine.

HOVSTAD: Really?

MRS. STOCKMANN: That you made?

DR. STOCKMANN: That I made. *He walks back and forth.* Now let the baboons running this town call me a lunatic! Now they'd better watch out. Oh, how the mighty have fallen!

PETRA: What is it, Father?

DR. STOCKMANN: Oh, if Peter were only here! Now you'll see how human beings can walk around and make judgement like blind rats.

HOVSTAD: What in the world's happened, Doctor?

DR. STOCKMANN, *stopping at the table*: It's the general opinion, isn't it, that our town is a sound and healthy spot?

HOVSTAD: Of course.

MRS. STOCKMANN: What happened?

DR. STOCKMANN: Even a rather unusually healthy spot! Oh, God, a place that can be recommended now only to all people but to sick people!

MRS. STOCKMANN: But, Tom, what are you--

DR. STOCKMANN: And we certainly have recommended it. I myself have written and written, in the

People's Messenger, pamphlets—

HOVSTAD: Yes, yes, but--

DR. STOCKMANN: The miraculous springs that cost such a fortune to build, the whole Health Institute, is a pesthole!

PETRA: Father! The springs?

MRS. STOCKMANN, *simultaneously*: Our springs?

BILLING: That's unbelievable!

DR. STOCKMANN: You know the filth up in Windmill Valley? That stuff that has such a stinking smell? It comes down from the tannery up there, and the same damn poisonous mess comes right our into the blessed, miraculous water we're supposed to *cure* people with!

HORSTER: You mean actually where our beaches are? DR. STOCKMANN: Exactly.

HOVSTAD: How are you so sure of this, Doctor?

DR. STOCKMANN: I had a suspicion about it a long time ago—last year there were too many sick cases among the visitors, typhoid and gastric disturbances.

MRS. STOCKMANN: That did happen. I remember Mrs. Svensen's niece--

DR. STOCKMANN: Yes, dear. At the time we thought that the visitors brought the bug, but later this winter I got a new idea and started investigating the water.

MRS. STOCKMANN: So that's what you've be working on.

DR. STOCKMANN: I sent samples of the water to the University for an exact chemical analysis. HOVSTAD: And that's what you have just received?

Dr. STOCKMANN, waving the letter again: This is it. It proves the existence of infectious organic matter in the water.

As you read this next scene, why do you think Kiil perceives this as a joke? Why does he appear to disbelieve Dr. Stockmann? Ibsen wrote the play in 1882 and this version was adapted by Arthur Miller in 1950. Yet, how does it speak to problems we still grapple with today? Explain.

Act I, Scene 2

KIIL, *slyly*: Is it really true?

Mrs. STOCKMANN, *walking toward him*:

Father! DR. STOCKMANN: Well, good morning!

MRS. STOCKMANN: Come on in. KIIL: It better be true or I'm going.

DR. STOCKMANN: What had better be true?

KIIL: This crazy story about the water system. Is it true?

MRS. STOCKMANN: Of course it's true! How did you find out about it? KIIL: Petra came flying by on her way to school this morning.

DR. STOCKMANN: Oh, she did?

KIIL: Ya. I thought she was trying to make a fool out of me-- MRS. STOCKMANN: Now why would she do that?

KIIL: Nothing give more pleasure to young people than to make fools out of old people. But this is true, eh?

DR. STOCKMANN: Of course it's true. Sit down here. It's pretty lucky for the town, eh? KIIL, *fighting his laughter*: Lucky for the town!

DR. STOCKMANN: I mean, that I made the discovery before it was too late.

KIIL: Tom, I never thought you had the imagination to pull your own brother's leg like this. DR. STOCKMANN: Pull his leg?

MRS. STOCKMANN: But, Father, he's not--

KIIL: How does it go now, let me get it straight. There's some kind of—like cockroaches in the waterpipes--

DR. STOCKMANN, *laughing*: No, not cockroaches. KIIL: Well, come kind of little animals.

MRS. STOCKMANN: Bacteria, Father.

KIIL, *who can barely speak through his laughter*: Ah, but a whole mess of them, eh? DR. STOCKMANN: Oh, there'd be millions and millions.

KIIL: And nobody can see them but you, is that it?

DR. STOCKMANN: Yes, that's—well, of course anybody with a micro—*He breaks off*. What are you laughing at?

MRS. STOCKMANN, *smiling at Kiil*: You don't understand, Father. Nobody can actually see bacteria, but that doesn't mean they're not there.

KIIL: Good girl, you stick with him? By God, this is the best thing I ever heard in my life! DR. STOCKMANN, *smiling*: What do you mean?

KIIL: But tell me, you think you are actually going to get your brother to believe this? DR. STOCKMANN: Well, we'll see soon enough!

KIIL: You really think he's that crazy?

DR. STOCKMANN: I hope that whole town will be that crazy, Morten.

Dr. Stockmann is informed by his brother, Peter Stockmann, that the cost of repairing the problem with the water supply will cost too much, close the springs for two years, and ruin the financial structure of the community. Dr. Stockmann thinks he is still backed by the newspaper and attempts to have his article printed, but his brother, they mayor, convinces the editor it would ruin the newspaper and the town. Discuss the confrontation of the two brothers. What does it reveal about their characters? Why do Hovstad and Aslaksen, who previously firmly backed Dr. Stockmann, change their minds? Explain.

DR. STOCKMANN: Well, Peter, poisoning the water was not enough! You're working on the press now, eh. *He crosses to the entrance door.*

PETER STOCKMANN: My hat, please. And my stick. *Dr. Stockmann puts on the Mayor's hat.* Now what's this nonsense! Take that off, that's official insignia!

DR. STOCKMANN: I just wanted you to realize, Peter—*he takes off the hat and looks at it*—that anyone may wear this hat in a democracy, and that a free citizen is not afraid to touch it. *He hands him the hat.* And as for the baton of command, Your Honor, it can pass from hand to hand. *He hands the cane to Peter Stockmann.* So don't gloat yet. The people haven't spoken. *He turns to Hovstad and Aslaksen.*

And I have the people because I have the truth, my friends.

ASLAKSEN: Doctor, we're not scientists. We can't judge whether your article is really true. DR. STOCKMANN: Then print it under my name. Let *me* defend it!

HOVSTAD: I'm not printing it. I'm not going to sacrifice this newspaper. When the whole story gets out the public is not going to stand for any changes in the springs.

ASKLAKSEN: His Honor just told us, Doctor—you see, there will have to be a new tax--DR.

STOCKMANN: Ahhhhh! Yes, I see. That's why you're not scientists suddenly and can't decide if I'm telling the truth. Well. So!

HOVSTAD: Don't take that attitude. The point is--

DR. STOCKMANN: The point, the point, oh, the point is going to fly through this town like an arrow, and I am going to fire it! *To Aslaksen:* Will you print this article as a pamphlet? I'll pay for it.

ASLAKEN: I'm not going to ruin this paper and this town, Doctor, for the sake of your family--

MRS. STOCKMANN: You can leave his family out of this, Mr. Aslaksen. God help me, I think you people are horrible!

DR. STOCKMANN: My article, if you don't mind.

ASLAKEN, *giving it to him:* Doctor, you won't get it printed in this town.

PETER STOCKMANN: Can't you forget it. He indicates Hovstad and Aslaksen. Can't you see now that everybody--

DR. STOCKMANN: Your Honor, I can't forget it, and you will never forget it as long as you live. I am going to call a mass meeting, and I--

PETER STOCKMANN: And who is going to rent you a hall?

DR. STOCKMANN: Then I will take a drum and go from street to street, proclaiming that the springs are befouled and poison is rotting the body politic! *He starts for the door.*

PETER STOCKMANN: And I believe you really are that mad!

DR. STOCKMANN: Mad? Oh, my brother, you haven't even heard me raise my voice yet.

Catherine?

He holds out his hand, she gives him her elbow. They go stiffly out.

At the end of ACT II, Dr. Stockmann is declared “an enemy of the people”. Why? What does it mean to be “an enemy of the people”? How has this situation developed?

DR. STOCKMANN: Answer me this! Please, one more moment! A platoon of soldiers is walking down a road toward the enemy. Every one of them is convinced he is on the right road, the safe road. But two miles ahead stands one lonely man, the outpost. He sees that this road is dangerous, that his comrades, are walking into a trap. He runs back, he finds the platoon. Isn't it clear that this man must have the right to warn the majority, to argue with the majority, to fight with the majority if he believes he has the truth? Before many can know something, *one* must know it! *His passion has silenced the crowd.* It's, always the same. Rights are sacred until it hurts for somebody to use them. I beg you now--I realize the cost is great, the inconvenience is great, the risk is great that other towns will get the jump on us while we're rebuilding--

PETER STOCKMANN: Aslaksen, he's not allowed to--

DR. STOCKMANN: Let me prove it to you! The water is poisoned!

THIRD CITIZEN, *steps up on the platform, waves his fist in Dr. Stockmann's face:* One more word about poison and I'm gonna take you outside!

The crowd is roaring; some try to charge the platform. The horn is blowing. Aslaksen rings his bell. Peter Stockmann steps forward, raising his hands, Kiil quietly exits.

PETER STOCKMANN: That's enough. Now stop it! Quiet! There is not going to be any violence here! *There is silence. He turns to Dr. Stockmann.* Doctor, come down and give Mr. Aslaksen the platform. DR. STOCKMANN, *staring down at the crowd with new eyes:* I'm not through yet.

PETER STOCKMANN: Come down or I will not be responsible for what happens. MRS. STOCKMANN: I'd like to go home. Come on, Tom.

PETER STOCKMANN: I move the chairman order the speaker to leave the platform.

VOICES: Sit down! Get off that platform!

DR. STOCKMANN: All right. Then I'll take this to out-of-town newspapers until the whole country is warned!

PETER STOCKMANN: You wouldn't dare!

HOVSTAD: You're trying to ruin this town--that's all; trying to ruin it.

DR. STOCKMANN: You're trying to build a town on a morality so rotten that it will infect the country and the world! If the only way you can prosper is this murder of freedom and truth, then I say with all my heart, "Let it be destroyed! Let the people perish!"

He leaves the platform.

FIRST CITIZEN, *to the Mayor:* Arrest him! Arrest him! SECOND CITIZEN: He's a traitor!

Cries of "Enemy." "Traitor." "Revolution.""

ASLAKSEN, *ringing for quiet:* I would like to submit the following resolution: The people assembled here tonight, decent and patriotic citizens, in defense of their town and their

country, declare that Doctor Stockmann, medical officer of Kirsten Springs, is an enemy of the people and of his community.

Rather than leave town, Dr. Stockman decides to remain even though the entire community appears to be against him. The following speech appears at the end of the play. Why is he staying? Why put his family in danger? Is he really “an enemy of the people”? Explain.

DR. STOCKMANN: They want me to buy the paper, the public, the pollution of the springs, buy the whole pollution of this town! They'll make a hero out of me for that! *Furiously, to Aslaksen and Hovstad:* But I'm not a hero, I'm the enemy-and now you're first going to find out what kind of enemy I am! I will sharpen my pen like a dagger-you, all you friends of the people, are going to bleed before I'm done! Go, tell them to sign the petitions! Warn them not to call me when they're sick! Beat up my children! And never let *her-he points to Petra-* in the school again or she'll destroy the immaculate purity of the vacuum there! See to all the barricades-the truth is coming! Ring the bells, sound the alarm! The truth, the truth is out, and soon it will be prowling like a lion in the streets!

What parallels do you see in our society today? How relevant do you think what occurs in the play is to our problems today? Why? Discuss and explain.