
Historical, Political and Social Background (AO3)

Priestley and Context

- Priestley lived through the time period the play is set and fought in WW1.
- He fought in the war that the Inspector predicts. "Fire and blood and anguish". Priestley saw these sufferings first hand and wanted to avoid further wars.
- His play represents the conflicting views on Capitalism and Socialism.
- He was concerned about social inequality during the 1930s
- Set up the Common Wealth Party – 1942
- Argued for public ownership of land and greater democracy
- Merged with Labour party
- Landslide victory in 1945
- Developed the idea of a Welfare State after WW2

Why was the play set in 1912?

- Written in 1945 but set in 1912 – written just after WW2 and set just before WW1.
- In 1912 Britain was at the height of Edwardian society, known as the "Golden Age" By setting the play in the past Priestley makes use of **DRAMATIC IRONY** – where the audience knows what has happened but the characters in the play do not.
- The **early 20th Century**:
 - Saw the start of a move away from an elite few controlling everything to society being more equal.
 - An increase in the number of strikes
 - Women were becoming more demanding of equality - suffragettes became militant during this time.
 - After the time the play is set there was an economic depression – not helped by the cost of war.
 - WW1 – 1914 to 1918 – Priestley makes reference to the war to show that mankind needs to change and to remind the audience what happens when people stop caring for each other and instead seek personal power.
 - Titanic sank on the 14th or 15th April 1912.
 - 1940 – Winston Churchill becomes Prime Minister.
 - 1945 – a socialist Government comes to power.

Capitalism	Socialism
• Mr Birling represents a capitalist society. • Capitalism is an economic system that is based on the private ownership of industry. • Problems with capitalism: • Leads to the few exploiting the many • Those who have the money have the power to stop others from sharing their wealth • No social mobility • The richer get richer and the poorer get poorer	• Socialism is the belief that as a society, we have to look after one another. • Under socialism the rich are responsible for looking after the poor. • Taxation is sometimes higher in a socialist state so that the Welfare State can be paid for (e.g. NHS, schools, unemployment benefit). • Socialists do not want a class system
1912	1946
• Country is still benefitting from new technology • Rigid class system • Conservative politics and government (individual responsibility) • Strong social division • Women subservient to and financially dependent on men	• 2 World Wars had taken place • Class system was less rigid • Women could now vote • Politics were more socialist (collective responsibility)

Link the contextual factors to the characters in the play. Show how Priestley depicts the main contextual ideas through the different characters...

Plot Summary (AO1)

Act 1

The Birling family (Arthur, Sybil, Sheila and Eric) and Gerald Croft, are having a meal to celebrate the engagement of Sheila and Gerald.

Arthur Birling makes a toast. In it, he informs the younger members of the family that their future looks bright and that it is important to look after themselves. Priestley makes use of dramatic irony to undermine Arthur Birling – Birling says there won't be a war and talks about the success of the Titanic.

Just as Mr. Birling says, "a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own", the doorbell rings. Shortly after, the maid shows Inspector Goole into the room.

The Inspector explains that a young woman has died after drinking bleach. He questions Mr. Birling, who admits to having her sacked after she was involved in a strike at the factory. The Inspector then questions Sheila, who admits to having the girl sacked from Milwards because she was jealous that the girl looked better in the dress she liked than she did.

Act 2

The Inspector's attention falls on Gerald. When questioned, he admits that he knew the girl. After meeting her at the Palace Music Hall in Brumley, Gerald set her up in the flat of a friend and they became lovers. After a happy period, it came to an end and Eva / Daisy left Brumley and went to the seaside. After the questioning, Gerald goes for a walk. The Inspector questions Mrs. Birling next. She admits that the girl came to her charitable organisation and asked for help, as she was pregnant and could not ask the father for money. Mrs. Birling believes the girl is putting on graces and is offended that she uses the name "Mrs. Birling". She therefore persuades the other members of the charity to refuse her request. Mrs. Birling is defiant and refuses to accept she did anything wrong. She tells the Inspector that the father of the child is to blame and it is the Inspector's "duty" to arrest him.

Instead of leaving as Mrs. Birling hoped, the Inspector waits to "do his duty."

Act 3

Eric returns to the house and into the firing line. He knows that his secret is already out but does explain what happened – he had an affair with the girl and she fell pregnant. He offered to marry her but she declined, knowing that he didn't love her. Eric gave her money to begin with, which he stole from his father's business. When she realised the money was stolen, she refused to take any more.

The Birling family appear to have learnt their lesson and seem sorry for what they have done. The Inspector tells them that we all have to look after each other and that there are plenty of other people in the world like Eva Smith. He then leaves.

Shortly after, Gerald Croft returns from his walk. He brings into doubt the identity of the Inspector (having spoken to a policeman who has never heard of him) and even explains that it is possible that Eva Smith never existed.

Quickly convinced by Gerald's arguments, Mr. and Mrs. Birling decide that it was a joke and laugh the whole thing off. They have not really learnt anything.

Eric and Sheila are not so easily swayed. They argue with their parents that this doesn't change anything – they are still responsible for the terrible things they did.

The telephone rings – it is for Mr. Birling. A young woman has just died at the infirmary and a police inspector is on his way to the house. The play ends on this chilling note, leaving both the audience and the Birlings in suspense.

CHARACTERS (AO1) (AO2)

Mr Birling

A prosperous factory owner – who is '*a self-made man*.' Birling is arrogant, insecure, selfish, only cares about appearances and his social status and his business as indicated in '*It's my duty to keep labour costs down*.' He welcomes Croft into his family as he represents a business link between his firm and that of Gerald Croft's father (a rival) – this will secure his financial stability. Has a direct and detached approach to his workers; he tells the Inspector that he wouldn't listen to Eva Smith's demand for a wage rise '*I refused, of course*' and is surprised why anyone should question why. Mr Birling strongly believes that '*a man has to make his own way*'. He does not consider the harm he may cause to other people because of his attitude. He is a '*hard headed business man*' He is a magistrate and former mayor who is looking forward to receiving a knighthood – to be even more socially superior. He is optimistic about the future. He refuses to accept any responsibility for Eva's death. He becomes increasingly annoyed by the Inspector's questioning and Eric's unsympathetic attitude. He uses his power and status to threaten the Inspector through his friendship with the Chief Constable. The most disturbing part of the play for Birling is the scene in which he learns that his own son is shown to be a thief, a drunkard and is responsible for fathering a child. When he learns of all this he exclaims '*You damned fool - why didn't you come to me when you found yourself in this mess?*' At the end of the play he grudgingly wishes things were better but even here he still thinks in terms of money '*Look, Inspector - I'd give thousands*' He continues to ignore the shameful things that his family has done. When it appears that the Inspector might be a hoaxer he is happy to believe that everything is as it was a few hours ago. He copies the Inspector and laughs when he remembers the faces of Eric and Sheila and accuses them of being '*the famous younger generation who know it all*'. This is an example of pride coming before a fall, a moment later of course he is panicking as the phone rings again. Mr Birling represents Priestley's hatred of businessmen who are only interested in making money. He will never alter his ways and it is left to the younger generation to learn from their mistakes.

Key Quotes

'You ought to like this port, Gerald. As a matter of fact, Finchley told me it's the same port your father gets from him.'

'Now you have brought us together, and perhaps we may look forward to a time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together – for lower costs and higher prices.'

'I'm talking as a hard-headed, practical man of business. And I say there isn't a chance of war.'

'So as long as we behave ourselves don't get into the police court or start a scandal -eh?'

'Sheila's a lucky girl - and I think you're a pretty fortunate young man too, Gerald'

'Fiddlesticks! The Germans don't want war. Nobody wants war.'

'The titanic- she sails next week' - 'Unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable'

'man has to mind his own business and look after himself.'

Themes

Social Class

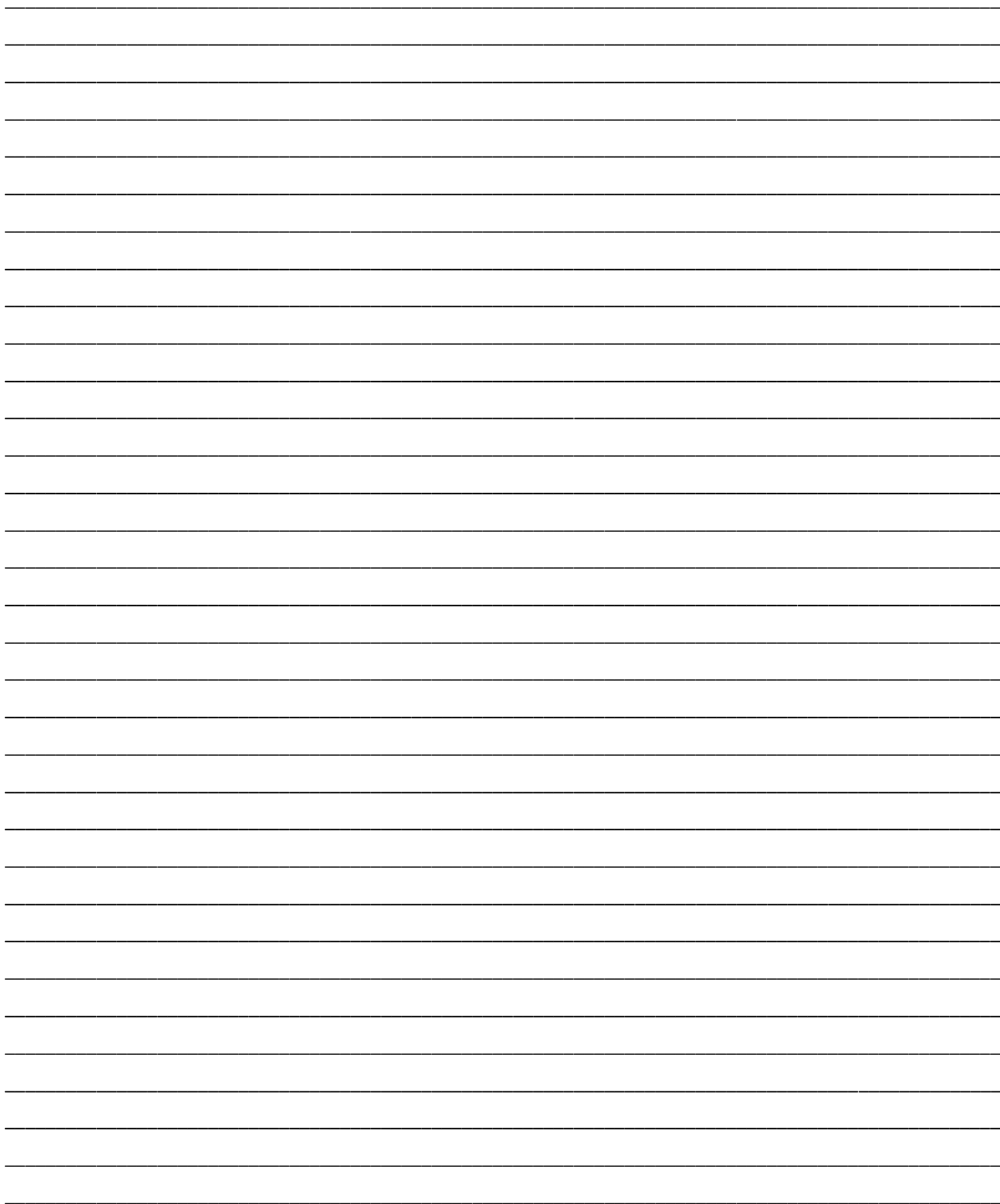
Reputation

Hypocrisy

Exploitation

Capitalism

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Sybil Birling

Sybil Birling is cold-hearted and sophisticated and regarded as her husband's social superior. She is described at the start as **"about fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior."** She is a 'snob', very aware of the differences between social classes and therefore very arrogant. She is dismissive of the poorer classes and has no respect for them or the inspector. She is a liar, very controlling and is patronising to her own children. She sees Sheila and Eric still as **"children"** and speaks patronisingly to them. She uses her power to judge people, especially the working classes and says that Eva 'was giving herself ridiculous airs.' when Eva does not take the money.

Believes she is always right and therefore ignorant – She is set in her own ways and class and doesn't believe a girl can have "fine feelings" Apathetic and uncaring, she dismisses Eva/Daisy as just **'girls of that class.'** Her charity work is conducted for selfish reasons. Mrs Birling's attitude is unchanged by the events of the play. She **tries to deny things** that she doesn't want to believe like Eric's drinking, Gerald's affair with Eva, and the fact that a working-class girl would refuse money even if it was stolen, claiming **"She was giving herself ridiculous airs."** She admits she was **"prejudiced"** against the girl who applied to her committee for help and saw it as her **"duty"** to refuse to help her. Her narrow sense of morality dictates that the father of a child should be responsible for its welfare, regardless of circumstances.

At the end of the play, she has had to come to terms with the fact that her son is a heavy drinker who got a girl pregnant and stole money to support her, her daughter will not marry a good social **'catch'** and that her own reputation within the town will be sullied. Yet, like her husband, she refuses to believe that she did anything wrong and doesn't accept responsibility for her part in Eva's death.

How does Priestley portray some of the main ideas and themes through Mrs Birling in the play?

Sheila Birling

At the start of the play she is '*very pleased with life*'. She is young, attractive and has just become engaged. ***Presented as a spoilt, materialistic and frivolous upper- class girl*** . Sheila is portrayed as naïve, shallow , self – centred, materialistic and superficial in the beginning, but undergoes a tremendous amount of learning and growth during the play. Represents hope and change from exploitative capitalism to shared responsibility and community consciousness. She displays a genuine sense of remorse, sensitivity and sympathy for Eva Smith when she finds about her death, and her unreasonable behaviour which led to Eva losing her job her the store. She is very distressed by the girl's suicide and thinks that her father's behaviour was unacceptable. She readily agrees that she behaved very badly and insists that she never meant the girl any harm.

Her true nature is revealed when she is horrified by her part in the events and realises '**but these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people.**' She is also very perceptive; she realises the Gerald knew Daisy Renton, that Eric is guilty of mistreating Eva and that her father was unfair to Eva. She displays curiosity and a growing maturity as she becomes resentful of her parent's thinking and conduct. When she says '**I must obviously be a selfish, vindictive creature,**' we realise that by the end Priestley has successfully enabled Sheila to develop her social conscience and awareness of her own responsibilities and her errors in judgement. Sheila is the first to see the truth and learns from the Inspector's visit. Her response to the tragedy is one of the few encouraging things to come out of the play. She is genuinely upset when she hears of Eva's death and learns from her own behaviour. She also appears keen and anxious to change her behaviour in the future, '**I'll never, never do it again.**' She learns of her responsibilities to others less fortunate than herself (the idea of the community) and is sensitive. Her readiness to learn from experience is in great contrast to her parents.

Key Quotes

"I went to the manager and told him this girl had been very impertinent – and – and - "

"Why- you fool- he knows. Of course he knows. And I hate to think how much he knows that we don't know yet. You'll see. You'll see."

"You mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl. If you do the Inspector will just break it down. And it'll be all the worse when he does"

Yes, go on, Mummy"

"(rather distressed) I can't help thinking about this girl- destroying herself so horribly- and I've been so happy tonight. Oh I wish you hadn't told me."

"But these girls aren't cheap labour- they're *people*."

"She was a very pretty girl...that didn't make it any better."

"And if I could help her now, I would-"

"I'll never, never do it again to anybody...I feel now I can never go there again"

"No, he's giving us the rope- so that we'll hang ourselves"

Bitterly "I suppose we're all nice people now

"It frightens me the way you talk"

"We killed her"

Themes

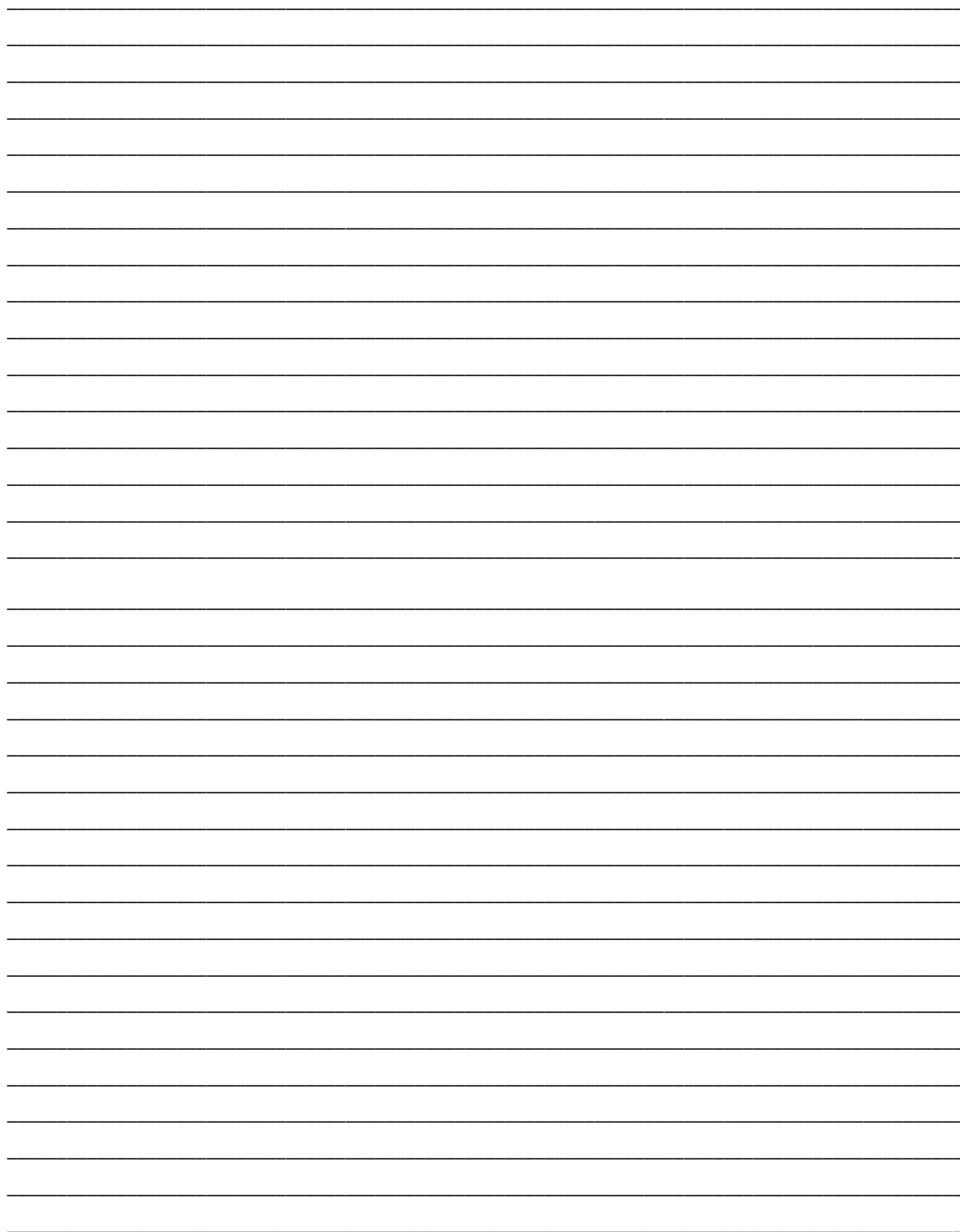
Power, Gender
Inequality

Generation Gap

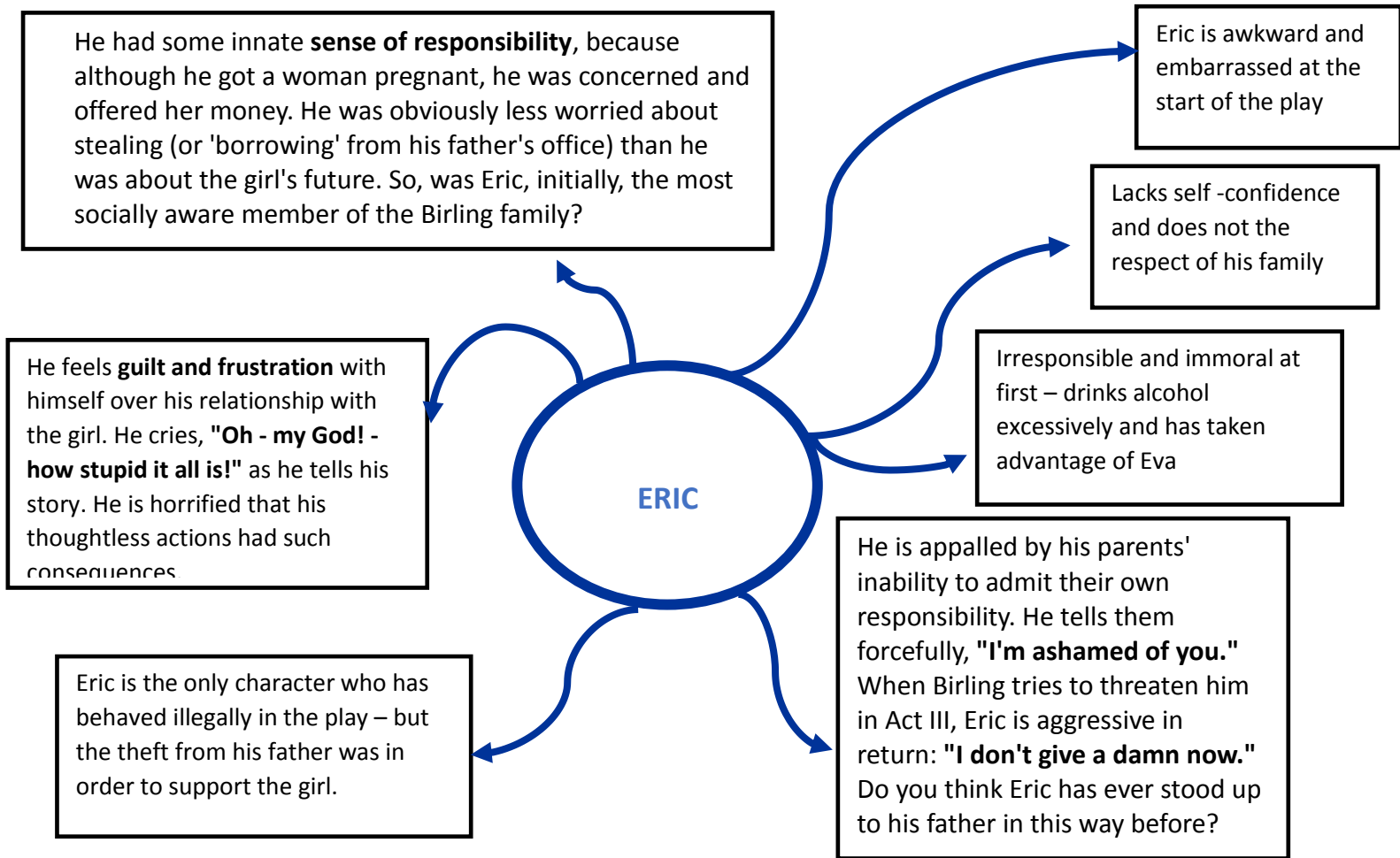
Social class

Social / Collective
Responsibility

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Eric Birling



Which themes and ideas does Eric reflect in the play?

Some Key Quotes

'not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive'

he 'suddenly guffaws'

drinks 'pretty hard'.

'I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty.'

The inspector says that Eric treated her 'as if she were an animal, a thing, not a person.'

"Why shouldn't they try for higher wages? We try for the highest possible prices"

she didn't want me to marry her. Said I didn't love her- and all that. In a way, she treated me- as if I were a kid. Though I was nearly as old as she was."

"**We did her in all right.**"

Gerald Croft

Portrayed from the beginning of the play as an upper- class gentleman who occupies a position of privilege in society and in the Birling's home. Mr Birling is clearly intent on impressing Gerald Croft from the beginning of the play in order to win his favour and to be finally connected to his family through the engagement and marriage to Sheila. He represents the stubbornness of the aristocracy and is clearly a sought -after man due to the financial stability his alliance with the Birling's will bring. He is described "**an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred man-about-town.**"

Priestley uses Gerald to highlight the power and status that the upper classes possess in society and the hypocrisy and selfishness they display. Gerald provides a strong contrast to Eric, Mr Birling's natural son and Priestley uses Gerald to show the tensions between Eric and his father.

Through Gerald, Priestley shows that it was common for the upper classes to behave arrogantly towards the working and lower classes and also to accept the condescending behaviour that other upper and middle classes towards them.

Key Quotes

"You couldn't have done anything else" (sacking Eva Smith)

"After all, y'know, we're respectable citizens and not criminals"

(about Sheila): "She's obviously had about as much as she can stand"

"Why should you [stay]? It's bound to be unpleasant and disturbing"

"It's a favourite haunt of women of the town"

'[Daisy] gave me a glance that was nothing less than a cry for help"

"Everything's all right now Sheila. What about this ring?"

"That man wasn't a police officer...I'm almost certain"

"But how do you know it's the same girl? ...

We've no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl"

Themes

Social Class

Power

Exploitation

Class Division

Hypocrisy

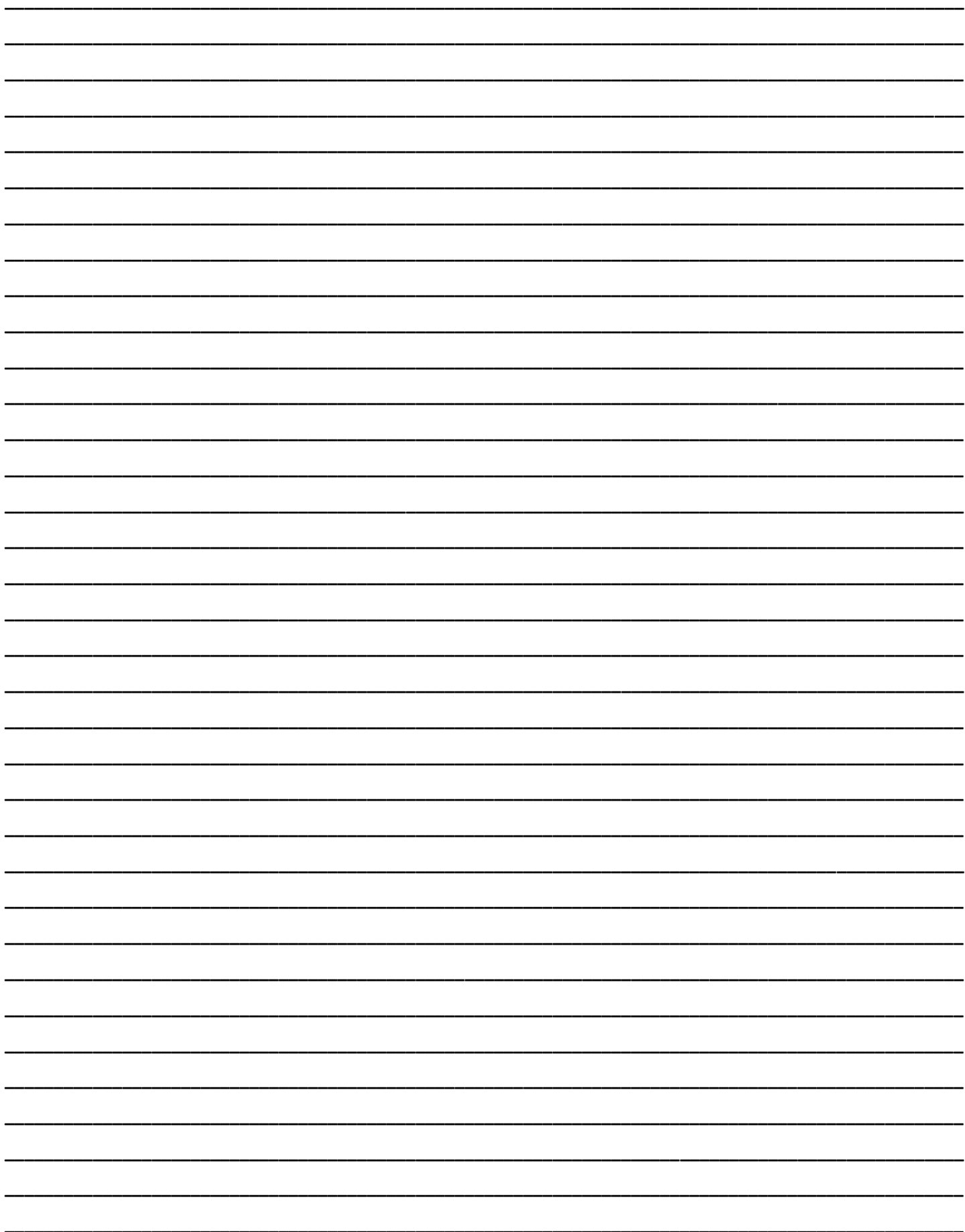
How does Priestley present Gerald Croft in An Inspector Calls?

You must include:

AO1 (Your understanding and interpretation of Gerald in relation to the other **characters and the themes and quotations**)

AO2 (Name and Explain the **Language devices and stage directions** that portray ideas about Gerald)

AO3 (**Context** – Ideas about the historical, political and social background)



Inspector Goole

Represents and promotes socialism, responsibility and compassion. He is the primary catalyst in the play.

Represents their conscience – represents morality and is Priestley's social voice in the play. Determined, discerning and a solid, unshakeable character in pursuit of the truth and **'he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness.'** Direct, unemotional and grows in stature as the play progresses. The inspector dismisses the Birling's ostentatious display of wealth, power and self-importance through his line of questioning. He intimidates them, which exposes their culpability. He is mysterious and omniscient through his knowledge of the events of Eva's life and death. Through his line of questioning, he controls the speech, actions and movement on stage and grows in stature and authority. Inspector Goole serves several functions in the play. He acts as the storyteller, linking all the separate incidents together into one, coherent story and through this he highlights the **"A chain of events" (may have driven her to suicide)**. Priestley has him to supply dates for events, or fill in background about the girl. He also behaves rather like a priest, someone to whom characters confess their sins, helping them to see the extent of their involvement in the downfall of Eva Smith, and encouraging them to acknowledge their guilt and repent.

Goole creates moments of tension and intrigue and acts as vehicle for Priestley's moral message. Through the Inspector's final dramatic speech, Priestley skilfully warns the audience of the potential social disasters of failing to support or help those in need in society and reminds them that **'it is better to ask for the earth than take it.'** The omniscient Inspector is used by Priestley to further convey his views on collective / social responsibility. The Inspector is used very effectively to highlight the corruption and the selfish attitudes of the twentieth century society.

Key Quotes

- 'Need not be a big man but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness.'
- "He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period. He speaks carefully, weightily and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking"
- "Two hours ago a young woman died in the Infirmary. She'd been taken there this afternoon because she'd swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course"
- "A chain of events" (may have driven her to suicide)
- "it's better to ask for the Earth than to take it"
- "Goole. G. double O-L-E"
- "it would do us all a bit of good if sometimes we tried to put ourselves in the place of these young women counting their pennies in their dingy little back bedroom"
- (To Gerald) "And you think young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?"
- "A girl died tonight. A pretty, lively sort of girl, who never did anybody any harm. But she died in misery and agony-hating life-
- "If there's nothing else we have to share our guilt"
- Millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths
- 'We are all members of one body'
- 'And you've slammed the door on her face'

Themes

Social Responsibility

Social Class

Morality

Collective Responsibility

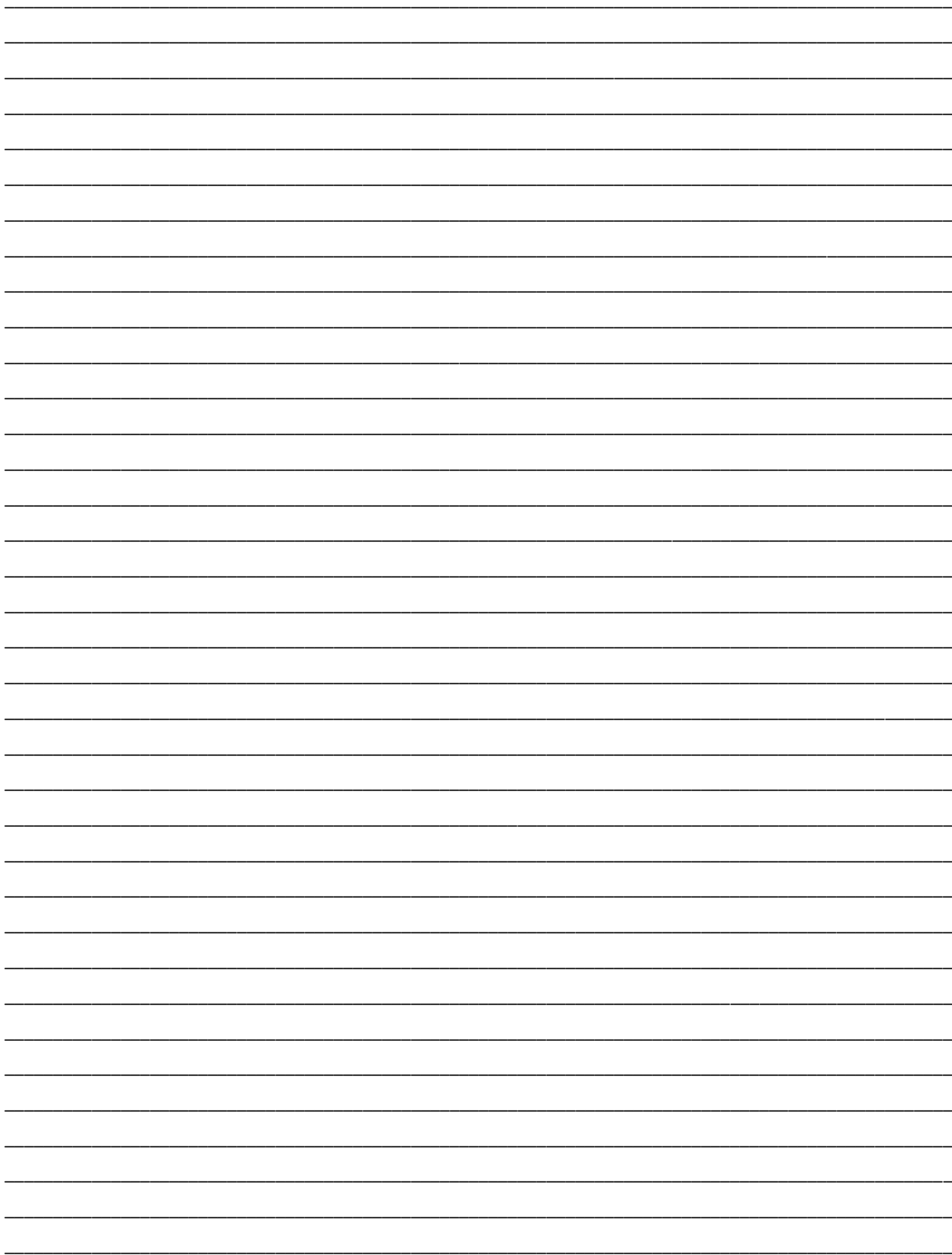
Explore how Priestley portrays Inspector Goole in the play? Remember to include your ideas on:

AO1 (Your understanding and interpretation of the Inspector Goole in relation to the other characters, themes and quotations)

A02 (Name and Explain the Language devices and stage directions relevant to the question)

A03 (Context – Ideas about the historical, political and social background)

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Eva Smith

Eva Smith is absent from stage and from the play but has a powerful presence in the lives of the Birlings. Priestley represents the masses of poor, working class people through Eva. Eva embodies the voiceless and faceless poor and oppressed people of England at the time the play was set. Eva is described in an **idealized way** – innocent victim, pretty, a good worker. She is presented as a symbol of the working class woman. In some ways, Priestley presents her as a martyr. The lower she sinks in her fortunes, the more honourable and noble she appears. She refuses to treat others as they have treated her, even though she is in a position to create scandal for them all. Through Eva Smith, Eva represents ordinary people who can be destroyed when society fails to grant them the right of basic human dignity. When Eric says **‘the one I knew is dead,’** we get the impression that he feels responsible and guilty about his conduct and carelessness. Through the other characters like Eric, we recognise that Eva was overlooked because of her social status. Her connection to the characters in the play is what prompts their confessions. Through Eva, Priestley promotes the idea that we have collective social responsibility. Despite her lower social class and death, Eva could be said to have the upper hand in the play as she is the one who has revealed the secrets of the Birlings and the Crofts and injustices she was subjected to. Mr Birling says **‘Rubbish! If you don’t come down sharply on some of these people, they’ll be asking for the earth.’** Clearly Mr Birling, who represents all other middle-class people believe that workers do not have the right to demand for fair wages and working conditions. Since Inspector Goole is Priestley’s mouth piece and promotes collective responsibility, he reminds the Birlings that **‘it is better to ask for the earth, than take it’**

“

Timeline of Events that led to Eva’s death

September 1910 Eva sacked by Birling & Co.
December 1910 Eva employed by Milwards.
Late January 1911 Eva sacked by Milwards.
March 1911 Eva becomes Gerald's mistress.
Early September 1911 Gerald breaks off the affair.
Eva leaves Brumley for two months.
November 1911 Eric meets Eva.
December 1911/January 1912 Eva finds she is pregnant.
Late March 1912 Mrs. Birling turns down Eva's application for
Early April 1912 Eva's suicide/the Inspector calls

Key Quotes

‘Now – about this girl, Eva Smith. I remember her quite well now. She was a lively good-looking girl – country-bred, I fancy – and she’d been working in one of our shops for over a year. A good worker too.’

“...and died, after several hours of agony...”

“She was a very pretty girl...that didn’t make it any better.”

“She was young and pretty and warm-hearted- and intensely grateful. I became at once the most important person in her life- you understand?”

“She was giving herself ridiculous airs...claiming elaborate fine feelings...that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.”

“As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!”

Themes

Social Class
Social Responsibility
Class Division
Gender Inequality

How does Priestley present the character of Eva Smith ideas about social responsibility in the play?

Think about:

- *What are Priestley's views? What and who does Eva represent in the play?*
- *How is she treated and what does this suggest about society and attitudes of people at that time?*
- *How does Priestley convey his views through the characters thoughts, words and behaviour and their treatment of Eva Smith?*

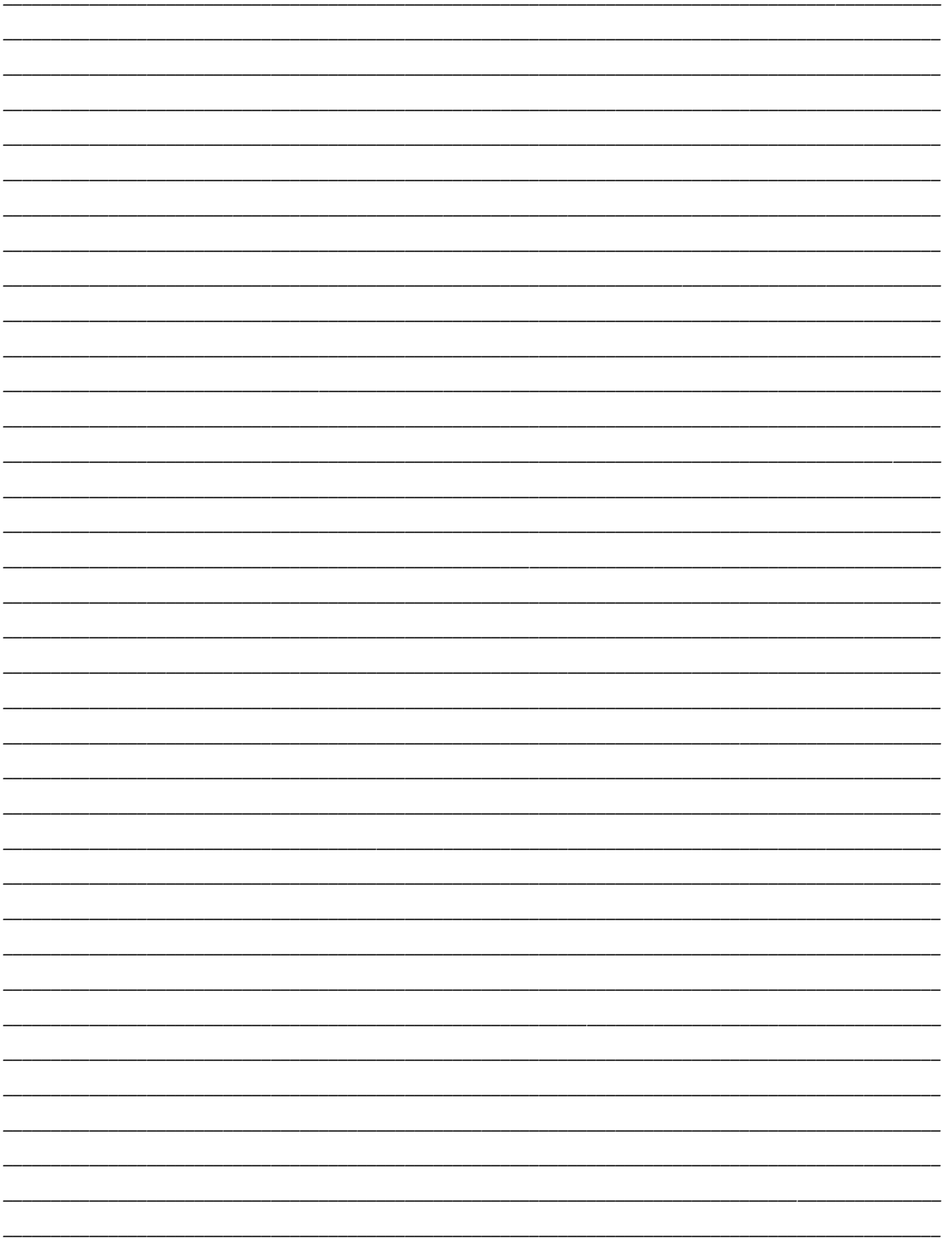
Your answer must include:

AO1 (Your understanding and interpretation of Eva Smith in relation to the other characters, the themes and quotations)

A02 (Identify and Explain the Language devices and Stage directions that convey ideas about Eva and Priestley's views)

A03 (Context – Ideas about the historical, political and social background)

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Dramatic Devices (AO2)

Stage Directions and Setting

Act 1 - Priestley uses **stage directions to set the scene and give us information about the Birling family** before we even see them. The setting suggests that the **Birlings are a comfortable and well – off** middle to upper class family. We can also tell that they are **all feeling relaxed and confident** at the beginning of the play:

- set - *large suburban house*
- furniture - *‘solid ...but not cosy and homelike’*
- props – suggests wealth *‘champagne glasses’, ‘decanter of port’*
- costume *‘evening dress of the period’* white tie and tails – a formal occasion
- lighting – *‘pink and intimate’*

At the start of the play the Birlings are seated and relaxed. By the end all standing and shouting and crying.

Staging

All the action in 1 room – claustrophobic and intense. Suggests that the Birlings live in a closed, protected world, sheltered from reality. The Inspector and social responsibility is not welcome.

Cliff Hangers

- **Act 1:** The inspector returns at the end of the scene and asks his question *‘Well?’* This is a **cliff-hanger – audience want to watch on to see how Gerald and Sheila react.**
- **Act 2:** The **front door slams, announcing Eric’s return**, but the audience have to wait until Act 2 for his confession.

(The front door bangs every time someone enters or leaves the house. The characters and audience can hear this, and wonder who enters the house- **effective sound effect in creating tension**

- **Act 3:** Ends off with the **telephone ringing sharply** and disturbing the atmosphere that they have restored after the inspector leaves - builds up the tension

Dramatic Irony (when an audience knows more about the characters/action than the characters on stage).

Priestley uses **dramatic irony to show how ridiculous and wrong Birling’s opinions are.** The dramatic irony makes the audience think Birling is foolish and lacking in knowledge about the future. It also makes his political opinions seem wrong. Priestley is also showing the audience his concern about such idiotic people and the degree of power they have in this society.

Birling says war won’t happen *‘I say there isn’t a chance of war’* but the audience knows there were **two World Wars about to happen**

Birling says that the **Titanic won’t sink** – *‘absolutely unsinkable’* – we know **it did, later that year.**

Birling thinks **there’ll be no tension between employers and employees** *‘you’ll be living in a world that will have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations’* but there were strikes in 1907-1912 because of poor conditions and the **General Strike of 1926 (AO3)**

Quotes

Dramatic Devices

The Entrance of the inspector

Sound Effect- The 'doorbell' Edna interrupts Birling in the middle of his speeches. The '*sharp*' ring would startle the audience – and suggests that the Inspector may be a 'sharp' (as in intelligent and possibly aggressive) person. The ring also interrupts Birling suggesting that the Inspector will have power and control over Birling.

Change of lighting from pink and intimate' to 'brighter and harder' when the inspector arrives. This suggests again that the Inspector is a 'hard' character who will wreck the cosy world the Birlings live in.

His name 'Inspector Goole' also suggests something unpleasant/interesting about the inspector – e.g. 'ghoul' means ghost

The inspector is a dramatic device

- The Inspector '**inspects**' or **interrogates** each person in turn. He shows a **photo of Eva Smith** to each character in turn that only they see. The **audience is intrigued** and wants to know what this is.
- The inspector '**creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness**'. He also speaks '**carefully, weightily**' and '**has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking**'. This interests an audience – **we want to know why he is there and how people will react** to his questioning.
- Inspector leaves the room, having introduced Eva Smith's change of name to Daisy Renton. **Audience want to know why this has occurred – suspense and intrigue builds up.**
- **Interrogation of Birling.** Birling feels uncomfortable and tries to threaten Goole with his friendship with Colonel Roberts- **Goole is not afraid of the power and status that Mr Birling has.**

Timing (Tension created through the timing)

Timing of entrances and exits is crucial.

- The Inspector arrives immediately after Birling has told Gerald about his impending knighthood and about how "a man has to look after himself and his own."
- **Sheila runs off stage** when she realises she is the reason Eva was sacked - **creates intense atmosphere.**
- **Sheila and Gerald are left alone to discuss Daisy Renton-** this draws information out for audience.
- Tension is further created by the way **information is gradually revealed**, one person at a time. The audience and characters are kept on

Tight Structure of Play

- Follows the rules of **Greek Drama-** the three unities of **place, action and time are kept to in a realistic manner.** i.e. The Drama all unfolds in one place- Birling's Dining room. Action all takes place in one evening, time passes in the same way as in real life. This makes the play realistic.
- The **Inspector acts like a Greek chorus (Narrator).** He sums up what has happened, and explains to both actors and the audience the lessons we must learn.
- Equally might be seen as a simple **crime/ mystery play-** 'Who dunnit?'
- Furthermore, The play has **myth-like quality in that it carries a moral message** that we should take better care of our fellow human beings, so in some ways is like a **parable.**
- The play has a **didactic purpose**

Themes (AO1)

Responsibility

Mr Birling's sense of responsibility stops at his business and he does not understand or appreciate the value of social or community responsibility. The inspector wanted each member of the family to share the responsibility of Eva's death; he tells them, "**each of you helped to kill her.** However, his final speech is aimed not only at the characters on stage, but at the audience too especially when he says, '**One Eva Smith has gone- but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us**', Through Eva's death, Priestley promotes collective responsibility, demonstrating that everyone in society is linked, in the same way that all the characters are linked to Eva Smith. Priestley promotes the idea that everyone is a part of "**one body**" and have collective responsibility, as the Inspector sees society as more important than individual interests. The inspector challenges the values of individualism. Priestley wanted the characters to develop a social conscience and to embrace collective responsibility. He reveals the consequences of individualism when he claims that "**if men will not learn that lesson, when they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.**" In the play, both Sheila and Eric develop a social conscience and have learnt that they need to be accountable for their actions. In this way, Priestley indicates that they have embodied the values of the Inspector and have become more socially responsible. Priestley also suggests through Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald Croft, that many people in society are entrenched in their individualistic and capitalist belief system and are only concerned with personal responsibility as indicated in '**a man has to mind his own business and look after himself**'

The Generation Gap

The play demonstrates the contrast between the older and younger generations. Sheila, Eric and Eva represent the huge generation gap in the play. The ideas of the parents are locked in the old way of thinking where children need to follow in the footsteps of their parents in an unquestioning way. They would like to think that they can control their children's thinking. They have little sympathy for Eva Smith and are only sorry that she has died because it could impact on their lives.

It is clear that the younger generation are different by the end of the play. They are no longer controlled by their parents and their ideas. While Mr and Mrs Birling refuse to accept responsibility for their conduct and actions towards Eva Smith, their children are taking responsibility and show remorse for their actions. They express sympathy for the strikers in Act 1 and they also show greater sympathy for Eva Smith. Through this, Priestley suggests hope for the future of Britain where people and governments are more socially

Gender Stereotypes

The women and men in the play have very definite and prescribed roles. They conform to the typical male and female gender stereotypes of their time. However as the play progresses, these stereotypes are challenged as Sheila comes more into her own- she reveals herself as a strong, independent thinker who challenges her father and mother due to her learning and compassion for Eva Smith, whom she recognises as a woman just like her. Her decision to give the ring back depicts her pride and sincerity about her feelings. Gender roles were well defined for the wealthy and middle class. Men worked to support their families and they were to protect their wives and daughters. Women were to marry into money so that they didn't have to work and they planned parties, visited friends and had children. Being a member of the poor working class, Eva was amongst the most marginalised in society, placing her at the bottom of the social ladder, with no financial stability, social security, or options for a better life. However, Eva has challenged the gender stereotype by refusing the money from Eric and by not agreeing to marry him. She is also responsible for rallying up support for the strike, which portrays her beliefs and views on capitalistic industrialist and the inequality and oppression suffered by workers. This portrayal of Eva presents her as being a strong, independent, fair woman who challenges the status quo.

Social Class

We learn about the poor, working class and the quality of their lives through the inspector and the Birlings. Their upper class lifestyle is revealed through Sheila's frivolous and extravagant habits, Mr Birling's rise to the upper class through his positions in society, Mrs Birling's aristocratic attitude and her charity, Gerald's frivolous and irresponsible attitude towards Daisy Renton, Eric's alcoholism and abuse of Eva. Mr Birling uses Gerald to promote his social class. The divisions in social class are strengthened through the conduct of the upper classes who abuse their power and status; leading to the marginalisation and further inequality and unfairness. They are never relaxed and content, but always on edge making excuses, displaying pretences and hiding their true nature. The middle and upper classes tend to repress their needs and hide their secret desires and inappropriate behaviour. These people are completely reliant on the class system to protect them and hide their inadequacies and oppressive, capitalistic ways. Eva represents ordinary people; the working- classes who can be destroyed by indifference when society fails to grant them the right of basic human dignity. When Mrs Birling says she does not recognise Eva it is because to her, she has no identity – she does not exist because she is lower class. The hierarchy shown at the start of the play is destroyed by the Inspector's arrival.

Structuring the Answer for the Exam Essay

1. Make a **Point** that is directly linked to the Question (**Topic Sentence**) – **AO1**
2. Support your point with **Evidence** – **AO1**
3. **Explain the evidence** and link your explanation to the Question – **AO1**
4. **Zoom into the specific language devices** – **name and analyse them and link to the question** – **AO2**
5. Write a sentence about **context** and link to the question – **AO3**

Sample Paragraph

How does Priestley present ideas about the generation gap in 'An Inspector Calls'?

Priestley portrays the difference in the thinking between the older and the younger generation through the use of sarcasm **(AO2)** when Mr Birling says '**the famous younger generation who know it all**', **(AO1)** suggesting that he does not take his children seriously and thinks they are foolish. This is reinforced when Mrs Birling refers to Sheila and Eric still as "**children**" and speaks patronisingly to them. However, Priestley presents the younger generation as developing a social conscience as the play progresses. In contrast to their parents, both Sheila and Eric are presented as remorseful when they accept responsibility by stating that '**we are all to blame**.' Through the use of the collective pronoun 'we', the theme of collective responsibility is explored **(AO2)**. Furthermore, Eric admits, '**I'll never, never do it again**,' however, he is appalled by his parents' inability to admit their own responsibility. He therefore tells them forcefully, "**I'm ashamed of you**.' Through the use of the repetitive exclamation, '**I'll never, never do it again**,' Priestley highlights Eric's resolve to make a change in himself **(AO2)**. In 1912, family members were expected to know their roles and to listen unquestioningly to parents who were in charge. However, through Sheila and Eric, Priestley presents the younger generation as being a symbol of hope and social change for the future. **(AO3)**

Clearly, Priestley uses Mr. & Mrs. Birling to represent old-fashioned ideas. He discredits them, and what they represent, by making them look foolish and by catching them out at the end when he warns them of the "**fire and blood and anguish**" that will result if they do not pay attention to what he has taught them **(AO1)**.