

An Inspector Calls by J. B. Priestley



Revision Guide

Dunsel

An Inspector Calls Revision Guide Contents

These notes are from a variety of sources and should be used for revision in addition to and not in place of the notes you're making in class. Some useful websites consulted here that may be useful for you to use at home include BBC Bitesize, Sparknotes, Cliffsnotes and litcharts. The CGP revision guide may also be of use.

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English Literature Paper 2 Section A

An Inspector Calls by J. B. Priestley

Key Information:

- You will complete this paper closed book. This means you will not have a copy of the play in the exam with you and so will need to know the text incredibly well.
- As part of your revision this year you should have read the play at home at least once.
- Even though the exam is closed book, you still need to use quotations so it is vital that you have learnt several key quotations that allow you to explore key characters, themes, ideas and settings. Try to choose quotations that overlap for these different question focuses.

Timings:

- Paper 2 will last for a total of 2 hours and 15 minutes
- You should spend approximately 45 minutes on section A writing about *An Inspector Calls*
- As part of this time remember to use the first 5 minutes to plan your answer and leave time at the end to check your work. This is particularly important as you are assessed for the accuracy of your use of spelling, punctuation and grammar in section A of this paper.

What am I assessed on and what are the marks available?

- In this question 30 marks are available for AO1, AO2 and AO3 (see below for reminders of what the assessment objectives assess).
- In Section A only of this paper you are also able to gain an additional 4 marks for SPaG (AO4).
- AO1: This AO tests your ability to read, understand and respond to texts. You should be able to show that you can maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response. You should also show that you can use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate your interpretations. Up to 12 marks available for this skill.
- AO2: This AO tests your ability to analyse the language, form and structure used by the writer to create meanings and effects. You should be able to use relevant subject terminology where appropriate. Up to 12 marks available for this skill.
- AO3: This AO tests your ability to show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written. This is where your historical knowledge and background understanding of the text and writer is important. Up to 6 marks available.
- AO4: This AO tests your ability to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation. Up to 4 marks available.

An Inspector Calls

Synopsis

The Birling family are spending a happy evening celebrating the engagement of Sheila Birling to Gerald Croft - a marriage that will result in the merging of two successful local businesses.

Yet, just when everything seems to be going so well, they receive a surprise visit from an Inspector Goole who is investigating the suicide of a young girl.

Act 1

The Birling family are holding a dinner party to celebrate the engagement of Sheila to Gerald Croft, the son and heir of Mr Birling's rival in business.

When the ladies leave the men to their port, Mr Birling has a 'man to man' chat with Gerald and Eric, advising them that a man needs to look after himself and his own family and not worry about the wider community. As he is telling them this, the door bell rings. Inspector Goole enters, an impressive, serious man whom none of them has heard of.

Inspector Goole announces that he has come to investigate the suicide of a young working-class girl who died that afternoon. Her name was Eva Smith. After seeing a photograph of her, Birling admits that she used to be one of his employees: he discharged her when she became one of the ring-leaders of a strike asking for slightly higher wages. Birling justifies sacking her by saying he paid his workers the usual rates; he cannot see that he has any responsibility for what happened to her afterwards.

When Sheila enters, the Inspector reveals that he would also like to question her about Eva Smith's death. He tells Sheila that Eva's next job was at a big shop called Milwards, but that she was sacked after a customer complained about her. When she too is shown a photograph of the girl, Sheila is very affected. She admits that it was her fault that Eva was sacked: when Sheila had gone in to try on a dress that didn't suit her, she had caught Eva smirking to another shop assistant - in her anger, Sheila had told the manager that if Eva wasn't fired, Mrs Birling would close their account. Sheila is hugely guilty and feels responsible for Eva's death.

When the Inspector then states that Eva, in despair, changed her name to Daisy Renton, Gerald Croft's involuntary reaction reveals that he knew her too. When the act ends, the audience is poised to find out what part Gerald had to play in her death.

Act One Analysis

"An Inspector Calls", as its curtain rises, does not seem particularly different from many other plays popular in the same period. A middle-class family sits around a table, having just enjoyed a satisfying dinner, and the maid clears the table. The scene sets the expectation that this is going to be a family drama, maybe even a comedy, and the focus will be on this happy family environment. Yet, Priestley's play undergoes a subtle shift in mood and tone until it has become something much more unusual, which defies both its initial expectations and its seeming naturalism.

This first tableau, for example, can be seen as something other as a cozy emblem of this rich family's life, for among them is a picture of one of the "millions and millions" of Eva Smiths, here working for what is likely a minimum wage, clearing the table and putting out port and cigars. It is no accident, surely, that "Eva" the girl and "Edna" the maid have such similar names. The presence of Edna onstage throughout the play symbolizes the presence of Eva and reinforces Priestley's ultimate point about the abuse of power and the failure to take sufficient responsibility for one's actions toward others.

Immediately, with the Inspector's interrogations of Birling and Sheila, we see Priestley's key salvo: the lower-class individuals are the responsibility of the middle and upper classes. This idea draws on traditional class morality. But as the society has become less hierarchical, the new way of expressing this morality is to say that society at large should care for people who are poor and need support. As Birling did not worry about firing the girls who led the strike for more wages, as Sheila did not think twice about causing the shop assistant to get in trouble, so too do the Birlings routinely ignore Edna during the play. Edna's silence in the play, though she begins as a natural component of the comfortable family room as the curtain rises, gradually comes to seem more and more significant as the play goes on.

The early part of the act provides further indicators of what is to come. Sheila's slightly acidic comment about Gerald's supposed absence last summer plants the idea that there must be a better reason for the absence (we will learn it soon enough: Gerald has had a lover), and her comment illustrates the cracks which are present from the very beginning in the relationship between Sheila and Gerald. Eric's unmotivated laugh in the middle of the conversation helps us to understand, later in the play, that he probably is "squiffy" as Sheila suggests, though it is not until much later that his alcohol problem will come to

light. Priestley carefully structures the play so that the careful listener or reader will hear these ambiguous possibilities of trouble.

The centerpiece of this first part of the play, though, is the self-satisfied attitude of Arthur Birling. He is indeed, as he puts it, every inch the "hard-headed man of business." Smug and sure of himself, he launches into a series of assertions which Priestley's 1946 audience would have known only too well to be false. Birling asserts that there will not be another war, yet, two years after this utterance (the play is set in 1912) the First World War was to begin. Moreover, the 1946 audience would have only just managed to live through the Second World War of 1939 to 1945. Birling also asserts that the *Titanic*, which sets sail "next week," is "unsinkable," yet the audience knows that the ship sank only a little later in 1912. Priestley's original audience probably would have found Birling's reference to the *Titanic* more distressing than a modern audience because some of them may have known people who died in the disaster. Priestley's dramatic irony, then, is poignant, not merely coy and comfortable, for the audience.

Birling's politics of self-reliance and personal responsibility are staunchly and unashamedly capitalist, perhaps even right-wing. He believes in "low wages, high prices," is absolutely dismissive of Eva's strike, and, even at the close of the Inspector's inquiry, can only limply claim that he would "give thousands" to make things better. Money, indeed, dominates the way he thinks, even to the extent that, Priestley subtly illustrates, he sees his daughter's engagement to Gerald Croft as a financial move and potentially the first step towards a merger between the Birling and Croft businesses. Birling represents the political point of view opposite to Priestley's own. Birling even makes himself out to be the antithesis of left-leaning writers and intellectuals generally, namely George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, both very famously left-wing voices.

Birling, moreover, represents "Middle England." This term is used generally to describe the right-leaning majority of the British public. Though it is a modern-day term, it could just as well apply to the middle-class, right-leaning majority of Priestley's Britain.

Yet, although Birling and his wife are indeed middle-class, Priestley tells us in one of his stage directions (though it is never explicitly referred to in the play itself) that Sybil is "a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior." Birling is throughout the play ticked down by his wife: early in this act, for instance, for complimenting the servants on the meal in front of a guest. Sybil, presumably from a better social background than Birling, seems to be, in an imperious, passive way, the one in control of the marriage—and of her husband.

Birling himself seems to have worked his way up to the middle classes (he is "provincial in his speech," Priestley tells us in another stage direction, which might be another clue to his background) and, as he explains to Gerald, he is currently trying to see his way to a knighthood and therefore greatly improving his social position. In short, the Birlings have ambitions to move up the social scale.

Gerald's parents, for their part, "Sir George and Lady Croft," already have their knighthood, and their business is considerably older and more successful than Birling's. They, we presume, are an upper-class family, and although we never meet them, Gerald's mother (like Sybil) seems to have a real eye on social status, feeling that Gerald "might have done better for [himself] socially." Is this, we might suggest, the reason for their not being at the Birlings' little celebratory dinner—do they disapprove that much? The initial lack of interest of the Birlings and people like them towards the fate of Eva Smith, in turn, is part of the overall class structure in England at this time, and Priestley, even this early in the play, draws our attention to the way that Lady Croft looks down on Birling just as he looks down on Eva.

It is interesting to examine who is control in each part of the play, and interesting too that the visiting police inspector (a staple, in fact, of drama in plays like *Dial M for Murder*) begins not as an avenging angel, but as a rather unremarkable character. Birling dominates their first conversation, boasting about his status as a former Lord Mayor and a magistrate. Yet Priestley still leaves us interesting clues. From what we know about the Inspector's later (seemingly supernatural) abilities, his statement "I've only recently transferred" carries tantalizingly ambiguous double meanings. How and from where (what town? what planet? what time?) has he "transferred?"

The Inspector's power and insight into the situation is only really glimpsed, in this first act, by Sheila, who ominously predicts to Gerald as the curtain goes down that everyone will come to see that the Inspector knows far more than anyone realizes. Yet Priestley, in the first act, gives the Inspector no explicit moment of surprising the family by knowing more than they do. The level of tension in the play starts extremely low, builds gradually as the Inspector enters, and builds more as the characters come to understand the fate of Eva and their roles.

Indeed, at the end of Act One, structured by Priestley so as to end on a point of tension, we discover that it is not just Birling and Sheila, but also Gerald, who is involved in Eva Smith's demise. The comfortable, warm atmosphere of the opening has been largely destroyed by the time the curtain comes down at the

end of the act, with three people so far responsible for Eva's fate, all responding differently. Significantly, we have little indication of where the play might go next, but the audience might predict that more family members will prove responsible for Eva's fate as we learn what else happened to her.

Act 2

After some tense words between Sheila and Gerald, an attempt by Mrs Birling to usher the Inspector away and the revelation that Eric Birling is a hardened drinker, Gerald admits that he too had known Daisy Renton. He had met her at the local Variety Theatre - known to be the haunt of prostitutes - and had 'rescued' her from the unwelcome attentions of Alderman Meggarty, a local dignitary. When he found out that Daisy was almost penniless, Gerald let her stay in the flat of a friend of his and she became his mistress. He ended the affair when he had to go away on business, giving her some money to see her through for a few months.

Sheila is glad to have heard this confession from her fiancé, although Mrs Birling is scandalised. Once Gerald has left to go for a walk and get over the news of Daisy's death, Inspector Goole shows a photograph to Mrs Birling. She grudgingly admits that she had seen the girl two weeks previously, when the girl - now pregnant - had come to ask for financial assistance from the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation.

Mrs Birling was the chairwoman and persuaded the committee to turn down the girl's appeal on the grounds that she had the impudence to call herself Mrs Birling and because she believed that the father of the child should bear the responsibility. She says the girl refused to let the father of the child support her because she believed money he had given her previously to be stolen, yet Mrs Birling is proud of refusing the girl aid. She claims that she did her duty and sees no reason at all why she should take any blame for the girl's death.

Right at the end of the scene, as Mrs Birling denounces the father of the child and claims he needs to be made an example of, Sheila (and the audience) realise that Eric is involved. When Eric comes into the room, the act ends.

Act Two Analysis

The development of Sheila, one of the central characters of the second act, is very important to the play. She starts, in Act One, as "a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited," and her excited reaction to Gerald's engagement ring suggests she is comfortably settled in the economic and cultural traditions of her father. At the start of the play, she was suspicious of Gerald's absence last summer, but showed no desire to investigate it further. Yet, by the end of the first act, she was openly mocking Gerald's desire to keep his involvement in Eva's life from the Inspector. We were prepared to see how her relationship with her fiancé was about to break down. Throughout the play, Sheila realizes faster than anyone else that it is better if the Inspector is directly told the truth. When she, much to her mother's chagrin, reveals to the Inspector openly that Eric has been drinking heavily for two years, Priestley is showing us a girl becoming aware that integrity demands that she be honest and truthful. One owns up to one's faults and takes responsibility.

Sheila clearly has begun to change. She is owning up to her responsibility for Eva's death, maturing as she does so. Notably, she stands in stark contrast to her mother, who refuses to change at all and (so far) refuses to drop her mask of icy, upper-class politeness. Priestley is interested in the well-worn idea that the young have the capacity to change, accept new ideas and move forwards while their parents and the older generations often fail to do so.

Shortly before his exit, we see that Sheila similarly has the maturity to, without tears, accept that things are now different between her and Gerald, even unemotionally offering the symbolic gesture of the return of his ring. Maturely, she accepts her part of the responsibility for Eva's death, noting that it is better that "at least [Gerald has] been honest." Moreover, as she points out to him, "this has made a difference," and the engagement will not be able to continue without serious reconsideration.

The moment when Sheila returns Gerald's ring perhaps symbolizes the distance the play itself has come: its comfortable "engagement party" opening has been entirely turned on its head. In addition, the man who was assumed (by Birling) to be just a local, Brumley police inspector has turned out to be something quite different. Sheila has been the first to realize the strangeness of the Inspector. "I don't understand about you," she says to him, while Priestley's double adverbs (in his stage direction) to direct the actor are "wonderingly and dubiously." It is Sheila who first suggests, later in the play, that the Inspector

might not have been an Inspector, and here she is already beginning to suspect that there is something unusual about him. Sheila, moreover, is aware of the fact that the Inspector is now going to control events until he leaves, regardless of what either of her parents tries to do to oppose him.

The Inspector himself is a fascinating character. As the title character, in many ways he is the most important character to any interpretation of the play. Priestley describes the Inspector on his first entrance as creating "at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness." He is in his fifties and has "a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking." The Inspector elliptically comments that he does not "see much of" the Chief Constable in Act One, which is unsurprising, given that he is not (as we find out in Act Three) actually a police officer. One of the key questions of the play is the precise nature of the Inspector's identity.

It is possible, of course, that the Inspector is perfectly human and unremarkable, as Birling says: a clever hoaxer, making the most of some information from the girl's diary. Yet, this would not explain the arrival of the police inspector at the end of the play! Moreover, the Inspector himself seems to run out of time as the play goes on, increasingly pressing the person he's questioning to hurry up (note, particularly; that Eric's interrogation is the shortest and the last).

Critics arguing for the supernatural power of the Inspector tend to focus on his name. "Goole," of course, spelled another way, becomes "ghoul": a haunting spirit closely associated with corpses and the dead. Is the Inspector some kind of ghostly incarnation of Eva Smith, determined to return to her killers to make them realize the error of their ways? Can the Inspector really be said to be a ghost who knows the future? At this point in the play, the Inspector's role is hugely ambiguous, yet his power over the family is growing. He silences Birling on more than one occasion and even manages to break the composure of Mrs. Birling by allowing her to trap her own son. He seems to have known already that Gerald, Eric, and Mrs. Birling were also involved.

Some critics have argued that "Goole" is in fact a reference to a fishing village not far from Priestley's native Bradford and that the Inspector is simply to be read as "fishing" for information and hooking in the Birlings. Whether a ghoul or simply Goole, the Inspector, by the end of the second act, has become a compellingly authoritative figure.

Priestley's socialist message—that everyone must look out for each other—is extended further in the Inspector's damning comment that the public people

"have responsibilities as well as privileges." Though the three younger characters, *Gerald*, *Eric* and *Sheila*, all are partly to blame in *Eva's* death, it is with the two elder *Birlings* that the main point of blame rests. *Birling*, as a public man, had a responsibility to do the right thing, and (particularly as an ex-Lord Mayor) should have been aware of the plight of girls like *Eva*. *Mrs. Birling*, as the Inspector points out, even managed to avoid giving help and support to *Eva* while sitting as the chairperson of a committee expressly designed for that purpose. It is not simply a personal misdemeanor, but a public, professional one: both of them symbolize the usual indifference of social organizations toward people in *Eva's* position.

Act 3

There is a bitter meeting between Eric and his parents, which the Inspector interrupts so that he can question Eric. Eric tells the story of his own involvement with the girl. He had met her in the same theatre bar as Gerald, had got drunk and had accompanied her back to her lodgings. He almost turned violent when she didn't let him in, so she relented and they slept together. When he met her two weeks later they slept together again and soon afterwards she discovered that she was pregnant. She did not want to marry Eric because she knew he didn't love her, but she did accept gifts of money from him until she realised it was stolen. Eric admits that he had taken about £50 from Mr Birling's office - at which Mr and Mrs Birling are furious.

All the Birlings now know they played a part in the girl's death. Mr and Mrs Birling are concerned about covering up their involvement, whereas Sheila and Eric are more aware of the personal tragedy and feel guilty. The Inspector leaves, after delivering a strong message about how we *all* should be responsible for each other.

After he has left, and the family has begun to consider the consequences of what has been revealed, they gradually begin to wonder about the Inspector. Was he real? When Gerald returns from his walk he explains that he also had suspicions about the Inspector and had found out that there is no Inspector Goole on the force, which Birling confirms with a phone call.

They gradually realise that perhaps the Inspector conned them - he could have showed each person a different photograph - and when they telephone the infirmary, they realise that there hasn't been a suicide case for months. Birling is delighted, assuming they are now all off the hook, while Sheila and Eric maintain that nothing has changed - each of them still committed the acts that the Inspector had accused them of, even if they did turn out to be against five different girls.

Yet then the telephone rings. Mr Birling answers it, and then tells the family that it was the police were on the line: an inspector is on his way to ask questions about the suicide of a young girl...

Act Three Analysis

The interrogation of Eric, which begins this act, is the last in a chain of interrogations which have structured the play since the Inspector's arrival (in order: Birling, Sheila, Gerald, Mrs. Birling, Eric). Each of the Birlings has played a part in Eva Smith's death, and each of them must take part of the responsibility for what happened to her and for her final, sad choice. This motif, as well as the structure of the play and of Eva Smith's life (though, to get the order of events right, Mrs. Birling was the last, not the penultimate, character to affect Eva in reality), points to two of Priestley's key themes: the interrelationship of cause and effect and, more generally, the nature of time.

The "chain of events" that the Inspector outlined as leading to Eva Smith's death in Act One is a key idea in the play. The chain of personal and social events is not simply a metaphor for the way the class system holds people like "Eva Smiths and John Smiths" firmly in their subservient positions in society, but it is also a neat encapsulation of the Inspector's key moral: that everyone, contrary to what Birling explains, is indeed bound up with everyone else "like bees in a hive." As much as we like to think of ourselves as individuals, we are also social beings.

The Birlings and Gerald Croft are chained together by Eva Smith's death. Birling sets off the chain which makes possible Sheila's bad deed against Eva, which in turn throws Eva into the path of Gerald and then Eric and, finally, in front of Mrs. Birling's committee. Each deed is tied to the deed before it and the deed after it. The individual deeds, linked together, make Eva's downfall so severe that she chooses suicide—effectively causing this choice. This is the "cause and effect" idea of succession that Priestley explores: the way in which time can indeed make us all responsible for each other.

Both of these themes are present elsewhere in Priestley's work, particularly in *Time and the Conways* and [I Have Been Here Before]. *Time and the Conways*, in particular, is interested in the notion of time as a series of interlocking dimensions: a series of parallel universes. He famously quoted the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle: "if there were more heavens than one, the movement of any of them equally would be time, so that there would be many times at the same time." Even if, therefore, the chain of events that led to Eva Smith's death was not in fact a chain, but separate events all involving different girls, Priestley's theory of time suggests that they might still be seen as part of the same whole.

Consider this passage from Priestley's "Man and Time": "We invent Time to explain change and succession. We try to account for it out there in the world we are observing, but soon run into trouble because it is not out there at all. It comes with the travelling searchlight, the moving slit." Might we see the Inspector as just such a "moving slit," a function of time who can send the searchlight through to each person's experiences? Is his role, perhaps, to bring together a series of separate deeds so as to make the Birlings and Gerald Croft realize their collective and individual responsibilities? Perhaps: Priestley leaves the Inspector's role open to such an interpretation. It is also fascinating to consider that (as is explored in the Stephen Daldry production) the Inspector might indeed come from the future. Is he the "Ghoul" of Eva Smith (or even of her dead baby, somehow) come back to haunt her murderers?

It is important to analyze the Inspector's promise, later repeated by Sheila, of "fire and blood and anguish" if men will not learn that they are responsible for each other. It seems very likely that Priestley intends the resonance of not just the Second World War but also the First World War, a catastrophically major event in British history that significantly changed the social structure of the country—and led to horrors, particularly in trench warfare, the likes of which had never been seen in living memory. Moreover, to Priestley's 1946 audience, it would have been an uncomfortably close reminder of the Second World War, which had just concluded.

Explaining Dunne's theory of time, Priestley noted, "Each of us is a series of observers existing in a series of Times." The Inspector, it seems, might be just such an observer, who can see beyond the play's 1912 setting to its 1946 performance date—and who, perhaps, with the promised reappearance of a police inspector at the end of the play (we never learn whether this Inspector is indeed Goole again) can move through time. What are we to take from the play's ending? The play is over after Birling announces his news, perhaps indicating that the play has gone back to the point at which the Inspector arrived, just to continue again once the curtain falls. Perhaps Eva Smith had not yet died and the Inspector was investigating an event which had not yet happened. However one chooses to interpret the play, one must face the play's use of the concepts of time that so fascinated Priestley.

After the Inspector's exit, the focus of the play shifts away from Eva Smith's story, now complete, as the characters unpack and examine more closely what has just happened. What we see, for the first time, is how the Birlings (and Gerald) are going to, in the Inspector's words, "adjust their family relationships." Immediately, the key alliance is formed between Mr. and Mrs. Birling, who are keen to judge Eric as harshly as possible, while sweeping their

own moral misdemeanors under the carpet. We also see, when Sheila steps in to defend Eric, that the two Birling siblings have formed another contrasting alliance in line with the Inspector's message about responsibility and maturity.

Birling himself does not really seem to have changed at all since the first act. His offer of money (could "thousands" really make amends for a girl's death?) is almost comically inappropriate. Almost as soon as the Inspector leaves, he is primarily considering the potential damage to his chances of getting a knighthood.

It is his wife, though, who seems to remain more ominously unchanged. She alone stands her ground in the face of the Inspector, icily dismissive of "girls of that class," and though she is shocked by Eric's behavior and the subsequent revelations, moments after the Inspector's exit she "comes to life" to tell Eric how "absolutely ashamed" of him she is. Birling throughout is something of a comic buffoon, but it is Sybil Birling, perhaps, who genuinely embodies the disdain for the lower classes, the extreme self-centeredness which Priestley is primarily arguing against.

The other character who interestingly comes into focus in this final act is Gerald Croft. He is not a social equal of his fiancé, and we do not find out a great deal about him—other than, of course, his dealings with Eva. Eric's naive comment about Eva in the Palace bar (which itself, Priestley makes quite clear, is a meeting place for prostitutes and their clients), about the "woman who wanted her to go there," seems to suggest that Eva is so desperate that she is working as a prostitute and that this woman is the madam. Yet what is interesting is that Eric, despite his drinking problem, genuinely seems not to understand the implications of it. Gerald could easily have been at the Palace bar looking for a prostitute, and the fact he knows that it is a "favourite haunt of women of the town" proves that he is far more streetwise than Eric Birling. We know, too, from his encounter with Eva that he is quite happy to undertake a sexual relationship without being in love.

Yet we never suspect, when Gerald leaves, that part of his motivation for going might be some interrogation of his own; when he returns, that is precisely what he has been doing. Gerald is even absent from the Inspector's final speech. We would not suspect, from his behavior at the beginning of the play, that he has been unfaithful to his fiancé. It is Gerald, moreover, who leads the way to unraveling the Inspector's case and who, in the closing minutes of the play, directly phones the infirmary to find out whether a girl has committed suicide.

Birling, naturally, is delighted. He tells Gerald that the Inspector "didn't keep you on the run as he did the rest of us." Yet one can never quite trust Gerald Croft. Ominously, the way he casts aside his own responsibility in favor of trying to prove that the Inspector was a hoaxer actually suggests that he is another Arthur Birling (or worse) in the making.

Priestley makes a fascinating psychological point regarding the ways people react to guilt and responsibility in this last act. The heady, breathless glee with which Mr. and Mrs. Birling react is incredibly well-observed. As more and more pieces of evidence fall into place, Birling, in particular, is so overjoyed and relieved that he even dares to imitate the Inspector's final speech. The point, clearly, is that some people are always unwilling to accept responsibility, no matter how clearly it is explained to them. In their own heads, they will find ways out of it. Here, all it takes is to know that they are not going to be held legally responsible in order to stop worrying about their moral responsibility. It will, as the Inspector warns the Birlings at the end, take more than simply being told; they will need to be taught the moral lessons at issue here.

Priestley's warning about responsibility has resonated through almost a century of constant international revival in the theatre. In any age it is performed, the apocalyptic, *Revelation*-style warning of "fire and blood and anguish" looks ominously forward to military conflict. The sociological point is this unusually portentous. If man will not learn to look out for his fellow man in small ways, Priestley seems to argue, then man will destroy man on battlefields, with bombs, with guns, with "fire and blood and anguish."

"An Inspector Calls" - J.B Priestley

Character List

Arthur Birling

Husband of Sybil, father of Sheila and Eric. Priestley describes him as a "heavy-looking man" in his mid-fifties, with easy manners but "rather provincial in his speech." He is the owner of Birling and Company, some sort of factory business which employs several girls to work on (presumably sewing) machines. He is a Magistrate and, two years ago, was Lord Mayor of Brumley. He thus is a man of some standing in the town. He describes himself as a "hard-headed practical man of business," and he is firmly capitalist, even right-wing, in his political views.

Gerald Croft

Engaged to be married to Sheila. His parents, Sir George and Lady Croft, are above the Birlings socially, and it seems his mother disapproves of his engagement to Sheila. He is, Priestley says, "an attractive chap about thirty ... very much the easy well-bred young-man-about-town." He works for his father's company, Crofts Limited, which seems to be both bigger and older than Birling and Company.

Sheila Birling

Engaged to be married to Gerald. Daughter of Arthur Birling and Sybil Birling, and sister of Eric. Priestley describes her as "a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited," which is precisely how she comes across in the first act of the play. In the second and third acts, however, following the realization of the part she has played in Eva Smith's life, she matures and comes to realize the importance of the Inspector's message.

Sybil Birling

Married to Arthur. Mother of Sheila and Eric. Priestley has her "about fifty, a rather cold woman," and--significantly--her husband's "social superior." Sybil is, like her husband, a woman of some public influence, sitting on charity organizations and having been married two years ago to the Lord Mayor. She is an icily impressive woman, arguably the only one of all the Birlings to almost completely resist the Inspector's attempts to make her realize her responsibilities.

Eric Birling

Son of Arthur and Sybil Birling. Brother of Sheila Birling. Eric is in his "early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive" and, we discover very early in the play, has a drinking problem. He has been drinking steadily for almost two years. He works at Birling and Company, and his father, we presume, is his boss. He is quite naive, in no way as worldly or as cunning as Gerald Croft. By the end of the play, like his sister, Eric becomes aware of his own responsibilities.

Inspector Goole

The Inspector "need not be a big man, but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness." He is in his fifties, and he is dressed in a plain dark suit. Priestley describes him as speaking "carefully, weightily ... and [he] has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before he speaks." He initially seems to be an ordinary Brumley police inspector, but (as his name might suggest) comes to seem something more ominous-- perhaps even a supernatural being. The precise nature of his character is left ambiguous by Priestley, and it can be interpreted in various ways.

Edna

"The parlour maid." Her name is very similar to "Eva," and her presence onstage is a timely reminder of the presence of the lower classes, whom families like the Birlings unthinkingly keep in thrall.

Eva Smith

A girl who the Inspector claims worked for Birling and was fired, before working for Milwards and then being dismissed. She subsequently had relationships with Gerald Croft and then Eric Birling (by whom she became pregnant). Finally she turned to Mrs. Birling's charitable committee for help, but she committed suicide two hours before the time of the beginning of the play; she drank strong disinfectant. It is possible, though, that the story is not quite true and that she never really existed as one person. Gerald Croft's suggestion that there was more than one girl involved in the Inspector's narrative could be more accurate.

Daisy Renton

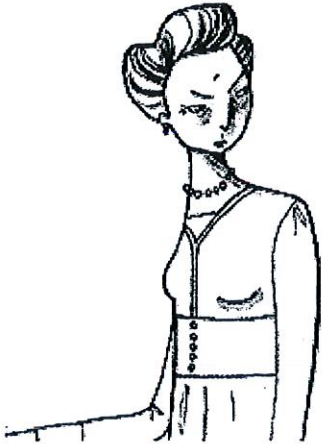
A name that Eva Smith assumes.

Mr Arthur Birling



- He is described at the start as a **"heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties but rather provincial in his speech."**
- He has worked his way up in the world and is **proud** of his achievements. He boasts about having been Mayor and tries (and fails) to impress the Inspector with his local standing and his influential friends.
- However, he is aware of people who are his social superiors, which is why he shows off about the port to Gerald, **"it's exactly the same port your father gets."** He is proud that he is likely to be knighted, as that would move him even higher in social circles.
- He claims the party **"is one of the happiest nights of my life."** This is not only because Sheila will be happy, but because a merger with Crofts Limited will be good for his business.
- He is **optimistic** for the future and confident that there will not be a war. As the audience knows there *will* be a war, we begin to doubt Mr Birling's judgement. (If he is wrong about the war, what else will he be wrong about?)
- He is extremely **selfish**:
 - He wants to protect himself and his family. He believes that socialist ideas that stress the importance of the community are **"nonsense"** and that a man has to 'look after number one': **"a man has to make his own way."**
 - He wants to protect Birling and Co. He cannot see that he did anything wrong when he fired Eva Smith - he was just looking after his business interests.
 - He wants to protect his reputation. As the Inspector's investigations continue, his selfishness gets the better of him: he is worried about how the press will view the story in Act II, and accuses Sheila of disloyalty at the start of Act III. He wants to hide the fact that Eric stole money: **"I've got to cover this up as soon as I can."**
- At the end of the play, he knows he has lost the chance of his knighthood, his reputation in Brumley and the chance of Birling and Co. merging with their rivals. Yet he hasn't learnt the lesson of the play: he is unable to admit his responsibility for his part in Eva's death.

Mrs Sybil Birling



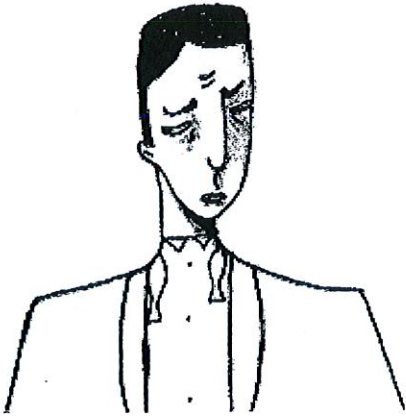
- She is described at the start as **"about fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior."**
- She is a **snob**, very aware of the differences between social classes. She is irritated when Mr Birling makes the social gaffe of praising the cook in front of Gerald and later is very dismissive of Eva, saying **"Girls of that class."**
- She has the least respect for the Inspector of all the characters. She tries - unsuccessfully - to intimidate him and force him to leave, then lies to him when she claims that she does not recognise the photograph that he shows her.
- She sees Sheila and Eric still as **"children"** and speaks patronisingly to them.
- She tries to **deny things** that she doesn't want to believe: 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 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.

Sheila Birling



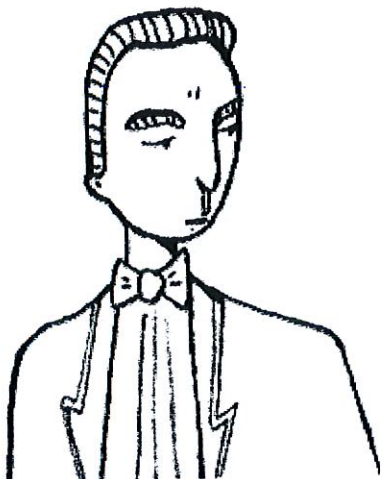
- She is described at the start as "a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited."
- Even though she seems very playful at the opening, we know that she has had suspicions about Gerald when she mentions "last summer, when you never came near me." Does this suggest that she is not as naïve and shallow as she first appears?
- Although she has probably never in her life before considered the conditions of the workers, she shows her compassion immediately she hears of her father's treatment of Eva Smith: "But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people." Already, she is starting to change.
- She is horrified by her own part in Eva's story. She feels full of guilt for her jealous actions and blames herself as "really responsible."
- She is very perceptive: she realises that Gerald knew Daisy Renton from his reaction, the moment the Inspector mentioned her name. At the end of Act II, she is the first to realise Eric's part in the story. Significantly, she is the first to wonder who the Inspector really is, saying to him, 'wonderingly', "I don't understand about you." She warns the others "he's giving us the rope - so that we'll hang ourselves" (Act II) and, near the end, is the first to consider whether the Inspector may not be real.
- She is curious. She genuinely wants to know about Gerald's part in the story. It's interesting that she is not angry with him when she hears about the affair: she says that she respects his honesty. She is becoming more mature.
- She is angry with her parents in Act 3 for trying to "pretend that nothing much has happened." Sheila says "It frightens me the way you talk:" she cannot understand how they cannot have learnt from the evening in the same way that she has. She is seeing her parents in a new, unfavourable light.
- At the end of the play, Sheila is much wiser. She can now judge her parents and Gerald from a new perspective, but the greatest change has been in herself: her social conscience has been awakened and she is aware of her responsibilities. The Sheila who had a girl dismissed from her job for a trivial reason has vanished forever.

Eric Birling



- He is described at the start as **"in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive."**
- Eric seems **embarrassed and awkward** right from the start. The first mention of him in the script is **"Eric suddenly guffaws"**, and then he is unable to explain his laughter, as if he is nervous about something. (It is not until the final act that we realise this must be because of his having stolen some money.) There is another awkward moment when Gerald, Birling and Eric are chatting about women's love of clothes before the Inspector arrives. Do you feel that there is tension in Eric's relationship with his father?
- It soon becomes clear to us (although it takes his parents longer) that he is a **hardened drinker**. Gerald admits, **"I have gathered that he does drink pretty hard."**
- When he hears how his father sacked Eva Smith, he supports the worker's cause, like Sheila. **"Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?"**
- He feels **guilt and frustration** with himself over his relationship with the girl. He cries, **"Oh - my God! - how stupid it all is!"** as he tells his story. He is horrified that his thoughtless actions had such consequences.
- He had some innate **sense of responsibility**, though, because although he got a woman pregnant, he was concerned enough to give her money. He was obviously less worried about stealing (or 'borrowing' from his father's office) than he was about the girl's future. So, was Eric, initially, the most socially aware member of the Birling family?
- He is appalled by his parents' inability to admit their own responsibility. He tells them forcefully, **"I'm ashamed of you."** When Birling tries to threaten him in Act III, Eric is aggressive in return: **"I don't give a damn now."** Do you think Eric has ever stood up to his father in this way before?
- At the end of the play, like Sheila, he is fully aware of his social responsibility. He is not interested in his parents' efforts to cover everything up: as far as he is concerned, the important thing is that a girl is dead. **"We did her in all right."**

Gerald Croft



- He is described as "an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred man-about-town."
- He is an aristocrat - the son of Lord and Lady Croft. We realise that they are not over-impressed by Gerald's engagement to Sheila because they declined the invitation to the dinner.
- He is not as willing as Sheila to admit his part in the girl's death to the Inspector and initially pretends that he never knew her. Is he a bit like Mr Birling, wanting to protect his own interests?
- He did have some genuine feeling for Daisy Renton, however: he is very moved when he hears of her death. He tells Inspector Goole that he arranged for her to live in his friend's flat "because I was sorry for her"; she became his mistress because "She was young and pretty and warm-hearted - and intensely grateful."
- Despite this, in Act 3 he tries to come up with as much evidence as possible to prove that the Inspector is a fake - because that would get him off the hook. It is Gerald who confirms that the local force has no officer by the name of Goole, he who realises it may not have been the same girl and he who finds out from the infirmary that there has not been a suicide case in months. He seems to throw his energies into *protecting* himself rather than *changing* himself (unlike Sheila).
- At the end of the play, he has not changed. He has not gained a new sense of social responsibility, which is why Sheila (who has) is unsure whether to take back the engagement ring.

Inspector Goole



- He is described on his entrance as creating "an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit. He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking."
- He works very systematically; he likes to deal with "one person and one line of enquiry at a time." His method is to confront a suspect with a piece of information and then make them talk - or, as Sheila puts it, "he's giving us the rope - so that we'll hang ourselves."
- He is a figure of authority. He deals with each member of the family very firmly and several times we see him "massively taking charge" as disputes erupt between them." He is not impressed when he hears about Mr Birling's influential friends and he cuts through Mrs Birling's obstructiveness.
- He seems to know and understand an extraordinary amount:
 - He knows the history of Eva Smith and the Birlings' involvement in it, even though she died only hours ago. Sheila tells Gerald, "Of course he knows."
 - He knows things are going to happen - He says "I'm waiting...To do my duty" just before Eric's return, as if he expected Eric to reappear at exactly that moment
 - He is obviously in a great hurry towards the end of the play: he stresses "I haven't much time." Does he know that the real inspector is shortly going to arrive?
- His final speech is like a sermon or a politician's. He leaves the family with the message "We are responsible for each other" and warns them of the "fire and blood and anguish" that will result if they do not pay attention to what he has taught them.
- All this mystery suggests that the Inspector is not a 'real' person. So, what is he?
 - Is he a ghost? Goole reminds us of 'ghoul'.
 - Is he the voice of Priestley?
 - Is he the voice of God?

- Is he the voice of all our consciences?
Do you have any other suggestions?

Eva Smith



Of course, we never see Eva Smith on stage in the play: we only have the evidence that the Inspector and the Birlings give us.

- The Inspector, Sheila Gerald and Eric all say that she was *"pretty."* Gerald describes her as *"very pretty - soft brown hair and big dark eyes."*
- Her parents were dead.
- She came from outside Brumley: Mr Birling speaks of her being *"country-bred."*
- She was working class.
- The Inspector says that she had kept a sort of diary, which helped him piece together the last two years of her life:
- However, in Act 3 we begin to wonder whether Eva ever really existed.
 - Gerald says, *"We've no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl."*
 - Birling adds, *"There wasn't the slightest proof that this Daisy Renton really was Eva Smith."* Yet the final phone call, announcing that a police inspector is shortly to arrive at the Birlings' house to investigate the suicide of a young girl, makes us realise that maybe Eva Smith did exist after all. What do you think?
- Think about Eva's name. *Eva* is similar to *Eve*, the first woman created by God in the Bible. *Smith* is the most common English surname. So, *Eva Smith* could represent every woman of her class.

Major Themes

Class

Taking the play from a socialist perspective inevitably focuses on issues of social class. Class is a large factor, indirectly, in the events of the play and Eva Smith's death. Mrs. Birling, Priestley notes, is her husband's social superior, just as Gerald will be Sheila's social superior if they do get married. Priestley also subtly notes that Gerald's mother, Lady Croft, disapproves of Gerald's marrying Sheila for precisely this reason. Finally, everyone's treatment of Eva might be put down (either in part or altogether) to the fact that she is a girl, as Mrs. Birling puts it, "of that class." Priestley clearly was interested in the class system and how it determines the decisions that people make.

Youth and Age

The play implicitly draws out a significant contrast between the older and younger generations of Birlings. While Arthur and Sybil refuse to accept responsibility for their actions toward Eva Smith (Arthur, in particular, is only concerned for his reputation and his potential knighthood), Eric and especially Sheila are shaken by the Inspector's message and their role in Eva Smith's suicide. The younger generation is taking more responsibility; perhaps because they are more emotional and idealistic, but perhaps because Priestley is suggesting a more communally responsible socialist future for Britain.

Responsibility and Avoiding It

Though responsibility itself is a central theme of the play, the last act of the play provides a fascinating portrait of the way that people can let themselves off the hook. If one message of the play is that we must all care more thoroughly about the general welfare, it is clear that the message is not shared by all. By contrasting the older Birlings and Gerald with Sheila and Eric, Priestley explicitly draws out the difference between those who have accepted their responsibility and those who have not.

Cause and Effect

The Inspector outlines a "chain of events" that may well have led to Eva Smith's death. Her suicide, seen in this way, is likely the product not of one person acting alone, but of a group of people each acting alone; it resulted from several causes. If Birling had not sacked Eva in the first place, Sheila could not have had her dismissed from Milwards, and Eric and Gerald would not have met her in the Palace bar. Had she never known Eric, she would never have needed to go to the charity commission. This series of events is closely associated with

Priestley's fascination with time and how things in time cause or are caused by others.

Time

Time, which deeply fascinated Priestley, is a central theme in many of his works. He famously was interested in Dunne's theory of time, which argued that the past was still present, and that time was not linear as many traditional accounts suggest. *An Inspector Calls* explicitly deals with the nature of time in its final twist: has the play, we might wonder, simply gone back in time? Is it all about to happen again? How does the Inspector know of the "fire and blood and anguish," usually interpreted as a foreshadowing of the First and Second World Wars?

The Supernatural

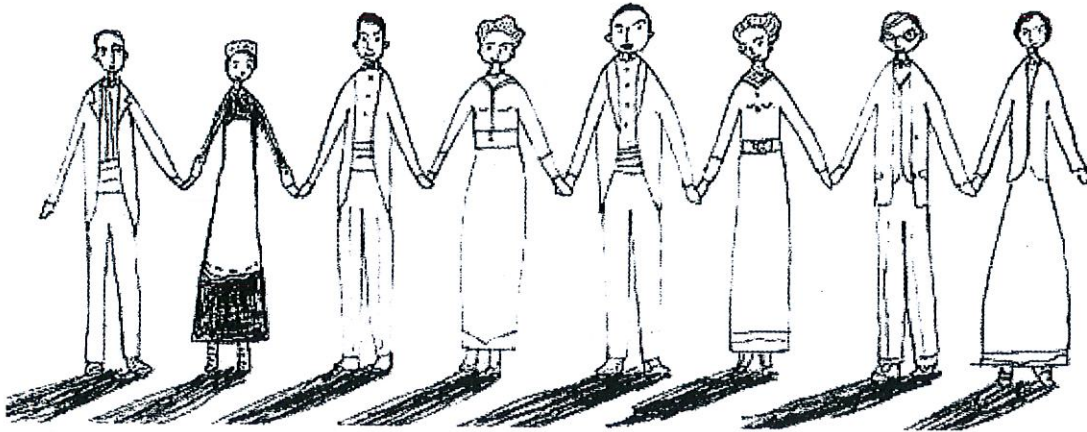
The Inspector's name, though explicitly spelled "Goole" in the play, is often interpreted through an alternative spelling: "ghoul." The Inspector, it seems, is not a "real" Brumley police inspector, and Priestley provides no answer as to whether we should believe his claim that he has nothing to do with Eva Smith. What are we to make of the police inspector who rings to announce his arrival at the end of the play? Is the original Inspector, perhaps, a ghost? What forces are at work in the play to make the Birlings really accept their responsibility and guilt?

Social Duty

"We do not live alone," the Inspector says in his final speech, "we are members of one body." This perhaps is the most important and central theme of the play: that we have a duty to other people, regardless of social status, wealth, class, or anything else. There is, Priestley observes, such a thing as society, and he argues that it is important that people be aware of the effects of their actions on others. The Birlings, of course, initially do not think at all about how they might have affected Eva Smith, but they are forced to confront their likely responsibility over the course of the play.

Themes

Responsibility



Everyone in society is linked...

The words **responsible** and **responsibility** are used by most **characters** in the play at some point.

Each member of the family has a different attitude to responsibility. Make sure that you know how each of them felt about their responsibility in the case of Eva Smith.

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:

"One Eva Smith has gone - but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, and what we think and say and do."

The Inspector is talking about a collective responsibility, everyone in society is linked, in the same way that the characters are linked to Eva Smith. Everyone is a part of *"one body"*, the Inspector sees society as more important than individual interests. The views he is propounding are like those of Priestley who was a socialist.

He adds a clear warning about what could happen if, like some members of the family, we ignore our responsibility:

"And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, when they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish."

What would Priestley have wanted his audience to think of when the Inspector warns the Birlings of the *"fire and blood and anguish"*?

Probably he is thinking partly about the world war they had just lived through - the result of governments blindly pursuing 'national interest' at all costs. No doubt he was thinking too about the Russian revolution in which poor workers and peasants took over the state and exacted a bloody revenge against the aristocrats who had treated them so badly.

Class

Apart from Edna the maid, the cast of the play does not include any lower class characters. We see only the rich, upwardly mobile Birlings and the upper class *Gerald Croft*. Yet we learn a lot about the lower class as we hear of each stage in Eva's life and we see the attitude the Birlings had for them.

Let's look at the way the Birlings saw lower-class Eva when they came into contact with her, and the way that they see themselves within their own class.

ATTITUDES TO THE LOWER CLASS:		ATTITUDES TO THE UPPER CLASS:
To this character, Eva was...		At the start of the play, this character was:
cheap labour	Mr Birling	keen to be knighted to cement his hard-fought rise to the upper class
someone who could be fired out of spite	Sheila	happy spending a lot of time in expensive shops
a mistress who could be discarded at will	Gerald	prepared to marry Sheila, despite her lower social position
easy sex at the end of a drunken night out	Eric	awkward about his 'public-school-and-Varsity' life
a presumptuous upstart	Mrs Birling	socially superior to her husband, and embarrassed at his gaffes

- The Palace Variety Theatre was a music hall. It was not seen as quite 'respectable' entertainment - probably not somewhere where Sheila would have gone. The stalls bar of the Palace Variety Theatre, where Eva Smith met both *Gerald* and *Eric*, was the bar for the lower classes and a favourite haunt of prostitutes. We could ask what *Gerald* and *Eric* were there in the first place! Alderman *Meggarty*, a local dignitary, also went there a lot.

Priestley is trying to show that the upper classes are unaware that the easy lives they lead rest upon hard work of the lower classes.

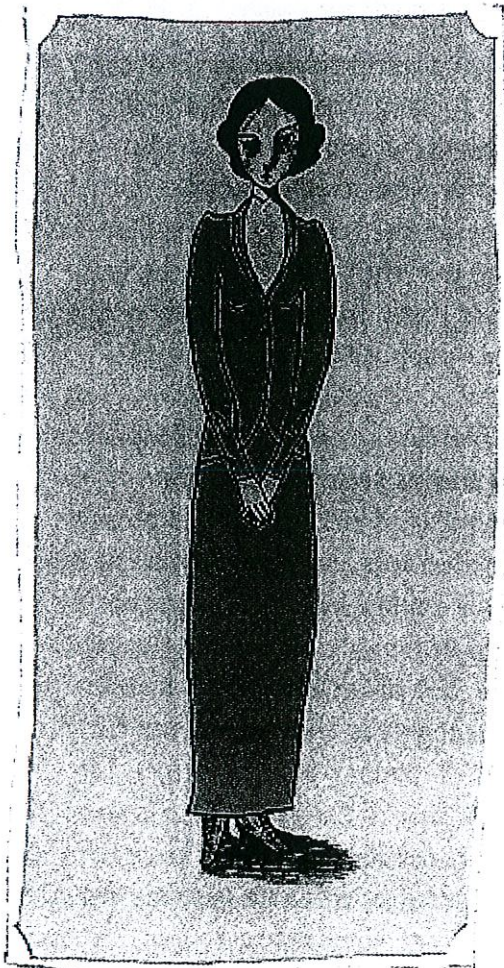
Gender

Because Eva was a woman - in the days before women were valued by society and had not yet been awarded the right to vote - she was in an even worse position than a lower class man. Even upper class women had few choices. For most, the best they could hope for was to impress a rich man and marry well - which could explain why Sheila spent so long in Milwards.

For working class women, a job was crucial. There was no social security at that time, so without a job they had no money. There were very few options open to women in that situation: many saw no alternative but to turn to prostitution.

Look at these quotations, showing the attitude to women of some characters:

- Mr Birling is dismissive of the several hundred women in his factory: *"We were paying the usual rates and if they didn't like those rates, they could go and work somewhere else."*
- Gerald saw Eva as *"young and fresh and charming"* - in other words, someone vulnerable he could amuse himself by helping.
- Mrs Birling couldn't believe that *"a girl of that sort would ever refuse money."* Her charitable committee was a sham: a small amount of money was given to a small amount of women, hardly scratching the surface of the problem.



SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In this play, J.B. Priestley presents us with a sincerely felt and powerfully expressed social message. We are shown the comfortable home and rich way of life of the Birling family. By contrast we have the accounts of the desperate attempts of the workers to increase their poor wages and the drab and sordid life that the girl is forced to live as a result of the actions of people such as the Birlings.

The Inspector champions the cause of the poor, and tries to get the others to accept that all people share a common humanity and so are all part of an interdependent community. This message does seem to get through to Sheila and Eric. Sheila is ready to accept and demonstrate this feeling of compassion, but her father simply dismisses the idea of a community, in which responsibility and guilt are shared, as the foolish mutterings of a socialist crank.

As the play progresses, the Inspector's point is put across more and more forcefully. Each character's involvement with Eva Smith/Daisy Renton adds to the Inspector's argument, and he becomes not only a spokesman for the disadvantaged but a voice for the conscience which the Birlings and Gerald seem to lack! The characters, especially the older ones, are increasingly shown to be hiding behind an appearance of respectability which has no foundation in any true sense of morality. The Inspector points out what would happen if injustice and inequality were allowed to continue unchecked. His increasingly missionary tone reaches its peak when J.B. Priestley's political message is thundered out in the Inspector's final speech. This exaggerated oratorical style might not be acceptable if J.B. Priestley had not gradually built up the mysterious and prophetic aspects of the Inspector's character.

We are never given a clear set of political policies but J.B. Priestley does make the general point that all of us have a share in the responsibility for what happens in our society, that we have a duty of care to others. We see that the sense of respectability with which the characters surround themselves does not stand up to close examination. The way that the older characters remain unmoved and immovable, uncaring for anyone but themselves, is one of the horrors of the play. Each of the revelations has deepened the lesson they should be learning but they refuse to take any notice. We are left wondering whether our society today is any less likely to survive a similarly close examination. Are we any better in our everyday dealings with other people than the Birlings?

Most of the characters have a narrow view of what it means to be responsible, but the Inspector provides us with a much broader one. Mr Birling is a business man and as such he feels his responsibility is to make a success of his business, which means making as much profit as possible even if that means being harsh in his dealings with those who work for him. As a family man he sees that he has a responsibility to provide for the material needs of his family, yet it is clear that Eric does not see him as the kind of father to whom he could turn when in trouble. Mrs Birling accepts her responsibility as chairwoman of the Women's Charity Organisation, but only sees a responsibility to help those that she feels are deserving of help. Sheila belatedly recognises that as a powerful customer she has an obligation not to let her personal feelings and ill-temper lead to misery for people who have no power. Eric has little sense of responsibility. He drinks far more than is good for him and he forces the girl into a relationship which has disastrous consequences. He attempts to help her by stealing from his father. Gerald shows some sense of responsibility when he rescues the girl from the unwelcome attentions of another man, feeds her and finds her somewhere to live. Yet he gives in to his own desire for personal pleasure and eventually abandons the girl without knowing, or very much caring, what happens to her.

The Inspector's role is to shake these people up and to make them aware of that broader view of responsibility which J.B. Priestley felt was essential if the world was ever going to learn from its mistakes and become a place where everyone has the right to be treated fairly.

LOVE

The play presents a variety of thoughts about love, the nature of love and different people's interpretation of love. Sheila and Gerald appear to be in love; they have just announced their engagement and seem happy enough contemplating a future dedicated to each other. After each of them has confessed to their shameful behaviour towards Eva Smith/Daisy Renton Sheila realises that they do not really know each other well and that trust is an essential ingredient in a loving relationship.

Mr Birling's remark about the engagement of his daughter bringing the two family firms into a closer working relationship, gives us an indication of his attitude towards love and marriage. He sees marriage as a convenient way of progressing up the social and economic ladder. This makes us wonder whether love played any real part in his marriage to the socially superior Sybil Birling and whether her coldness to others, including her own children, does not have its roots in a loveless marriage.

Both Gerald and Eric have been involved with the girl, yet each of them denies that they loved her — their relationships were prompted by physical attraction. The girl had taken up with Eric out of necessity, but she does, however, seem to have felt a genuine love for Gerald. Gerald's ending of the affair may be seen as being callous in view of her love for him.

The Inspector preaches a form of love, not too dissimilar to that preached by Christ when he instructed his followers to love one another as much as they love themselves. This form of love is the true 'charity', and is something which appears quite alien to women such as Mrs Birling who bask in the glory of volunteering their time to 'charity' while being devoid of any true charity in their hearts.

TIME

J.B. Priestley wrote the play for an audience just coming out of the horrors of the Second World War, yet he set his play in 1912, two years before the start of the First World War and this brings us to a consideration of J.B. Priestley's use of time as an element of his plays. At the end of the play we are left with a sense that the events are going to start all over again. We wonder whether things will be different and how the characters will behave.

The Inspector, arriving before the suicide is a reality offers each a chance to see the consequences, to change the future, to break the circle. Eric and Sheila seem prepared to take that opportunity to face up to their past actions and to improve themselves, but the others do not. The reflections on the past, and the possibilities of the future highlight the importance of caring for others, of taking responsibility for our actions and of considering the consequences of them. The Inspector's knowledge of events, apparently before they happen, his steady revelation of the characters' pasts and their links to the dead girl over a two-year period gives him a mystical, unworldly quality. His departure leaves the characters free to decide their future, while at the end we are left to wonder how they will cope with reliving the close scrutiny of their dealings with others when the cycle starts all over again.

By setting the play in 1912 and presenting it to a later audience, J.B. Priestley has covered an era which includes both World Wars. The failure of the older characters to learn anything reflects the failure of generations to learn from the mistakes of the recent past. There is dramatic irony in that characters talk of hopes for peace and prosperity, but we know these will not happen. By 1945 J.B. Priestley was hoping that the second time around the world might learn from past mistakes and we might see such hopes realised if we, the audience, can accept the challenge to be caring and socially aware.

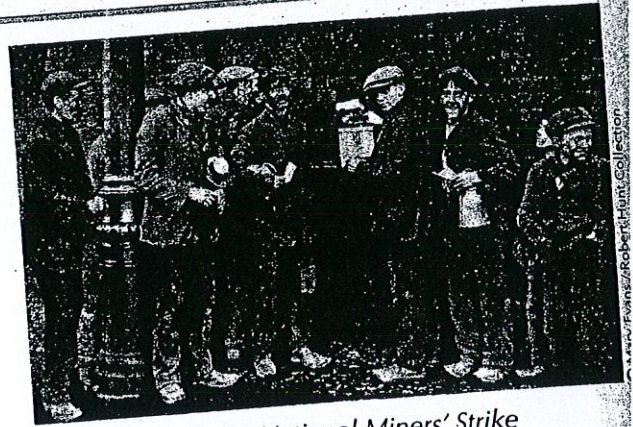
Section Three — Context and Themes

Britain in 1912 and 1945

An Inspector Calls is set near the beginning of the 20th century. Priestley wrote it in the 1940s. You're reading it now at the beginning of the next century. How things have changed...

In 1912 Britain was a very different place from how it is now

- 1) British society was firmly divided along class lines. Those with the most money had the most power. The Labour Party was formed in 1906 to represent the interests of the working class.
- 2) Only men who owned property could vote. Women weren't allowed to vote in national elections at all. Women's lives were far more controlled by their families and husbands than today.
- 3) There was not as much government help for people in need as there is today. This is why charities like Sybil's were so important.



The 1912 National Miners' Strike
Over a million workers across Britain campaigned for fairer wages for miners. At the time it was the largest strike in Britain.

Britain was heading towards the First World War...

- There was a dangerous level of tension between the big European countries in 1912, which resulted in the First World War (1914-1918). This was a terrible conflict which cost millions of lives.
- After the war many British people questioned the leadership given by the upper classes during the war.

Things had changed by 1945 — but there were still big problems

- 1) Britain was still divided by class, but by 1928 all men and women over 21 got the vote, which meant power was shared out more evenly.
- 2) There were still conflicts between business owners and workers, such as the 1926 General Strike which saw many important industries grind to a halt.
- 3) From 1930 a global economic slump known as the Depression hit many British industries. There was a big increase in unemployment and many workers faced terrible poverty.

Priestley wrote the play during the Second World War

- Millions of people from all classes had fought for Britain during the Second World War (1939-1945). After the war people wanted to work out how to make a better society.
- The world wars made people question Britain's social structure. Socialism and other left-wing ideas, which call for the more equal sharing out of wealth and power, became more popular.
- The Labour Party won the 1945 General Election by a landslide. In government they focused on improving the welfare system to look after the needs of the poorest in British society, e.g. the NHS was started in 1948.

Right-wing ideas favour private ownership and wealth.

Talk about why Priestley set the play when he did...

Mention that a lot changed in British society between 1912 and 1945. Priestley set the play at the start to show that things had improved, but he also highlights that many things had not.

Family Life

At the start, Gerald thinks that the Birlings seem to be "a nice well-behaved family". But Gerald, and the audience, are yet to find out about the murky secrets lurking behind their polite and polished behaviour.

There were expectations of middle-class families in 1912

- 1) Family members were expected to know their role, and be content with their position — the parents were in charge of the family, and the children were expected to be obedient and unquestioning.
- 2) 'Gender roles' (how men and women are supposed to behave) were well defined for the wealthy middle class:

Men were expected to:

- Work to support their 'perfect' family.
- Protect women — especially their wives and daughters.

Women were expected to:

- Marry into money so they didn't have to work.
- Plan parties, visit friends and have children. They didn't do jobs like washing, cooking or cleaning.

- 3) However, working-class families, and especially working-class women, had very different roles. Many had jobs in factories or worked as servants.

The Birling family seems fairly normal...

- 1) The Birlings want everyone to believe they're the perfect family.
- 2) The gender roles are clearly defined — the ladies 'withdraw' to let the men talk about 'male' stuff.
- 3) But there's tension bubbling just under the surface:

- Mrs Birling keeps correcting her family's social mistakes.
- Eric laughs out of turn and acts oddly.
- Sheila teases Gerald half playfully, but also "half serious", about last summer.



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre

... but something's not right

- 1) The clear hierarchy at the beginning is destroyed by the Inspector's arrival.
- 2) Without their parents' influence, Sheila and Eric can think for themselves:

A hierarchy is a way of ranking people according to status or authority.

- Sheila doesn't know whether she'll marry Gerald any more. She needs time to decide for herself.
- Eric says his mother doesn't "understand anything" and that Birling's "not the kind of father a chap could go to" for help.
- The family is in a mess, and Sheila and Eric refuse to "go on behaving just as we did". They don't want to pretend any more. The parents no longer have any authority over their children.



"You seem to be a nice well-behaved family —"

The Birling family is held together by lies, and when the truth's revealed they fall apart. And it's not pretty. There's hatred, envy, theft, prostitutes, and even being responsible for the death of your own grandchild...

Social Class

Social class is really important in *An Inspector Calls*. Class influences the Birlings' behaviour and causes them to treat people differently. The class system had existed for a long time and Priestley didn't agree with it.

Class drives the plot and shapes the characters

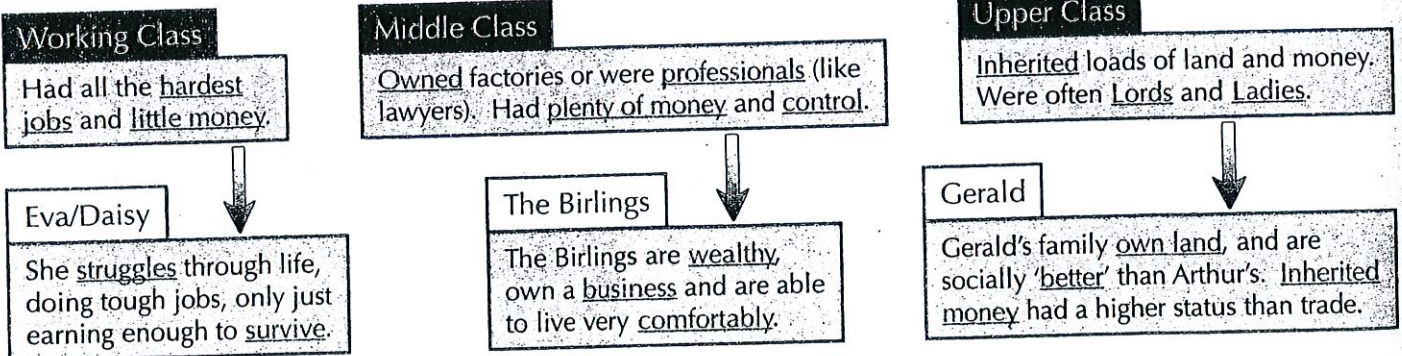
Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre



- 1) Priestley designed the characters to put across his message.
- 2) The message is about social responsibility, so class plays a central part in the plot.
- 3) The characters in the play represent the classes — and Priestley challenges their views and behaviour in order to challenge the class hierarchy.

There was a clear class structure in the early 20th century

Many things contributed to what class you were in, but most of it came down to money — those who had it, and those who didn't. There were three main classes:



The class system meant the lower classes struggled

- 1) The class system could make life difficult for those lower down — it would have been hard for people like Eva/Daisy to help themselves if they were in trouble.
- 2) Priestley portrays the upper classes as having a limited sense of social responsibility for those less well off. They either:

DIDN'T KNOW

OR

DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW

OR

DIDN'T CARE

- 3) Mrs Birling claims not to recognise Eva/Daisy's photo. For her, Eva/Daisy has no identity.
- 4) Priestley suggested that the higher classes didn't question the class system as it worked for them. This is the same reason why they also overlooked problems of alcoholism and womanising — it was easier to ignore unpleasant things than to deal with them.
- 5) The Inspector tells the Birlings that they must accept that everyone should take responsibility for each other, or it'll all end in "fire", "blood" and "anguish".

Social Class

The Birlings think class is all that matters

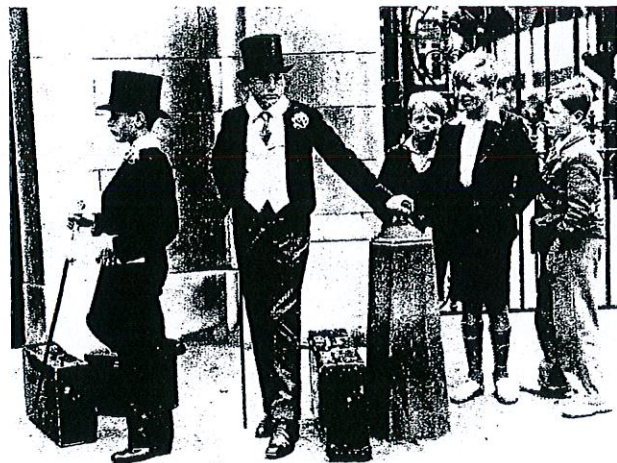
- 1) Birling's biggest concern about Eva's death is that he won't get his knighthood because there will be a "public scandal".
- 2) Birling thinks his positions of authority make him more important. He'd been Lord Mayor and an Alderman (Council member) for many years, and he's now a magistrate who sits in courts and dishes out justice. →
- 3) He uses Gerald to promote his social class — he asks him to hint to his parents that he's expecting a knighthood, and he's also very pleased that his daughter is marrying into a higher class.
- 4) Sybil Birling is a leading member of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation. This group's supposed to give money to desperate women, but Mrs Birling's only involved for the social status.

Theme — Judgement

It's ironic that Birling passes judgement on others when he's acted so immorally.

Priestley thought class shouldn't matter

- 1) Priestley uses the play to reveal the unfairness of the class system — he uses the Birlings as exaggerated caricatures of all the bad qualities he thought the ruling classes had.
- 2) The play isn't just about one family's scandal. It shows how Priestley saw society. Priestley presents the Birlings' arrogant behaviour and selfish attitudes as common to the middle classes.
- 3) Priestley presents the working class as victims of the class system — although Eva/Daisy's story is unique, the miseries she suffered were probably quite common. Eva Smith could have been anyone.



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How people act isn't just about class

- 1) Eva/Daisy is expected to have low morals, but she refuses to accept stolen money even when she's desperate.
- 2) The Birlings think that class is all that matters, but Priestley is trying to present the opposite view. He suggests that class only clouds people's judgements, and people should be judged by what they do, not by what class they happen to be in.
- 3) By presenting Sheila and Eric as having changed at the end of the play, turning against the views of their own class, Priestley's saying that class isn't all that matters — individuals can break out and choose to act differently.

Writer's Technique

Priestley's presentation of Eva/Daisy as more honourable than the middle and upper classes might have surprised some members of the audience.

Talk about how the Inspector doesn't have a class...

The Inspector doesn't clearly fit into the class structure, and he thinks everyone should be treated equally. You could write about how he challenges attitudes about class, and makes Sheila and Eric want to change.

Young and Old

The Inspector, and his story about Eva Smith/Daisy Renton, causes a rift between the old traditionalists and the young idealists. One side wants nothing to do with the story — the other feels like it's their job to rewrite it.

The older generation are old-fashioned

- 1) Priestley presents Arthur and Sybil Birling as having very traditional views — they think that they know best, that children should be seen and not heard, and they don't like their authority to be challenged.
- 2) They represent the views of the ruling class.
- 3) By questioning their old-fashioned personal views, Priestley also questions their obsession with social class — he's suggesting that the whole class system is out of touch and needs to be reformed.

The younger generation are different

- 1) Some are ambitious, determined and motivated — Eva/Daisy “had a lot to say — far too much”. Her courage is the main reason Birling sacked her.
- 2) The younger generation are shown as challenging the authority of their elders. This threatens Birling, who tells them they'd “better keep quiet”.
- 3) Because the younger generation learn their lesson, there's a chance for an equal and fairer society in the future.

Theme — Learning

Eric and Sheila learn that they are responsible for their actions and that their decisions affect other people.

Eric at the end is standing around as if he wants nothing to do with his parents. Sheila stands by him. By the end of the play they're no longer controlled by their parents.

Gerald's the oldest young man around

- 1) Gerald's closer to Sheila and Eric's age than he is to Mr and Mrs Birling's, but he's a young man who's already old in his attitudes. He's a younger version of Arthur — shallow and stubborn:

- His marriage to Sheila is for business reasons.
- He agrees with Birling that Eva/Daisy had to be fired.

- 2) He doesn't learn anything:

- When he's found out to have ditched Daisy/Eva, he doesn't seem to feel guilty.
- At the end, he thinks his engagement's back on: “Everything's all right now, Sheila.”

- 3) The fact that Gerald is of the younger generation but remains unchanged suggests that a more caring future isn't inevitable — people can choose whether to change or not. Priestley is also making a criticism of the upper classes, that they're set in their ways and therefore unlikely to change.



Photo: An Inspector Calls, ©2010 Lamb's Players Theatre



“the famous younger generation who know it all.”

Although Birling's being sarcastic, Priestley shows that the only characters who really listen to the Inspector's message are Sheila and Eric. Mr and Mrs Birling aren't as willing to change or learn from their mistakes.

Men and Women

In 1912, men and women had different roles in the family and society — they led very different lives from each other. Priestley is asking his audience to think about how people are treated differently because of their gender.

The women and men start out as stereotypes

A stereotype is an idea you might have about people before you really know them. It's usually based on things like their sex, age and class.

WOMEN

- 1) They're supposed to be obsessed with "pretty clothes", shopping and weddings — Sheila gazes adoringly at her ring and asks, "is it the one you wanted me to have?"
- 2) They're protected against "unpleasant and disturbing" things.
- 3) Sheila gets Eva sacked because of pride, vanity and jealousy — stereotypical female traits in the play.
- 4) Sheila is accused of being hysterical — a state often associated with women at the time.

MEN

- 1) They're preoccupied with work and public affairs — e.g. "the miners came out on strike".
- 2) Gerald feels it's his duty to rescue Daisy/Eva from the womanising Alderman Meggarty.
- 3) Gerald is allowed to sleep around before his marriage. Sheila isn't. Arthur says that even in his day they "broke out and had a bit of fun sometimes". There are different rules for men and women.

The young women challenge the stereotypes

Eva/Daisy and Sheila try to rebel and break out of the roles that society has given them.

- Eva/Daisy questioned the decision of her boss instead of quietly accepting it.
- Instead of relying on a man to save her, Eva/Daisy refused to accept Eric's stolen money.
- Sheila interrupts and challenges everyone at different times, apart from the Inspector.

By the end the stereotypes are turned upside down

- 1) As the play develops Birling, Gerald and Eric get weaker, while Sheila gets stronger. Priestley does this to challenge the audience's view of women at the time.
- 2) Gerald's rejected by Sheila, and Eric is revealed to be nervous and lazy, with a drinking problem. Birling suffers the most — the whole night has slowly undermined his authority. He's "panic-stricken" as he speaks the final line — a very different man from the one at the beginning.
- 3) Sheila starts stating her own opinions, not those she is 'supposed' to have — "That's what's important — and not whether a man is a police inspector or not." She's learnt to think for herself.



© Simon Cough Photography

Mention that the Birlings judge people on their gender...

Impress the examiner by explaining how the Birlings look at class, gender and even clothes to judge people. Stereotypes help them decide who they like and don't like before getting to know them.

Judgement

Priestley makes the end of the play quite a mystery — it's a bit of a cliffhanger. Apart from making the play more exciting, it leaves the audience to figure out what has happened, and more importantly, who to judge.

The style is like an old morality play

An Inspector Calls is like a murder mystery — but it's also like a morality play.

- 1) Morality plays were religious plays written in the late Middle Ages. They tried to teach people how to behave and were warnings against the dangers of sin.
- 2) *An Inspector Calls* follows the same kind of idea as these morality plays — it points out everyone's sins, and tries to get them to confess and repent.
- 3) This play is different from the old morality plays, because it doesn't follow Christian ideas. The moral judge isn't God, it's a police inspector. Priestley makes his morality play secular.
- 4) The Inspector represents temporal law (law courts not based on religion) — but in the end it turns out that it's not a legal issue — it's a moral one.

Writer's Technique

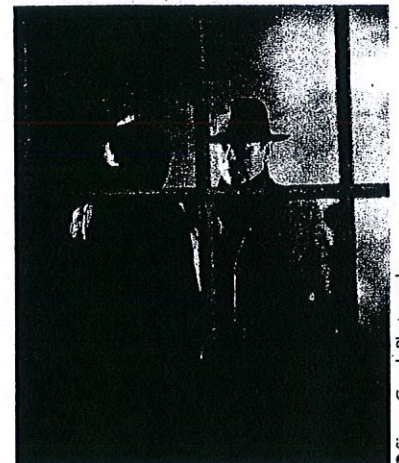
Morality plays focus on the seven deadly sins — pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, anger and sloth.

Secular means 'not religious'.

There's something odd about the Inspector

- 1) Sheila says she had an idea "all along" that "there was something curious about him" and questions the supernatural side of the whole thing — she asks what he was, not who he was.
- 2) His origin is unknown, and he appears omniscient — they didn't tell him anything he didn't already know. It seems unbelievable that a real inspector would know so many details.
- 3) Priestley deliberately leaves questions about the Inspector unanswered, as it increases the mystery and the feelings of tension within the play (see p.20).

Omniscient means 'knowing everything'.



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The important thing is to learn the lesson

- 1) In the end, it doesn't matter who the Inspector is. He teaches the Birlings a lesson — what matters most is how they react to it and which of them learns from it.

- Gerald, Arthur and Sybil decide it was a hoax. They're relieved that the Inspector was a fraud — they think they've been let off the hook.
- Sheila and Eric waver slightly when they find out there was no suicide, but they've learnt the important lesson — even if their story didn't have the tragic ending it might have done.

- 2) Sheila and Eric hold true to their moral instincts — even when they're given an opportunity to pretend it never happened. The others, however, act selfishly and never take responsibility for their actions.



"You admit being prejudiced against her case?"

The final thing that doomed Eva/Daisy was Sybil's judgement that she was unworthy of charity. The Inspector reverses that process — suddenly it's Sybil, and the rest of the Birling family, who are being judged. Sneaky.

Learning about Life

This play presents a harsh world. It's not a world for innocent people. You've got to learn fast. Some innocents — like Eva/Daisy's baby — die without ever having a chance.

Some people never learn...

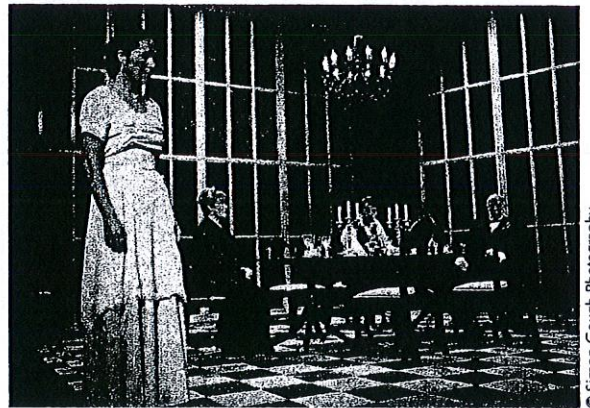
- 1) Birling sneers at Eric's private education and the younger generation who "know it all", because he's worked his way up.
- 2) This arrogance is the reason why Birling is so stubborn. He doesn't think anyone has anything of use to tell him — especially not his children or a lowly inspector. He only listens to Gerald because he's from a higher social class.
- 3) Arthur, Sybil and Gerald's arrogance prevents them from changing. They don't see anything wrong in the way they think or act. They believe that they know best. Mr Birling's views are made clear in Act One and they don't change.

Theme — Young and Old

This is ironic — it's mainly the older generation who think they know it all.

... others try to change

- 1) The Inspector has much more of an effect on Eric and Sheila, who are ashamed of their behaviour. They reject their parents who have refused to learn from the night's events.
- 2) They understand that the important thing about the evening was the lesson learnt, not whether the Inspector was real.
- 3) Before they even realise they're involved with the girl's death, they criticise their father's behaviour.
- 4) Sheila changes not only her views but also her personality — she starts out playful, self-centred and obedient, but as the play progresses her character dramatically develops and she becomes more aware, sensitive and mature.



© Simon Gough Photography

Ignorance is bliss

- 1) One of the reasons that the older generation refuse to change is that they're happy living in ignorance. The problems of the working class don't affect them, so they don't want to know.
- 2) In fact, they don't like to think about anything troubling:
 - Prostitution — "I see no point in mentioning the subject," says Birling.
 - Womanising — "you don't mean Alderman Meggarty?" says Mrs Birling, even though it's well known.
 - Drinking — "It isn't true" says Mrs Birling when Eric's habit is revealed.
- 3) Even Sheila tries to forget about her bad behaviour — "it didn't seem to be anything very terrible at the time."
- 4) They do everything they can to avoid changing, even when it's clear that they've done wrong — they refuse to believe it, and blame everyone else instead.
- 5) It suits them to think that they're always right — they don't see the point of changing or learning from their night's ordeal. The system works in their favour.



"You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner"

Although she's no longer angry at Gerald, and respects him for finally telling the truth, Sheila knows the Inspector's visit has changed them both. She accepts her mistakes, and can't just go back to her old life.

Social Responsibility

The play's purpose is to show the importance of social responsibility — the idea that people should act in a way that helps less privileged people rather than hurting them.

The characters' views are challenged

Birling...

... thinks that community responsibility is "nonsense". The interests of business are more important than worker's rights.

Mrs Birling...

... believes that they have no responsibility to the working class — her prejudices are so ingrained that they can't be changed.

Sheila...

... realises that getting Eva/Daisy sacked out of spite was irresponsible — but she didn't do anything about it at the time. The Inspector challenges her to improve her behaviour.

Eric...

... realises too late that his selfish actions were responsible for ruining Eva/Daisy's chances of improving her life.

Social responsibility is the Inspector's main focus

- 1) His final speech is clear and to the point — it's a summary of his lesson about responsibility.
- 2) The Inspector wasn't just trying to make the family feel guilty for Eva Smith, but to make them aware of the difficulties faced by all the "millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths".

All the events in *An Inspector Calls* are connected. Priestley's moral seems to be that it doesn't take great people to change the world — we all change it every day just by the way we treat others.

The play reveals a lot about Priestley's socialist ideas

- 1) Priestley was a supporter of socialism — his plays promote social responsibility and criticise the problems caused by the class divide.
- 2) *An Inspector Calls* tries to make the audience question not only their social responsibility, but also how responsible they are for their own actions.
- 3) The audience are already wary of Birling's short-sighted opinions, so when he criticises socialism, the audience are more inclined to disagree with him. In this way Priestley uses Birling to promote socialist ideas:

- During his speech at the start, Birling says that the whole world will have "peace and prosperity" except "Russia". Russia became a socialist state in 1917, and Priestley was interested in seeing how successful this was in creating greater equality for the Russian people. The first production of *An Inspector Calls* was held in Moscow in 1946.
- Birling attacks George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells, who were well-known socialist writers during that time — just like Priestley in the 1940s.

Show that you understand Priestley's main message...

Priestley is a bit preachy (not surprising given his surname) but that's the point of the play. He wants to spread his ideas about social responsibility as far as he can, so show the examiner that you understand this.



GCSE English Literature: 'An Inspector Calls' by J B Priestley

Priestley's Use of Dramatic Devices

Priestley's play, *An Inspector Calls*, conveys a strong political message. The play strongly promotes the political idea of socialism - that is, the creation of a society in which more equality, community and responsibility are central; a society where the competitiveness and unthinking greed of uncontrolled capitalism are checked and replaced by a more compassionate, responsible society with a greater sense of community.

Priestley's socialism is strongly contrasted with the idea of unrestrained capitalism, in which 'every man is an island' and has to work for himself and his family, with no second thought for others, especially the poor. The playwright, J. B. Priestley, uses many dramatic devices, such as dramatic irony and tension in order to effectively convey this political message throughout the play. He uses them appropriately both for the time in which the play was first shown, in 1945 as the Second World War was ending and for the time in which the play is set in 1912, the year of the first coal miner's strike, the year the 'unsinkable' Titanic sank and just two years before the beginning of the First World War - the so-called 'war to end all wars'.

- o *In 1945 the country was moving towards introducing a 'Welfare State' to help those unable to help themselves - the sick, elderly and very poor. Priestley wanted to ensure this became a full reality and used his play to promote this.*

The play is set in Edwardian England. This was a very difficult time for the country. It was a period when there were many strikes, food shortages and great political tension. In contrast to that, the play was written and published when the country was also in disarray. Priestley uses this time difference effectively, showing people that the way forward is socialism. He implies that in order to move forward and to rebuild the country, people have to work together as a society, instead of reverting back to pre-war capitalism.

At the beginning of the play, Priestley sets out an extensive series of stage directions. He applies them effectively as a dramatic device, in that he uses them to show how the Birling family are cold, distant people and how capitalism has corrupted them as a family. He illustrates how the family are very well off, alluding to 'dessert plates' and 'champagne glasses' as well as other expensive items. However, there is also a sense of formality and distance between the family members as he writes that 'men are in tails and white ties' and that it is 'not cosy and homelike'. He also emphasises the remoteness between Mr and Mrs Birling by situating them at opposite ends of the table.

Included in the stage directions is the colour and brightness of the lighting. Priestley also uses this as a dramatic device skilfully. The lighting first used is described as 'pink and intimate' showing a 'warm' and 'joyful' atmosphere. However the audience gets the sense that it is just a screen covering up secrets and that they are in fact looking through 'rose-tinted glasses' and that it is not really what it seems. This is confirmed when the Inspector appears and the lighting changes to a 'brighter and harder light' where it gives the impression of exposure and the revelation of truth.

In this way, the character of the Inspector has also been used as a dramatic device. He is used to convey a message, as a mouthpiece to Priestley's views. He makes it seem as if socialism is the true and honest way to live. The Inspector does not use euphemisms (i.e. polite ways of hiding the harshness of reality) and instead uses graphic imagery in order to shock the Birlings into giving him information, 'she'd swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out of course'.

The Inspector is also given a sense of omniscience and prophecy - a sense of knowing everything and what will happen if things don't change - and an almost ghostly presence. His name, Inspector Goole, indicates this as Goole sounds like 'ghoul' and Inspector sounds like 'spectre'. The Inspector is used by Priestley to 'correct' the capitalists in the play and to make a strong statement in favour of socialism in his final rhetorical, i.e. persuasive, speech. In this speech he states that for the lower or working class, 'Eva Smiths and John Smiths' there is a 'chance of happiness' if society embraces socialism.

The Inspector also makes the audience realise that they are 'members of one body' and that they should try their best to help people like Eva Smith, otherwise, as the Inspector implies, 'they will be taught in fire and blood and anguish'. This almost acts as a threat to the audience and persuades them to recognize the value of Priestley's message.

Dramatic irony is also used in many ways as a dramatic device. It is used to promote the Inspector yet mock Mr Birling. In Mr Birling's speech at the beginning of the play, he proudly states that 'as a hard-headed businessman' he thinks that 'there isn't a chance of war' and that the Titanic is 'absolutely unsinkable'. With the play being published after two world wars and the sinking of the Titanic, Priestley makes the audience think that Birling is a fool. Whereas the Inspector, who states in his final speech that 'they will be taught in fire and blood and anguish' indicating that there will be a war, is elevated by the use of dramatic irony.

- o *This persuades the audience to accept the socialist views of the Inspector instead of the 'foolish' views of Mr Birling.*

During the play, Priestley uses the juxtaposition (i.e. creating contrast by putting together) between the Inspector and Mr Birling as a dramatic device. Mr Birling and the Inspector's views completely oppose each other. As the Inspector puts others first, whereas Mr Birling believes that you are responsible only for yourself. An example of this is during Mr Birling's and the Inspector's speeches. The Inspector talks about how 'we are members of one body' and that we 'are responsible for each other'; however, Mr Birling makes a speech about how 'a man has to make his own way' and how 'a man has to mind his own business and look after himself'. Priestley uses this opposition in order to dishonour capitalism and instead promote socialism.

Another effective device used by Priestley is that of timings. He times the entrance of the Inspector so that he enters just after Mr Birling has made his speech, as if to discredit everything Mr Birling has just said.

Priestley uses symbolism extensively as a dramatic device during the play in order to express his views. He uses Arthur Birling as a voice for capitalism, who is ridiculed by the Inspector, a representative of socialism. The dialogue between them shows this, as the Inspector

repeatedly twists what Birling says, showing that he is the voice of truth. For example,

INSPECTOR: I'm sorry. But you asked me a question.
BIRLING: And you asked me a question before that, a quite unnecessary question too.
INSPECTOR: It's my duty to ask questions'

The Birlings could also be symbolised by the Bible's 'seven deadly sins': Mr Birling being greed for sacking Eva Smith, just to save a few shillings, or pride for boasting about his wealth and high status. Mrs Birling could be wrath for being angry with Eva Smith over calling herself 'Mrs Birling'. Sheila could be envy for being jealous of Eva in Milward's, and Gerald could be lust for having an affair with Eva. The fact that they can be identified as 'sins' shows how Priestley emphasises the immorality of capitalism; this puts the play, *An Inspector Calls*, within the ancient medieval genre of a morality play.

Eric and Sheila's positive response to the Inspector's message, compared to Mr and Mrs Birling's negative response, is also greatly symbolic.

- Priestley uses this generation divide to show that the younger generation symbolise hope for the future. The fact that the younger characters develop and change for the better by showing they are remorseful of what they have done suggests that they (and the future generation of adults) will make a conscious effort to improve human relationships.
- This is unlike their parents, who are only interested in wealth and material items.
- Priestley shows that the younger generation will endeavour to perform their moral duties towards their fellow citizens - especially people such as Eva Smith.

Throughout the play, tension is continuously building up both between the Inspector and the Birlings as well as within the Birling family. An example of this is when Sheila asks about where Gerald was 'last summer' and Gerald tries to cover it up. This shows how the underlying secrets within the family create lots of tension.

Another example of creating tension is when Birling tells Gerald about his possible knighthood, then refuses to tell Eric about it when he enters. Priestley also uses repetition in order to build up tension, even before the Inspector arrives Mr Birling keeps hinting that they might have done something wrong, he emphasises 'so long as we behave ourselves'.

Priestley also uses uneasy laughter and accusations between members of the Birling family, such as 'unless Eric has done something', in order to build up tension. Priestley uses tension as a dramatic device in order to keep the audience interested and anxious to find out more, and so alert to his socialist theme or message.

Priestley also uses cliff-hangers to create tension. Such as at the end of the play, when Birling answers the phone to find out that a second Inspector is on his way and that what they thought was just a hoax was in fact true. Ending the play on this cliff-hanger - a 'coup de theatre' or spectacular turn of events - makes the audience want to watch more and find out what happens next. It also keeps them thinking about the play and its meaning afterwards.

Another example of the use of a cliff-hanger is at the end of Act One when Gerald admits to Sheila that he had had an affair with Eva Smith. The Inspector then enters and simply says 'Well?' This hooks the audience, as they want to find out what happens next in the play, keeping them on the edge of their seats.

Act Two then begins, exactly the same as Act One ended. Priestley decided not to change anything in order to achieve a sense of continuity. Continuity is thus used as a dramatic device to keep the play focused and concentrated on one subject. This also raises the tension and draws in the attention of the audience.

Priestley emphasises the difference between the upper and lower classes very strongly throughout the play.

- He uses the Birling family and Gerald Croft as representatives of the upper middle class.
- He uses Eva Smith/Daisy Renton and Edna, the maidservant, as representatives of the lower or working class.

Priestley shows how in 1912, upper and middle class citizens, such as the Birlings and the Crofts, showed little or no respect for the lower and working classes.

- This is perhaps especially ironic as evidence is given in the stage directions that Birling's background is certainly not upper class (the stage directions give him a regional accent with which to speak, 'provincial in his speech').
- Priestley uses this class divide to convey his socialist message.
- He shows that rigidity of the class system is incompatible with his views on community and responsibility.

The fact that a meaningful thematic message is represented would indicate that *An Inspector Calls*, as well as being a murder mystery, in the way that Priestley uncovers the story of the death of Eva Smith, is also a moralistic play. Priestley shows the audience how not to live their lives, using dramatic devices to demonstrate this. He makes the audience contemplate that they are actually 'members of one body' and that they are all 'responsible for one another' and has made them realise that socialism is the way forward instead of capitalism. In this way, *An Inspector Calls* is very relevant today's society where people still do need to work together and help others in need.

J.B. Priestley effectively uses many dramatic devices in *An Inspector Calls*, such as symbolism and timings. He applies them in order to portray his political views, using an upper middle class, Edwardian family to do so.

Key Quotations by Character - Sheila

"I'm sorry, Daddy." She looks attentive, as they all do. (Act 1)

But these girls aren't cheap labour- they're people. (Act 1)

Oh - Gerald - you've got it - is it the one you wanted me to have? (Act 1)

If she'd been some miserable plain little creature, I don't suppose I'd have done it. But she was very pretty and looked as if she could take care of herself. I couldn't be sorry for her. (Act 1)

It's the only time I've ever done anything like that, and I'll never, never do it again to anybody. (Act 1)

(laughs rather hysterically) 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. (Act 1)

(eagerly) I know I'm to blame - and I'm desperately sorry - but I can't believe - I won't believe - it's simply my fault that in that in the end she - she committed suicide. That would be too horrible -(Act 2)

We all started like that - so confident, so pleased with ourselves until he began asking us questions. (Act 2)

(slowly, carefully now) you mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl. If you do, then the inspector will just break it down. And it'll be all the worse when he does. (Act 2)

I'm not a child, don't forget. I've a right to know. (Act 2)

(rather wildly, with laugh) No, he's giving us the rope - so that we'll hang ourselves. (Act 2)

I don't dislike you as I did half an hour ago, Gerald. In fact, in some odd way, I rather respect you more than I've ever done before. But this has made a difference. You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner here.(Act 2)

Don't interfere, please, father. (Act 2)

We've no excuse now for putting on airs and if we've any sense we won't try (Act 2)

I behaved badly too. I know I did I'm ashamed of it. But now you're beginning all over again to pretend that nothing much has happened- (Act 3)

(flaring up) It's you two who are being childish - trying not to face the facts. (Act 3)

(bitterly) I suppose we're all nice people now.(Act 3)

(flaring up) Well, he inspected us all right. And don't let's start dodging and pretending now. Between us we drove that girl to commit suicide. (Act 3)

(tensely) I want to get out of this. It frightens me the way you talk. (Act 3)

I tell you - whoever that Inspector was, it was anything but a joke. You knew it then. You began to learn something. And now you've stopped. You're ready to go on in the same old way. (Act 3)

Key Quotations by Character - Sybil Birling

All right, Edna. I'll ring from the drawing room when we want coffee. Probably in about half an hour. (Act 1)

(reproachfully) Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things- (Act 1)

What an expression, Sheila! Really the things you girls pick up these days! (Act 1)

Please don't contradict me like that. And in any case I don't suppose for a moment that we can understand why the girl committed suicide. Girls of that class—(Act 2)

That - I consider - is a trifle impertinent, inspector. (Act 2)

(with dignity) Yes. We've done a great deal of useful work in helping deserving cases. (Act 2)

Yes, I think it was simply a piece of gross impertinence - quite deliberate - and naturally that was one of the things that prejudiced me against her case. (Act 2)

If you think you can bring any pressure to bear upon me, Inspector, you're quite mistaken. Unlike the other three, I did nothing I'm ashamed of or that won't bear investigation. (Act 2)

I'll tell you what I told her. Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility. (Act 2)

She was giving herself ridiculous airs. She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position. (Act 2)

I didn't see any reason to believe that one story should be any truer than the other. Therefore, you're quite wrong to suppose I shall regret what I did. (Act 2)

I'm sorry she should have come to such a horrible end. But I accept no blame for it at all. (Act 2)

If, as she said, he didn't belong to her class, and was some drunken young idler, then that's all the more reason why he shouldn't escape. He should be made an example of. If the girl's death is due to anybody, then it's due to him. (Act 2)

(shocked) Eric! You stole money? (Act 3)

Well, I must say his manner was quite extraordinary; so - so rude - and assertive - (Act 3)

Really, from the way you children talk, you might be wanting to help him instead of us. Now just be quiet so that your father can decide what we ought to do. *(Looks expectantly at Birling.)* (Act 3)

They're over-tired. In the morning they'll be as amused as we are. (Act 3)

Key Quotations by Character - Arthur Birling

Perhaps we may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together - for lower costs and higher prices. (Act 1)

As a hard-headed business man, who has to take risks and know what he's about - I say, you can ignore all this silly pessimistic talk (Act 1)

I've always been regarded as a sound useful party man. So - well - I gather there's a very good chance of a bright future - so long as we behave ourselves, don't get into the police court or start a scandal - eh?(Act 1)

The way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive - community and all that nonsense. (Act 1)

Still, I can't accept any responsibility. If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody we'd had anything to do with, it would be very awkward, wouldn't it? (Act 1)

This girl. Eva Smith, was one of them, she'd had a lot to say - far too much - so she had to go. (Act 1)

Rubbish! If you don't come down sharply on some of these people, they'd soon be asking for the earth. (Act 1)

angrily) Inspector, I've told you before, I don't like the tone nor the way you're handling this inquiry. And I don't propose to give you much rope. (act 2)

dubiously) I must say, Sybil, that when this comes out at the inquest, it isn't going to do us much good. The press might easily take it up—(Act 2)

You must give me a list of those accounts. I've got to cover this up as soon as I can. (act 3)

angrily) Yes, and you don't realize yet all you've done. Most of this is bound to come out. There'll be a public scandal. (act 3)

angrily) Drop that. There's every excuse for what both your mother and I did (Act 3)

That fellow obviously didn't like us. He was prejudiced from the start. Probably a socialist or some sort of crank - he talked like one. And then, instead of standing up to him, you let him bluff you into talking about your private affairs. (Act 3)

triumphantly) There you are! Proof positive. The whole story's just a lot of moonshine. Nothing but an elaborate sell! (Act 3)

joyfully) But the whole thing's different now. Come, come, you can see that, can't you? (*Imitating Inspector Goole's final speech.*) You all helped to kill her. (*pointing at Sheila and Eric, and laughing.*) and I wish you could have seen the look on your faces when he said that. (Act 3)

pointing to Eric and Sheila) Now look at the pair of them - the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke- (Act 3)

Key Quotations by Character - Eric

I don't know - really. Suddenly I felt I just had to laugh. (Act 1)

(rather noisily) All the best! She's got a nasty temper sometimes - but she's not bad really. Good old Sheila! (Act 1)

I left 'em talking about clothes again. You'd think a girl had never any clothes before she gets married. Women are potty about 'em. (Act 1)

By jove, yes. And as you were saying, dad, a man has to look after himself- (Act 1)

He could. He could have kept her on instead of throwing her out. I call it tough luck. (Act 1)

Why shouldn't they try for higher wages? We try for the highest possible prices. And I don't see why she should have been sacked just because she'd a bit more spirit than the others. You said yourself she was a good worker. I'd have let her stay. (Act 1)

(suddenly bursting out) I'm sorry - but you see - we were having a little party - and I've had a few drinks, including rather a lot of champagne - and I've got a headache - and as I'm only in the way here - I think I'd better turn in. (Act 1)

(bitterly) You haven't made it any easier for me, have you, mother? (Act 2)

Yes. And that's when it happened. And I didn't even remember - that's the hellish thing. Oh - my God! how stupid it all is! (Act 2)

Yes. I wasn't in love with her or anything - but I liked her - she was pretty and a good sport--

No. 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. (Act 2)

(miserably) Yes. That was the worst of all. She wouldn't take any more, and she didn't want to see me again. (Act 2)

(nearly at breaking point) Then - you killed her. She came to you to protect me - and you turned her away - yes, and you killed her - and the child she'd have had too (Act 2)

(unhappily) My God - I'm not likely to forget. (Act 2)

Well, I don't blame you. But don't forget I'm ashamed of you as well - yes both of you. (Act 3)

(bursting out) What's the use of talking about behaving sensibly. You're beginning to pretend now that nothing's really happened at all. And I can't see it like that. This girl's still dead, isn't she? Nobody's brought her to life, have they? (Act 3)

The money's not the important thing. It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters. And I still feel the same about it, and that's why I don't feel like sitting down and having a nice cosy talk. (Act 3)

Key Quotations by Character - The Inspector

'd like some information, if you don't mind, Mr Birling. Two hours ago a young woman died on the infirmary. She'd been taken there this afternoon because she'd swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course. (Act 1)

(coolly, looking hard at him) There might be. (Act 1)

They might. But after all it's better to ask for the earth than to take it. (Act 1)

(dryly) I don't play golf. Act 1)

(slowly) Are you sure you don't know? *(He looks at Gerald, then at Eric, then at Sheila.)* (Act 1)

(steadily) That's more or less what I was thinking earlier tonight when I was in the infirmary looking at what was left of Eva Smith. A nice little promising life there, I thought, and a nasty mess somebody's made of it. (Act 1)

Sometimes there isn't much difference as you think. Often, if it was left to me, I wouldn't know where to draw the line [between respectable citizens and criminals]. (Act 1)

(harshly) Yes, but you can't. It's too late. She's dead. (Act 1)

'ou think young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things? (Act 2)

(sternly to them both) You see, we have to share something. If there's nothing else, we'll have to share our guilt. (Act 2)

(cutting in, with authority) he must wait his turn. (Act 2)

(sharply) your daughter isn't living on the moon. She's here in Brumley too. (Act 2)

(massively) Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges. (Act 2)

(very deliberately) I think you did something terribly wrong - and that you're going to spend the rest of your life regretting it. (Act 2)

(very sternly) Her position now is that she lies with a burnt-out inside on a slab. *(As Birling tries to protest, turns on him.)* Don't stammer and yammer at me again, man (Act 2)

(firmly) Yes. *(As Birling looks like interrupting explosively.)* I know - he's your son and this is your house - but look at him. He needs a drink now just to see him through. (Act 3)

Each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it. *(He looks from one to the other of them carefully.)* But then I don't think you ever will. (Act 3)

One Eva Smith has gone - but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, and what we think and say and do. We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, when they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Good night. (Act 3)

Key Quotations by Theme and Character

Act 1 Quotations

"There's a good deal of silly talk about these days—but—and I speak as a hard-headed business man, who has to take risks and know what he's about—I say, you can ignore all this silly pessimistic talk. When you marry, you'll be marrying at a very good time."

Related Characters: Arthur Birling (speaker), Sheila, Gerald Croft

Related Themes: Class Politics

"I tell you, by that time you'll be living in a world that'll have forgotten all these Capital versus Labor agitations and all these silly little war scares. There'll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere."

Related Characters: Arthur Birling (speaker)

Related Themes: Class Politics

"A man has to make his own way—has to look after himself—and his family, too, of course, when he has one—and so long as he does that he won't come to much harm. But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive."

Related Characters: Arthur Birling (speaker)

Related Themes: Blame and Responsibility; Class Politics

"It's the way I like to go to work. One person and one line of inquiry at a time. Otherwise, there's a muddle."

Related Characters: Inspector Goole (speaker)

Related Themes: Morality and Legality

"If we are all responsible for everything that happened to everybody we'd had anything to do with, it would be very awkward, wouldn't it?"

Related Characters: Arthur Birling (speaker)

Related Themes: Blame and Responsibility

"Birling: It's a free country, I told them.

Eric: It isn't if you can't go and work somewhere else."

Related Characters: Arthur Birling (speaker), Eric (speaker), Eva Smith

Related Symbols: Eva Smith

Related Themes: Wealth, Power and Influence, Class Politics

"I can't help thinking about this girl—destroying herself so horribly—and I've been so happy tonight."

Related Characters: Sheila (speaker), Eva Smith

Related Symbols: Eva Smith

Related Themes: Blame and Responsibility

"Inspector: There are a lot of young women living that sort of existence, Miss Birling, in every city and big town in this country.

Sheila: But these girls aren't cheap labor. They're people."

Related Characters: Sheila (speaker), Inspector Goole (speaker)

Related Symbols: Eva Smith

Related Themes: Class Politics

"Gerald: We're respectable citizens and not dangerous criminals.

Inspector: Sometimes there isn't as much difference as you think."

Related Characters: Gerald Croft (speaker), Inspector Goole (speaker)

Related Themes: Power, Wealth and Influence, Blame and Responsibility

Act 2 Quotations

"Miss Birling has just been made to understand what she did to this girl. She feels responsible. And if she leaves us now, and doesn't hear any more, then she'll feel she's entirely to blame, she'll be alone with her responsibility."

Related Characters: Inspector Goole (speaker), Sheila, Eva Smith

Related Symbols: Eva Smith

Related Themes: Blame and Responsibility

"If there's nothing else, we'll have to share our guilt."

Related Characters: Inspector Goole (speaker)

Related Themes: Blame and Responsibility, Class Politics

"You know, of course, that my husband was Lord Mayor only two years ago and that he's still a magistrate?"

Related Characters: Mrs. Birling (speaker), Arthur Birling

Related Themes: Wealth, Power and Influence

"I don't dislike you as I did half an hour ago, Gerald. In fact, in some odd way, I rather respect you more than I've ever done before."

Related Characters: Sheila (speaker), Gerald Croft

Related Themes: Public vs Private

"We've no excuse now for putting on airs."

Related Characters: Sheila (speaker)

Related Themes: Wealth, Power and Influence, Blame and Responsibility

"You've had children. You must have known what she was feeling. And you slammed the door in her face."

Related Characters: Inspector Goole (speaker), Mrs. Birling, Eva Smith

Related Symbols: Eva Smith

Related Themes: Blame and Responsibility

Act 3 Quotations

"There'll be plenty of time, when I've gone, for you all to adjust your family relationships."

Related Characters: Inspector Goole (speaker), Arthur Birling, Mrs. Birling, Sheila, Gerald Croft, Eric

Related Themes: Public vs Private

"This girl killed herself—and died a horrible death. But each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it. But then I don't think you ever will."

Related Characters: Inspector Goole (speaker), Arthur Birling, Mrs. Birling, Sheila, Gerald Croft, Eric, Eva Smith

Related Symbols: Eva Smith

Related Themes: Blame and Responsibility

"There are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, with what we think and do. We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other."

Related Characters: Inspector Goole (speaker), Eva Smith

Related Symbols: Eva Smith

Related Themes: Blame and Responsibility, Class Politics

"If all that's come out tonight is true, then it doesn't much matter who it was who made us confess."

Related Characters: Sheila (speaker)

Related Themes: Morality and Legality

"Whoever that chap was, the fact remains that I did what I did. And Mother did what she did. And the rest of you did what you did to her. It's still the same rotten story whether it's been told to a police inspector or to somebody else."

Related Characters: Eric (speaker), Mrs. Birling, Inspector Goole

Related Symbols: Eva Smith

Related Themes: Morality and Legality

"Everything we said had happened really had happened. If it didn't end tragically, then that's lucky for us. But it might have done."

Related Characters: Sheila (speaker)

Related Themes: Morality and Legality

Resource taken from www.litcharts.com, a resource you may find useful that is affiliated to sparknotes, another useful revision site.

Batkin, Liza. "An Inspector Calls Quotes." LitCharts. LitCharts LLC, 3 Apr 2014. Web. 8 Sep 2016.

Some useful quotations with analysis

1. BIRLING

A friend of mine went over this new liner last week - the Titanic - she sails next week - forty-six thousand eight hundred tons - forty-six thousand eight hundred tons - New York in five days - and every luxury - and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable.

Act One

Priestley's love of dramatic irony is biting here, and his irony is never more satirical than in these comments of Birling's, which, to his original audience in 1946, must have seemed more controversial than they do today because the sinking of the ship was within people's memory. Symbolically, just as the *Titanic* is destined to sink, so too is Birling's political ideology, under the Inspector's interrogation. The ship was a titan of the seas, and its imminent failure "next week" suggests the dangers of capitalistic hubris, illustrating the risk of the entrepreneur.

2. *GERALD [laughs]: You seem to be a nice well-behaved family -*

BIRLING: We think we are -

Act One

Coming early in the play, these lines also exemplify Priestley's love of dramatic irony: the last thing the Birlings have been is well-behaved. These lines also suggest the alliance between Gerald and Birling, two men who share the same values, whose bond will become stronger after the Inspector's exit.

3.

BIRLING

But take my word for it, you youngsters - and I've learnt in the good hard school of experience - that a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own - and -

We hear the sharp ring of a front door bell.

Act One

Birling is taking an individualist, capitalist point of view about personal responsibility, and his lines here provide the general attitude of his speeches since the play began. According to him, experience proves that his point of view is correct, in contrast to the possibly more idealistic "youngsters." Yet, the bell marks the moment at which the Inspector arrives, and it is no accident that the socialist-leaning Inspector arrives at precisely this moment.

4. INSPECTOR

... what happened to her then may have determined what happened to her afterwards, and what happened to her afterwards may have driven her to suicide. A chain of events.

Act One

In this fascinating excerpt, the Inspector outlines the nature of the moral crime the Birlings and Gerald have committed against Eva. Each of them is responsible in part for her death, and together they are entirely responsible. This construction is itself a metaphor for Priestley's insistence that we are all bound up together and responsible communally for everyone's survival. Note, too, that the repetition in the Inspector's lines reflect the "chain" he is talking about.

5. SHEILA

[laughs rather hysterically]

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. She looks at him almost in triumph.

Act One

Sheila, shortly before the end of Act One, crucially understands the importance of the Inspector and the fact that he has more information than he is revealing. She is the first person in the play to really begin to understand the Inspector which, in turn, leads her to see her relationship with Gerald in a more realistic, more cynical way.

6. INSPECTOR

Yes, Mr. Croft - in the stalls bar at the Palace Variety Theatre...

GERALD

I happened to look in, one night, after a rather long dull day, and as the show wasn't very bright, I went down into the bar for a drink. It's a favorite haunt of women of the town -

MRS. BIRLING

Women of the town?

BIRLING

Yes, yes. But I see no point in mentioning the subject

Act Two

Eva Smith, by the time she encounters Eric in the Palace bar, seems to be working as a prostitute, and indeed, the fact that the Palace bar is a location known for prostitutes looking for business is here partly mentioned but partly suppressed. Moreover, this information points out the streetwise character of Gerald Croft, and it might even lead to questions about precisely what he *was* doing in that bar, at night, other than just happening to "look in" after a "dull day" and having "a drink."

7. INSPECTOR

She kept a rough sort of diary. And she said there that she had to go away and be quiet and remember "just to make it last longer." She felt there'd never be anything as good again for her - so she had to make it last longer.

Act Two

This is an unusually personal moment from the Inspector, who gives us one of the first insights into Eva Smith's feelings and personality. He claims, of course, that he has found a diary in Eva Smith's room, though many interpretations have argued that the Inspector in fact has a more personal connection to Eva Smith: perhaps he even is her ghost, or a ghoulish embodiment of her dead child? Priestley never tells us, but there is certainly opportunity for the actor in this part to suggest a more personal connection. Note, too, the interest in time on Eva's part, keeping a diary and making a point of remembering the past nostalgically.

8. BIRLING

You'll apologize at once ... I'm a public man -

INSPECTOR *[massively]*

Public men, Mr. Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.

Act Two

Here the Inspector, who by this middle act of the play is gaining in power and control over the situation, "massively" silences Birling with a putdown. It is not the first or last time that Birling is cut off mid-thought. It is also important because Priestley points an extra finger of blame at Birling not just for his actions, but for his failure to see that his public position entails a duty of responsibility to other people. Interestingly, this attitude draws on the traditional notion of the upper classes taking responsibility for the welfare of the lower classes, but in the newer, more democratic life of Britain, the "public men" are not necessarily of higher social class even if they have more public privileges; at any rate, their position of power comes with responsibility.

9. INSPECTOR

We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Good night.

Act Three

The Inspector's final lines, from a longer speech he makes shortly before his exit, are a blistering delivery of Priestley's socialist message. Moreover, his promise of "fire and blood and anguish" also looks forward to the First and Second World Wars, a resonance, which, to Priestley's 1946 audience, must have been quite chilling.

10. BIRLING

... we've been had ... it makes all the difference.

GERALD

Of course!

SHEILA [bitterly]

I suppose we're all nice people now.

Act Three

These lines illustrate the mood of this last part of the play, as well as the split between the Birlings and their children. Sheila and Eric realize the importance of the Inspector's lesson, notably that they need to become more socially responsible whether or not the particular scenario was a valid example. In contrast, their parents absolutely fail to learn such a lesson, arguing that the failure of the example invalidates the Inspector's argument. Why still feel guilty and responsible? It also is significant that Gerald Croft takes Birling's side (uncritically) rather than Sheila's.

Example Questions for *An Inspector Calls*

Theme/ Ideas/ Attitudes

How does Priestley present attitudes of those of a higher social class towards people of a lower social class?

Write about:

- what different characters' attitudes are towards people of a lower social class
- how Priestley presents different characters' ideas about social class by the way he writes

[30 marks]

A04 [4 marks]

How does Priestley present some of the differences between men and women in *An Inspector Calls*?

Write about:

- how the different genders respond to events and to each other
- how Priestley presents the different genders in the play

[30 marks]

A04 [4 marks]

Questions based on Characters/ Relationships

How does Priestley present family relationships in *An Inspector Calls*?

Write about:

- some of the family relationships that are presented in the play
- how Priestley presents these relationships by the way he writes.

[30 marks]

A04 [4 marks]

Do you think Arthur Birling is an important character in *An Inspector Calls*?

Write about:

- how Priestley presents the character of Arthur Birling
- how Priestley uses Arthur Birling to present ideas about responsibility and society.

[30 marks]

A04 [4 marks]

Questions based on Setting

How does Priestley use the setting of the Birling family home to represent ideas in *An Inspector Calls*?

Write about:

- the Priestley presents the Birling family home
- how Priestley uses the Birling family home to explore ideas about society and people [30 marks]

A04 [4 marks]

How does Priestley use the 1912 setting to present ideas in *An Inspector Calls*?

Write about:

- why Priestley set the play in 1912
- how the setting of 1912 allows Priestley to present important ideas in the play [30 marks]

A04 [4 marks]

Questions using a Quotation

In *An Inspector Calls*, Arthur Birling says "If we are all responsible for everything that happened to everybody we'd had anything to do with, it would be very awkward, wouldn't it?" How does Priestley present Birling's attitude towards responsibility in the play?

Write about:

- what Birling says about responsibility
- how Priestley presents Birling's attitude towards responsibility [30 marks]
A04 [4 marks]

In *An Inspector Calls*, Inspector Goole says: "(massively) Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges." How does Priestley present ideas about social class and society in the play?

Write about:

- what you think Priestley is saying about social class and society
- how Priestley presents these ideas through events and what characters say in the play [30 marks]
A04 [4 marks]

Questions based on an aspect of Structure

What do you think is the importance of the ending of Act One in *An Inspector Calls*?

Write about:

- the dramatic effects created by the end of Act One
- how Priestley presents important ideas through the ending of Act One in the play [30 marks]
A04 [4 marks]

What do you think is the importance of the beginning of *An Inspector Calls*?

Write about:

- how the beginning of the play presents some important ideas
- how Priestley presents these ideas by the way he writes [30 marks]
A04 [4 marks]

Questions prompting Argument/ Debate

'The characters in *An Inspector Calls* rarely say quite what they mean'. How far do you agree with this statement?

Write about:

- how trustworthy and responsible the Birlings are presented in the play
- how Priestley uses the characters to explore some of his ideas about responsibility [30 marks]
A04 [4 marks]

"I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish." How far do you agree that *An Inspector Calls* is a novel with a powerful moral message?

Write about:

- the ideas about morality presented in the play
- how Priestley presents these ideas by the way he writes [30 marks]
A04 [4 marks]

Section A: Modern texts Questions 1–24 (30 marks – AO1=12, AO2=12, AO3=6)

Mark	AO	Typical features	How to arrive at a mark
Level 6 <i>Convincing, critical analysis and exploration</i> 26–30 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical, exploratory, conceptualised response to task and whole text Judicious use of precise references to support interpretation(s) 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be a critical, exploratory, well-structured argument. It takes a conceptualised approach to the full task supported by a range of judicious references. There will be a fine-grained and insightful analysis of language and form and structure supported by judicious use of subject terminology. Convincing exploration of one or more ideas/perspectives/contextual factors/interpretations.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of writer's methods with subject terminology used judiciously Exploration of effects of writer's methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploration of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by specific, detailed links between context/text/task 	
Level 5 <i>Thoughtful, developed consideration</i> 21–25 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thoughtful, developed response to task and whole text Apt references integrated into interpretation(s) 	<p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 5 and be starting to demonstrate elements of exploratory thought and/or analysis of writer's methods and /or contexts.</p> <p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be thoughtful, detailed and developed. It takes a considered approach to the full task with references integrated into interpretation; there will be a detailed examination of the effects of language and/or structure and/or form supported by apt use of subject terminology. Examination of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors, possibly including alternative interpretations/deeper meanings.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examination of writer's methods with subject terminology used effectively to support consideration of methods Examination of effects of writer's methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thoughtful consideration of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by examination of detailed links between context/text/task 	
			<p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 4 and be starting to demonstrate elements of thoughtful consideration and/or examination of writer's methods and/or contexts.</p>

<p>Level 4</p> <p><i>Clear understanding</i></p> <p>16–20 marks</p>	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, explained response to task and whole text • Effective use of references to support explanation 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be clear, sustained and consistent. It takes a focused response to the full task which demonstrates clear understanding. It uses a range of references effectively to illustrate and justify explanation; there will be clear explanation of the effects of a range of writer's methods supported by appropriate use of subject terminology. Clear understanding of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear explanation of writer's methods with appropriate use of relevant subject terminology • Understanding of effects of writer's methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear understanding of ideas/perspectives/ contextual factors shown by specific links between context/text/task 	
<p>Level 3</p> <p><i>Explained, structured comments</i></p> <p>11–15 marks</p>	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some explained response to task and whole text • References used to support a range of relevant comments 	<p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 3 and be starting to demonstrate elements of understanding and/or explanation of writer's methods and/or contexts.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explained/relevant comments on writer's methods with some relevant use of subject terminology • Identification of effects of writer's methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some understanding of implicit ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by links between context/text/task 	
			<p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be explanatory in parts. It focuses on the full task with a range of points exemplified by relevant references from the text; there will be identification of effects of a range of writer's methods supported by some relevant terminology. Explanation of some relevant contextual factors.</p>
			<p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 2 and be starting to explain and/or make relevant comments on writer's methods and/or contexts.</p>

Assessment of AO4

AO4 will be assessed on **Section A** only. The performance descriptors are provided below.

Performance descriptor	Marks awarded
<p>High performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with consistent accuracy, and consistently use vocabulary and sentence structures to achieve effective control of meaning.</p>	4 marks
<p>Intermediate performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with considerable accuracy, and use a considerable range of vocabulary and sentence structures to achieve general control of meaning.</p>	2–3 marks
<p>Threshold performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with reasonable accuracy, and use a reasonable range of vocabulary and sentence structures; any errors do not hinder meaning in the response.</p>	1 mark

Where a candidate writes nothing or fails to meet threshold performance they should receive 0 marks.