

Characterisation (A02)

Arthur Birling	avaricious Edwardian businessman; pompous; driven by reputation; stubborn; a social climber; archetypal capitalist; no remorse; ridiculed by Priestley; middle-class; a caricature; a misogynist; a patriarch; a hypocrite; evokes contempt & derision; symbol of capitalism.
Sybil Birling	aloof & supercilious; upper-class; prejudiced; infantilises her children; no remorse; stubborn; antithesis of her daughter; an aristocratic fossil; evokes contempt.
Sheila Birling	naïve (start); materialistic (start); stereotypical middle-class young woman (start); compassionate; perceptive; curious; wiser; a proto-feminist; has a social & moral epiphany; transformation; role-model for the younger generation; symbol of hope.
Eric Birling	juvenile (start); socially inept (start); reckless; frustrated; repentant; undergoes transformation; unloved; does not fit the mould; a victim of parents' values.
Gerald Croft	an aristocrat; a misogynist; manipulative; enjoys adoration of women; unchanged, ruthless & callous; a barrier to change.
Eva Smith	'warm-hearted'; moralistic; symbol of the oppression of working-class women; underpaid; a desperate victim; evokes audience pity.
Inspector Goole	'massiveness'; systematic; didactic; unflappable; mysterious; a prophet of doom (if no equality); voice of each character's conscience; blunt; Priestley's mouthpiece; Arthur Birling's iceberg; preacher of socialism.
Edna	voiceless, the underdog, working-class, visual reminder of silent working class.

Authorial intention & methods (A02)

Religious allusion	References to Christian beliefs – e.g. Eva Smith (symbol of all women – first sin); 'members of one body' (Corinthians – united in the church through Christ); 'fire and blood and anguish' (Armageddon & hell).
Dramatic irony	Birling's faith in progress and lasting peace (e.g. 'unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable'); Mrs Birling's realisation that Eric was the father; Gerald jokes about 'police scandal' in Act 1; Mr and Mrs Birling accuse Sheila/Eric of childishness; 'charity worker' Mrs Birling commits worst crime; socialist message really for post-war audience, not Birling family (breaks fourth wall).
Cyclical narrative	the ending takes story back to beginning of inspection; symbolically, Priestley is warning against returning to errors of pre-war Edwardian era; Ouspensky's theory of time; prolepsis gives Birling family an opportunity to repent & change.
Symbolism	Titanic = Edwardian middle-class; ring = traditional female role; one body = a society that works for each other; pink lighting = Birlings' conceit; wall = class divide; slab = middle-class cruelty
Contrast	Sheila vs (<i>is the antithesis of</i>) Eva Smith; appearance vs reality; the family's immorality vs Eva's morality; Inspector's blunt language vs Birling family's euphemistic language.
Tension	hints of unrest in opening stage directions; claustrophobic single setting; Arthur & Sybil at table; Inspector secretive with photo.
Dramatic moments	Inspector breaks 4 th wall in final speech; Inspector arrives in Birling's 'look after himself' speech; Mrs Birling realises Eric is father; Eric's entrance end of Act 2; surprising/enigmatic denouement (ending).

Priestley's themes & ideas (A01 & A02)

Class system	class system destroying Britain; working-class oppressed; middle-class arrogant /hypocritical; social status more important than moral goodness.
Wealth & poverty	employers mistreat their workers; the poor remain voiceless; poverty is inescapable; the rich build a 'wall' between themselves and the poor.
Responsibility	middle-class must take responsibility for society; actions of rich have huge effect on poor; failure to take responsibility will cause war/apocalypse; audience must examine their consciences & change.
Gender	misogyny rife in Edwardian society; no social safety net for unmarried, pregnant women; working-class women main victims; emancipation of women will lead to a fairer & stronger society.
Capitalism & socialism	capitalists are selfish & uncaring; capitalists foolish to believe in never-ending progress; socialism will cure the ills of society; socialism is the future.
Generation gap	future lies in the hands of the young; old are stubborn & unwilling to take responsibility; intransigent young (e.g. Gerald) are a threat to society.

Context and society (A03)

Poverty	1892: turn of the century, 30% of people living in London lived in absolute poverty – e.g. unable to feed & clothe themselves or find adequate shelter.
Labour	1900: Keir Hardie & his party represented the trade unions. The workers from the shop floor were starting to challenge factory owners. Accompanied by worker unrest, strikes, violent riots., etc.
Edwardian era	1901-1914: was a time of great social inequality. Industrialisation & empire combined to create huge wealth. Britain owned ¼ of the world; ¼ population in the British empire; navy twice as large as the next biggest. However, wealth in the hands of the few, not the many.
Liberal reforms	1906-1916: General election. Landslide victory for Liberal Party who brought in social reforms including free school meals, pensions, workers benefits, etc. Groundswell of public opinion in favour of fairer Britain. (Labour victory of 1945 <i>mirrors</i> Liberal Victory of 1906.)
Titanic	1912: A metaphor for the end of the Edwardian age of confidence & the beginning of the modern age of anxiety.
Women	1913: Few rights – e.g. wage inequality (1/2 man's wage for same job), abortion illegal, social stigma of pregnancy out of wedlock. 1913 saw rise in Suffragette violence after government rejected The Conciliation Bill.
War	1914 & 1939 - British empire collapsed; devastating economic impact; people calling again for a new and fairer Britain after the wars
1945	Priestley writes an Inspector Calls. Clement Atlee's Labour Party wins landslide General Election on a platform of welfare reform – pension extensions, more workers' benefits (unemployment and sickness) & NHS.