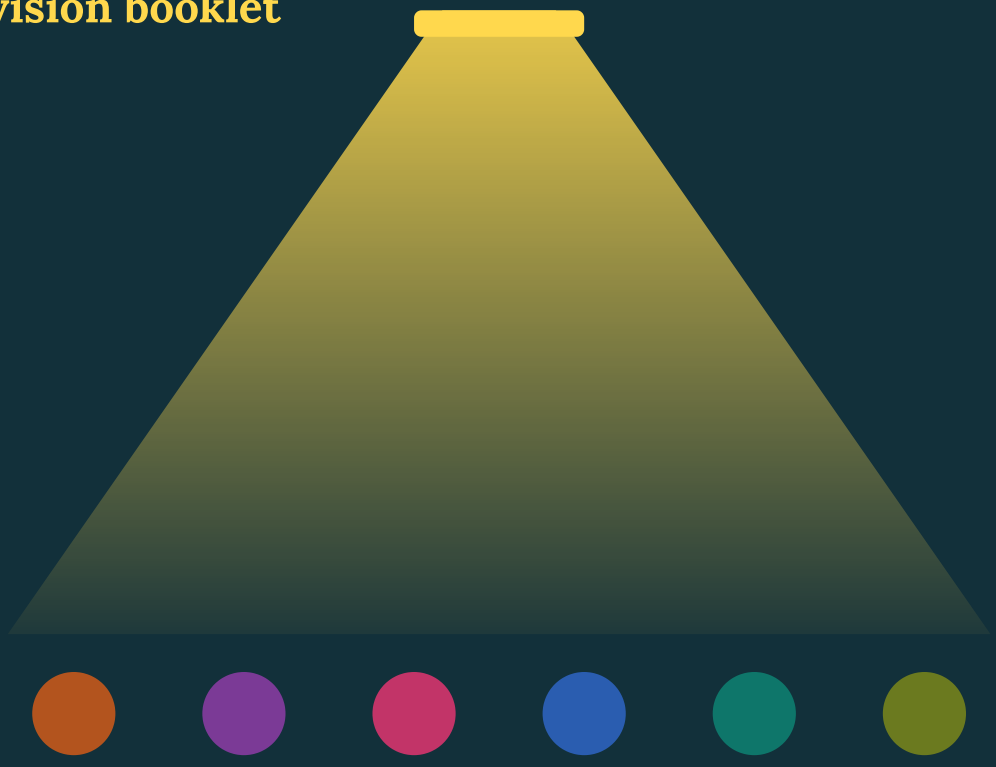
GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE · PAPER 2

An Inspector Calls

Revision booklet



"brighter and harder"

Name _____

Teacher _____

Adapted from the Stoke Newington School revision booklet

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The characters

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The Inspector
Police inspector

Eva Smith
Never appears on stage

How to use this booklet

1. **Read** the plot, then one character page at a time.
2. **Learn** the three quotation cards at the top of each page.
3. **Link** each character to context and themes.
4. **Practise** with the essay questions and fill in the revision grid.

THE STORY

Plot summary

1 Act One

- The Birling family and Gerald Croft are celebrating Sheila's engagement to Gerald
- Although there are a few signs that not everything is perfect (Mr Birling is too anxious to impress Gerald, Eric seems nervous and Sheila mentions that Gerald did not come near her the previous summer) there is a happy, light-hearted atmosphere.
- Mr Birling makes arrogant speeches, telling the other characters his views on science, the Titanic and the relationship between bosses and workers, saying that a man 'has to mind his own business and look after himself'
- His speech is interrupted by the arrival of a police inspector, named Goole. Inspector Goole is investigating the suicide of a young woman named Eva Smith
- The Inspector shows Mr Birling a photograph of Eva Smith. Mr Birling admits he employed her in his factory but sacked her for demanding higher wages.
- Sheila is shown the photograph and realises that she had Eva Smith sacked from her next job as a shop assistant, because she thought Eva Smith laughed at her.
- The Inspector reveals that Eva Smith changed her name to Daisy Renton. Gerald's reaction makes it obvious that he also knew the girl.
- The Inspector suggests that many people share responsibility for the misery which prompted Eva Smith / Daisy Renton to end her life.

2 Act Two

- Gerald admits he met Daisy Renton in the spring of the previous year and that she was his mistress.
- Sheila is hurt and angry, yet she praises Gerald for at least being honest.
- Mrs Birling tries to bully the Inspector and control events.
- While Eric is out of the room, Mrs Birling is forced to admit that Eva / Daisy asked for the help of her charity, but that Mrs Birling refused to help her. She was offended because Eva Smith called herself 'Mrs Birling'
- It is revealed that the girl was pregnant. Mrs Birling lays the blame for the girl's death on the father of the unborn child.
- At this moment, Eric enters the room again.

3 Act Three

- Eric confesses that he got Eva Smith pregnant and that he stole money from his father's firm to support her.
- Eric learns that his mother had refused to help Eva Smith. He blames his mother for Eva's death.
- The Birling family begin to accuse one another angrily. The family atmosphere has changed completely from the polite scene at the start of the play.
- The Inspector takes charge and makes a dramatic speech about the importance of social responsibility. He leaves.
- Gerald and Mr Birling begin to suspect the Inspector. They gradually prove that the man who called on them was not a real police inspector.
- A telephone call to the Infirmary (hospital) reveals that there has been no recent suicide.
- Eric and Sheila still feel guilty, but the others now shrug off guilt.
- Mr Birling answers the telephone: a young woman has just died and an inspector is on his way to make enquires.
- The play ends here, leaving the audience wondering who the original Inspector was and why history seems to be repeating itself...

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Mr Birling

WHO
Capitalist · businessman

DOES THE CHARACTER CHANGE?
No

SYMBOL OF
Capitalists: selfishness and arrogance

> *"I speak as a hard-headed practical man of business"*

> *"The Titanic sails next week... unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable"*

> *"There'll be a public scandal"*

> *"Look, Inspector – I'd give thousands – yes, thousands"*

WHO IS MR BIRLING?

Mr Birling is a successful businessman, who has been Lord Mayor of Brumley. He is the father of Sheila and Eric.

WHAT DOES MR BIRLING DO?

- Mr Birling hosts the dinner to celebrate Sheila's engagement to Gerald Croft.
- He claims that a man's responsibility is only to himself and his family.
- Two years ago he fired Eva Smith from his factory.
- He is only concerned with protecting his reputation and avoiding a scandal.

STRUCTURE: HOW THE CHARACTER CHANGES

1. **Opening**
The play opens with Mr Birling asking for the port to be poured. Birling is trying to impress Gerald by choosing the same port as Gerald's father likes. Priestley is using the port as a symbol to reveal that Mr Birling is a materialistic character who cares about his status and reputation above all else.

2. **The Inspector's entrance**
Just before the Inspector arrives, Mr Birling dismisses socialist views of community as 'nonsense' and claims that a man 'has to mind his own business and look after himself'. The interruption of Birling's speech foreshadows that the Inspector will disrupt these arrogant views.

3. **Ending**
By the ending of the play, Mr Birling has not changed. He is delighted when he discovers the Inspector is a fake, shown by the repeated stage direction 'triumphantly'. Priestley reveals that capitalists like Mr Birling are too selfish to change.

Mr Birling the Capitalist

Mr Birling is a capitalist who values business and profit above all else. He makes his views clear in the early speeches in Act 1, and these do not change.

★ Priestley's message

Priestley uses Mr Birling as a symbol to represent the selfishness and arrogance of capitalists in Edwardian society. Priestley wanted his audience to dislike Mr Birling and to see him as a fool. By rejecting the attitudes held by Mr Birling, Priestley's audience would lead a more responsible, socialist life.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Mrs Birling

WHO
Snob · charity organiser

DOES THE CHARACTER CHANGE?
No

SYMBOL OF
The wealthy, privileged classes

ABOUT EVA
"A girl of that sort"

ABOUT GERALD'S AFFAIR
"It's disgusting to me."

"Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility."

WHO IS MRS BIRLING?

Mrs Birling is an important member of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation. She is the mother of Sheila and Eric.

WHAT DOES MRS BIRLING DO?

- Mrs Birling treats the Inspector as an inferior.
- She is disgusted when she learns that Eva / Daisy was Gerald's mistress.
- She persuaded the charity not to help the pregnant girl.
- She blames the girls' death on the father of the child – who turns out to be her son.
- She claims she was the only one not to 'give in' to the Inspector.

STRUCTURE: HOW THE CHARACTER CHANGES

1 **Opening**

Mrs Birling shows her narrow-mindedness from her early lines. When Sheila questions where Gerald was all summer, Mrs Birling warns her that men have important work to do and shouldn't be questioned. She praises Gerald for his timing of the presentation of the ring.

2 **The Inspector's entrance**

Mrs Birling is off stage when the Inspector arrives, and does not re-enter until Act Two. At this point, she enters 'self-confidently' and attempts to dismiss the Inspector's investigation, calling it an 'absurd business'. This indicates her arrogance and unwillingness to listen or to change. Even after admitting that she has met Eva, Mrs Birling refers to her only as a 'girl', not by her name, as though Eva is not worthy of being recognised as an individual. Mrs Birling implies that a woman in Eva's position is not capable of the same level of emotion or morality as somebody in the upper or middle class.

3 **Ending**

By the end of the play, Mrs Birling has not changed. She seems the most resistant to the Inspector's message. Priestley shows that she has a lack of understanding of how other people live and thinks that all classes behave in a certain way. The speed at which she recovers after the Inspector leaves reflects her coldness and lack of conscience. Her last line in the play is a prediction that they will all be 'amused' by the Inspector's visit in the morning – a prediction that shows how little she has understood.

Mrs Birling the snob

Mrs Birling is a capitalist and a snob who values social class above all else. She is an ignorant character, who doesn't think there are any problems in her family and struggles to believe that Eric drinks heavily or that he was the father of Eva's child.

★ Priestley's message

Priestley uses Mrs Birling as a symbol to represent the wealthier, privileged classes and their selfish attitudes. She sees the working class as morally inferior. Priestley wanted his audience to despise Mrs Birling and the ignorant social snobbery she represents.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Sheila Birling

WHO
Daughter · younger generation

DOES THE CHARACTER CHANGE?
Yes, most of all

SYMBOL OF
Younger generation and socialism

> *"These girls aren't cheap labour – they're people."*

> *"(miserably) So I'm really responsible?"*

TO MRS BIRLING
> *"You mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl."*

WHO IS SHEILA BIRLING?

Sheila is the daughter of Mr and Mrs Birling and at the start of the play is engaged to Gerald Croft.

WHAT DOES SHEILA DO?

- Sheila shows real emotion when she hears that a young woman has died.
- She was responsible for getting Eva Smith fired from her job in the dress shop.
- She realises the Inspector is important and should not be ignored / lied to.
- After hearing about Gerald's affair, she breaks off her engagement with him.
- She reveals that Eric drinks too much.
- She understands that the family needs to take responsibility for what they have done and to change their treatment of working class people.

STRUCTURE: HOW THE CHARACTER CHANGES

1. **Opening**
At the start of the play, Sheila is playful and self-centred, enjoying the attention her engagement brings. She is particularly excited about the engagement ring, calling it 'wonderful!'. At first, Sheila seems superficial and materialistic like the rest of her family.

2. **The Inspector's entrance**
When Sheila meets the Inspector, she shows a sensitive side to her nature. She responds to Eva Smith as a person, not as cheap labour, and criticises her father. When she realises her jealousy and bad temper caused Eva to lose her job, she is genuinely sorry.

3. **Ending**
By the end of the play, Sheila Birling has changed more than any other character. She refuses to continue the engagement with Gerald by the end of the play, even though he claims 'everything's all right now'. She understands the importance of the Inspector's message, and even echoes his words, 'fire and blood and anguish'. These things all help to make her a more sympathetic character.

Sheila the socialist

Sheila shows genuine concern for Eva Smith and understands the Inspector's message. She forms a contrast to her narrow-minded, materialistic parents.

★ Priestley's message

Priestley uses Sheila, along with Eric, as a symbol to represent the younger generation and socialism. Sheila gives the audience hope that their society can improve if people take responsibility for the impact of their actions. You could also argue that Sheila comes to reflect new ideas about gender equality, connected to the suffragette movement of the period – she challenges the outdated attitudes of her father, mother and Gerald Croft.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Eric Birling

WHO
Son · younger generation

DOES THE CHARACTER CHANGE?
Yes

SYMBOL OF
Younger generation and socialism

TO MRS BIRLING, ON LEARNING THAT SHE REFUSED EVA / DAISY HELP
"You killed her... and the child she'd have had too – my child – your own grandchild – damn you, damn you"

ABOUT FORCING HIS WAY INTO EVA SMITH'S ROOMS
"I insisted... I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty."

TO MR BIRLING
"Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?"

WHO IS ERIC BIRLING?

Eric is the son of Mr and Mrs Birling. He is employed in his father's business, drinks more than is good for him and is the father of Eva's / Daisy's child.

WHAT DOES ERIC DO?

- Eric drinks too much at the family dinner.
- Eric met Eva / Daisy in the bar of the Palace Theatre.
- Eric forced his way into Eva's / Daisy's rooms and made her pregnant.
- He stole money from his father's firm to give to Eva / Daisy.
- He accuses his mother of killing her own unborn grandchild.
- He accepts his guilt, whether the Inspector is a real police officer or not.

STRUCTURE: HOW THE CHARACTER CHANGES

1. **Opening**
   At the start of the play, Eric has clearly had too much to drink. His first action is to 'guffaw' suddenly. Sheila then describes him as 'squiffy' (drunk). This prepares the audience for what we later learn about his drunken behaviour with Eva / Daisy. However, Eric already seems to be less ignorant than his father, and attempts to challenge his predictions about the future, asking him questions like 'What about war?'
2. **The Inspector's entrance**
   Eric responds with real emotion when hearing of Eva's death, crying 'involuntarily' 'My God!'. He also criticises his father's treatment of Eva Smith, calling it 'tough luck' and 'a dam' shame'.
3. **Ending**
   By the end of the play, Eric, like his sister Sheila, becomes aware of his own responsibilities, realising that he has played a part in Eva Smith's death.

Eric the changed man

Eric was part of the 'chain of events' that led to Eva Smith's death, by having a fling with her and getting her pregnant. At the start of the play, he was just like the others – abusing his power over a working class girl. However, he accepts responsibility and is ashamed of his behaviour, so the audience is more likely to forgive him.

★ Priestley's message

At first, Priestley uses Eric's actions to symbolise how capitalists abuse their power over the working class (for example, treating Eva Smith 'as if she were an animal, a thing, not a person'). You could argue that Eric's rape of Eva Smith represents how capitalists figuratively 'rape' the poor.

However, Eric does change in the play. By the end, Eric, like his sister, is used by Priestley as a symbol to represent the younger generation and socialism. Eric gives the audience hope that their society can improve if people take responsibility for the impact of their actions.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Gerald Croft

WHO
Upper class · Sheila's fiancé

DOES THE CHARACTER CHANGE?
Very little

SYMBOL OF
The selfish upper class

> *"I'm rather more – upset – by this business than I probably appear to be –"*

ABOUT EVA / DAISY

> *"She was young and pretty and warm-hearted – and intensely grateful."*

> *"There isn't any such inspector. We've been had."*

WHO IS GERALD CROFT?

Gerald is the son of a wealthy industrialist and business rival of Mr Birling. At the start of the play, he has just become engaged to Sheila Birling. Gerald is slightly socially superior to the Birlings – he is upper class / aristocratic.

WHAT DOES GERALD DO?

- Gerald gives Sheila an engagement ring at the start of the dinner party.
- He agrees with Mr Birling about the way a business should be run.
- He had an affair with Eva / Daisy for six months, then broke off their relationship.
- At the end of the play, he finds out that a police sergeant has never heard of Inspector Goole.
- He telephones the Infirmary and learns that no girl died that day.

STRUCTURE: HOW THE CHARACTER CHANGES

1. **Opening**

   At the opening of the play, Gerald echoes many of Mr Birling's opinions, especially on matters of business. Unlike Eric, he does not challenge Mr Birling and in fact supports him.

2. **The Inspector's entrance**

   When the Inspector begins to question Mr Birling, Gerald shows 'annoyance' not to be able to see the photograph of Eva Smith. He supports Mr Birling's decision to sack Eva Smith. Initially, he tries to keep his own relationship with Eva Smith a secret. However, he does admit his relationship and seems to show some concern about what happened to her.

3. **Ending**

   By the end of the play, Gerald does not seem to have changed very much. His last action is to suggest to Sheila that they should remain engaged, holding up the ring and saying, 'Everything's all right now, Sheila.' This suggest that Gerald is more like Mr and Mrs Birling than the socialists Eric and Sheila.

Gerald the aristocrat

Gerald is a complex character. On the one hand, you could argue that Gerald's interaction with Eva / Daisy was motivated by sympathy and then genuine attraction. He is at least honest when discussing his attachment to Eva / Daisy. However, on the other hand, he discarded Eva / Daisy when it suited him. He is aligned with Mr Birling, echoing his views on business and his excitement that the Inspector isn't a real police officer. He lets the audience down – we hoped that he would change his attitudes, but he doesn't.

★ Priestley's message

Priestley uses Gerald as a symbol to represent the selfish attitudes of the upper class. The fact that Gerald doesn't change his attitudes conveys how ingrained this attitudes were in the aristocracy, and how difficult it was to change them.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The Inspector

WHO
Police inspector

DOES THE CHARACTER CHANGE?
n/a

SYMBOL OF
Priestley's own voice

> *"It would do us all a bit of good if sometimes we tried to put ourselves in the place of these young women counting their pennies in their dingy little back bedrooms."*

> *"She'd swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course. She was in great agony."*

> *"There are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths."*

WHO IS INSPECTOR GOOLE?

He introduces himself as Inspector Goole, a police officer who has come to investigate the background of a young woman's suicide.

WHAT DOES THE INSPECTOR DO?

- The Inspector interrupts the Birling family gathering.
- He establishes they each did something cruel or unkind to the dead girl.
- He takes control of the situation and refuses to acknowledge that any of the others is superior to himself.
- He leaves them after making a passionate speech about social justice.

STRUCTURE: HOW PRIESTLEY BUILDS HIS POWER

The Inspector's power comes from his uncanny ability to control the characters and events in the play. Look closely at the stage directions associated with the Inspector:

- The lighting becomes 'brighter and harder' once the Inspector arrives, suggesting that the Inspector will put the actions of the Birling family under a harsh light.
- He arrives at a crucial time – to interrupt Mr Birling's selfish views.
- The first stage directions about the Inspector emphasise his authority, describing his 'impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness'.
- The adverbs associated with the Inspector are very important: he speaks 'carefully, weightily', which gives his words authority; he cuts through the Birlings 'massively' which shows his power over them and his refusal to be intimidated by their social class.
- The Inspector controls who sees the photograph, building up drama as only one character gets to see it at a time. He therefore controls the structure of the play – each revelation moves the drama one step forward.
- Finally, the Inspector seems to operate outside of time – for example, at the end of Act Two, he waits for Eric to appear, looking 'at his watch' before the dramatic revelation about Eric's role in Eva's life.

★ Priestley's message

The Inspector represents Priestley's voice – he conveys Priestley's strong socialist views. He challenges the characters, and therefore the audience, about their treatment of the working class. You could argue that the fact that he operates outside of time gives him a moral or Godly power that places his views above all of the others in the play.

The Inspector also heightens drama – his entrances and exits are all well-timed in order to create maximum tension. This also adds to the sense of his importance – it is as if he is controlling the structure of the drama itself.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Eva Smith / Daisy Renton

WHO
Never appears on stage

DOES THE CHARACTER CHANGE?
n/a

SYMBOL OF
The exploited working class

THE INSPECTOR
"young women counting their pennies in their dingy little back bedrooms."

MR BIRLING
"She'd had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go."

SHEILA
"I can't help thinking about this girl – destroying herself so horribly"

WHO IS EVA SMITH / DAISY RENTON?

These are the two names by which the girl who suffered at the hands of the Birling family and Gerald was known.

WHAT HAPPENS TO HER?

- Mr Birling sacked her from his factory for leading a strike for better pay.
- She was sacked from a dress shop, after Sheila unjustly complained about her.
- She became Gerald Croft's mistress.
- She was made pregnant by Eric Birling.
- She applied to a charity for help, but Mrs Birling refused that help.
- She committed suicide by swallowing disinfectant.

Eva Smith – symbol of the working class

Eva Smith remains a mystery. She never appears on stage and we do not know her real name, but the play revolves around her. She forms a sharp contrast with the Birling family: she worked hard, supported her fellow workers and was kind. Her honesty prevented her from considering marriage to Eric and protected him from his foolishness in stealing money. In contrast to Mrs Birling's snobbish prejudice about her ('as if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!', Eva Smith was too moral to accept stolen money from Eric.

★ Priestley's message

Priestley uses Eva Smith as a symbol to represent the working class women (and men) who are exploited by capitalists like the Birling family. You could argue that Priestley emphasises her morality in order to challenge any prejudices the Birlings, and the audience, may hold about working class women and men.

CONTEXT

Why was the play written?

1912	1914	1942	1944	1945
Play set in Brumley. The Titanic sinks.	First World War begins.	Priestley helps set up the Common Wealth Party.	Priestley writes the play.	Labour wins the general election.

Setting of 'An Inspector Calls'

'An Inspector Calls' is set in a fictional industrial town of Brumley in 1912. Priestley wrote 'An Inspector Calls' in 1944 and, like much of his work, the play contains strong political messages. Priestley deliberately set 'An Inspector Calls' in 1912 because that era represented the opposite of what people were hoping for in 1945.

Priestley's politics

Priestley was a socialist. Socialists believe that capitalists (such as Mr Birling) benefit the rich over the poor. Socialism is based on giving power and rights to the working class (such as Eva Smith, working in the factory). Socialists strongly support unions, organisations that protect workers' rights.

During the 1930s Priestley became very concerned about the consequences of social inequality in Britain, and in 1942 Priestley and others set up a new political party, the Common Wealth Party, which argued for public ownership of land, greater democracy, and a new 'morality' in politics. The party merged with the Labour Party in 1945. Priestley was influential in developing the idea of the Welfare State which began to be put into place at the end of the war.

By 1945, socialism was a fresh and very popular movement. In the UK general election of 1945, held two months after the end of the Second World War in Europe, the Labour Party beat Winston Churchill's Conservatives, winning a majority of seats for the first time in British election history. Priestley, along with nearly 12 million other Britons, voted for Labour.

Key contextual ideas

'An Inspector Calls' is set in 1912, the Edwardian era. The play is set just before the Titanic sinks, and two years before the start of World War One. Here are some of the key contextual ideas of the play:

Social position in 1912

Your place in society was far more important in 1912 than it is today. Industrialists like Mr Birling made enough money to rise up the social ladder – but this wealth was not shared with their workers like Eva Smith. Arthur Birling has made his money through building up a successful manufacturing business. Mrs Birling's social snobbery and her desire for strictly 'correct' behaviour suggest that she has come from a socially 'better' family background than Mr Birling. Mr Birling has improved his social status by becoming Lord Mayor and accepting the duties of a magistrate. He hopes to improve his social status further by being awarded a knighthood. Mr Birling is delighted that Sheila is engaged to Gerald Croft at the start of the play, because this will improve his social status. His focus on social position explains why Mr Birling is so worried about creating a 'public scandal' that may damage his reputation. Priestley makes Mr Birling's obsession with social position look foolish and immoral to his 1945 audience.

Workers and bosses

At the time the play is set (1912), the rights of workers like Eva Smith were not taken too seriously by many employers. Workers didn't have much job security and being fired from a job meant you had no references, making it harder for you to find another job. There was no unemployment pay or benefits system to help you when you were out of work. This is why life becomes so difficult for Eva Smith after she is fired from two jobs because of Mr Birling and Sheila. We can see how easy it would be for her to have ended up trapped by Alderman Meggarty, Gerald and Eric. By presenting Eva's experience on stage, Priestley shows the 1945 audience how important it is that workers are protected.

Charities

As there was so little protection for people like Eva Smith, they were reliant on charities for help. When Eva Smith finds herself unemployed, pregnant and penniless, a charity organisation such as 'The Brumley Women's Organisation' (run by Mrs Birling) was the only place she could turn to. However, this left her at the mercy of women like Mrs Birling, who would decide whether to help or not. Priestley wanted to show his 1945 audience how unfair this system was. Priestley wanted to create support for the 'welfare state', introduced in 1945, which entailed the creation of the NHS, benefits for the unemployed, state pensions etc. It meant that the vulnerable in society would be offered some protection. Priestley used the play to show how vital this was.

A troubled future

Mr Birling thinks the future looks good – he explains to Sheila and Gerald that 'when you marry, you'll be marrying at a very good time. Yes, a very good time'. However, he is completely wrong. Priestley is deliberately presenting Mr Birling as foolish to a 1945 audience, who have experienced two world wars, the Great Depression, social unrest, strikes and a widening gap between rich and poor. The Inspector is accurate when he predicts the future, warning the Birlings of the 'fire and blood and anguish' that everyone will experience if they do not learn to take responsibility for one another.

The role of women

At the time the play was set, women had fewer rights. They were subservient to men. Rich, middle class women were expected to get married. Poor women were used as cheap labour. The difference in the way working class and middle class women were treated in the play can be seen through the different experiences of Eva Smith and Sheila Birling. Eva was objectified by Alderman Meggarty, Gerald and Eric, and suffered greatly. However, Sheila and Mrs Birling are seen as delicate creatures who need to be protected from the harsh realities of the world (e.g. Mrs Birling was protected from the knowledge that many upper class men attend prostitute bars and that her son drank heavily).

However, the fight for gender equality had begun by 1912 with the suffragette movement. As the play progresses, Priestley shows that Sheila begins to fight for equality – refusing to go to bed, standing up to her father, refusing the ring Gerald offers. In this way, the 1945 audience may have recognised that Sheila represented hope for gender equality in the future.

Challenge: time theories

Priestley was interested in theories of time. One influence on Priestley was a Russian philosopher, Ouspensky, who believed that time continued to repeat itself and that individuals must learn to stop repeating the same mistakes. 'An Inspector Calls' is one of Priestley's 'time plays' – plays that are interested in how time works. You could argue that the Inspector comes from the future or a place outside of time to offer the Birlings an opportunity to change – an opportunity they don't take. In the end they have learned nothing and so will have to go through it all over again.

Themes

An Equal Society / Class

In this play, Priestley presents us with a powerful social message. We are shown the comfortable home and rich way of life of the Birling family (see the opening stage directions for props that represent this wealth). This is contrasted with the desperate accounts of workers to increase their poor wages and the dismal life that Eva Smith is forced to live as a result of the Birlings' actions.

The Inspector champions the cause of the poor and tries to get others to accept that all people share a common humanity and are part of a community. The Inspector is a spokesperson for the disadvantaged and a voice for the conscience which the Birlings and Gerald seem to lack.

Responsibility

Many of the characters have a narrow view of what it means to be responsible, but the Inspector provides a stronger message about social responsibility. Each family member has a different attitude towards responsibility – for example, Birling feels his responsibility is simply to make a success of his business. Make sure you know how each character felt about their responsibility towards Eva Smith.

The Inspector wanted each member of the family to accept responsibility for Eva's death: he tells them 'each of you helped to kill her'. However, his final speech is aimed not only at the characters but at the audience too.

Love

The play presents many different interpretations of love. Sheila and Gerald appear to be in love at first – however, after each of them has confessed to their shameful treatment of Eva / Daisy, Sheila realises that they do not really know each other and that trust is an essential part of a loving relationship. Both Eric and Gerald sleep with Eva, but neither of them seem to love her – showing how working class women were vulnerable to being exploited by richer men.

Mr Birling's remark about the engagement of his daughter bringing the two firms into a closer working relationship reveals something about his attitude towards love and marriage. He sees marriage as a way of progressing up the social and economic ladder. We wonder whether love played any real part in his marriage to the socially superior, but cold-hearted, Sybil Birling.

Age

The older generation and the younger generation take the Inspector's message in different ways. While Sheila and Eric accept their part in Eva's death and feel huge guilt, their parents do not admit they did anything wrong.

The old, represented by Mr and Mrs Birling, are set in their ways. They are utterly confident that they are right and they see the young as foolish. They will do anything to protect themselves: Mrs Birling lies to the Inspector when he first shows her the photograph; Mr Birling wants to cover up a potential scandal. Mr and Mrs Birling, with so much to lose from a potential socialist revolution, dismiss the Inspector's warnings and convince themselves that they are not to blame. In contrast, the younger generation, represented by Sheila and Eric, have embraced socialism and rejected capitalism. Priestley uses the younger generation to represent hope for change to the 1945 audience. Ultimately, the audience can be optimistic that the young – those who will shape future society – are able to learn from the Inspector's socialist message.

LEARN THESE

Key quotations

Mr Birling

- Birlings' 'large suburban house' – contrast with Eva's 'dingy little back bedroom' (described by the Inspector)
- Birling's first line: 'Giving us the port, Edna? That's right.' Structurally the play opens with Birling's focus on consumerism, his wealth and attempts to impress Gerald Croft
- Birling, celebrates the engagement of Sheila and Gerald: 'It's one of the happiest nights of my life' (he's happy that the Croft and Birling firms may work together in the future!)
- "nobody wants war"
- "unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable" (about the Titanic)
- Describes himself repeatedly as 'a hard-headed practical man of business'
- "a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own – and – (door bell rings)"
- "It's my duty to keep labour costs down"
- Describes Eva's death as a ''horrid business' (uses the language of business rather than understanding the true horror of Eva's death)
- 'I was quite justified' in sacking Eva Smith
- His main concern is to avoid a "public scandal"
- When worried his family is responsible for Eva's death: 'Look, Inspector - I'd give thousands – yes, thousands –' This reveals Birling's hypocrisy – he has money to spare for a bribe, to avoid a scandal, but he won't pay his workers a penny more than they currently earn.
- After the Inspector leaves: 'You allowed yourself to be bluffed. Yes – bluffed.'
- After the Inspector leaves: repeatedly described in the stage directions as speaking 'triumphantly'

Sheila

- At the start of the play, when Gerald gives her the ring: 'Oh – it's wonderful! Look Mummy – isn't it a beauty?'
- "But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people"
- When she had Eva Smith fired, she uses the power she has as a good customer of the store: "I'd persuade mother to close our account with them"
- '(Miserably) So I'm really responsible?'
- "I'll never, never do it again to anybody."
- When she hears about Gerald's affair with Eva: 'You were the wonderful Fairy Prince. You must have adored it, Gerald.'
- "You mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl." Sheila uses the metaphor of the 'wall' to show that she understands that there should be no separation between the Birlings and Eva. She realises that class divisions must be torn down.
- To Mrs Birling, when she turns Eva away from the charity: 'Mother, I think it was cruel and vile.'
- When Mrs Birling is unknowingly blaming her own son: '(with sudden alarm) Mother – stop – stop!'
- She repeats the Inspector's message and seems to learn from him by the end of the play: 'Fire and blood and anguish. And it frightens me the way you talk, and I can't listen to any more of it'

Gerald

- About Eva Smith: 'She was young and pretty and warm-hearted – and intensely grateful'
- About Eva: 'I asked her questions about herself.'
- About Eva / Daisy: 'I insisted on Daisy moving into those rooms... because I was sorry for her.'
- About his affair, to Mrs Birling, when she calls it disgusting: 'It wasn't disgusting.'
- When asked if he loved Eva Smith / Daisy, 'I didn't feel about her as she felt about me.'
- "I'm rather more upset by this business than I probably appear to be"
- The Inspector isn't as harsh on him as he is on Mr and Mrs Birling – he notes that at least Gerald 'had some affection for her and made her happy for a time.'
- "There isn't any such inspector. We've been had."
- At the end of the play: "Everything's all right now Sheila. What about this ring?"

Mrs Birling

- To Arthur, about his comments about the cook: 'Arthur you're not supposed to say such things'
- To Sheila, on her slang: 'Sheila! What an expression!'
- To Sheila, about Gerald: 'Now Sheila don't tease him. When you're married you'll realise that men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on business.'
- To Gerald, about his affair with Eva: 'I don't think we want any more details of this disgusting affair.'
- "I didn't like her manner"
- About Eric, when Sheila tells him that Eric has been drinking too much for years: '(staggered) It isn't true. You know him, Gerald,'
- "I accept no blame"
- "a girl of that sort"
- When blaming the father of Eva's baby (not realising it's Eric): 'he ought to be dealt with very severely.'
- To Sheila, when she tries to interrupt: '(severely) You're behaving like an hysterical child tonight.'

Eric

- Criticises his father for firing Eva Smith: 'He could have kept her on instead of throwing her out.'
- Before sleeping with Eva: "I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty"
- "I wasn't in love with her or anything"
- To Mr Birling: "You're not the kind of father a chap could go to"
- "we all helped to kill her"

The Inspector

- "an impression of massiveness"
- "she was in great agony"
- "she'd swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course."
- 'no work, no money coming in, and living in lodgings, with no relatives to help her, lonely, half starved, she was feeling desperate'
- "young women counting their pennies in their dingy little back rooms"
- "each of you helped to kill her"
- "Public men , Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges"
- "Millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths"
- "with their lives, their hopes and fears, their chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives"
- "we are responsible for each other"
- "will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish"

PRACTISE

Sample essay questions

1. How and why does Sheila change in An Inspector Calls?
2. What do you think is the importance of the ending in An Inspector Calls?
3. How and why is the Inspector presented as a dramatic and powerful figure in An Inspector Calls?
4. What do you think is the importance of the opening in An Inspector Calls?
5. What do you think is the importance of Gerald's character in An Inspector Calls?
6. How does Priestley explore the idea of class in An Inspector Calls?
7. How does Priestley explore the position of women in An Inspector Calls?
8. What is the importance of Eva Smith in An Inspector Calls?
9. How does Priestley explore the importance of class in An Inspector Calls?

Before you write

1. Underline the key words in the question.
2. Plan five boxes: introduction, beginning, middle, end, conclusion.
3. Choose short quotations and say what single words suggest.

YOUR TURN

Revision grid

Fill in the grid below with **three quotations** for each character, links to themes and analysis. The first one has been done for you.

Character	Quotation	Key themes / ideas	Analysis of language / structure
Mr Birling model answer	"hard-headed business man"	• Mr Birling is proud of his capitalism • Links to his pride in his social position / financial success	The adjective 'hard-headed', with its harsh alliteration, emphasises that Mr Birling's harsh attitude – suggesting he's heartless as well as hard-headed. He repeats this description, which shows how pleased he is – but the audience dislikes him.
Mrs Birling			
Sheila Birling			
Eric Birling			
Gerald Croft			
Inspector			