

# **An Inspector Calls** **by** **J. B. Priestley**

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**“There is no such thing as society.  
There are individual men and women,  
and there are families.”**

Margaret Thatcher, *Woman's Own*, 31 October 1987

## *An Inspector Calls*

The play was written in 1945, but it is **set** in 1912.

Here are **some** of the key events which persuaded J. B. Priestley to write this play:

1912 The Titanic sinks on its maiden voyage. 1,513 lives lost.

1914 -18 The First World War 1

1917 Revolution in Russia.

1926 General Strike in Britain.

1928 Women in Britain get the right to vote.

1929 The Wall Street Crash in America.

1933 Hitler appointed Chancellor in  
Germany.

1934 Hitler becomes Dictator

1939 Second World War begins.

1940 France conquered by Germany.  
Battle of Britain.  
London Blitzed.

1941 Germany attacks Russia.  
Japanese attack on Pearl  
Harbour.

1944 Allied invasion of Europe.

1945 Hitler commits suicide.  
Atomic bombs dropped on  
Japan.  
End of the Second World War.  
*An Inspector Calls* produced in Moscow.

1946 General Assembly of the United Nations opens in New York  
*An Inspector Calls* produced in London.

## *An Inspector Calls* : background information

### **1912 to 1945**

This was the period of the Russian Revolution, two terrible world wars, the Holocaust and the Atom Bomb. Priestley deliberately set his play in 1912 because it was very different from the time he was writing. In 1912, there were very rigid class and gender boundaries which seemed to ensure that nothing would change. By 1945, many of those class and gender divisions had gone. Priestley wanted to make the most of these changes. Through this play, he encourages people to seize the opportunity the end of the war had given them **to build a better, more caring society.**

## *An Inspector Calls* : **Setting**

**Eva Smith is a typical example of the many young women living in poverty at the time this play is set.** Here is some background information about conditions in 1912.

- There were huge social divisions. One historian has written that *‘class divisions were never so acutely felt as by the Edwardians’*.
- The worst divisions were those of income and wealth, resulting in a huge difference in living standards. In fact **87% of the country’s personal wealth was in the hands of 5% of the population.**
- Eight million people had to get by on less than 25 shillings a week and as a result were:

*“underfed, under-housed and insufficiently clothed . . . Their growth is stunted, their mental powers are cramped, their health is undermined.”*

Working conditions were much harder for most people than today. A typical basic working week was about sixty hours - that’s eleven hours a day plus half-day on Saturday. Trade unionism was still in its very early days and workers had very few rights or protection, or control over their working conditions. There were rules and fines in most workplaces for the workers to obey, but few regulations about safety, working conditions and sufficient work breaks. By and large, a worker was at the mercy of his or her employer. It was estimated in 1899 that for a family of two adults and three children to survive they needed about 21 shillings a week (£1.05). On average, men working in towns earned just under a pound but in the country 15 shillings (75p) was more common. **Women’s wages were, on average, half**

“Look at the people who swarm the streets to see the Lord Mayor’s Show, and where you will see a more pitiable sight? These beef-eating, port-drinking fellows in Piccadilly, exercised, scrubbed, groomed, they are all well enough to be sure; but his other side of the shield is distressing to look at. Poor, stunted, bad complexioned, shabbily dressed, ill-featured are these pork-eating, gin drinking denizens of the East End. Crowds I have seen in America, in Mexico, and in most of the great cities of Europe . . . nowhere is there such squalor, such pinching poverty, so many undersized, so many plainly and revolting diseased, so much human rottenness as here . . . “

*(England and the English from an American Point of View, 1909.)*

## ***An Inspector Calls* : timescale within the play**

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

***An Inspector Calls* by J. B. Priestley [Recap Questions]**

Section A Factual

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When is the play set?  
Why is the date of the play important?  
When was the play written?  
What was happening at that time in history [when Priestley wrote the play]?  
Name two historical events Mr Birling refers to  
What does this show about Mr Birling?  
What is the name of the Inspector?  
Why might this name be important?

Section B Characters

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Write down two reasons why Mr Birling is pleased his daughter is marrying Gerald Croft  
How can we tell that Mr and Mrs Birling come from different backgrounds?  
How can we tell that the Inspector does not think much of Mr Birling?  
What was Mr Birling's involvement with Eva Smith?  
How can we tell that he does not regret what he did?  
Does Gerald agree with Mr Birling or the Inspector?  
What was Sheila's involvement with Eva Smith?  
How can we tell that Sheila regrets what she did?  
What was Eric's involvement?  
How can we tell that Mrs Birling has a blinkered view of the world?  
Which character has most regret for what they did?  
Which character has least regret?

Section C: Opinions

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Who do you think the Inspector is and what is his message?  
How do the younger and older generations react differently to his visit?  
In what ways is the play still relevant to us today?

Section D: Definitions

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What do the following words mean?

- (a) community
- (b) society
- (c) responsibility
- (d) conscience
- (e) socialism
- (f) capitalism

**Imagine that each of the main characters have to attend an inquest into the death of Eva Smith/Daisy Renton.**

***What answers would each person give to these questions from the coroner?***

**[You will either have to answer the questions orally or in written format.]**

**Mr Birling**

- When did you last see Eva Smith?
- How did you come to meet the girl?
- Would you have described her as a good worker?
- Did you have any contact with her after she left?
- What does the phrase 'lower costs and higher prices' mean to you?
- What were the demands of the strikers in 1910?
- Would you describe yourself as a powerful member of the Brumley community?
- What would happen if you had to close your factory?
- Was Eva Smith the only person to be sacked as a result of the strike?
- What would be the effects of a merger between your company and that of Lord Croft?
- What did you mean when you accused your children of 'not being able to take a joke'?
- Do you feel that you are in any way to blame for the girl's death?

**Mrs Birling**

- What is the name of the charity organisation of which you are chairperson?
- What is the purpose of the organisation?
- How did you come to meet the deceased woman?
- Can you think of any particular reason why this woman would have chosen to use your name?
- Why did the girl come to your organisation?
- Why did you reject her appeal?
- Are you aware of the identity of the person who was 'responsible' for her condition?
- Do you still believe him to be entirely responsible?
- What help was available to the girl after she left you?
- Would you say that your organisation has helped many young women in a similar position?
- How do you decide if a particular case deserves your help?
- What effect will the publicity and court case have on you and your family?
- Do you hold yourself to blame in any way for the girl's death?

**Sheila Birling**

- Have you ever held down a job for any length of time?
- Where does your income come from?
- Have you ever known what it is like to be desperate?
- Describe your meeting with Eva Smith.
- Describe the girl to the court.
- Would you say that she was attractive?
- What was her job at Milwards?
- Is it true to say that you had her fired?

- You claim that you saw the girl smiling, what do you think she found that was so funny?
- Are you aware that she enjoyed the job she was doing and hoped to make a career of it?
- Do you think that you would have become so annoyed had the girl been a little less attractive?
- Was Eva Smith asked to model this dress for you?
- What was your reaction when you first learned of the girl's death?
- After your father's phone call to the police to check up on the identity of the Inspector, you were heard to mutter: 'I suppose we're all nice people now'. What did you mean by this ?
- Do you feel in any way responsible for the death of Eva Smith?

### **Gerald Croft**

- When and where did you first meet Eva?
- Describe to the jury the type of place the Stalls Bar is
- What sort of people frequent this establishment?
- Do you visit there regularly?
- Is it usual for the son of titled parents to visit such a place?
- Explain how you met the deceased for the first time.
- What was her reaction to Mr Megarty's advances?
- Was she grateful for your intervention?
- What happened when Mr Megarty left?
- What did she tell you about herself on that first night?
- What were your reasons for installing her into a 'nice set of rooms'?
- Did you help her financially?
- Did you have a regular girlfriend at the time?
- Is it true to say that you became her lover?
- Why did the affair end?
- What did Miss Renton say to you when the affair ended?
- Do you feel, in any way, responsible for the girl's death?

### **Eric Birling**

- What is your present employment?
- Do you drink?
- Are you in control of yourself when you drink?
- When and where did you first meet the deceased?
- Were you drunk?
- Did you force your attentions on her that night?
- Did you meet her again?
- When did she tell you that she was pregnant?
- How did you feel when you found out?
- Did you love the girl?
- Did you get her pregnant?
- Did you give her any money?
- Where did you get it from?
- What was the girl's attitude when she discovered how you were obtaining it?
- Why didn't you do the decent thing and marry the girl?
- Did you intend to return the money?
- What was your father's reaction when he learned what you had been up to?
- Why didn't you ask your parents for help when you realised that you were in so much trouble?
- Explain your feelings to the jury when you heard that the girl had committed suicide
- Do you think that you were in any way to blame for the girl's death?

## **“An Inspector Calls” SUMMARY OF THE PLAY (with comments).**

### **The start of the play**

The stage directions at the opening: ‘*heavily comfortable, but not cosy and homelike*’ tell us that the Birling family are **well-off**. The champagne glasses, decanter of port and the cigars reflect their **rich life-style**. but they are **not very close**.

The light-hearted conversation shows **Sheila** as **excitable, youthful and enthusiastic**.

However there is **an edge** to her on page 3 when she mentions ‘*last summer*’. She even gives Gerald a ‘*half playful, half serious*’ warning.

**Eric** seems **shy, awkward** and close to being **drunk**. However also a hidden edge to him. His sudden laughter is strained. What is he laughing at?

**Gerald** appears **self-assured** and someone who knows how to behave at all times. However, he turns out to be a liar. Gerald’s comments that perhaps Eric has been ‘up to something’ proves to be **ironic** as they have all been up to no good.

**Mrs Birling** takes little part and what she does say reinforces the idea that she is **a cold person** who stands apart from the others.

**Mr Birling** is in a good mood but cannot resist making speeches.

**His comments show how wrong he can be:**

- the Titanic **did** sink on its maiden voyage;
  - there **were** two world wars;
  - depression, social unrest, unemployment and strikes **did happen** in the next three decades.
- An audience watching this play would realise that these comments are **IRONIC**.

### **Pages 10 – 16 (to where Sheila enters)**

Mr. Birling states that a man only needs to look after himself and his family. He says they should ignore the “cranks” who claim that everybody has a responsibility to care for everybody else in the community. It is at this point that Inspector Goole arrives to make enquiries about the suicide of a young woman, Eva Smith.

‘‘*The lighting should be pink and intimate until the INSPECTOR arrives, and then it should be brighter and harder.*’

The change in lighting is **symbolic**.

- (1) With the arrival of the Inspector a note of *tension* and *menace* is introduced
- (2) The inspector is going to throw some light on past events which have been concealed.

Mr. Birling is shown a photograph of the girl and admits that he had employed her in his factory two years ago. He sacked her for being one of the leaders in a strike for higher wages.

Birling begins to show his true colours as his impatience grows. He refers to Eva Smith’s death as ‘*the wretched girl’s suicide*’. (pg 13).

The inspector soon adopts a very **moralising tone** which continues throughout the play. From this early stage the inspector is presented by Priestly as more than a policeman. He becomes **social commentator, philosopher, judge and jury**.

Birling tries to intimidate [threaten] the inspector by naming the people he knows. The fact he plays golf is also revealing. It was very much a rich man’s game.

### **Pages 16 – 26**

Sheila and Eric react emotionally to Eva Smith’s story. The younger members of the family throughout show more sympathy and concern for others than their elders do.

When Sheila is shown the photograph she realises that, driven by jealousy and ill-temper, she later had

the same girl sacked from her job as a shop assistant at Milwards.  
Sheila's character is far deeper than originally thought – this is shown through her acceptance of her own guilt and what she appears to have learnt from it.

Gerald says: *'we're respectable citizens not criminals!'*  
The Inspector replies *'Sometimes there isn't as much difference as you think.'*

The Inspector seems to know a lot about the family's dealings with Eva Smith. He announces that the girl had changed her name to Daisy Renton. Gerald's reaction makes it clear that he too had known the girl.

Notice Priestley's **stage craft**. The inspector has a solid motive to leave the stage just before the curtain falls at the end of Act One. It gives Sheila time to get the truth out of Gerald. She warns him not to try to hide anything from the inspector.

Giving the inspector the final word of the act (*'Well?'*) is dramatic and creates tension for the audience.

### **Pages 27 – 40 (Act Two onwards)**

The inspector is getting skilful at getting people to condemn themselves. He gets Gerald to suggest (p27) that young women should be *'protected against unpleasant and disturbing things'* and then says, *'Well, we know one young woman who wasn't, don't we?'*

The inspector's role as some sort of mysterious, all-knowing power, is reinforced when he explains to Gerald Croft why Sheila wants to stay to hear his confession.

His comment, *'If nothing else, we'll have to share our guilt'* is **very important in the play**.

Sheila's appreciation of the inspector's power grows in this Act. She seems to sense his super-human qualities when she says to him, *'I don't understand you.'*

Gerald admits that in the spring of the previous year he had met Daisy Renton and she had become his mistress. He had ended the affair six months later.

Sheila is hurt and angry at Gerald's involvement with the girl, but she also respects him for his honesty.

Mrs. Birling enters and tries to **intimidate** the Inspector.

The inspector's comment to Mrs Birling about young people – *'They're more impressionable'* (pg 30) – adds weight to our feelings that the **older generation is fixed in its attitudes and that if society is to become more caring and more just it will have to be through the efforts of the young**.

Another major theme appears. Sheila says (p32) *'But we really must stop these silly pretences'*. Priestly is saying that we all tend to hide our weaknesses from ourselves – these pretence needs to be stripped from society.

The audience is meant to feel that it is not only the Birling family which is on trial. Men like Alderman Meggarty, from a privileged social position, also treated Daisy Renton (and other girls) badly.

In one sense, the whole society is on trial. A lot is meant to be inferred from Charlie Brunswick's lending of his rooms to Gerald. They were probably meant for taking women back to. This reveals a lot about the attitudes of the men about town from this social class.

There is some development in the relationship between Gerald and Sheila – it moves from the romantic illusion to a more realistic understanding of each other.

### **Pages 40 to 49.**

Mrs. Birling is forced to admit that just two weeks earlier the girl had tried to get help from Mrs. Birling and had been refused.

Mrs Birling says on (p45) that it is the father's responsibility to look after the baby. Not only is she condemning her son, but it also reinforces one of the major themes of the play – the idea of responsibility.

It is at this point that Eric reappears. By now everyone, including Mrs. Birling, realises that Eric is the father of the unborn child.

### **Pages 50 – 56 (Act Three onwards)**

Eric confesses that he had got the girl pregnant. He had also stolen money from his father's firm to try to support her.

Eva Smith emerges as the most decent character with the strongest principles. She doesn't want Eric to marry her because he didn't love her. She refused to accept his money when she discovered that he had been stealing it (pg 53).

He is horrified to learn that his mother had refused to help the girl. He blames his mother for the death of the girl and the unborn child. *'You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried . . .'*

Arthur Birling seems to be more concerned with the theft of money from the business than with Eric's treatment of Eva Smith. His first instinct is to cover Eric's tracks – to put the money back into accounts where it should be to cover up the scandal. (pg 54)

The inspector's final speech (p56) is not the language of a policeman.

His departing lines summarise the play's message. From the point of view of the audience in 1946, just recovering from the horrors of the Second World War the statement, **'if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught in fire and blood and anguish'** must have had great power.

For the characters on stage in 1912 when the play is set, the Great War (First World War) is looming. **Priestly is telling his audience, we haven't learnt anything.**

### **Pages 56 – 72.**

The family seem to fall apart after the inspector leaves.

Birling is **anxious about his knighthood.**

Eric and Sheila are **emotionally drained** and **deeply ashamed** – of themselves and their parents.

Sheila has been emerging during the play as the most **sensitive** character with the keenest awareness of the inspector's role. She is the one first person to suspect that the inspector was a fake.

Gerald and Mr. Birling gradually prove that he was not a real police inspector. They then wonder if they have all been talking about the same girl - and about whether any girl had actually killed herself.

When they all think they have been tricked, **only Eric and Sheila stick by their remorse.**

**Birling and Sybil are glad to be off the hook.** Sybil is even **'amused'** by the hoax (p71).

**Gerald** thinks that **'Everything's all right now, Sheila'** and expects her to take back his engagement ring.

**Birling** looks at Sheila and Eric and says, **'they can't even take a joke...'** (p72).

At this point the telephone rings. He answers to find that it is the police calling. He is told that a young woman has just died on her way to the Infirmary and an inspector is on his way to make inquiries into her death.

**What do you think is going through the audience's mind at the end of the play?**

**Who was Inspector Goole? How did he know a girl was going to die?**





- He has **no conscience**, and dismisses any suggestion that he should show responsibility towards his employees: “If you don't come down sharply on these people they'll soon be asking for the earth”(p.15). Goole's response, “it's better to ask for the earth than to take it”, implies that this is exactly what he thinks Birling has done.
- Birling **does not display any anger with Gerald when he hears that Gerald has had an affair**. This suggests that while he does not approve, neither does he greatly blame Gerald □even though it was his own daughter being betrayed.
- He says, “Now Sheila, I'm not defending him. But you must understand that a lot of young men...” (p.40). Earlier, he reminisces that “we [i.e. he and his friends] broke out and had a bit of fun sometimes”(p.9). Gerald's reply “I'll bet you did” implies approval for male ‘high spirits’.
- Birling seems to return this **unspoken tolerance of drinking and womanizing by his attitude towards Gerald's actions** with Daisy. As the ‘breadwinners’, both Gerald and Birling seem to think they ‘earn’ the right to ‘break out’ **it is alright so long as the women don't find out it is also ‘alright’ to treat people like Eva badly as long as “the papers” do not bring it to public attention; the crime is only a scandal' if other people hear about it.**
- Birling also **supports his wife's action in rejecting Eva** “Damned impudence! “(p.43) and reassures her that it is not her he is accusing of being “bluffed”(p.60).
- **He is quick to seize upon the idea that Goole was not a real police inspector** “if he wasn't it matters a devil of a lot”(p.58) because he thinks this will excuse him from the potentially scandalous situation, and thus safeguard his knighthood the only thing that he really values.
- During Gerald's suggestion that Goole was a fake, Birling speaks “*eagerly*” (pp. 67, 68) “*triumphantly*”(p.69), “*jovially*”(p.70) and “*heartily*”(p.71); his mood has completely changed from angry and bitter to relieved at the thought that none of Goole's story was ‘real’ and therefore it has no meaning for him. This is typical of his complacent, selfish character.
- **His only show of remorse for Eva's death is momentary** “Look Inspector - I'd give thousands yes thousands “(p.56); but this wish to make amends disappears when Goole leaves.
- At the end he wants to carry on as if the Inspector had never called, and **learns nothing** from him.
- **Overall, Birling is a greedy, selfish, pompous, arrogant, self important, callous, complacent, cowardly and stupid man who is presented as hopelessly incapable of learning the moral lesson taught by Goole.**

### Sheila Birling

- Sheila is perhaps the **most sympathetic of the Birlings**, though her own part in Eva's death is arguably less defensible than Mr Birling's.
- She is a highly **perceptive** character who is the first to realise that the Inspector is no ordinary policeman, and that he has an almost supernatural knowledge: “Why you fool *he knows*. Of course he knows. And I hate to think how much he knows that we don't know yet.”
- Similarly, she is the first to realise that the father of Eva's baby is none other than Eric, and



- To her credit, she says “It's the only time I've ever done anything like that, and I'll never, never do it again to anybody”(p.24), so we may assume that her nature is not normally bad (unlike Mr and Mrs Birling, who show no such regret).
- Mr Birling regards Eva as “cheap labour”, but Sheila insists, “But these girls aren't cheap labour □ they're people.”(p.19).
- She has far more of a conscience than any other character (though Eric is equally remorseful for his part in Eva's death).
- Sheila is essentially a good character who in a moment of uncharacteristic cruelty committed an act which she would regret for the rest of her life.
- Her remorse is Priestley's way of showing that human beings do have a good side to their nature. If there is hope that people will one day develop a social conscience and awareness that “We are members of one body”, then it is among the younger generation. **Priestley wants the audience to respect and like Sheila.**

### Eric Birling

- Eric is the younger child of Arthur and Sybil, described as “*not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive.*”(p.2).
- Eric's mood in the opening minutes is cheerful, but he becomes **uneasy** when he thinks Birling and Gerald know something about him, responding to Gerald's smooth assurance that they were having “a joke” with, “*Well, I don't think it's very funny.*”(p.10). This suggests he has a **guilty conscience**, and is afraid of his activities being exposed.
- Eric **shows sympathy for Eva** when he hears that she lost her job in Birling's factory. While Gerald says that Birling “*couldn't have done anything else*”, Eric bluntly says “*He could. He could have kept her on instead of throwing her out. I call it tough luck.*”(p.15).
- Soon afterwards he ‘bursts out’ “*Well I think it's a dam' shame*”(p.16), and shows understanding for Eva's wish for higher wages, and respect for her having “a bit more spirit than the others.”
- **Eric differs from his father, because where Mr Birling had to work his way up the social ladder, Eric was born into wealth and privilege, and so lacks the instinctive ‘self-made man’ outlook of his father.**
- In some ways this automatic access to wealth has made him turn into an irresponsible, careless young man; in others, it has at least saved him from the selfishness and arrogance of Birling.
- Ironically, it is his own mother who insists that “he [the father of Eva's child] ought to be dealt with very severely”(p.48). When Eric returns, she denies that Eric drinks, but Sheila reminds her that he *does*. Eric calls her “you little sneak!”(p.50), suggesting that he still believes in ‘keeping things quiet’ where convenient. Mr and Mrs Birling both condemn her “If you had any sense of loyalty □ again revealing their very different values; ‘loyalty’ is more important than honesty, even when the welfare of another person (Eva or Eric...) is involved.
- Eric is an **alcoholic** “His *whole manner of handling the decanter and then the drink shows his*

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*familiarity with heavy drinking.*”(p.51). This reflects his weakness as a character.

- Eric meets Eva (Daisy Renton to him) in the Palace bar the same place as Gerald and drunkenly seduces her. This makes him effectively a younger version of Alderman Meggarty (“a notorious womanizer as well as being one of the worst sots and rogues in Brumley” (p.35) . He “threatened to make a row”(p.52) and so gained access to Eva's room.
- When he heard that she was pregnant he was “in a hell of a state about it”(p.53), though probably more because he is afraid of a scandal. He says that Eva “treated me as if I were a kid” which he is: **immature and irresponsible**.
- Eric then admits to stealing money to support Eva an **act of kindness**, though also **cowardly**, because once again he wants to keep the problem a secret.
- When Birling furiously demands “*Why didn't you come to me?*”, Eric replies “*Because you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble.*” (p.54).
- Eric almost loses control when he hears that Mrs Birling refused Eva help, and accuses her of killing her and “*your own grandchild. . . damn you*” (p.55). This outburst at least suggests that he is genuinely grief stricken at the tragedy.
- Eric takes the **same view as Sheila about Goole**, agreeing that “*it doesn't make any real difference*”(p.59) whether Goole was a real policeman or not.
- He says that he is “*ashamed*” of his parents (p.57), which reflects his own having learned from Goole's visit, while disgusted at the way his parents have not.
- Eric **refuses to dodge responsibility** “*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?*”(p.64)... “*It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters*” (p.65).
- Eric and Sheila repeatedly try to get their parents and Gerald, who is proud of his discovering that Goole was in fact not a `real' policeman, to accept the reality of their collective guilt, but they are all determined to reject any responsibility.
- Even after Gerald suggests that they could have been shown four different photographs, not one, Eric says, “*You lot may be letting yourselves out nicely, but I can't*”(p.68).
- While the other three congratulate themselves, Eric admits that their complacent, arrogant attitude “*frightens*” him. He is honest and shows integrity.
- Even though he is weak, he shows a **moral strength and courage** which his bullying father completely lacks.
- Eric is very similar to Sheila in that he is **not a corrupt and insensitive person** (like his parents).
- He is a **weak, foolish, immature and thoughtless youth** whose crime was committed more out of these character flaws than out of wickedness.
- He, like Sheila, shows **the power to learn and change of the younger generation** and at least will never be like his father. **Does Priestley want the audience to forgive Eric?**

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## Mrs. Birling

- Mrs Birling is described as “*a rather cold woman, and her husband's social superior*” (p.1).
- This ‘social superiority’ is stressed throughout the play; she is **extremely snobbish**, and regards those on a ‘lower’ social level as ‘beneath’ her.
- She is even squeamish about what people around her say “(reproachfully) *Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things -*” (p.2) and she is shocked at Sheila's language “*Really the things you girls pick up these days!*”(p.3).
- **Her outlook is governed by what she considers acceptable.** Anything which falls outside these narrow boundaries is either “*impertinent*” or “*disgusting.*”
- She calls Goole “*a trifle impertinent*”(p.30), and Eva calls herself ‘Mrs Birling, this is “*gross impertinence*”(p.43).
- Later she speaks with scandalised disbelief of “*The rude way he [Goole] spoke to Mr Birling and me □ it was extraordinary!*” (p.61).
- She thinks she deserves to be treated with the utmost respect an attitude which Goole (and Sheila) regard with utter contempt.
- Sheila twice warns her mother against this proud, arrogant attitude “*You mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl*”(p.30)
- When Mrs Birling is urges severe punishment for the father of the unborn child she cannot face up to the truth that it is her own son Eric.
- This is summed up by her final words of Act II “I don't believe it I *won't* believe it... ”(p.49).
- It is this deliberate evasion of the truth which means that Mrs Birling feels no guilt whatsoever for what she has done □ “*I accept no blame at all.*”(p.47).
- When Mrs Birling first meets Inspector Goole adopts a **patronising manner** with (p.29),
- She thinks that he can quickly be awed by her superior status, but the Inspector refuses to be intimidated.
- She tries to threaten him: “You know of course that my husband was Lord Mayor only two years ago and that he's still a magistrate”(p.31).
- Mrs Birling is so used to dominating people by such threats that when she encounters someone who resists her **bullying** she reacts angrily. (N.B. as a bully she is very like her husband).
- It was Eva's “impertinence” in calling herself Mrs Birling which infuriates the real Mrs Birling.
- Her refusal to grant Eva charity, despite her obvious need for it, is a sign of her **pettiness** and **vindictiveness**.
- Of all the characters, Mrs Birling's conduct towards Eva is **arguably the most despicable**.

THANK YOU FOR WATCHING

While Sheila and Eric also acted selfishly and thoughtlessly, Mrs Birling's actions affected not only Eva herself but also her child “your own grandchild”(p.55).

- It is obvious that Mrs Birling's motive for her charity work are **selfish** she has no genuine concern for the women, or she could never have treated Eva so heartlessly, however rude she had been towards her.
- She is totally **heartless**, insisting that “she only had herself to blame” (p.43).
- She dismisses Eva's refusal to take money from the father of her child as “*elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position*”(p.46).
- It is **IRONIC** that Mrs Birling cannot believe that a girl “of that class” could have “scruples”, as if these are a quality of the upper classes` Goole successfully proves that the upper classes are sadly lacking in even basic feelings of humanity.
- Mrs Birling is **typical of the older generation** in that she **prefers to remain ignorant** of anything which may be ‘upsetting’ or which might not fit into her artificially well ordered world.
- For example, she is “*staggered*”(p.32) and “*shocked*”(p.35), both by the news that Eric drinks heavily, and by the news that Alderman Meggarty is a “notorious womanizer”: “*Well, really! Alderman Meggarty! I must say, we are learning something tonight*”(p.35).
- This ignorance makes her seem naive, more ‘innocent’ than her children □ but in fact it is all based on her desire to avoid hearing anything which is ‘offensive’.
- When she hears of Gerald's involvement with Eva she says with the deepest contempt “*It's disgusting to me.*”(p.38).
- Goole (and Priestley) takes a grim satisfaction in the way she attacks the father of Eva's child; the message here is that by avoiding all knowledge of anything unpleasant, Mrs Birling is **abandoning her responsibility to others as a member of society, but also her responsibility as a mother for the welfare of her son.**
- When Eric makes his confession, Mrs Birling has to leave the room, unable to bear hearing such dreadful news but soon returns, admitting “I had to know what's happening”(p.53).
- Sybil Birling is just as delighted as Arthur when she hears that Goole was “not a real policeman”; she is smug and “*triumphant*”, congratulating herself “*I was the only one who didn't give in to him*”(p.63).
- She shows **no remorse** for what she did, and her first words after Goole's final speech are to blame Eric “*Eric, I'm absolutely ashamed of you*”(p.57). She does not learn from the Inspector's visit, and remains as **stubborn, snobbish, arrogant, corrupt, cowardly and selfish** as ever.
- **Priestley wants the audience to dislike her.**



*carcase of his*”(p.35).

- He seems **momentarily shocked when he realises what he has done** “*I’ve suddenly realised taken it in properly that she’s dead*“, and after he has confessed, he seems genuinely upset, speaking “*In low, troubled tone*”(p.39).
- He tries to explain himself to the Inspector, saying that he let her live in his friend's flat “*because I was sorry for her*” and that “*I didn't ask for anything in return.*”(p.37).
- Goole merely responds, “I see.”
- However, Gerald is undoubtedly speaking more honestly and openly than he has ever done though only because he now realises he has no alternative.
- However, after he has proved that Goole was not in fact a ‘real’ policeman, he is only too willing to “*pretend everything's as it was before.*” He says, “*Everything's all right now, Sheila*”(p.71) even though he was unfaithful to her.
- Gerald is **honest enough to admit that he was flattered by his role as “the wonderful Fairy Prince**”(p.38), and Sheila commends him “*That's probably the best thing you've said all night. At least it's honest.*”
- At the conclusion of his forced confession, Sheila declares, “*in some odd way, I rather respect you more than I've done before... And now at least you've been honest.*”(p.40).
- By the end he is **clearly in agreement with Mr and Mrs Birling a young man, but with the ideas and corrupt ways of the older generation** (of upper class society).
- If Eric is a younger Alderman Meggarty, at the end, Gerald is almost a younger Mr. Birling.
- Goole has some kinder words to say in Gerald's favour during his final reminder of their collective guilt □ “*he at least had some affection for her and made her happy for a time.*”(p.56).

**What is Priestley’s intention here?**

**Does he want the audience to sympathize with Gerald?**

- In the end, though, **Gerald's repentance is temporary, and his old cynical, selfish instinct takes over. He is therefore as guilty as Mr. and Mrs. Birling.**

## THEMES IN THE PLAY

**A theme is an idea that runs through a text. There can be one theme or many. If we can understand the themes, a play becomes more important. We are encouraged to think more deeply about the story and work out what lies beyond the plot.**

### 1. Social v. Individual Responsibility

This is the central theme in the play.

The socialist [Priestley's] view is that we are all collectively responsible for each other and our society. **The Inspector is champion of these socialist values.**

The capitalist view is that it's every man for himself. Human beings are exploited. **Mr. Birling represents capitalism and selfish values.**

**Priestley [through the Inspector] shows that Eva's death was the result of each person's selfish actions. Only Sheila and Eric accept their responsibility.**

### 2. Capital v. Labour [Social Class]

In the play, Birling represents the forces of capital [**money**] and Eva Smith represents the **downtrodden working class.**

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

Gerald: I should say so!

Inspector: They might. But after all it's better to ask for the earth than to take it.

The Inspector is suggesting that the upper middle classes shouldn't have all the money and own the factories. [The socialist view is that factories and industries should be owned by the workers.]

Sheila says: **"But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people."**  
The Inspector has successfully converted her to his way of thinking.

In this play, the Inspector points out what would happen if injustice and inequality were allowed to continue in society. Priestley is trying to show that the upper classes are unaware that the easy lives they lead rest upon the hard work of the lower classes!

### 3. Guilt v. Denial

By Act 3, when the Inspector finally leaves, Birling is only concerned about a public scandal. Once it is discovered that Goole was not a real police inspector, Birling, Sybil Birling and Gerald Croft think that every thing will be fine. **They are in a state of denial.**

Sheila and Eric cannot understand this reaction.

Sheila says: **" but don't you see, if all that's come out tonight is**

**true, then it doesn't matter who it was that made us confess."**

Eric says: **"And I say the girl's dead and we all helped to kill her - and that's what matters."**

Priestley is suggesting that hope for the future lies with the younger generation.

#### **4. Respectability v. Pretences [Double Standards]**

At the start of the play each character seems outwardly decent, but each has done something they should be ashamed of.

Sheila realises this: **"We must stop these silly pretences."**

The characters, especially the older ones, are shown to be hiding behind an appearance of respectability.

#### **5. The older v. the younger generation**

While Sheila and Eric accept their part in Eva's death and feel huge guilt about it, their parents are unable to admit that they did anything wrong. [Gerald Croft is a problem character - an old head on young shoulders!]

##### **The Old** (Mr and Mrs Birling)

The old are set in their ways. They are utterly confident that they are right and they see the young as foolish.

The old 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.

They have never been forced to examine their consciences before and find they cannot do it now - as the saying goes, 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks'

Mr and Mrs Birling have much to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they know they will lose everything.

##### **The Young** (Sheila and Eric)

The young are open to new ideas. This is first seen early in Act 1 when both Eric and Sheila express sympathy for the strikers - an idea which horrifies Birling, who can only think of production costs and ignores the human side of the issue.

The young are honest and admit their faults. Eric refuses to try to cover his part up, saying, ***the fact remains that I did what I did.***

Sheila and Eric see the human side of Eva's story and are very troubled by their part in it. They *do* examine their consciences.

Sheila and Eric have nothing to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they have already admitted what they have done wrong, and will change.

#### **5. Men v. Women [Gender Issues]**

Eva Smith is exploited particularly badly because she is a woman. She was in an even worse position than a working class man. There was no social security at the time, so without a job there was no money. There were very few options open to women in that situation and many became prostitutes.

Even upper class women had few choices. For most, the best they could hope for was to impress a rich man and marry him.

## POSSIBLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

[The following notes cover all the main types of question in the exam].

### 1. Compare and contrast two characters from 'An Inspector Calls' by JB Priestley.

#### Mr Birling

- He is prosperous factory owner, not the social equal of his wife. He is '*a self made man*'.
- His first priority is to make money '*It's my duty to keep labour cost down*'
- He welcomes Croft into his family as he represents a business link between his firm and that of Gerald Croft's father (a rival)
- He has an honest approach to life, he tells the Inspector that he wouldn't listen to Eva Smith's demand for a wage rise '*I refused, of course*' and is surprised why anyone should question why.
- He strongly believes that '*a man has to make his own way*'. He does not consider the harm he may cause to other people because of his attitude. He is a '*hard headed business man*'
- He is a magistrate and former mayor who is looking forward to receiving a knighthood
- He is very aware that Gerald's mother is rather against her son's marriage because she believes him to be marrying beneath him socially
- He is optimistic about the future, yet we know that what he predicts will not become true (nb **dramatic irony**)
- He refuses to accept any responsibility for Eva's death. He becomes increasingly annoyed by the Inspector's questioning and Eric's unsympathetic attitude
- He tries to threaten the Inspector by talking about his friendship with the Chief Constable
- The most disturbing part of the play for Birling is the scene in which he learns that his own son is shown to be a thief, a drunkard and is responsible for fathering a child. When he learns of all this he exclaims '*You damned fool - why didn't you come to me when you found yourself in this mess?*'
- Eric's reply indicates that Mr Birling was never close to his son '*Because you're not the kind of chap a man could turn to when he's in trouble*'. Such a response indicates that things aren't going to improve much after the play ends
- He represents a very unattractive sort of person. At the end of the play he grudgingly wishes things were better but even here he still thinks in terms of money '*Look, Inspector - I'd give thousands*'
- He continues to ignore the shameful things that his family has done. When it appears that the Inspector might be a hoaxer he is happy to believe that everything is as it was a few hours ago. He copies the Inspector and laughs when he remembers the faces of Eric and Sheila and accuses them of being '*the famous younger generation who know it all*'. This is an example of pride coming before a fall, a moment later of course he is panicking as the phone rings again
- Mr Birling represents Priestley's hatred of businessmen who are only interested in making money. He will never alter his ways and it is left to the younger generation to learn from their mistakes

#### Sheila

- At the start she is '*very pleased with life*'. She is young, attractive and has just become engaged
- Her happiness is soon to be destroyed as is her faith in her family
- Her response to the tragedy is one of the few encouraging things to come out of the play. She is genuinely upset when she hears of Eva's death and learns from her own behaviour
- She is very distressed by the girl's suicide and thinks that her father's behaviour was unacceptable. She readily agrees that she behaved very badly and insists that she never meant the girl any harm.
- The Inspector says that she is only partly responsible and later on, when he is about to question Gerald, he encourages her to stay and listen to what he has to say so that she doesn't feel entirely responsible
- Not only is she prepared to admit her faults, she also appears keen and anxious to change her behaviour in the future, '*I'll never, never do it again*'
- She is aware of the mystery surrounding the Inspector, yet realises that there is no point in trying to hide the facts from him
- She is mature about the breaking up of her engagement and remains calm. She won't be rushed into accepting the ring back once the Inspector has left
- She is unable to accept her parents' attitude and is both amazed and concerned that they haven't learned anything from the episode. Although the Inspector might be a hoax, the family have still behaved in an entirely unsuitable manner
- She learns of her responsibilities to others less fortunate than herself (the idea of the community) and is sensitive. Her readiness to learn from experience is in great contrast to her parents.

2. How does J. B. Priestley create tension in “An Inspector Calls”?  
or How does J. B. Priestley keep the audience interested during this play?

- The play deals with number of issues which the characters [and the audience] are forced to think about e. g. class, reputation, responsibility, guilt, abuse of power, pretences etc.
- There is a very **compact structure** to the play. **Nothing is allowed to distract the audience** from the central theme. There is **no sub-plot**.
- The play takes place in just **one location**, the action is continuous.
- Priestley keeps the audience in suspense by his **skilful use of climaxes** within a **carefully controlled plot**.
- At the **end of each act there is a new twist** to keep the audience interested.

**[n.b. look at the tension graph towards the front of your notes]**

- Act One begins by introducing the characters and establishing the idea of a happy and united family looking forward to the future with a degree of confidence.
- However, there are **a number of hints that all is not as it seems** but these are not particularly obvious until later in the play. There is nothing to warn us of the shock of the Inspector's visit
- By **using Inspector Goole to tease out answers** from the other characters, Priestley is able to maintain drama, without it becoming boring.
- Events soon gather speed and it is not long before we are being informed of Birling and Sheila's involvement with Eva Smith
- Tensions increase, firstly as Gerald's affair is unveiled (and the scandal it would cause) and Sheila begins to realise that they are all implicated in some way 'he is giving us rope - so that we'll hang ourselves'.
- Mrs Birling's attempts to shift the blame for the girl's suicide leads her to blame the father of the unborn child. The tension is heightened at this point by the dramatic entrance of Eric.
- When the Inspector departs it would appear that what follows will be something of an anti-climax as the Inspector's identity is put into doubt by a series of observations made by the Birling family and Gerald. Even the existence of Eva is called into question.
- However, the tension remains to some extent as the two generations confirm the differences as suggested by the Inspector - the moral divide is very great indeed
- The final twist is the phone call announcing that a police inspector is on his way to ask some questions about a girl who has just died in the infirmary. This is as shocking and surprising. It ensures that the audience will leave the auditorium in a state of real shock.

3. Who or what is Inspector Goole?

His identity is a mystery. There is plenty of evidence that he is not a real policeman.

- The timing of his entry—when Birling talks about a man “*looking after his own.*”
- His method of working: “one person and one line of enquiry at a time” (A policeman would not insist on this. A real policeman would interview people alone. This Inspector already knows; he wants the others to see what they have done.)
- His asking Birling why he refused Eva's request for a pay rise.
- His statement that it is his duty “to ask questions”.
- His saying that he never takes offence.
- His statement that he does not see much of the chief constable.
- His failure to be alarmed by Birling's threats.
- His reply to Birling's question: “You sure of your facts?” - “Some of them - yes”. Not all, because not all have happened yet: Eva Smith has not yet killed herself, it would seem.
- His concern for **moral law** not for criminal law.
- His statement: “some things are left to me. Inquiries of this sort, for instance”.
- Sheila's recognition of his authority and supernatural knowledge - as shown in her warnings to

Gerald and to her mother .

- His statement about the impression he has made on Sheila: “We often do on the young ones”.
- His impatience to “get on” with his questioning followed by his statement that he hasn't “much time”. A police officer would take as much time as was needed. **It is as if he needs to finish before the moment at which Eva will decide whether or not to end her life.**
- His saying, “I don't need to know any more”, once he has shown the Birlings and Gerald what they have done.
- His final speech, which has nothing to do with criminal law, but which is a lecture on social responsibility and the perils of ignoring it.
- The Birlings' discovery that no such officer is on the local police force.
- The Inspector's telling Sheila there is “no reason why” she should “understand about” him
- Eric's saying “He was our police inspector all right” followed by Sheila's comment “Well, he inspected us all right”
- His foreknowledge of Eva's death.
- His intimate knowledge of Eva's life and despite the fact that he never spoke to her
- His prediction of a massive social catastrophe (“fire and blood and anguish”) which clearly refers (for the Birlings) to the First World War and (for the audience) to both World Wars. each has done.

**Some suggestions.** Perhaps he is:

- (1) simply an imposter who played an elaborate hoax on a group of upper class people who deserved to be frightened in this way.
- (2) some kind of spiritual being with a moral mission to punish selfish behaviour among the rich on Earth; the name ‘Goole’ sounds like ‘Ghoul’ (ghost, spirit). He seems **omniscient** (all-knowing), possessing knowledge which it seems he could not have known by normal means,. This suggests that there is something supernatural about him.
- (3) a **‘mouthpiece’ for J.B. Priestley**. Priestley was a socialist, and firmly believed that “we are all members of one body” etc. *An Inspector Calls* is a play with a clear moral and political message which Priestley wanted the audience to accept. Priestley uses Goole to voice views which he himself held. Mr Birling says the Inspector was, “*Probably a Socialist or some sort of crank □ he talked like one*”(p.60).
- (4) Perhaps the Inspector stands for our **collective conscience**. Your conscience is the ‘voice within’ which tells you when you are doing something wrong;

**What are the Inspector's aims?**

- He wants to make the Birlings and Gerald **admit their guilt** and feel genuine **remorse** for their part in Eva's death.
- He succeeds with Sheila and Eric: “*I behaved badly too. I know I did. I'm ashamed of it*” (p.57). “The money's not important. It's what happened to the girl and what we did to her that matters”(p.65). But the others do not feel any guilt □ which is why the process has to start all over again at the end of the play; it will continue to recur until they have all learned their lesson.
- He also helps to get the audience on Priestley's side by his presentation as a man of great **integrity, bravery** and refusal to be swayed in his moral mission.
- The audience **identifies with him**, and will want to see him succeed in his task with the Birlings and Gerald. He also does this by presenting the unseen Eva Smith as a sympathetic character □ she was a “*very pretty*”(p.18) girl.

- His **championing of Eva** helps the audience to sympathise with her and be hostile towards the Birlings, who are made to appear particularly heartless. *“I think 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 back bedrooms”*(pp19□20).
- Goole is **the focus for audience sympathy and the moral and dramatic backbone of the play.**

**A similar question might be:**

4 How does Priestley use the character of the Inspector to convey his own opinions and attitudes?

OR

“We don’t live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other.” What is Priestley’s aim in “An Inspector Calls”? How successfully does he achieve this?

- *An Inspector Calls*, set in 1912, is a play with a number of social and political messages.
- J. B. Priestley believed that people needed to be more caring about their community and the people in it.
- Priestley uses the character of the Inspector to convey his own thoughts, feelings and opinions about social issues.
- He also uses other characters, for example Mr. Birling, to **show us what he thinks is wrong**. Arthur Birling is a rich businessman who thinks very highly of himself.
- Birling says *“there isn’t a chance of war”* and the Titanic is *“unsinkable”* .
- This is an example of dramatic irony because the audience would know that Birling’s ideas are wrong .
- Birling says *“the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you’d think everybody has to look after everybody else”*. The cranks are socialists. He is a **capitalist**.
- Priestley wants the audience to have a low opinion of Birling and **capitalism**.
- Mr. Birling says *“A man should look out for himself, and his family if he has one.”* This shows just how selfish he is.
- The playwright **deliberately introduces Inspector Goole at this point.**
- The name 'Goole,' which could be a pun on the word '**ghoul**' which suggests some kind of ghostly being.
- The Inspector’s **aim** seems to be to change the thoughts and opinions of the Birling

family.

- He attempts to do this is by questioning each one of the Birlings [and Gerald Croft] in turn.
- The Inspector first interrogates Mr. Birling, asking him why he dismissed Eva Smith from her job at his factory, just for asking for more money.
- Birling says that it is his **“duty to keep labour costs down”**
- This shows that he does not think of each worker as a person and only cares about money.
- We see early on that Sheila is a better person than her father as she points out that **“these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people”**. Priestley obviously wants the audience to agree with this.
- When Sheila realises that she had Eva Smith sacked, she says **“So I'm really responsible?”**. She can admit she is wrong. **J. B. Priestley wants us to see that admitting your guilt is good.**
- She shares the same views as the Inspector when it comes to the way workers should be treated. **Sheila becomes a second mouthpiece for Priestley as the play progresses.**
- Once the line of questioning turns to Gerald, **the Inspector is more friendly to Sheila**. He understands that she would want to hear about Gerald's affair with Eva Smith and ensures that she stays by arguing that if she left then and heard no more she would 'feel she's entirely to blame.'
- When Gerald tells his story, he is questioned mainly by Sheila who is angry with Gerald for betraying her. The Inspector treats Gerald with neither fondness nor contempt. He observes that *'he at least had some affection for her and made her happy for a time.'*
- By questioning Gerald about his affair with Eva Smith, or “Daisy Renton”, the Inspector [ and Priestley] is showing that **everyone should think about the possible consequences of their actions, before they carry them out.**
- Like her husband, Mrs. Birling refuses to accept any responsibility for the death of Eva Smith. Protective of her family, she does not criticise any of them either, but turns all of the blame onto the unidentified man: the father of Eva's child. She very happily says that the man should be 'dealt with very severely' and made to 'confess in public his responsibility,' oblivious to what most of the audience would have realised; that Eric was the father. This is another example of irony. She believes that the man must be someone who is working-class and has not been brought up properly because he was a drunk and guilty of theft.
- **By doing this Priestley's aim is to show that all classes of people should be treated the same, and lower class people shouldn't be looked down on.**

- Each of the Birlings and Gerald have done things to Eva that were wrong. However, Sheila and Eric are very regretful and seem to have learnt from their mistakes and immediately become more likeable and seem less at fault.
- Mr. and Mrs. Birling represent the older generation. Priestley is hinting that he believes **older people are less likely to change their views, as they're more set in their ways than younger generation.**
- The Inspector implies that the Birling parents and Gerald Croft are the ones more at fault because their ideas about class and Capitalism do not change.
- Priestley and the Inspector think that 'Public men . . . have responsibilities as well as privileges' which suggests that Priestley thinks that those who forget their responsibilities also cause social problems.
- The Inspector says in his final speech *'We are responsible for each other.... if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught in fire and blood and anguish.'*
- This sums up how he, **and Priestley**, feel about people disregarding other peoples' feelings.
- **In this speech he, and therefore Priestley, try to make people understand just how serious problems can get when we do not realise that 'We are responsible for each other.'**
- This speech gives an opposite message to Birling who said that *'a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own.'*
- Throughout the play there are hints that the Inspector isn't all he seems to be. Is it possible that he's actually just a fraud claiming to be an Inspector?
- Towards the end of the play it becomes apparent to the audience that he wasn't an actual Police Inspector. The play finishes with a telephone call from the police saying that 'A girl has just died.... after swallowing some disinfectant' and a real Inspector will question the family.
- This is an unexpected twist. Priestley doesn't actually reveal who, or what, the Inspector is.
- **Perhaps Priestley's aim was to leave this matter a complete mystery.** This might make the audience think more carefully about the play and its issues.
- The fake Inspector was there to punish them on a moral level and to try and make them feel guilty enough to change their behaviour.
- This was accomplished with Eric and Sheila, but not with the others.
- The only thing that they would be affected by was a 'public scandal,' and the real Inspector would ensure that that is what they would get.

- **The Inspector's main purpose is to teach the characters of the consequences of their actions. A girl killed herself because they had each been guilty of selfishness.**
- **He voices Priestley's opinions that we cannot make any progress if we do not work together.**

5. Who do you think is most to blame for the death of Eva Smith/Daisy Renton?

*[It doesn't matter who you decide on, but **you must examine the role of every character and give reasons.** You might decide that they all share responsibility]*

A good answer will look at what J. B. Priestley wanted the audience to think about each character. Eric and Sheila accept their guilt. Their parents and Gerald think that everything is alright at the end. Clues might be found in the way the Inspector [Priestley's mouthpiece] treats each character. He is harsher towards Arthur and Sybil Birling.

- Each member of the family is partly, not wholly, responsible for the death of Eva Smith. Each character used their wealth, power and influence to either use or abuse her.
- Arthur Birling started the chain of events which eventually led to her suicide. He sacked her from his factory because she was the ring-leader in a strike, although he admits that she was a good worker who had been recommended for promotion.
- He shows no sympathy for Eva, only anxiety that her death might affect his chances of a knighthood,
- He has not learnt his lesson at the end of the play, saying: "There's every excuse for what both your mother and I did."
- The playwright obviously wants the audience to dislike Mr. Birling. Is he most guilty because he was the first one to ruin Eva's life?
- Eva Smith found a job at Milwards. Sheila Birling took advantage of her position as a valued customer to get the girl sacked, just because she was smiling when Sheila insisted on trying on a dress that did not suit her.
- Sheila was clearly motivated by jealousy and acts out of temper in the heat of the moment.
- However, she immediately shows remorse. She repeatedly makes statements like "It's a shame" and "I know I'm to blame and I'm desperately sorry".
- We know that she possesses moral values She also values honesty. After Gerald admits an affair with Daisy Renton (Eva Smith), she says, "Well at least he's been honest".
- She is very strong-minded about women's rights. She contradicts her father, who talks about Eva as cheap labour, by saying "Women aren't cheap labour".
- When the Inspector has left Sheila became quite angry at the way her parents seem

to be ignoring the lesson they should have learnt.

- Therefore we are meant to feel a bit more sorry for Sheila.
- Gerald's first impulse is to conceal his involvement with Eva; but unlike Mr. and Mrs. Birling, he shows genuine sorrow when the news of her death finally sinks in.
- Gerald Croft helped Eva out of real sympathy for her situation and did not take advantage of her in the violent and drunken way in which Eric did. Gerald did make Eva truly happy for a time
- The Inspector is not as harsh with Gerald as he is with most of the other characters.
- Is he perhaps the least to blame for her death?
- However, he doesn't feel guilty about having an affair with her. He thinks everything is alright at the end. Priestley wants us to regard him as immoral and untrustworthy.
- The drunken Eric Birling, finding Eva destitute in the Palace Bar, took advantage of someone who had no-one to turn to. After he had made Eva pregnant, he stole money from his father's business to give to the girl. However, she does not accept it because she knows it is stolen.
- His involvement is sordid and unpleasant, but he is horrified by Eva's death.
- Eric accepts responsibility for his part in Eva Smith's death. He says: "It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters".
- Mrs. Birling is the last link in the chain. As head of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation, she used her power to turn the pregnant Eva Smith/Daisy Renton away, even though she was destitute.
- She says, "Unlike the other three, I did nothing I'm ashamed of or that won't tolerate investigation". She's certain she didn't do anything wrong, but is prepared to blame others.
- Mrs. Birling admits to being prejudiced right from the start, ". . . girls of that class".
- She is the least affected by Eva's death. Only the news of Eric's involvement upsets her, but cares nothing for the death of a young woman and her unborn child.
- The Inspector is particularly harsh on her which is significant. Priestley obviously wanted the audience to dislike her. Did he want us to blame Mrs. Birling the most? [She was the one who gave Eva the final push towards suicide.]
- To conclude, I think all of the characters played a part in Eva Smiths' suicide. Although they did not commit criminal crimes, they are all guilty, morally. Unless they all start to take responsibility for their actions they will keep going back to their selfish, ignorant ways.

6. How important are the stage directions to 'An Inspector Calls' in enhancing your appreciation and understanding of the play and its characters?

How does J. B. Priestley use stage directions in 'An Inspector Calls'?

[n. b. these notes will also help you to answer the context question in the exam]

- Priestley provides extensive stage directions in 'An Inspector Calls' which are very helpful to anyone wishing to stage the play [ . . . and equally useful to someone who was studying it as a text.!]
- The introduction to the play offers a lengthy description of the set, helping the reader to picture the scene, as well as some useful descriptions of the characters.
- For example, Mr Birling is a "**rather portentous man...rather provincial in his speech**" while Mrs Birling is "**a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior**".
- These attributes of 'portentiousness', or pomposity, and 'coldness' are central to these two characters, and help to explain their behaviour towards Eva Smith.
- Similarly, Priestley's description of Inspector Goole as creating "**an impression of massiveness, solidity and purpose**" is a key characteristic, helping to explain his ability to dominate the arrogant and hypocritical Birlings and Gerald.
- On several occasions, Goole is described as "**cutting through massively**", or "**taking charge massively**"; reinforcing his dominance and forcefulness.
- He is also described as "**cutting in, calmly**" or "**cutting in with authority**".
- Stage directions such as these **help the Inspector to impose his personality on the play**, and to keep the plot moving forwards at a brisk pace; he refuses to allow the Birlings to distract him from his inquiry, interrupting their quarrels and asserting, "There'll be plenty of time for you to readjust your family relationships later."
- Just before he makes his final speech he is described as "**taking charge, masterfully.**"
- Goole is often said to speak "**sternly**", "**severely**", "**very deliberately**", "**coolly**", "**gravely**", "**steadily**" and "**with calm authority**".
- He is mainly shown to be in emotional control of himself – "**impeturbable**" – as well as in control of the other characters.

- In contrast, the Birlings often speak "**miserably**", "**bitterly**", "**wildly**". They are much less in control of their emotions.
- When Goole does show emotion, it is harsh and angry, reflecting his outrage at the callous and selfish behaviour of the Birlings.
- The stage directions often give a helpful indication of how different characters respond to Goole's interrogation, and how they regard him as a character.
- For example, Sheila is the only member of the group to perceive that there is something strange and exceptional about the Inspector.
- At the end of Act One she "**laughs rather hysterically**" and tells Gerald that "He [Goole] knows", before looking at him "**almost in triumph**".
- Sheila's sensitivity to Goole, and her genuine remorse for her part in the tragedy, are reflected in the "urgent" manner in which she tries to prevent her mother from offending Goole by the snobbish and arrogant manner she displays towards him: "That – I consider – is a trifle impertinent, Inspector."
- Stage directions highlight the contrasts between the characters and their reactions to the death of Eva.
- For example, Sheila "**almost breaks down, but just controls herself**", which indicates the heartfelt remorse she feels, while Gerald is merely "**distressed**" at the news of her death, but later, after he has proved that Goole is "not an Inspector" he "**looks round triumphantly at them**", as he is proud of himself for having (he thinks) saved their reputations. Gerald probably shows the least emotion of any character, while Eric and Mr Birling often speak "**angrily**" or shout "furiously", which reflects their emotional instability.
- Similarly, Sheila is "**astonished**" to hear that her Mother has seen Eva only two weeks previously, while just a few lines later, Birling is in turn "**astounded**" – but only because Eva called herself 'Mrs Birling', not because he is horrified that his wife has been connected with the suicide of a young woman!
- In conclusion, the stage directions help to enhance the reader's understanding of the characters and their emotions. They reflect the characters' differing responses to the news of their role in Eva's death. The stage directions help to illuminate the dialogue, and add significantly to the play's dramatic impact.

## Methods Used in the Play 'An Inspector Calls'

**AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate. (The examiner will look for this in your response)**

<b>Method</b> (What Priestley deliberately uses to get his ideas across to the reader)	<b>Some points to consider</b>	<b>Quotation or Example</b>	<b>Analysis/ effect/ writer's purpose (This is the bit that gets you your marks)</b>
<b>Form</b>	Dramatic morality play. Written to be performed/ deliberately dramatic.		
<b>Structure</b>	The way the plot is put together and events are slowly unravelled. The beginning and the end. The chain of events.		
<b>Setting</b>	Choosing to set the play in 1912 How society wanted to improve after the war.		
<b>Characters</b>	What they symbolise, their attitudes and viewpoints and individual character qualities. E.g.: Priestley deliberately creating a satirical character in Mr Birling/ Birling's speeches.		
<b>The Birling family as a whole</b>	The fact that he uses them as a metaphor/ a microcosm of the middle and upper class in Edwardian society.		
<b>Contrast</b>	Between: the upper, middle and working class; the younger and older generation; capitalist and socialist ideologies.		
<b>Entrances and Exits</b>	How they heighten dramatic tension/ create suspense		
<b>Dramatic Irony</b>	Mr Birling's confidence with events to come: war and the Titanic being unsinkable/ when Mrs Birling talks about the father of the baby.		
<b>Foreshadowing</b>	When Gerald was away for so long over summer		
<b>Stage directions and lighting</b>	At the beginning/ when the inspector arrives		
<b>Themes</b>	Social injustice, social class, social responsibility, responsibility. gender, judgement etc.		
<b>Language</b>	Similes, repetition, pronouns, symbolism, euphemisms, etc.		
<b>The Inspector's Speech</b>	The power of it and how it links to Priestley's key ideas.		

**Remember to consciously acknowledge the writer's deliberate choices, e.g.: Priestley deliberately/ effectively uses...**

# Literature Paper 2

## Edna the Examiner's An Inspector Calls Workbook

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Arguably, this is the text you'll need to know your very best before the exam because you won't have an extract to fall back on. You'll have a simple question on a character, theme or attitude and you'll need to give your marker all they're going to want – without any help from the examiner.

# The Plot

1. An inspector arrives at the Birling house. He tells them how a girl called Eva Smith has killed herself by drinking disinfectant - he wants to ask them some questions.
2. The Inspector reveals that the girl used to work in Arthur Birling's factory and he had her sacked for going on strike. Mr Birling refuses to accept any responsibility for her death.
3. The Inspector then reveals that Sheila thought that Eva had made fun of her, complained and got her sacked. Sheila is deeply ashamed and feels responsible for the girl's death.
4. The Inspector forces Gerald to confess to an affair he had with Eva. Sheila respects Gerald's honesty but returns the engagement ring he gave her.
5. It is revealed that Sybil Birling had refused to help the pregnant Eva.
6. It turns out that it was Eric who got Eva pregnant, and stole money from his father to help her.
7. The Inspector leaves. The family ring the infirmary and there is no record of a girl dying from drinking disinfectant.
8. Suddenly the phone rings, Mr Birling answers it, to his horror the phone call reveals that a young woman has just died from drinking disinfectant and the police are on their way to question them about it. The curtain falls and the play ends.

# Key Contexts

**The Writer:** JB Priestley was born in 1894. After fighting in World War I, he became disillusioned and upset at the economic depression and widespread poverty in the UK. He was a socialist, and used his radio show in the 1940s to share his hopes for a better, fairer Britain.

This play is his message to the world: a call for people to look after other people, and to push towards full equality.

**Contexts present in the play:** What are the following and who represents them in the play?

## Capitalism

*What is Capitalism?*

*Who represents Capitalism in the play?*

*What is Priestley's message about capitalism?*

## Socialism

*What is socialism?*

*Who represents socialism in the play?*

*What is Priestley's message about socialism?*

## Class

*What is the class system?*

*Who represents the upper, middle and lower class?*

*What is Priestley's message about the classes?*

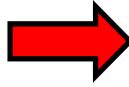
Why is it relevant the play is set in the **Midlands** in 1912?

Were **men and women** equal at this time?

How significant was **morality** in 1912?

# 1912 - 1946

The play is set in 1912



But was performed in 1946

For each of the following, explain what the context was like in 1912, and then what it was like in 1946:

	In 1912...	By 1946...
<b>War</b>		
<b>Class System</b>		
<b>Women</b>		
<b>Political leaders</b>		

**Priestley's Purpose:** Why do you think Priestley set his play in 1912? What is his message to the audience of 1945?

**STRETCH:** Do you think this message is still relevant to the audience of 2017?

# Setting: The Birling's House

*This is a play, so you are expected to write about stage directions – however not the same way you would analyse language. You need to be thinking how the stage directions reflect the situation, and how they show what the characters are thinking / feeling...*

The room has “good, solid furniture of the period... substantial and heavily comfortable, but not cosy and homelike.” What does this show about the Birlings? What are they not?

Priestley explains the stage should not be warm and comfortable: what might this imply is missing from their family home life?

The lighting is to be a rosy glow. How might this reflect the Birling's view on life? (Think rose-tinted spectacles)

When the Inspector enters, the lighting becomes ‘brighter and harder.’ Why?

What do their body positions reflect about the characters?  
Edna (the maid):

Mr Birling:

The family:

It's a ‘suburban’ house (meaning in a city or town). What does this show about the family's status?

They're drinking from ‘champagne glasses.’ What does this show about the family?

How does this contrast to Eva Smith?

# Mr Arthur Birling

Who is he? What does he do in the play?

*In the Inspector's Investigation:* What did Birling do?

How does he treat the Inspector when he leaves. What does this tell us about Birling?

Birling's actions	What do we learn about him?
At the start, he brags about the quality of his port and cigars.	
He warns Eric and Gerald, "a man has to make his own way – has to look after himself"	
He is delighted that Shela and Gerald's engagement has brought Crofts limited and Birling & Company together.	

**If there's one quote to know:** What does this quote tell us about Birling? How does this comment foreshadow his family?

*"Unsinkable, absolutely  
unsinkable"*

# Mrs Sybil Birling

Who is she? What does she do in the play?

*In the Inspector's Investigation:* What did Mrs Birling do?

What does she ask the Inspector to do to the man who got Eva pregnant? What does this tell us about her?

Mrs Birling's actions	What do we learn about her?
She follows her husbands lead (passes the message onto the cook, leaves the room so the men can talk)	
She speaks 'haughtily' and 'rather grandly' to the Inspector, and then boasts 'she was the only one... who didn't give in'	
She has a key role at the Brumley Women's Charity, yet turned down Eva's application.	

**If there's one quote to know:** What does this quote tell us about Mrs Birling?

*"Girls of that class"*

# The Birlings – STRETCH Analysis

**Mr Birling Key Character Traits:** What do you learn about him from the following...

<p>He is placed at 'one end' of the table, interrupts others and makes long speeches.</p>	<p>He gives orders to Sybil to praise the cook (rather than do it himself), without using the cooks name.</p>
<p>He has a 'provincial' accent, but hopes for a knighthood for being a 'sound party man'</p>	<p>He acknowledges Gerald's mother thinks the Birlings are socially inferior.</p>

**Mrs Birling Key Character Traits:** What do you learn about her from the following...

<p>She says about her children; "he's only a boy" and "it would be much better if Sheila didn't listen to this story"</p>	<p>She didn't know Eric has a drinking problem, and couldn't believe he'd have an affair.</p>
<p>She criticises Eva's lover's lack of morals.</p>	<p>She excuses her actions, repeating the word 'justified'</p>

# Sheila Birling

Who is she? What does she do in the play?

*In the Inspector's Investigation:* What did Sheila do? Why was her class a factor in this?

How does Sheila now feel about her actions?

Sheila's actions	What do we learn about her?
The opening stage directions say Sheila is 'very pleased with life and rather excited'	
She refers to Mr and Mrs Birling as 'Mummy' and 'Daddy,' yet she's engaged to Gerald.	
Whereas Arthur, Gerald and Sybil deny their responsibility, Sheila realises she cannot hid the truth.	

**If there's one quote to know:** What does this quote tell us about Sheila?

*"Mother – I begged you and begged you to stop"*

# Eric Birling

Who is he? What does he do in the play?

*In the Inspector's Investigation:* What did Eric do?

How does he deal with his actions?

Eric's actions	What do we learn about him?
The opening stage directions say he is 'not quite at ease'. He stops himself mid-sentence a few times.	
He bursts out laughing for no reason and has a squabble with Sheila. His parents talk down to him.	
He tells both his parents that he's never been able to talk to them: "You're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble."	

**If there's one quote to know:** What does this quote tell us about Eric?

*"You killed them both – damn you, damn you"*

# The Young Birlings – STRETCH Analysis

**Sheila Key Character Traits:** What do you learn about her from the following...

She focusses on her own emotions on the night, “I’ve been so happy tonight. Oh I wish you hadn’t told me”

She goes on to say about Milwards, “I feel now I can never go there again” – what do these views tell us about her upbringing?



*“I know I’m to blame – and I’m desperately sorry – but I can’t believe – I wont believe – it’s simply my fault that in the end she – committed suicide”*

How does she feel?

Does she take responsibility?

What do the dashes reflect about her state of mind?

**Eric Key Character Traits:** What do you learn about him from the following...

He suggests Eva was right to go on strike.

When he returns in Act 3, his family do not support him, but are angry about the impending scandal. He is ‘explosively’ refused a drink.

**Priestley’s Purpose:** What is Priestley’s message through Eric and Sheila? Think about how they are different to their parents...

# Gerald Croft

Who is he? What does he do in the play?

*In the Inspector's Investigation:* What did Gerald do?

What were Gerald's intentions? How does he feel about her death?

Gerald's actions	What do we learn about him?
Gerald and Arthur agree with each other about the strike, and Arthur sticks up for Gerald after the affair is revealed.	
Birling lectures Gerald, yet confides in him about his impending knighthood.	
Sybil calls Gerald's story a "disgusting affair," whilst previously she had stopped Mrs Birling from teasing Gerald for working too much over the summer.	

**If there's one quote to know:** What does this quote tell us about Eric?

*"We're respectable citizens and not criminals"*

# Eva Smith / Daisy Renton

Who is she? What does she do in the play?

Eva's story demonstrates the struggles of being a woman in 1912. Where do we see the following in the play:

Dominance of men	
Treatment as a sexual object	
Difficulty in being independent	
Prejudice about sexual activity	

Eva / Daisy's actions	What do we learn about her?
She won't take Eric's stolen money and she organised the strike at the factory.	<p><i>STRETCH: How does this differ to the Birlings?</i></p>
She never appears on stage, yet she is central to all the characters' lives.	
Before he knows how the night would unfold, Mr Birling describes her as a lively, hard-working and good-looking.	

**If there's one quote to know:** What does this quote tell us about Eva / Daisy?

*"Just used her... as if she was an animal, a thing, not a person"*

# Inspector Goole

Who is he? What does he do in the play?

**Priestley's Purpose:** What does Inspector Goole represent?

Inspector's actions	What do we learn about him?
In the opening stage directions, he projects, "an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness"	
When he walks on, the lighting becomes "brighter and harder"	
Despite being a lower class, he has all the power on stage (eg: he is not intimidated by Arthur or Gerald: "cutting through massively" and "cooly, looking hard at him")	

**If there's one quote to know:** What does this quote tell us about the Inspector's view on responsibility?

*"if men will not learn that lesson, when they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish."*

# Inspector Goole

**Inspector Goole Key Character Traits:** What do you learn about him from the following...

<p>What does Priestley's use of wordplay in Goole / ghoule suggest about the Inspector?</p>	<p>He stares at people before questioning them, only deals with one person at a time, and is clearly judgemental rather than objective.</p>
<p>He is like an omniscient narrator: he appears to already know everything about the Birlings.</p>	<p>At the end, we find out there is no Inspector Goole.</p>

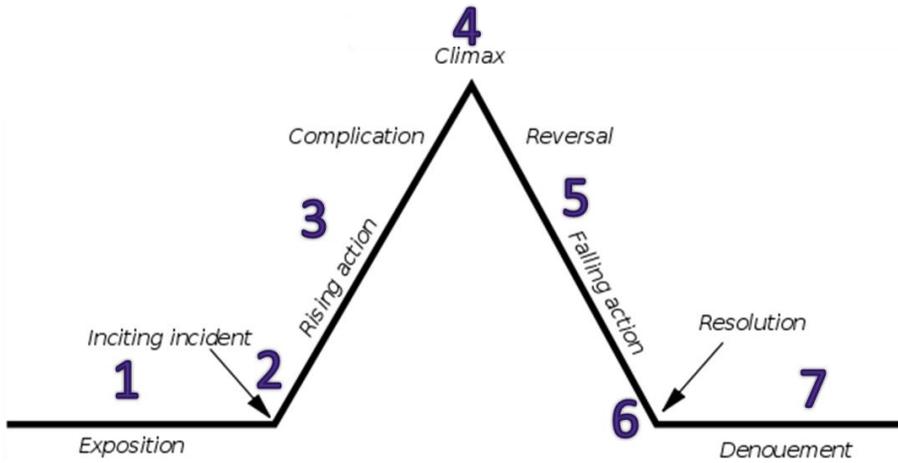
**The Inspector's Impact on the Characters:** When they find out he's a hoax, how do the characters react and what is Priestley's message through this?

Characters	Key Quote	How have they been affected? What is Priestley's message through this?
<p><b>Arthur and Sybil (Old, middle class)</b></p>	<p>'[imitating Inspector] You all helped to kill her [pointing ... laughing]</p>	
<p><b>Gerald (Upper Class)</b></p>	<p>"What girl? There were probably four or five..."</p>	
<p><b>Sheila and Eric (Young)</b></p>	<p>Sheila repeats Inspectors final words – "fire and blood and anguish"</p>	

# Structure of the Play

The easiest way of analysing structure is by considering Freytag's theory of dramatic structure

Freytag's theory is:



Why do you think Priestley uses a simple narrative structure (One plot, one set, one night)?

**Analysing Structure:** For each of the 7 points, state what is happening and then explain Priestley's message through this structural choice...

	What happens?	What is Priestley's message?
<b>1</b>	<i>Eg: The family are celebrating Sheila and Gerald's engagement. They're relaxed and happy.</i>	<i>Eg: That the middle classes are at ease in their luxury. They are unconcerned by any hardships beyond their home.</i>
<b>2</b>		
<b>3</b>		
<b>4</b>		
<b>5</b>		
<b>6</b>		
<b>7</b>		

# Themes: Young & Old

What do the actions of the young and old reflect about their age group at different times in the play?

## At the Start:

Mr Birling has the greatest number of lines, expects people to pay attention and doesn't like to be interrupted. Mrs Birling also snaps "please don't contradict me like that" to the children. What does this suggest about the older people?

Eric and Sheila stop squabbling when Mrs Birling tells them. Eric asks "[not to rudely]" a request.

## When Goole arrives

Sybil disapprovingly notes, "You seem to have made a great impression on this child, Inspector."

Sheila challenges her parent's behaviour. She tells her Dad not to "interfere" with Gerald's situation, and calls her mum "cruel and vile." Eric is more aggressive and extreme: "damn you" and "{almost threatening her}"

## When Goole leaves

The older generation mock and laugh at the Inspector. They share a relief their reputation is intact and offer no concern for Daisy Renton.

Eric and Sheila have been deeply affected by the evening's events. They challenge their parents refusal to alter their behaviour: "You're ready to go on the same old way... and it frightens me"

**Priestley's Purpose:** What is Priestley's message here about young and old? Is this a hopeful message for the future or not?

# Themes: Personal Responsibility

The Inspector came with a mission to get everyone to understand and admit their personal responsibility for Eva's death: a "confession" as Sheila put it.

For each character, using the quote / actions, explain their view on their personal responsibility at the end and why they feel that way.

	Quote / Details	What's their view on their personal responsibility?
<b>Sheila</b>	<i>"I behaved badly. I know I did. I'm ashamed of it."</i>	
<b>Eric</b>	"I did what I did. And Mother did what she did. And the rest of you did what you did to her"	
<b>Gerald</b>	After being remorseful and guilty with the Inspector, at the end he asks Sheila to stay engaged to him and doubts the story of Eva's death.	
<b>Mr Birling</b>	They both explain and justify their actions throughout, never admitting any wrongdoing. When they prove the Inspector is fake, they laugh and joke about the night's events.	
<b>Mrs Birling</b>		

**Priestley's Purpose:** After these conversations, Priestley has the phone ring again with news an Inspector is on his way. How does this reflect his message on personal responsibility?

# Themes: Social Responsibility

What is social responsibility?

The Inspector is the voice of social responsibility in the play. How does he present his views here...?

Inspector's Quotes	How does this present his view on social responsibility?
"Their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering, and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives..."	
"She needed not only money, but advice, sympathy, friendliness"	
"We'll have to share our guilt"	

"It's my duty to keep labour costs down"  
How does Arthur Birling present social responsibility?

On the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation, Sybil helps girls with "deserving cases" – but she saw to it Eva is refused. How does she present social responsibility?

**If there's one quote to know:** What does this quote tell us about Birling's view on social responsibility?

*"like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense"*

# Themes: Morality

What is morality?

"We're respectful citizens and not criminals"  
How do Gerald and the Birlings believe morality is shown? Can you see an example in the play?

Priestley uses the Christian ideas of the seven deadly sins to show the characters lack of social morality, and to demonstrate how much that is exactly what Eva Smith needs. Complete the table below, just like the example...

	Where can you see this sin demonstrated?	How does this juxtapose with the victim, Eva Smith?
<b>Gluttony</b>	<i>The play opens with the table being cleared of 'dessert plates and champagne glasses.' Everyone drinks port. Eric's heavy drinking.</i>	<i>Eva is hungry and lives in poverty. She had so little to eat that Gerald started supporting her financially.</i>
<b>Greed</b>		
<b>Wrath (anger)</b>		
<b>Envy</b>		
<b>Pride</b>		
<b>Lust</b>		

# Themes: Love

## Sheila and Gerald

The play opens with the Birlings celebrating Sheila and Gerald's engagement: but how is their love presented?

Why is Mr Birling so happy about this engagement? What is implied about their romance?

Engagement Quotes	How does this present their love?
Sheila talked '[gaily]' and in a '[playful]' manner.	
Gerald says, "and I drink to you – and <b>hope</b> I can make you as happy as you deserve to be"	
To the ring, Sheila says "Now I feel really engaged"	

## Girls vs Boys

The characters' view on love is shaped by their gender. How is their view on love presented in the following:

Eric says of Eva, "She was pretty and a good sport"

Gerald says Eva, "became at once the most important person in her life."

Gerald admits about Eva "I didn't feel about her as she felt about me"

Sheila says Gerald was "the wonderful Fairy Prince"

# Themes: Inequality

Why does Eva Smith suffer from such inequality?

Priestley's key message is about the inequality in society. Eva's lifestyle was completely shaped by her inequality, whereas the Birlings massively benefitted from the social inequality that existed.

In the table below, explain how Eva Smith's experience and The Birling's experience juxtaposed because of their inequality. The first one has been done for you...

	Eva Smith	The Birlings
<b>Gaining Employment</b>	<i>Arthur asks if after she was sacked if she "got into trouble? Go on the streets?" – thereby suggesting that there was no other option of her but to turn to crime or prostitution as a means of making money.</i>	<i>Mr Birling had the luxury of removing peoples employment whenever he felt it in the best interest of the company.</i>
<b>Personal Relationships</b>		
<b>Keeping Employment</b>		
<b>Living Arrangments</b>		
<b>Democracy and Elections</b>		

**Priestley's Purpose:** What do you think is Priestley's message about inequality – as presented through the Inspector.

## Plan

Section 1 - Birlings representing middle/high class

Feel more important

Don't care about lower classes

Birling tries to intimidate inspector with his class and connections

Theme of judgment

Section 2 - ~~Eric~~ Inspector un-intimidated as he doesn't have a class

'responsibilities as well as privileges'

Eva Smith and John Smith

Birling remains ignorant - No identity

Section 3 - Sheila and Eric change - showing

how boundaries can be broken

Daisy most honourable.

## Question 1

Priestley just explores attitudes to social class by using the different characters to represent the classes. Eva Smith represents

the lower classes, the Birling's represent the middle/high class and Gerald represents

the highest class. Priestley uses characters such as Mr Birling to show

the ignorance of the higher classes. For example, ~~Mr~~ tells of

how 'you'd think everybody has

to look after everybody else' and

refers to that idea, as 'community and all that nonsense'. Here, Priestley is showing that Mr Birling has a limited sense of social responsibility and didn't care nor want to know about those below him. In 1912, class distinctions were very clear and that is the time in which the play was set - so Priestley clearly shows this. He also presents the idea of class making people such as Mr Birling ~~more~~ feel a sense of social superiority and importance. As an example, Mr Birling tries to intimidate the Inspector straight from his arrival in act one - telling him of how he 'was an alderman for years & Lord Mayor two years ago - and [he is] still on the bench.' Here, not only does this show Mr Birling's attempt to intimidate the Inspector with his position, Priestley also uses social class to present irony, as Mr Birling passes judgement to others as a magistrate ~~but~~ despite his own immoral acts.

Birling continues to intimidate the Inspector with his connections also, and uses Gerald - who is of a higher social class - to further promote himself, ~~the~~ saying that he should <sup>introduce</sup> [the Inspector] to Gerald Crofts, son of Sir George Crofts - you know, Crofts

Limited?'. Birling also feels that ~~he~~ he  
~~has~~ 'ought to warn' the Inspector  
that he plays golf with his boss, again  
to intimidate the Inspector. The Inspector,  
however, remains unintimidated throughout  
the play; Priestley doesn't portray him  
as intimidated due to the fact that  
the Inspector doesn't have a social  
class. The Inspector does not represent  
any of the classes nor does he  
fit into any of them, and so  
naturally can see the ignorance and  
disregard from those of a higher class  
to those below them. In fact, the  
Inspector shows that of a socialist  
view - everyone is equal and deserves  
to be treated the same. To the Inspector  
the class distinctions mean nothing and  
so he feels the need to remind  
characters such as Mr Birling that  
he has 'responsibilities as well as privileges'  
and that there are 'millions and millions  
and millions of Eve Smiths and John Smiths  
that exist'. The Inspector's views mirror  
that of Priestley's own socialist views and  
Priestley likely shows the Inspector  
as what many would perceive as  
the protagonist in the play in order  
to show that his views and attitudes  
are morally right - and the Birlings ~~are~~ sum up  
what is wrong with the class system.

Despite this, Priestley wishes to show

That people can change from being heavily sheltered by a class system and move to a socialist viewpoint. Priestley uses Eric and Sheila to do this as Sheila almost becomes a mini-inspector at points even refers to the lower class as 'not just cheap labour, they're people'. Here, Priestley is showing the start of the realisation that ~~class boundaries~~ ~~are~~ by some of the characters, that his own viewpoint that class distinctions are ~~an~~ unnecessary and don't control ~~people~~ ~~and~~ or define people, and that those class boundaries can be broken. Priestley also shows this when the characters believe it may all be a hoax and Sheila and Eric react in the way that although they may not have killed ~~any~~ their actions had the potential to ~~and~~ they should start caring for one another.

Priestley also explores social class by changing the audience's possible perceptions of it. For example, the audience may have believed that the lower classes partook in crime and other immoral acts. Despite this, Eva/Daisy is presented as the most honest character as 'she refused to take any more money when she believed it was stolen. This may ~~not~~ surprise the audience causing us to register to them a lot more and change how they view things to almost

MIRROR Priestley's own views.

# An Inspector Calls - Factsheet

## Key techniques

- Lighting
- Entrances and exits
- Flashbacks
- Dramatic irony
- Use of language to reveal class of characters

## Context

- Socialism – this was gaining popularity at the time the play was written, but the Birlings are Capitalists
- Setting the play before it was written (set in 1912, written in 1945) – Priestley is giving a firm warning about war and how to avoid it in the future
- Divide between the rich and the poor
- Divide between the younger and older generation – represents the positive changing ideas towards Socialism

## Key themes

- Socialism and Capitalism
- Class
- Responsibility
- Guilt
- 'Inspection'

## Quotation

- "... a man has to make his own way—has to look after himself—and his family" – Mr Birling to Gerald and Eric
- "I did nothing I'm ashamed of or that won't bear investigation." – Mrs Birling to 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." – Inspector to Family
- "Fiddlesticks! The Germans don't want war!" – Birling to Eric and Gerald
- "There are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths." – Inspector to Family

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

### **An Inspector Calls - Key Quotations**

"You're squiffy" – Sheila to Eric (Act 1)

- Shows Eric/ Sheila's brother/ sister relationship.
- Colloquial language set period.
- Shows Eric drinks too much.

"I speak as a hard-headed business man." (Act 1)

- Shows Mr Birling is hard-hearted.
- Shows pride in his hard-won success.

"Unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable." Mr Birling (Act 1)

- Dramatic irony – audience knows something the characters don't.
- Titanic is a metaphor for the family and its privileged position.

"We really must stop these silly pretences." Sheila to Mrs Birling (Act 2)

- Sheila understands the Inspector's message.
- Shows a division growing between Sheila and her mother.
- Shows that Sheila understands the need to stop lying. (Key theme)

"Girls of that class." Mrs Birling to the Inspector (Act 2)

- Shows Mrs Birling thinks she is socially and morally superior.
- Almost as though the poor are by definition squalid and worthless.
- Emphasis on "that" shows her disgust in the working class.

"She was very pretty – soft brown hair and big dark eyes." Gerald (Act 2)

- Gerald's language stresses the difference between Eva and "women of the town" who he calls "hard-eyed" and "dough-faced".
- By stressing the positive aspects of Eva, it makes her mistreatment seem even more cruel.

"You're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble." Eric (Act 2)

- The Birlings are not only hard-hearted towards the working class, but they are also inadequate parents.
- Birling says his son has been spoilt, and he is more concerned with covering up Eric's wrongdoings so to avoid a social scandal.

"We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other." The Inspector (Act 3)

- The core message of the Inspector and the play.
- Directly contrasts with Birling's message of 'every man for himself'.
- The message applies to all the characters and the audience.

"Everything's all right now, Sheila." Gerald to Sheila (Act 3)

## 1912 to 1945

This was the period of the Russian Revolution, two appalling world wars, the Holocaust and the Atom Bomb.

### This table describes what society was like in 1912 and in 1945

<i>An Inspector Calls</i> set in 1912	<i>An Inspector Calls</i> was written in 1945.
The First World War would start in two years. Birling's optimistic view that there would not be a war is completely wrong.	The Second World War ended in Europe on 8 May 1945. People were recovering from nearly six years of warfare, danger and uncertainty.
There were strong distinctions between the upper and lower classes.	Class distinctions had been greatly reduced as a result of two world wars.
Women were subservient to men. All a well off women could do was get married; a poor woman was seen as cheap labour.	As a result of the wars, women had earned a more valued place in society.
The ruling classes saw no need to change the status quo.	There was a great desire for social change. Immediately after The Second World War, Clement Attlee's Labour Party won a landslide victory over Winston Churchill and the Conservatives.

Priestley deliberately set his play in 1912 because the date represented an era when all was very different from the time he was writing. In 1912, rigid class and gender boundaries seemed to ensure that nothing would change. Yet by 1945, most of those class and gender divisions had been breached. Priestley wanted to make the most of these changes. Through this play, he encourages people to seize the opportunity the end of the war had given them to build a better, more caring society

- 1) How does Priestley present the character of Gerald as an upper class young man in this play?
- 2) Do you consider An Inspector Calls to be an effective title for this play?
- 3) How does Priestley present the character of Inspector Goole in the play?
- 4) "We do not live alone. We are members of one body."  
How does this play represent the theme of responsibility?
- 5) An important person in the play does not appear. How does Priestley use Eva Smith / Daisy Renton in the course of the play?
- 6) How does Priestley show the differences in attitudes between the older and the younger generations in the course of the play?
- 7) How does Priestley make the ending striking?
- 8) How and why does Sheila / Eric change in the play?
- 9) How far do you believe Mrs Birling is more responsible for the death of Eva Smith than the other characters?
- 10) How does Priestley build sympathy for Eva Smith throughout the play?
- 11) Write about the way the relationship between Gerald and Sheila develops during the play.
- 12) What is revealed about family relationships throughout the play?
- 13) How does Priestley show that tension is at the heart of the Birling family?

## An Inspector Calls Revision Sheet

### Plot

1. The Birling Family and Gerald Croft are having a celebratory dinner.
2. Just as Mr Birling is at his most confident; an inspector arrives to investigate a suicide.
3. Mr Birling reveals he sacked Eva Smith.
4. Sheila explains that she had Eva sacked from her next job and Milwards.
5. Gerald recognises the name Daisy Renton
6. Gerald admits that he kept Daisy as his mistress.
7. Mrs Birling tells the group that she denied help to a pregnant girl when she went to Mrs Birling's charity organisation
8. Eric enters, just as we realise he is the father of the child.
9. Eric explains his relationship with the girl and how he stole money to help her.
10. The Inspector leaves.
11. The family gradually realises the Inspector could have been a fraud.
12. The celebratory mood is almost restored - then a phone call announces that an Inspector is on his way to investigate a girl's suicide.

### Characters

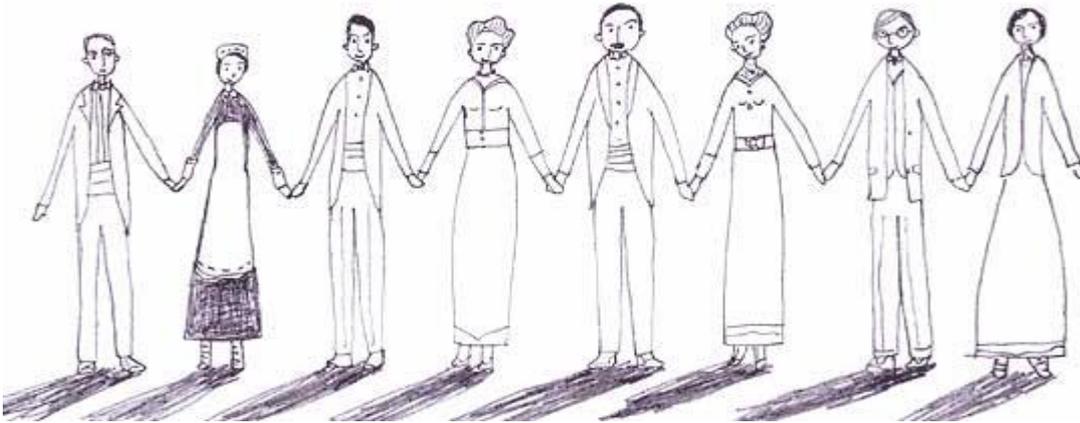
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior</li> <li>• "She was giving herself ridiculous airs"</li> <li>• she refuses to believe that she did anything wrong and doesn't accept responsibility for her part in Eva's death</li> </ul>	Mrs Birling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking</li> <li>• "We are responsible for each other"</li> <li>• He works very <b>systematically</b></li> </ul>	Inspector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive</li> <li>• "Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?"</li> <li>• he is fully aware of his social responsibility</li> </ul>	Eric
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred man-about-town</li> <li>• "She was young and pretty and warm-hearted - and intensely grateful."</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>	Gerald
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties but rather provincial in his speech</li> <li>• "a man has to make his own way"</li> <li>• <b>optimistic</b> for the future and confident that there will not be a war.</li> </ul>	Mr Birling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited</li> <li>• "But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people."</li> <li>• feels full of <b>guilt</b> for her jealous actions</li> </ul>	Sheila

## An Inspector Calls Revision Sheet

### Themes

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

*"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."*



**Class:** 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.

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	<b>Mr Birling</b>	keen to be knighted to cement his hard-fought rise to the upper class
someone who could be fired out of spite	<b>Sheila</b>	happy spending a lot of time in expensive shops
a mistress who could be discarded at will	<b>Gerald</b>	prepared to marry Sheila, despite her lower social position
easy sex at the end of a drunken night out	<b>Eric</b>	awkward about his 'public-school-and-Varsity' life
a presumptuous upstart	<b>Mrs Birling</b>	socially superior to her husband, and embarrassed at his gaffes

An Inspector Calls Revision Sheet

**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 about it, their parents are unable to admit that they did anything wrong.

The Old (Mr and Mrs Birling)	The Young (Sheila and Eric)
The old are set in their ways. They are utterly confident that they are right and they see the young as foolish.	The young are open to new ideas. This is first seen early in Act 1 when both Eric and Sheila express sympathy for the strikers - an idea which horrifies Birling, who can only think of production costs and ignores the human side of the issue.
The old 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.	The young are honest and admit their faults. Eric refuses to try to cover his part up, saying, " <i>the fact remains that I did what I did.</i> "
They have never been forced to examine their consciences before and find they cannot do it now - as the saying goes, 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks.'	Sheila and Eric see the human side of Eva's story and are very troubled by their part in it. They <i>do</i> examine their consciences.
Mr and Mrs Birling have much to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they know they will lose everything.	Sheila and Eric have nothing to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they have already admitted what they have done wrong, and will change

Gerald Croft is caught in the middle, being neither very young nor old. In the end he sides with the older generation, perhaps because his aristocratic roots influence him to want to keep the status quo and protect his own interests.

Ultimately, we can be optimistic that the young - those who will shape future society - are able to take on board the Inspector's message.