

# **An Inspector Calls**

## **Study Pack**

### **English Literature Unit 2a**

**Question 1 -Drama**

**Divided into;**

**A context passage with question -20 minutes**

**One essay from a choice of two options -40 minutes-**

**1 hour in total.**



## ACT ONE

1

The curtain opens to reveal the dining-room of a large Edwardian house - the home of Mr. and Mrs. Birling and their children, Sheila and Eric. This is obviously the home of a successful and prosperous man. The stage directions tell us that the "general effect is substantial and heavily comfortable". The family and their guest, Gerald Croft, have just finished dinner. Priestley's stage directions (page 1) give us our first information about the characters:



**ARTHUR BIRLING** We are told that he is a prosperous manufacturer. He is described by Priestley as well-built and rather pompous and solemn ("portentous"). He is in his middle fifties. His speech is a little unpolished.

**SYBIL BIRLING** is his wife. She, too, is about fifty. The author tells us that she is a cold, austere woman and that she has come from a more superior social position than her husband.



**SHEILA BIRLING**, their daughter, is described as being in her early twenties, pretty and obviously very pleased with life.

**ERIC BIRLING**, their son, is also in his early twenties. He is not really sure of himself - "not quite at ease".



**GERALD CROFT**, has just become engaged to marry Sheila. He is about thirty years old and very sure of himself.

When the play opens they have finished dinner and are settling down to the port. Arthur Birling makes a very smug, self-satisfied speech to the family to toast the happiness of Sheila and Gerald. The door bell rings. Edna, the maid, announces that a police inspector, **INSPECTOR GOOLE**, has arrived to see Mr. Birling. He is shown into the dining room.

**INSPECTOR GOOLE** makes a strong impression on the family - and on the audience - as soon as he enters. Priestley says that he gives an "impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness". He is in his fifties and dressed in a plain, dark suit. He fixes people with his eye in a very disarming way before he speaks.



The inspector reveals that he has called because he is investigating the suicide of a young woman who had died two hours previously in the Infirmary. She had poisoned herself with strong disinfectant.

Inspector Goole tells them that she has left a diary and a letter and that her original name was Eva Smith.

Mr. Birling was the first member of the group to have had dealings with Eva Smith.

At first the name means nothing to Arthur Birling. The inspector tells him that she had been employed at Birling's factory. He shows Birling a photograph and then Birling remembers the girl.

Arthur Birling explains that Eva Smith had been involved in a dispute over wages. She had been a ring-leader in a strike and when the strike was over, Birling dismissed her.

The inspector tells them that after she left Birling's employment she changed her name. She was out of work for two months. She had no money and was desperate until she found a job at a high class clothes shop called Milwards. She was good at her work but was dismissed after a couple of months.

Sheila Birling was the second member of the group to have had dealings with Eva Smith.

We soon learn that Sheila Birling had been a valued customer at Milwards. As soon as Sheila saw the photograph of the dead girl she remembered her. She also remembered that she had complained to the shop because she thought the girl was laughing at her when she tried on a dress. As a result of the complaint the girl was dismissed.

After leaving Milwards Eva Smith changed her name to Daisy Renton.

Gerald Croft was the third member of the group to have had dealings with Eva/Daisy.

When Gerald heard the name he reacted so strongly that Sheila noticed. He, too, had known the girl - as Daisy Renton. At the end of Act One Gerald admitted to Sheila that he had had an affair with Daisy Renton the previous summer, but that it was all over and done with.

## ACT ONE - Phase One (Pages 1-10)

The family celebrates the engagement of Sheila and Gerald.



### Comments on Phase One (pages 1-10)

1. When the play opens the mood seems to be relaxed, friendly, happy and trouble free. In one sense it is. The family is celebrating. However, even in the first two or three pages there are subtle signs of tension.
2. Birling's rather domineering nature and his social climbing are immediately apparent. He is quick to point out in the opening lines of the play that the port he has provided is the same as the port bought by Gerald's father, Sir George Croft. It is quite obvious that Birling has asked the wine merchant - Finchley - what kind of port Sir George buys. (page 2)
3. It is clear that Arthur Birling and his wife, Sybil, are not from the same social class. Birling is confident but tends to betray his lack of social graces. His wife "corrects" him when he makes self-satisfied comments about the dinner they have just eaten. (page 2)
4. Notice how skilfully Priestley uses language to define his characters - how the *way* the characters speak is always in keeping with their personalities:
  - (a) Birling speaks in a relaxed but rather pompous manner - he is very pleased with himself, clearly sexist in his attitudes and tends to preach at his family.
  - (b) At first Sheila seems to be a rather trivial person. Her language style is provocative, teasing, flirtatious. She often uses current, fashionable slang terms.
  - (c) Mrs. Birling speaks in a rather reserved way - without enthusiasm or warmth.
  - (d) Gerald Croft speaks in a confident, self-assured manner.
  - (e) Eric Birling's first utterance is a loud guffaw! Sheila accuses him of being drunk and he certainly seems to lack control in his speech. He is sometimes put down by his father when he tries to express a point of view. Like Sheila, Eric often uses informal, fashionable language.

These are very generalised comments, of course. *Pay careful attention to how the characters develop during the play and how they react under stress.* Notice how aptly Priestley makes the use of language suit the character and the situation.

5. Although the play begins in a happy, relaxed mood, indications of stress and trouble to come soon creep in. On page 3 of the play Sheila reminds Gerald that he stayed away from her for a long time during the previous summer. He makes the lame excuse that he had been busy at work. Neither the audience nor Sheila is convinced.
6. Notice that although Arthur Birling is undoubtedly pleased about his daughter's happiness in her engagement to Gerald, he is also acutely aware of the possible business advantages arising from the union of the two families - "...now you've brought us together, and perhaps we may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together - for lower costs and higher prices." (page 4)
7. Sheila *assumes* that Gerald will make decisions for her. Gerald has chosen the engagement ring *he* wanted Sheila to have. (page 5)
8. Notice the dramatic irony in Birling's speech on page 6 of the play. The play was first produced in England in London, in 1946. The play is set in 1912. The 1946 audience knows things that the characters in the play do not know - the First World War (1914-1918), the sinking of the "unsinkable" *Titanic* in 1912, labour unrest and unemployment of the 1920s, the Second World War (1939-1945).

8. (cont.)

Pay particular attention to these comments (pages 6-7) by Birling:

- (a) "you can ignore all this silly pessimistic talk"
- (b) "there's a lot of wild talk about possible labour trouble in the future"
- (c) "The Germans don't want war."
- (d) "And I say there isn't a chance of war."
- (e) "the *Titanic* ...sails next week...and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable"
- (f) "In twenty or thirty years' time - let's say, in 1940 ....you'll be living in a world that'll have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations and all these silly little war scares."

9. Birling's social aspirations come out into the open when he tells Gerald that he might be in line for a knighthood. (page 8) He is well aware that Gerald's family is socially superior to his - "an old county family - landed people and so forth" - and is anxious to improve his own status. Don't miss the line - "there's a very good chance of a knighthood - so long as we behave ourselves, don't get into the police court or start a scandal - eh?" Birling's smug and complacent attitude is soon to be shaken.
10. There is another hint of trouble beneath the surface when it becomes clear that Eric has something to hide. In response to his father's comments about clothes he is about to say something - "Yes, I remember -" but stops short in confusion. (page 9)
10. Just before the maid announces that a police inspector has called, Birling makes a comment which goes right to the heart of the play. He says, "But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive - community and all that nonsense." (page 10) Birling is referring to the rise of socialist ideas, particularly to the work of writers like Bernard Shaw and H.G.Wells, which he regards as nonsense. The story of Eva Smith, however, will soon challenge Birling's position. Priestley is saying that we cannot cut ourselves off from each other, that we *do* share a corporate responsibility - that in John Donne's words, "No man is an Island". (John Donne, English poet, 1571-1631).

## ACT ONE - Phase Two (Pages 10-16)

The inspector arrives.

Arthur Birling's connection with Eva Smith is revealed.



### Comments on Phase Two (pages 10-16)

1. After Edna has announced the arrival of Inspector Goole, Birling says, "All right, Edna. Show him in. Give us some more light." In the stage directions at the beginning of Act One the author says "The lighting should be pink and intimate until the INSPECTOR arrives, and then it should be brighter and harder." The change in the lighting does two things. First of all it signals a change in the *mood* of the play. With the arrival of the inspector a note of *tension* and *menace* is introduced. Secondly, the increased intensity of the light suggests that the inspector is going to throw light on events in the past which have been concealed - to show up some of the darker secrets of the characters.
2. Gerald speculates, light-heartedly, that perhaps the inspector has arrived because Eric has been up to mischief. His comments are ironic - they have all been "up to something". Look carefully at the stage directions. They are very revealing. Gerald and Birling are relaxed and light hearted. Eric is ill at ease - uneasy and defiant.
3. Priestley's stage directions on the entrance of Inspector Goole need to be read carefully. (page 11)
 

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| age:    | fifties  |
| size:   | not necessarily big but giving the impression of strength and determination  |
| speech: | careful, considered, "weightily" - creating the feeling that what he has to say is important                             |
| dress:  | plain, dressed in dark clothes   |
| manner: | looks hard at the person he is talking to - this can be "disconcerting" for the person addressed - off putting, alarming |
4. Priestley has built up the tension before the inspector arrives on stage. He has created a sense of false security in the relaxed dinner party but has also occasionally introduced a note of tension. When the maid announces that a police inspector has arrived the audience *expects* the smugness and complacency of Birling and his world to be challenged. Eric seems to sense trouble. He is clearly feeling guilty about something and he communicates this to the audience.
5. Birling tells the inspector that he employs several hundred women - obviously a large and successful industrialist.
6. When the inspector shows Birling the photograph of Eva Smith he is careful to prevent the others from seeing it. Later in the play it is suggested by Gerald that the inspector could have had photographs of several different girls - that they may not all have been involved with the same girl. From a moral point of view, however, this does not in any way diminish responsibility, as Sheila and Eric well understood. Gerald, and some of the others, are looking for excuses.
7. Birling's involvement with Eva Smith goes back to 1910. Eva Smith was sacked by him in September of that year.
8. The way the inspector responds to the introduction of Gerald ("Mr. Gerald Croft, eh?") suggests at this early stage in the play that Gerald, too, may be involved in some way. This will remind the audience of Sheila's suspicious attitude concerning Gerald's behaviour the previous year.
9. Birling begins to show his true colours as his impatience grows. He refers to Eva Smith's death as "the wretched girl's suicide". (page 13)

happened to her then may have determined what happened to her afterwards, and what happened to her afterwards may have driven her to suicide..." Keep a sharp eye open throughout the play for these moral pronouncements of the inspector - most of them quite out of keeping with the normal line of official questioning - as the characters on stage also notice.

11. Birling's comment to the inspector (page 14) that "If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody .... it would be very awkward" takes us back to his earlier statement to Eric and Gerald about responsibility. (pages 9-10)
12. Birling tells us that the girls he employed were earning "about twenty-two and six" a week, which he said was general in his industry. Twenty-two and six means twenty-two shillings and six pence. There were twenty shillings in a pound and twelve pence in a shilling. His girls, therefore, were getting a little over a pound a week - a direct translation into our decimal currency would give us £1.25. This doesn't mean much unless we consider what wages were like in 1912. In 1911 a police constable got twenty-seven shillings a week - not much more than Eva Smith - and a bricklayer's labourer got eighteen shillings a week - less than Eva. A few years earlier, in 1906, women over the age of 18 working in textiles earned eighteen shillings a week. Birling was not underpaying his workers by the standards of 1912. However, during this period wages were beginning to rise. Birling is clearly resisting the attempts of workers to get a better share of the cake.
13. Birling refers to the Chief Constable, Colonel Roberts, in order to try to intimidate Inspector Goole. This little exchange reveals class differences. Birling is anxious to let the inspector know that he is friendly with Colonel Roberts and that they play golf together at the West Brumley golf club. When the inspector responds, somewhat sarcastically, that he doesn't play golf, Birling replies "I didn't suppose you did". Golf in England until relatively recently was very much a rich man's game. It would have been quite beyond the means of the average working man to buy the golf equipment and to pay membership fees at a golf club. In addition, few golf clubs in England would have accepted ordinary working-class men as members.
14. Eric has clearly had educational advantages which his father had been denied. His father's money has been able to buy him an education at public school and at university. Birling doesn't seem to think much of it as a preparation for life in business. (page 16)

## ACT ONE - Phase Three (pages 16-26)

Sheila Birling's connection with Eva Smith is revealed.

We learn that Gerald Croft has been involved with Daisy Renton (Eva Smith).



## Comments on Phase Three (pages 16-26)

1. Like Eric, Sheila reacts emotionally to the news about Eva Smith. The younger members of the family throughout show more sympathy and concern for others than their elders do. Perhaps Priestley is saying that if we are going to change society it will have to be by the efforts of the young generation. In the play the older generation seems to be set in its ways and unwilling to change opinions and attitudes.
2. Notice how Sheila's manner changes. When she first heard how Eva Smith had died her response was instinctive, emotional and horrified. By page 18 when the family is threatened she, too, has defensive, even aggressive moments. She reacts sharply to the inspector: "What do you mean by saying that? You talk as if we were responsible -" A few lines further on she is sorry about the hardships Eva Smith had experienced.
3. Look at the inspector's speech on page 19 beginning "There are a lot of young women living that sort of existence..." Here Priestley has left the immediate concerns of Eva Smith and is making a general philosophical - perhaps political - point.
4. Gerald says to the inspector, "...we're respectable citizens and not criminals." This allows the inspector to stress one of Priestley's central themes in the play. The inspector replies, "Sometimes there isn't as much difference as you think." Throughout the play Priestley seems to be making the point that there is no clear dividing line between different elements in society. We can't be sure just

We are, says, Priestley, for better or for worse, all part of humanity and we need to share problems and difficulties, good fortune and comfort. We need to accept some measure of responsibility for other people. The inspector, at least, doesn't "...know where to draw the line."

5. Sheila is open and honest about her involvement with Eva Smith. She accepts responsibility for her wilful actions and expresses sincere regret.
6. We feel that Sheila's feelings of regret are genuine when she says, "It's the only time I've ever done anything like that, and I'll never, never do it again to anybody." We believe her.
7. The inspector's long speech on page 25 ("That's what I asked myself...") serves as a summary of the story so far and also introduces, in dramatic fashion, the involvement of Gerald Croft with the girl. When the inspector mentions the name, Daisy Renton, Gerald is startled into a reaction which Sheila does not miss. By the end of the act Sheila knows why he spent so little time with her the previous summer.
8. Notice Priestley's deft handling of the characters on stage. He finds a solid motive for the inspector to leave the stage just before the curtain closes on Act One in order to give Sheila and Gerald time alone and to give Sheila the opportunity of worming Gerald's guilty secret out of him. The return of the inspector, who is given the final word in this act, is dramatic and gives the audience plenty to anticipate in the interval before Act Two.



## ACT TWO

### What happens in Act Two

Act Two opens at exactly the same place as Act One closed - with the inspector's question, "Well?"

Gerald knows that the inspector's questions will expose his involvement with Daisy Renton. He wants Sheila to leave but she insists on staying. Mrs. Birling enters and meets the inspector for the first time. She tries to make light of the situation which she refers to as "this absurd business". Sheila realises that her mother's arrogant and uncaring attitude will eventually be turned against her and tries to stop her. We realise that the members of the family really know very little about each other. At this point, Mrs. Birling, for example, discovers that Eric has been drinking heavily for the past two years.

The inspector questions Gerald who has to admit that he knew Daisy Renton. He met her in the bar at the Palace Variety Theatre in Brumley. Gerald explains that Alderman Meggarty, who had a reputation with women, was harassing Daisy Renton and that he rescued her. He took her for a drink and a meal. We learn that Gerald set her up in rooms which belonged to a friend of his and she became his mistress. The affair came to an end in September. The inspector knew all this (from Eva Smith's diary) and volunteered the information that Daisy had gone away for a couple of months to a seaside place after the affair finished. At the end of Gerald's confession Sheila gives him back her engagement ring. Gerald leaves to go for a walk to think things over.

The inspector shows the photograph of the girl to Mrs. Birling. At first Mrs. Birling denies all knowledge of her. Clearly, however, the inspector knows everything. After some prompting Mrs. Birling admits that the girl had approached The Brumley Women's Charity Organisation, of which Mrs. Birling was a prominent committee member, for help. Eva, who was pregnant, had unfortunately called herself Mrs. Birling when she first met the committee which immediately prejudiced Mrs. Birling against her. Mrs. Birling persuaded the committee not to help the girl and told her to go and look for the father of her child. She does not realise, as Sheila does by this time, that the father of the child was Eric. The inspector leads her on until she defines what, in her opinion, should happen to the father of the child.

At the end of Act Two Eric returns looking pale and distressed.

### ACT TWO - Phase Four (pages 27- 40)

Gerald's confession



### Comments on Phase Four (pages 27- 40)

1. Gerald tries to get Sheila to leave. He makes out that he is trying to protect Sheila but Sheila knows that he doesn't want her to hear the details of his affair with Daisy Renton.
2. The inspector is skilful at getting people to condemn themselves. He gets Gerald to suggest (page 27) 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?"
3. The inspector's role as some sort of mystic, 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" has universal significance and is not restricted to the immediate concerns of the Birling family. 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 about you."
4. The inspector's comment to Mrs. Birling about young people - "They're more impressionable" (page 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.

5. Talking about Eric's excessive drinking (page 32) Sheila says, "But we really must stop these silly pretences". In a wider sense this is very much a central theme in the play. Priestley is saying that we all tend to hide our weaknesses from ourselves - that the veneer of pretence needs to be stripped from society.
6. Although Eric is the topic of conversation near the beginning of Act Two, he cannot be interviewed yet. His involvement with Eva Smith comes chronologically after her affair with Gerald Croft. The revelations about Eric at this stage increase dramatic tension as the audience finally realise that the whole family must share responsibility.
7. There is a lot of meaning in Mrs. Birling's comment, "I must say, we *are* learning something tonight". They are learning not only about Gerald's infidelity and not only about Alderman Meggarty's drinking and womanising. They are learning a great deal about themselves as the inspector strips away their veneer of respectability, although the elder Birlings do not yet realise it. 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 of society is on trial.
8. Priestley's sympathy for the plight of girls like Eva Smith is evident. It is part of his deeply felt, genuine concern for humanity, not just the expression of a political opinion. In one of his autobiographical books (*Margin Released*, first published 1962) he writes:  

"An ultra-respectable suburb like ours, I began to see, had too many badly divided men, all heavily solemn and frock-coated on Sunday morning, too coarsely raffish, well away from their families, on Saturday night. Managers who were obdurate if the mill girls wanted another shilling a week could be found in distant pubs turning the prettiest and weakest of them into tarts."
9. When Gerald Croft's friend, Charlie Brunswick (page 36) went to Canada for six months, he let Gerald have the keys to a set of rooms he had in Morgan Terrace, asking him to look after them and to use them if he wanted. What are we meant to infer from this? It seems to be obvious that Charlie Brunswick had kept the rooms for entertaining lady friends and that he supposed Gerald might conceivably want to use them in the same way. Gerald doesn't spell this out but it seems clear that if the rooms had been Charlie Brunswick's permanent home Gerald would not have put a stranger into them. It is, perhaps, a small point but it does reveal a lot about the attitudes (and opportunities) of the men about town from this social class.
10. Gerald Croft makes a very open confession about his affair with Daisy Renton. Sheila is, naturally very angry and often sarcastic about it. But she is beginning to develop a new respect for Gerald. She can say to him, "That's probably about the best thing you've said tonight. At least it's honest." (page 38) To some extent the relationship between Gerald and Sheila seems to be evolving from the earlier immature and romantic illusion into a more human and ultimately stronger bond. By the end of the play, however, all the characters, some more than others have still a lot of learning to do.

## ACT TWO - Phase Five (Pages 40-49)

Mrs. Birling's involvement with Eva Smith is revealed.



### Comments on Phase Five (Pages 40 - 49)

1. The inspector tells Birling that those of us who manage to rise to positions of strength in society, have to accept not only the privileges which good fortune brings, but also a sense of responsibility for those less fortunate. (page 40) This is Priestley's deeply held socialist philosophy coming through again.
2. Sheila's speech (page 41) ("It means that we've no excuse for putting on airs ...") summarises the situation so far and also helps to make Mrs. Birling realise that she will have to tell the truth about her dealings with Eva Smith.
3. Mrs. Birling is in many ways stronger than the rest of her family. She stands up to the inspector and is convinced of the justice of her position. The inspector, however, leads her, step by step, into the destruction of her own smug complacency. The turning point comes when she says (page 45) "I'll tell you what I told her. Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility". This important quotation is very revealing. It gives the inspector the chance to lead Mrs. Birling into condemning her own son, Eric. It also reinforces one of the major themes in the play - the notion of responsibility. Mrs. Birling is saying, it's not our fault that the Eva Smiths of this world (note the universal nature of the name *Smith*) lose their jobs, have difficulty coping with life, become pregnant, can't support themselves. It's someone else's fault - let them sort out their own self-inflicted problems.
4. Birling's main concern (page 45) ("I must say, Sybil, that when this comes out ...") is for his knighthood. He is afraid that if the story gets into the papers his social position will be damaged.

## ACT THREE

### What happens in Act Three

Eric returns to the dining room looking pale and distressed. He realises when he enters the room that everyone knows that he was the father of Eva Smith's child. Eric explains that he met Eva Smith during the previous November in the Palace bar - just as Gerald Croft had done. He said he had had too much to drink and that he had taken her back to her lodgings, insisted on going in with her and had forced her to let him make love to her. He met her again a fortnight later and a relationship started. Eva told Eric she was expecting his child. She told him that she didn't want to marry him as she knew that he didn't really love her. Eric started to give her money. When Eva discovered that he was giving her stolen money she refused to take any more.

As the details of the relationship emerge Eric and his parents become involved in heated, emotional exchanges. The inspector makes a final, prophetic speech and leaves.

The family start to discuss the strange behaviour of the inspector. Sheila wonders if he really was a genuine police inspector. Birling becomes excited when he realises that they may escape a public scandal. Sheila and Eric realise that their previous behaviour towards Eva Smith remains the same - even if Inspector Goole turns out to be a fake policeman. Gerald returns and tells them that he has made enquiries and doesn't believe there is a real Inspector Goole on the Brumley force. Gerald then suggests that they may all have been involved with different girls as the inspector could have shown each one of them a different photograph. They were only allowed to see the photograph one at a time. Arthur Birling telephones the Chief Constable who confirms that there is no Inspector Goole on the force. Gerald suggests that there may not have been a suicide at all. He rings the infirmary. They confirm that no girl has been brought in after drinking disinfectant and that they have had no cases of suicide.

The elder Birlings revert to their earlier arrogant, selfish attitudes. Their new-found confidence is shattered when the telephone rings to inform them that a girl has just died after swallowing disinfectant and that a police inspector is on his way to ask them some questions.

### ACT THREE - Phase Six (pages 50-56)

Eric makes his confession.



### Comments on Phase Six (pages 50-56)

1. This is 1912 and sexual matters would not be discussed openly. Daisy Renton's activity as a prostitute is only hinted at - "She wasn't the usual sort. But - well, I suppose she didn't know what to do". (page 51) Eric's sexual encounter with her is only half stated - "And that's when it happened..." (page 52)
2. Eric puts another dent in the veneer of respectability which cloaks the privileged classes. His coupling (page 52) of "these fat old tarts around the town" with the "respectable friends" of Arthur Birling makes the same dramatic and philosophical point as the earlier references to Alderman Meggarty.
3. Eva Smith emerges as the character with the strongest principles and the most sincere sense of truth and decency. She doesn't want Eric to marry her because he doesn't really love her. She refuses to accept his money when she discovers that he has been stealing it. (page 53)
4. 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 damage limitation - to put the money back into the accounts where it should be to cover up the scandal. (page 54)
5. The enormous gulf between parents and children becomes apparent when Eric discovers that his mother had rejected Eva Smith. "You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried..." (page 55)

6. The inspector's final speech (page 56) has a strange, powerful and prophetic quality. This is not the language of a policeman. His departing lines summarise the play's philosophy. From the point of view of the audience of 1946, just recovering from the horrors of the Second World War (1939-1945) the statement, "if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish," must have had great power to move. For the characters on stage in 1912 when the play is set, the Great War of 1914-1918 is looming. Priestley is saying, we haven't learnt anything.

### ACT THREE - Phase Seven (pages 56-72)

The family discuss the situation. They discover that Inspector Goole was not a genuine policeman and that there had been no reported suicide.

The telephone rings to report the imminent arrival of a police inspector to ask questions about the death of a girl who has taken disinfectant.

### Comments on Phase Seven (pages 56-72)

1. When the inspector has left the stage the recriminations start. Birling is anxious about his knighthood. Eric and Sheila are emotionally drained and deeply ashamed - of themselves and of their parents.
2. Sheila has been emerging during the play as the character with the greatest sensitivity and the keenest awareness of the inspector's role. It is significant that she is the one first to suspect the inspector's authenticity.
3. When they all think they have been hoaxed by a phoney inspector only Eric and Sheila stick by their remorse. Arthur and Sybil Birling are glad to be let off the hook. Mrs. Birling is even "amused" by the hoax. (page 71) Gerald thinks that "Everything's all right now, Sheila" and expects her to take back his engagement ring.
4. The word "joke" returns. Just before the first inspector was shown in by Edna, Gerald replies to the uneasy Eric, "Only something we were talking about when you were out. A joke really." (page 10) Just before the telephone rings at the end of Act Three to announce the imminent arrival of a second inspector, Arthur Birling looks at Sheila and Eric and says, "they can't even take a joke..." (page 72)

Which of the characters do you feel was MOST responsible for the death of Eva Smith? Consider the part that each of the characters plays in Eva Smith's tragic death.

*An Inspector Calls* is full of lies and deceit. Write fully about the way Priestley exposes weakness and wickedness, not only in the characters on stage, but also in society.

Write fully about ONE of the characters in the play.

Take into account what they have done before the play begins as well as their actions, words and attitudes during the course of the play. Write about the way attitudes, moods and opinions change and develop during the course of the action on stage.

Priestley ends each act on a note of high drama. Write about the way he builds up the tension towards the end of each act. Describe how he leaves the audience with plenty to think about during the intervals and after the play has finished.

Choose ONE of the flashback scenes in the play - the sacking of Eva Smith; the scene in Milwards when Sheila is trying the dress; Gerald's first meeting with Daisy Renton; Eva Smith being interviewed by the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation. Write the scene in the form of a play.

Study the way *An Inspector Calls* is set out on the page. Study the use of stage directions. Set your scene out in a similar way. Introduce any extra characters that you need.



# THE CHARACTERS IN "AN INSPECTOR CALLS"



## Arthur Birling...

...is the head of the family. He's rich and irritable. He's also very stuffy and traditional. He doesn't care about anyone unless they're making him rich or look good. And he's wrong.



## Sybil Birling...

... is obsessed with etiquette and her status in society. She's a right stubborn snob, and is the most cold-hearted character in the whole play. She's definitely not the sort you'd ever want for a mother-in-law. Or a mother.

## Sheila Birling...

...is in her mid-twenties, is quite attractive and rather spoilt. She's quite lively and excitable. This means that she tends to cry a lot. She's the most moral one of the family though.



## Eric Birling...

... is a bit of an alcoholic. Well actually he's a raging alcoholic who's pretty nervous and paranoid. He doesn't like his parents, but that's okay as they don't seem to love him much.



## Gerald Croft...

...is thirty, attractive, really rich, and engaged to Sheila. He's a bit smug, and he agrees with Mr Birling about business. He's very successful, but he's a liar, and he's been a tad on the unfaithful side to Sheila.



## Edna...

... is the maid. Her big line is "Please, sir, an inspector's called". She answers the door a couple of times. That's about it.

## Eva Smith / Daisy Renton...

...is, erm, well, who knows? We never meet Eva or Daisy. We're not sure if they're the same person, or a whole bunch of different girls. She might not even be dead. Hmmm....



## Inspector Goole...

... is not a real police inspector. Unfortunately, that's as much as we do know. He's mysterious, purposeful and aggressive towards the family. He's very moral and seems bent on getting them all to confess their sins. Weird...



# PART TWO: PLOT AND ACTION

## Plot summary: What happens in *An Inspector Calls*?

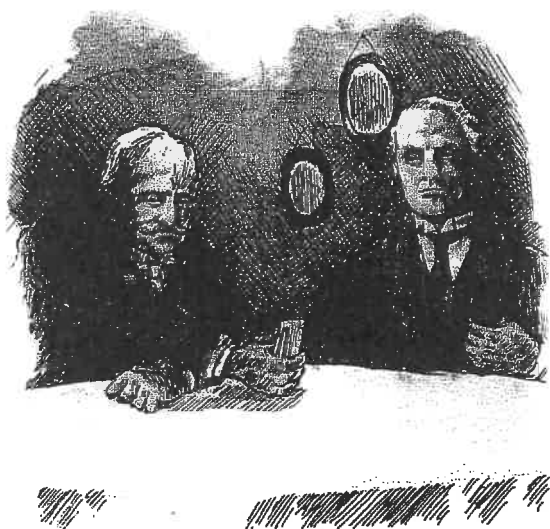
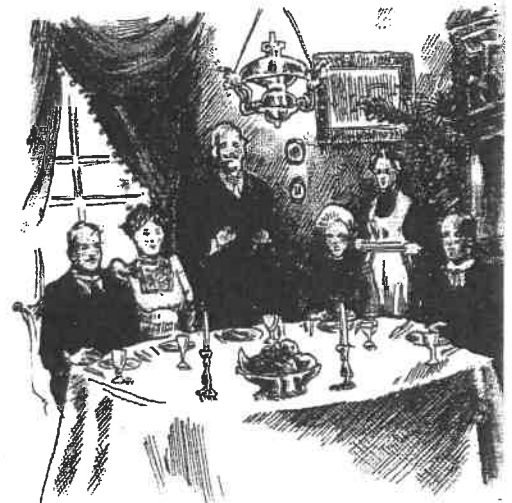
### REVISION ACTIVITY



- Go through the summary lists below and **highlight** what you think is the **key moment** in each Act.
- Then find each moment in the **text** and **reread** it. Write down **two reasons** why you think each moment is so **important**.

## ACT ONE

- The Birling family and Gerald Croft are celebrating Sheila's engagement to Gerald.
- Mr Birling makes pompous speeches outlining his views on the advances in science, new inventions and the relationship between bosses and workers, and saying they should ignore the 'cranks' (p. 10) who claim everybody has a responsibility to care for everybody else.
- The evening is interrupted by the arrival of a police inspector named Goole making enquiries about the suicide of a young woman, Eva Smith.



- Shown a photograph of the girl, Mr Birling admits he employed her in his factory but sacked her for being one of the leaders of a strike for higher wages.
- Sheila and Eric both feel their father has acted harshly, but Gerald supports Mr Birling's claim that he acted reasonably.
- Sheila is shown the photograph and she realises that, driven by jealousy and ill temper, she later had the girl sacked from her job as a shop assistant.
- When Gerald hears the girl changed her name to Daisy Renton, his reaction shows he too has known the girl.
- The Inspector suggests that many people share responsibility for the misery which prompted Eva Smith/Daisy Renton to end her life.
- Left alone with Gerald, Sheila warns him not to try to hide anything from the Inspector.



## Two

Eric admits he had met Daisy Renton in the spring of the previous year and that she was his mistress for six months.

Sheila is hurt and angry at Gerald's involvement with the girl, yet she has a certain respect for the openness of his admission.

Eric Birling tries to bully the Inspector and to control events.

Sheila realises that the Inspector's enquiries are well founded, and that her mother might also have had some dealings with the girl.



- While Eric is out of the room, Mrs Birling is forced to admit the girl asked for the help of a charity that she worked for and was refused.
- It is revealed that the girl was pregnant, and Mrs Birling lays the blame for the girl's death on the father of the unborn child.
- There is a suspicion that Eric might have been the father of that unborn child.



## Three

Eric confesses that he got the girl pregnant and that he stole money from his father's firm to support her.

Assuming that the girl had appealed to his mother for help and been turned down, Eric blames his mother for the girl's death.

The Inspector makes a dramatic speech about the consequences of the sort of social irresponsibility that Mr Birling was preaching at the end of the dinner.

The Inspector, having shown that each had a part in ruining the girl's life, leaves.



- Between them Gerald and Mr Birling gradually prove that the man was not a real police inspector.
- A telephone call to the Chief Constable establishes there is no Inspector Goole on the police force.
- A telephone call to the Infirmary reveals that there has been no recent suicide.
- Eric and Sheila continue to feel guilty about what they have done, but the others now shrug off any guilt.
- Mr Birling answers the telephone: a young woman has just died on her way to the Infirmary and an inspector is on his way to make enquiries.



## Social Class

There's a clear hierarchy\* of social classes in this play. Many things contribute to where you are in the social scale. Most of it comes down to money — those who have it, and those who don't.

### WORKING CLASS

Had all the rubbish jobs and no money.

### MIDDLE CLASS

Owned places of work like factories or were professionals (like lawyers). Had plenty of money.

### UPPER CLASS

Inherited loads of land and money. Were often Lords and Ladies.

## The Birlings and the Crofts are pretty High Up socially

Your class depends on the family which you were born into (so, it's a lottery, though the lucky ones might argue differently).

- 1) The Birlings are clearly comfortably middle class.
- 2) Sybil Birling, however, is her husband's "social superior". That means her family were higher up the social hierarchy.
- 3) If your family owned land then it was of higher status than a city family who have made money out of business. That's why Gerald's family are seen as superior to Arthur's. Where your money came from was important.

Pretty unfair this class thing, eh? You can't choose which family you're born into. And most people tended to die in the same social class they started in — it's not like you can switch teams.

Gaining a title (like Sir, Lord etc.) can really help out with this business of impressing others. Arthur Birling reckons he's set to get a knighthood in the next Honours List.

## Class is great for Showing Off in the community

What's the point of being successful if you can't rub other people's noses in it? Arthur Birling is obsessed with this aspect of his social class — his biggest fear just after the Inspector leaves seems to be that he won't get his knighthood because there'll be a "public scandal".

- 1) He was Lord Mauor two years previously and had been an Alderman (Council member) for many years.
- 2) He "sits on the Bench". He's a magistrate — a judge who sits in courts and dishes out justice.
- 3) He hopes to get a knighthood so he'll be Sir Arthur. He wants Gerald to hint this to his parents. It'll impress them. There's something really smug and nasty about asking Gerald to drop hints.
- 4) Sybil Birling is a leading member of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation. This is a group of wealthy middle-class women who give money to desperate women (or are supposed to anyway).

## Small things Matter when you're Middle Class in 1912

- 1) Arthur has bought the SAME port as Gerald's dad, hoping to impress him. It doesn't, because Gerald doesn't recognise the port. (And anyway, he doesn't like port.)
- 2) Sybil disapproves of her husband saying what good food it was in front of Gerald. That's not the done thing — "Tell cook from me" implies that they actually talk to the servants (oh the horror). That won't do.
- 3) Playing golf with the Chief Inspector is supposed to be something that would impress Inspector Goole.
- 4) Even the ceremony of the dinner party is sacred — e.g. the order of events (food, port, the women retiring to the drawing room leaving the men to smoke cigars etc.).

These little things matter to Arthur and Sybil because they show the world that you have a place in the social hierarchy — the more refined and daft the ritual, the higher up you are.

## Feeling left outside? — sneak in through a window...

The Inspector is OUTSIDE all this class structure and so finds it easy to attack the class system. In fact, he begins to destroy it. He changes the attitudes of Sheila and Eric.

\* The social hierarchy is based on status or authority.

## Social Class

Still, the middle and upper classes are a funny lot, if you ask me. They want to get all the money they can (fine) and keep it (fine), but they pretend that money makes them better people. Weird.

### The middle class do a lot of Hiding and Repressing

These middle-class people never seem relaxed and open and honest in their prosperity. Sybil is a cold person so she finds it easy to repress things, though Sheila's a bit different. She is by nature a more open and honest person. Still, certain things are not spoken about:

- 1) Prostitution — "I see no point in mentioning the subject," ← These are euphemisms.  
For more on these see page 48 says Birling when "women of the town" are mentioned.
- 2) Mistresses — women aren't meant to know about these. Sheila figures it out, but Sybil is shocked.
- 3) Eric and his serious drinking — Sheila had worked it out but his parents hadn't wanted to know.
- 4) Alderman Meggarty's womanising — well known but not spoken about. Sybil is shocked when it is mentioned. Sheila knows a girl was assaulted by him in the town hall, but her mother shuts her up.



There are much worse things to keep schtum about, now that the family's mixed up with the death of a prostitute:

- 1) Arthur is desperate to hide the fact that his own son has been stealing from the company.
- 2) And that his son got a cheap working-class prostitute pregnant and was stealing FOR HER.
- 3) Finally that his wife deliberately and maliciously refused to help this girl and effectively killed her own grandchild — "when this comes out at the inquest, it isn't going to do us much good," says Birling.

### Sybil thinks the working classes are a Different Species

Sybil's obsession with her social status is chronic. She refuses to believe that Eva/Daisy turned down Eric's money because it was stolen, saying that a "girl of that sort" does not have "fine feelings and scruples".

- 1) Sybil is such a cold person, and has probably repressed emotion all her life in the name of 'fitting into society' — it's not surprising she gets "very distressed" and collapses "into a chair" at the end.
- 2) She's the one member of the family who's obsessed with etiquette — like telling off members of the family for swearing or for saying other inappropriate things.
- 3) She claims not to recognise Eva/Daisy's photo — for her, Eva/Daisy has no identity. Sybil goes so far as to say: "I don't suppose for a moment that we can understand why the girl committed suicide. Girls of that class —" before Sheila interrupts her. Sybil likes her working class faceless and dehumanised.

### The class system of the early 1900s caused Problems

The hierarchy of social class could make life difficult for those lower down — it would have been hard for people like Eva/Daisy to help themselves if they were in trouble.

The Inspector warns us that if we don't accept that we must all take responsibility for each other, because we are all equal, it'll all end in tears. (Well, "fire", "blood" and "anguish" actually...)

### The last class I tried to get into was cancelled — \*sigh\*

Arthur says the Inspector was "probably a Socialist". Socialists were very much against the upper classes and the idea that you had to be BORN in the right place in order to get anywhere in life. They wanted everyone's own hard work to determine their status. Come in Birlings — time's up.

## Generational Conflict

Eva Smith, Daisy Renton, 'her with the disinfectant' or whatever-her-name-is... She **SPLITS UP** the generations in this play. She causes a rift between the good old hypocrites and the young idealists.

### The Older Generation are Old-Fashioned

At the beginning, the authority of Arthur and Sybil Birling is unquestioned. They are in control.

- 1) Arthur is the boss of Birling and Company. He's also in charge of the family and dinner party — he is the one who decides to make a speech. He also calls Gerald "my boy". (euch)
- 2) Sybil is in charge of domestic arrangements — reprimanding Eric, organising Edna and reminding her husband not to be too long in talking to Eric and Gerald.

From their point of view, the younger generation are still basically "children" who follow dutifully in their parents' footsteps (even though both Eric and Sheila are in their early twenties). Eric is almost certainly being groomed to take over the company from his father.

### The Younger generation are Different

The young 'uns challenge the oldies by being different.

- 1) Eva/Daisy was just another young, working-class girl — poor, hoping for better wages and a better life. Her vitality is basically the reason Birling sacked her — she "had a lot to say — far too much — so she had to go." This is the same reason why he says things to his kids like, "If you've nothing more sensible to say than that... you'd better keep quiet." He wants to suppress the youth which challenges his authority.
- 2) Eric is a sulking young man who is called a "boy" by his father. He's in the shadow of his father and suffers because of it. Later his father says that he was "spoilt". He certainly has behaved like an immature man who has got himself into trouble. BUT he wants to be understood, and at the end knows that he doesn't want to be like his parents — "I don't give a damn now whether I stay here or not."
- 3) Sheila has to tell her father she is "not a child". But she did behave like a spoilt child in having Eva/Daisy dismissed. Eric says she has a "furious temper". BUT she grows up during the course of the play and ends up telling her parents that "it frightens me the way you talk, and I can't listen to any more of it."

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

### Gerald's the Oldest young man around

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

- 1) He works for his father's company.
- 2) He's marrying Sheila and probably hopes to bring a merger between the two companies.
- 3) He agrees with Birling that Eva/Daisy had to be fired — "I should say so."  
He also says the strike wouldn't have lasted long because "They'd be all broke — if I know them." That "them" is the typical "us and them" attitude that this play is all about. He thinks he knows everything. Eughggghhh, Gerald's SO slimy...

Gerald never rocks the boat — he's got nothing of the rebel in him and he's as shallow as Arthur. He just wants to sweep everything under his middle-class carpet.

- 1) Even when he's found out to have ditched Daisy/Eva, he's not particularly remorseful.
- 2) When he comes back from his walk he's really keen to discredit the Inspector, but not feeling guilty or bad.
- 3) He doesn't seem to be suffering, unlike Eric and Sheila.
- 4) He actually thinks his engagement can be back on: "Everything's all right now, Sheila." I don't THINK so.

Gerald's a pretty depressing character, because he shows a side of society that will never change — whether they're young or old, people like him will always be greedy and mean, and never learn.

## On the Stage

This is a PLAY and don't you forget it. DON'T EVER call it a novel or a book. Just say in your essay that it's a play and so it's meant to be seen, and that it's dramatic, and you'll be fine.

### A good play will have Conflict, Tension and Drama

A good production of the play will have plenty of conflict, tension and drama — and should show a family falling apart, with its individual members turning on each other.

The audience should see that while the meal is a happy event, there are also signs of problems:

- 1) The meal is over and everyone noticeably relaxes — everyone is looking "pleased with themselves".
- 2) But the audience will notice that Mrs Birling keeps reminding her husband how to behave.
- 3) The audience will also see Sheila questioning Gerald. She hardly saw him last summer — because of work, he says. The part of Sheila must be well acted, so the audience see that she's not convinced.

And then there's Arthur's speech about the state of the world.

Because this play was written in 1945 but set in 1912, the postwar audiences would know that he was very very wrong. And a fool.

See page 4 for more about all this stuff.

And... when Arthur is boasting to Gerald that he may be getting a knighthood, he says that all the family will have to do is "keep out of trouble". This is seconds before the Inspector enters with trouble for the family. Ho ho. Ah, the irony.

There'll be no more wars, the Titanic is unsinkable, and there's no such thing as a dragon...

So... an alert audience is able to sense that all is not well in the world.

The audience knows stuff that the characters don't — this is dramatic irony.

### "An Inspector Calls" has Tension and Conflict from the Start

Inspector Goole's arrival in Act One brings chaos to the stage. Here are some examples of how:

- 1) He's blunt in his questioning. For example, he asks why Birling refused his factory girls a pay rise. And Arthur can't believe it: "Did you say 'Why?'" — he isn't used to being spoken to like this.
- 2) The Inspector dripfeeds the Birlings and Gerald with information and drops hints (like when he finds out who Gerald is and says, "Then I'd prefer you to stay."). This keeps them on their toes — they can't resist.
- 3) There are loads of delays. There is a delay before we hear Gerald's confession — Sheila insists she stay in the room, and then Sybil enters and demands to know what on earth is going on. This fills the audience with anticipation — they want to know what Gerald did.
- 4) Gerald, Arthur and Sybil are against the Inspector almost from the start and try to challenge him.
- 5) Priestley builds the tension by having the Inspector show photos to some people and not others (and always one at a time). The Inspector even sticks himself between people so they can't see properly — this is visually striking.
- 6) The family all start seated, and pretty still and well-behaved. But by the end, there are people stomping round, shouting, drinking and crying — it's a big visual change, from peace to chaos.

Suddenly, from a state of celebration and relative harmony, they are a family at war. The Inspector brings out fundamental differences in their attitudes and morals.

The parents are split from the children. Their future in-law, Gerald, becomes the loyal son.

And this is only the beginning. Who knows how they'll go on to "adjust" their family relationship?

### Oh — the whole world's a stage to me, darling...

If you get the chance to see a performance of "An Inspector Calls", go and see it, even if you haven't read it. Because you're more likely to remember stuff you've seen than stuff you've read. Or that's what I reckon anyway. Or you could just not bother and do something you're actually interested in...

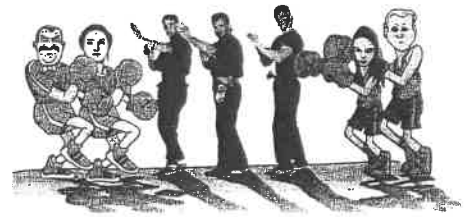


# On the Stage

## There are Crucial Entrances and Exits

The entrances and exits are important. They add visual excitement and change — the audience can see them running out or in, and it makes a big difference. Might wake up the sleepy ones too.

- 1) Sheila runs out of the room when she realises she got Eva sacked from Milwards.
- 2) The Inspector leaves Gerald and Sheila alone immediately after he says the name "Daisy Renton".
- 3) In Act One Eric tries to leave but is told he will be needed. In Act Two he does sneak out of the house, slamming the door. Maybe he went off for a drink, or some fresh air — he's got a lot on his mind.
- 4) In Act Two Sheila insists on staying to hear details of Gerald's summer with Daisy/Eva.
- 5) The Inspector arrives straight after Arthur's formal speech about life, and leaves immediately after he's delivered one of his own.
- 6) Gerald returns from his walk and fresh air with the news that the Inspector was a "fake".



Every time someone leaves or enters the house, the front door bangs. Everyone in the dining room, and the audience, can hear this — they're left wondering who's coming and who's going.

## The Beginnings and Ends of the Acts are Dramatic Moments

Between Acts, there'd usually be a break of about ten minutes to get ice creams and go to the loo. The playwright J. B. Priestley deliberately freezes the action between the Acts to create tension.

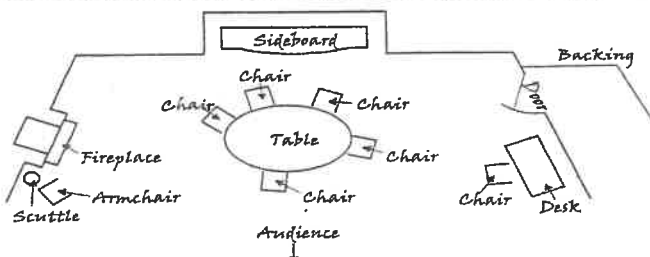
- 1) The end of Act One is a crucial moment. The Inspector returns, looks "steadily and searchingly" at Sheila and Gerald, and says "Well?". Then the Act ends. Lights out. When Act Two starts, everyone is in the same position and the Inspector repeats the question. The audience is left hanging, wondering what Gerald has been up to — the audience's imagination plays a key part in building up the suspense.
- 2) The end of Act Two is another frozen moment. The front door slams. Everyone is in the dining room and suspects that Eric is the father of Daisy/Eva's child. Eric enters "looking extremely pale and distressed". End of the Act — lights out. At the start of Act Three time hasn't moved on, and they're all in the same positions. Priestley teases the audience again — he makes them wait for Eric's confession.

## What the play looks like is important

Like a film, a play's appearance is important. The way the set and the characters look can tell us a lot about the play's message — so Inspector Goole shouldn't dress like Krusty the Clown.

- 1) The play all takes place in one room (the Birlings' dining room).
- 2) The lighting is "pink and intimate" for the start of the play and then "brighter and harder" when the Inspector has arrived — it's like a spotlight is turned on the Birlings' cosy world.
- 3) The Birlings and Gerald Croft look wealthy. This should be clear from their clothes, and the room they're in.
- 4) But Inspector Goole will look relatively plain. This highlights the contrast between the others and him.

## One Set can be used for the Whole Play



All the action takes place in the Birlings' dining room — so the whole play can be staged using one set (though it doesn't have to be).

This diagram is a plan of the set used in the first production of "An Inspector Calls", in 1946.

### ★ GRADE BOOSTER

A feature of A-grade writing on literature is the ability to see more than one possibility of interpretation and to support a preference for one of them.

### 6 EXAMINER'S TIP

Short, or even single-word, quotations can be very effective if embedded into your own writing.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Most of the characters have a narrow view of what it means to be responsible, but the Inspector provides us with a much broader one. Mr Birling feels his responsibility is to make a success of his business. This means making as much profit as possible, even if he is harsh in his dealings with those who work for him. As a family man he has a responsibility to provide for the material needs of his family, yet it is clear that Eric does not see him as the kind of father to whom he could turn when in trouble.

Mrs Birling accepts her responsibility as chair of the Women's Charity Organization, but sees only a responsibility to help those that she feels are deserving of help. She allows her personal feelings to prejudice her decisions. Sheila belatedly recognises that as a powerful customer she has an obligation not to let her personal feelings and ill-temper lead to misery for people who have no power, while Eric has little sense of responsibility at all. He drinks far more than is good for him and he forced the girl into a relationship which had disastrous consequences. He attempted to help her by stealing from his father.

Gerald showed some sense of responsibility when he rescued the girl from the unwelcome attentions of another man, fed her and found her somewhere to live. But he gave in to his own desire for personal pleasure and eventually abandoned the girl without knowing, or very much caring, what happened to her.

### REVISION ACTIVITY

Go back and look up these examples of occasions when you can see some of the characters' attitudes towards responsibility:

- Mr Birling's speech on page 10 and Eric's echoing of that speech on page 58.
- Mrs Birling's views, towards the end of Act Two, on who is to blame for the girl's death.
- What we learn of Eric's behaviour towards the girl in Act Three.

## LOVE

The play presents a variety of thoughts about love, the nature of love and different people's interpretation of love. Sheila and Gerald appear to be in love, and their engagement seems to bring them happiness as they contemplate their future together. After each of them has confessed to their shameful behaviour towards Eric Smith/Daisy Renton, Sheila realises that they do not really know each other well and that trust is an essential ingredient in a loving relationship. We are left wondering if their love will survive these events.

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

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

Inspector Goole preaches a form of love, a sort of true 'charity' which is a deep care for fellow human beings. This is quite alien to Mrs Birling who is prepared to devote herself to 'charity' while having no real care for others.

## REVISION ACTIVITY



- Look at the way Gerald and Sheila talk at the time when he hands her the engagement ring (p. 5).
- Notice how Sheila, after hearing Gerald's story, realises that they don't really know each other (p. 40). Think about whether this suggests their love was true love or not.
- When Gerald is asked whether he loved Daisy Renton, he says 'It's hard to say. I didn't feel about her as she felt about me' (p. 38). Eric is more straightforward, saying 'I wasn't in love with her or anything – but I liked her – she was pretty and a good sport' (p. 52). What do we learn of the two men's attitudes?

## TIME

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

The 'time' theory suggests that when we die we re-enter our life and live it all over again, and only by doing things better can we escape that cycle and begin a new life in which we do not repeat our mistakes. Another theory states that you could be given the gift of seeing forward in time as well as looking back. This would mean that, just as you can look back and see what actions led to your present situation, you could look forward and see the consequences of your actions. So, if you wished, you could change those actions and avoid the consequences.

*Inspector Calls* contains elements of these time theories. The Inspector, arriving before the suicide is a reality, offers each character a chance to see the consequences, to change the future, to break the circle. Eric and Sheila seem prepared to face up to their past actions and to improve themselves, but the others do not.

The reflections on the past, and the possibilities of the future, highlight the importance of caring for others, of taking responsibility for our actions and of considering the consequences of them.

## ★ GRADE BOOSTER

A good answer will show that you can interpret and analyse points in the text, so avoid vague general statements.

## 6 EXAMINER'S TIP

It is always a good idea to collect a range of words to describe a character.

## KEY CONNECTION

J. B. Priestley based his 'Time' plays on the ideas which P. D. Ouspensky expressed in his book *A New Model of the Universe* (1931) and on the theories of J. W. Dunne. Try finding out more about these writers.



### An Inspector Calls – Mr Birling

| Point  | Quote   | Explain  |
|--|---|--|
| Mr Birling is a rich factory owner   | <i>Prosperous manufacturer</i>  | He has a comfortable life  |
| His furniture is described in the stage directions   | <i>Substantial and heavily comfortable but not cosy and homelike.</i>                         | He wants others to see that he has money. This is more important to him than creating a sense of warmth.   |
| Mr Birling's manner is described in the stage directions, as is his accent.  | <i>Rather portentous man - - but rather provincial in his speech.</i>                         | We learn that he is full of a sense of his own importance and that he wasn't born rich, otherwise he'd have a posh accent.   |
| Mr Birling's choice of wife reflects his priorities.   | <i>A rather cold woman and her husband's social superior.</i>                                 | This tells us that he was more concerned with climbing the social ladder than personal warmth.   |
| At the end of Sheila's engagement dinner, Mr Birling tries to impress Gerald Croft by stressing that they serve the same port as the Croft family.   | <i>Finchley told me it's exactly the same port your father gets from him.</i>                 | Birling wants to impress Gerald, whose family is titled and richer than the Birlings. He stresses that they have the same standards and good taste.                                |
| Mr Birling is concerned that the Crofts haven't attended the engagement dinner.  | <i>It's a pity Sir George and – er – Lady Croft can't be with us.</i>                         | The snub by the Crofts is on his mind. He realises that they don't think that Sheila is good enough for their son.   |
| Mr Birling starts on a long speech to the family. He tells Gerald and Sheila what good the future will bring and claims to be speaking as an expert. | <i>I speak as a hard headed business man, who has to take risks and know what he's about.</i> | He repeatedly stresses his knowledge and business brain to make himself seem superior. He mentions protecting the interests of capital. His concern is all for money and position. |
| He tells the family that there are good times on the way and that the strikes everyone fears and the war which is looming will not happen.           | <i>The world is developing so fast that it will make war impossible.</i>                      | The play is set in 1912 but was first performed in 1946, so the audience will know how wrong Mr Birling is. There had been two world wars between 1912 and 1946.                   |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| Mr Birling makes other errors such as praising the Titanic and mentioning how wonderful a time it will be when Gerald and Sheila's child gets engaged in about 1940. | <i>There'll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere.</i>   | Again the theatre audience will know that the Titanic sank on its maiden voyage and that 1940 was one of the darkest periods of World War Two. This makes Mr Birling seem foolish rather than knowledgeable. (Dramatic irony) |
| Mr Birling repeats his concern to Gerald that the Crofts are not happy with the engagement. He hints at a possible title in the next honours list.                   | Of Lady Croft - <i>She comes from an old country family – landed people and so forth</i>                               | He wants to impress Gerald and suggest that their status might become more equal soon. He and Gerald are both very smug about it and laugh at the prospect of any scandal preventing it.                                      |
| He condemns the idea that socialists have that we should all look after each other in society. He repeats how experienced and hard headed he is.                     | <i>These cranks (Socialists)</i><br><br><i>A man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own -</i> | A socialist government had just been voted into power in 1945 and the theatre audience would be aware of this.<br>Just as Birling is at his most selfish, the bell rings and the Inspector is at the door.                    |
| When the Inspector tells Mr Birling of the dead girl, his immediate reaction is to distance himself.   | <i>(rather impatiently) Yes, yes, horrid business. But I don't understand why you should come here Inspector.</i>      | This contrasts to Eric's reaction of instant sympathy for the dead girl.  |
| When Mr Birling hears that the girl worked at his factory, he still aims to distance himself.  | <i>If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody - - it would be very awkward, wouldn't it?</i> | He shows no sympathy and seems only concerned with making sure that he's not linked to the incident.  |
| He shows no regret at refusing his factory workers a modest pay rise or for sacking the leaders.   | <i>I went down myself and told them to clear out, They'd soon be asking for the earth.</i>                             | He doesn't care about his workers, just maximising profits.   |
| Mr Birling makes sure that the Inspector knows of his golf with the Chief Constable.   | <i>He's an old friend of mine</i>  | He tries to intimidate the Inspector with his social connections so that he changes his attitude.   |

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| Mr Birling tries to send Inspector away after he heard about the strike and is angry when the Inspector refuses to let Sheila leave the room.   | <i>(angrily) Look here Inspector, I consider this uncalled-for and officious. I've half a mind to report you.</i>   | He tries to intimidate the Inspector and wants to get rid of him as soon as possible. He can't understand why the Inspector isn't impressed by his status.                                   |
| When Mr Birling hears that the Inspector isn't just there to accuse him, he relaxes a bit.  | <i>Of course if I'd known that earlier -</i>  | He's selfish and once he knows that others are likely to be blamed too, he feels better. Should he react like this?  |
| As he leaves to speak to his wife, Mr Birling turns angrily to the Inspector.   | <i>We were having a nice little family celebration tonight. And a nasty mess you've made of it now haven't you?</i> | His concern is not for the dead girl or any guilt but just about himself and the party.  |
| There are occasions when Mr Birling tries to stop the Inspector from questioning his family.  | <i>Is there any reason why my wife should answer questions from you, Inspector?</i>                                 | He's used to having his own way and can't understand why he's not being obeyed.  |
| When he hears that Eric is the father of the girl's unborn child and that he took cash to help her, Mr Birling is angry rather than supportive. | <i>I've got to cover this up.<br/><br/>The trouble is - you've - been spoilt -</i>                                  | Instead of trying to understand, he just wants to avoid a scandal and he turns on Eric in anger, almost threatening to hit him when he claims that his mother never tried to understand him. |
| After the Inspector has left, Mr Birling's main concern is that others will hear of what happened to the girl.                                  | <i>There'll be a public scandal.</i>  | Publicity rather than the fate of the girl is what matters to him.<br>He turns on Eric but feels no shame for his own behaviour.   |
| When Sheila suggests that the visitor wasn't like a normal police inspector, Mr Birling sees this as a chance to escape a scandal               | <i>It matters a devil of a lot.</i>   | He's only concerned with avoiding a scandal but Eric and Sheila realise that, no matter who the Inspector was, they've learnt about their own selfish behaviour.                             |

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| He accuses other members of the family of giving in to the Inspector.                      | <i>Instead of standing up to him, you let him bluff you into talking about your private affairs.</i>                   | He seems to have no family loyalty, although he does defend his wife. He doesn't consider how he could help his children.  |
| When it's confirmed that there's no Inspector Goole at Brumley or a death at the hospital. | <i>The whole thing 's different now<br/><br/>You all helped to kill her.(Pointing at Sheila and Eric and laughing)</i> | Mr Birling hasn't learnt anything about himself. He even makes fun of the Inspector's words and disregards Sheila's advice that they should all learn from the experience. |
| When the phone rings at the end of the play to tell them that an inspector is on his way.  | <i>Looks in a panic- stricken fashion at the others.</i>   | We wonder whether he will learn anything this time or if he'll be just as uncaring and selfish.  |

### **Mr Birling – Summary of Important Points**

- What we learn of his background .The predictions he makes in his after dinner speech and the effect of being so wrong.
- His attitude towards class, capital, the workers and social responsibility.
- His main concern throughout the play is his social position. There is very little affection in the way he treats anyone.
- How he treats Gerald Croft because of his family connections.
- The way he tries to fob off the Inspector throughout the play and expects to be obeyed just because of his social position.
- His attitude towards the striking workers at his factory.
- His lack of remorse and desire to distance himself from Eva Smith's death.
- The way he reacts to the revelations about the other members of his family.
- The emotional distance from Eric. His response when he hears of Eric's situation is harsh and concerned only with preventing a scandal. Is he a good parent?
- The way he reacts when there's doubt about the true identity of the Inspector.
- He doesn't seem to have changed or learnt anything about himself.

## An Inspector Calls – Mrs Sybil Birling

| <u>Point</u>   | <u>Quote</u>   | <u>Explain</u>   |
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| Mrs Birling is described in the stage directions   | <i>A rather cold woman and her husband's social superior</i>   | This emotional coldness is obvious throughout the play.  |
| From the start, we see that Mrs Birling is very concerned with social etiquette ("proper" behaviour)                         | When her husband praises the dinner in front of Gerald; (reproachfully) <i>Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things-</i><br>She criticises Sheila for using the word squiffy<br><i>Really the things you girls pick up these days!</i> | She often corrects members of her family. She's very concerned with how others would view the family and wants Gerald to be impressed.   |
| Like her husband, Mrs Birling does all she can to try to shorten the Inspector's visit.                                      | As she greets the Inspector, she tells him<br><i>I don't think we can help you much.</i>   | Her attitude from the start is superior. She expects to take control and is surprised when Sheila asks her to moderate her behaviour.  |
| Mrs Birling views the poor as an inferior species and shows no emotional response to Eva Smith's death.                      | <i>I don't suppose for a moment that we can understand why the girl committed suicide. Girls of that class -</i>   | She behaves as if the poor think differently and don't deserve the same consideration as the rich.   |
| She tries to impress the Inspector with her husband's social connections.  | <i>You know of course that my husband was Lord Mayor only two years ago and that he's still a magistrate -</i>   | Like her husband, she's used to being obeyed because of her social status and can't understand the Inspector's attitude. She's also shocked at Sheila telling her not to obstruct the Inspector.             |
| She shows her lack of knowledge about Eric when the Inspector asks about his drinking habits                                 | <i>He's only a boy.</i><br>When Sheila confirms that Eric drinks too much, she's shocked.<br><i>You know him Gerald- and you're a man- you must know it isn't true.</i>  | The fact that she calls Eric <i>a boy</i> when he's in his twenties and hasn't realised that he's been drinking heavily for two years shows how little she's noticed.  |
| Mrs Birling disapproves of any unsuitable behaviour and tries to prevent Sheila hearing about Gerald visiting the Palace Bar | <i>It would be much better if Sheila didn't listen to this story at all.</i><br><br><i>It's disgusting to me.</i>  | She tries to protect Sheila from the mention of prostitutes etc and is horrified to hear about the reputation of Alderman Meggarty. She chooses to close her eyes and ears to anything she finds unpleasant. |

| <u>Point</u>   | <u>Quote</u>   | <u>Explain</u>  |
|--|--|---|
| Mrs Birling admits to being prejudiced against Eva's request for financial help from the Brumley Women's Charity.  | <i>First she called herself Mrs Birling - - a piece of gross impertinence -</i><br><br><i>She had only herself to blame.</i>   | She doesn't even pretend to have given the request a fair hearing and shows no remorse at turning the pregnant Eva away. She seems to feel no sadness at her death.                                       |
| She insists to the Inspector that she was right to reject Eva.   | <i>I consider I did my duty - - You have no power to make me change my mind.</i>   | Sheila and the Inspector both try to persuade her of the tragedy of what has happened but she refuses to accept that she's been hardhearted.  |
| Mrs Birling traps herself by turning the blame onto the father of the child.   | <i>Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility.</i>   | She's trying to deflect blame from herself.   |
| She admits to a lack of sympathy because she felt that a poor girl wouldn't have the morality to refuse to take stolen money from the baby's father.   | <i>She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.</i><br><br><i>As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money.</i> | Mrs Birling's view is that somebody poor wouldn't have moral standards and would never refuse money. She sees the poor almost as a different species.   |
| Mrs Birling finally cracks when she realises who the father of the unborn child is.  | <i>(agitated) I don't believe it. I won't believe it.</i>  | She has repeatedly asserted that the Inspector needs to do his duty and punish the father, thinking that she is deflecting the blame. Now she realises that she's condemned her own son. (dramatic irony) |
| At first Mrs Birling leaves the room on her husband's request to avoid the sordid details of Eric's relationship with the girl but feels compelled to return and is upset when Eric turns on her for rejecting the request for help. | <i>I had to know what's happening.</i><br><br><i>(very distressed now) No - Eric- please - didn't know- I didn't understand.</i>   | Mrs Birling has shown complete lack of awareness of how her son has changed. She does at least show emotion at Eric's anger.  |
| When Sheila questions the true identity of the Inspector, Mrs Birling sees this as a chance to escape consequences.  | <i>Sheila: But it doesn't make any real difference, you know.</i><br><i>Mrs Birling: Of course it does.</i>  | Sheila and Eric realise that they have learnt about their own selfishness, regardless of who the Inspector is. Mrs Birling just wants to avoid a scandal (like her husband)                               |

| Point  | Quote   | Explain  |
|--|---|--|
| Once she finds out that there was no death at the infirmary, Mrs Birling thinks that the matter is over. | (of Eric and Sheila) <i>They're over- tired. In the morning they'll be as amused as we are.</i> | She's relieved that the investigation seems to be a hoax. She hasn't changed at all. |

### Mrs Birling – Main Points

- She is described as a cold woman
- She seems very concerned about proper behaviour.
- She is snobbish and sees those who are less well off as inferior in every way.
- She is very high handed with the Inspector, tries to withhold information and expects him to obey her because of her social status.
- She shows no sympathy towards Eva Smith and actually admits to being prejudiced against her.
- She shields herself from less pleasant aspects of life e.g. Alderman Meggarty's womanising, Eric's drinking
- She shows no awareness of how Eric has changed and how he lives his life.
- She tries to deflect blame from herself by blaming the father of the child, not knowing that she's blaming her own son (dramatic irony)
- Although she's upset at Eric's anger, she also blames him for stealing money from the firm.
- Is she a good mother to Eric and Sheila?
- Is she a good wife?
- She doesn't learn from the Inspector's visit and is relieved when it seems to be a hoax as this avoids a scandal.

### An Inspector Calls - Sheila Birling

| <u>Point</u>  | <u>Quote</u>  | <u>Explain</u>  |
|---|---|---|
| Sheila is described in the stage directions   | <i>A pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life -</i>  | The Inspector's visit will change her way of looking at life.   |
| At the start of the play , Sheila's behaviour to her new fiancé is flirtatious.   | When Mr Birling says he's treating Gerald like one of the family<br><i>(with mock aggressiveness)Go on ,Gerald – just you object!</i> | She is obviously delighted at the engagement.   |
| There is an early clue that there may be future problems for Sheila and Gerald.   | - <i>All last summer when you never came near me, and I wondered what had happened to you.</i>  | We later learn that Gerald had been with Daisy Renton (Eva Smith)   |
| When Sheila hears of the dead girl at the infirmary, her response is instantly sympathetic.                                       | <i>Oh how horrible! Was it an accident?</i>   | This contrasts to her father, who tried to distance himself.  |
| Sheila disagrees with her father sacking the girl.  | <i>I think it was a mean thing to do.</i>   | Mr Birling insists that he did the right thing.   |
| When the Inspector tells Sheila that girls like Eva Smith are cheap labour to Mr Birling, Sheila disagrees.                       | <i>But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people.</i>  | This also contrasts to Mrs Birling's attitude, who sees poor people as lacking the same feelings and needs as the rich.                 |
| As soon as Sheila hears from the Inspector that Eva lost her job at Milwards because a customer complained, she's full of regret. | <i>(Staring at him, agitated)When was this?</i><br><br><i>She looks at the photo, Gives a half stifled sob, and then runs out.</i>    | She obviously realises that she's responsible for the loss of Eva's job at Milwards. She makes no excuses or denials as her father did. |
| Sheila admits that she complained about the girl out of jealousy and anger when a dress suited the girl better than Sheila.       | <i>She was a very pretty girl too - - I caught sight of the girl smiling at Miss Francis -</i>  | She admits that she was wrong and that she used her social influence out of spite.  |



| <u>Point</u>   | <u>Quote</u>  | <u>Explain</u>   |
|--|---|--|
| As soon as the Inspector mentions that the girl changed her name to Daisy Renton, Sheila knows that Gerald has been involved with her. | <i>You gave yourself away as soon as he mentioned her other name.<br/>Were you seeing her last spring and summer ?</i>  | She realises that he had an affair with her and had probably suspected that something was wrong last summer.   |
| Right from the start Sheila suspects that this man is no ordinary inspector.   | When Gerald asks her to hide the affair from the Inspector,<br><i>Why – you fool – he knows -</i>   | Sheila realises that the Inspector hasn't visited to gather information but to make them confess it and learn.   |
| Sheila insisting that she should stay to hear of Gerald's involvement with Daisy Renton causes tension between the two.                | Gerald tells her <i>You've been through it – and now you want to see somebody else put through it.</i><br>Sheila tells him: <i>I can't believe – I won't believe- it's simply my fault.</i> | The Inspector realises that Sheila wants to hear of Gerald's involvement to see how they all share the guilt for the death, not to be spiteful as Gerald seems to think.                     |
| Sheila still feels that there's something different about the Inspector.   | <i>You know. (She gets close to him, wonderingly)I don't understand about you.</i>  | Sheila realises that the way this man behaves is different. He already seems to know the answers and stresses the importance of taking responsibility.                                       |
| Sheila realises that if her mother continues to behave snobbishly towards the Inspector, she will regret it.                           | <i>You mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl. If you do, the Inspector will just break it down.</i>   | As the Inspector already knows the facts, there's no point in being evasive. Sheila realises that all will be revealed whatever Mrs Birling says and that resisting will just make it worse. |
| Sheila shows that she is far more aware of what has been happening around her than her mother.   | Eris has been <i>steadily drinking too much for the last two years.</i>   | She also mentions Alderman Meggarty's womanising, both revelations shock her mother.   |

| <u>Point</u>   | <u>Quote</u>  | <u>Explain</u>  |
|--|---|---|
| Sheila shows that she can be sarcastic as Gerald tells of his involvement with Daisy Renton                                  | <i>You were the wonderful fairy prince.</i>   | The mood has changed from the flirtatious romance of the family dinner.   |
| At the end of Gerald's account, Sheila hands him back his ring.  | <i>You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner here.</i>  | She feels a kind of relief to have an explanation for Gerald's absence last summer but knows that they both need time to review the situation in the light of what they've learnt.  |
| As Mrs Birling is questioned, Sheila still shows sympathy towards the girl, especially when she hears that she was pregnant. | <i>(horried)No! Oh – horrible! How could she have wanted to kill herself?</i><br>When hearing that her mother turns down the girl's request for help, Sheila comments.<br><i>I think it was cruel and vile.</i> | This shows how much more caring she is than her parents, who still deny responsibility. She sees the girl as a person whose been constantly battered by the family's selfishness and accepts her share of the responsibility. |
| Sheila tries to stop Mrs Birling from condemning the father of the child.  | <i>(With sudden alarm)</i><br><i>Mother – stop – stop!</i>  | Sheila has worked out that the baby's father is Eric and that Mrs Birling is now condemning her own son.  |
| After the Inspector has left, Sheila starts wondering about the significance of his time of arrival,                         | - <i>Was he really a police inspector?</i>  | Sheila starts to link the arrival to Mr Birling's comments about being responsible only for those directly related to us. She's already had doubts about his identity.  |

| <b><u>Point</u></b>   | <b><u>Quote</u></b>  | <b><u>Explain</u></b>  |
|---|--|--|
| Sheila also realises that the identity of the Inspector is not the most important thing.                                | <i>If all that's come out tonight is true, then it doesn't much matter who it was who made us confess.</i>   | Mr and Mrs Birling think that the Inspector's identity is important as their concern is avoiding a scandal. Sheila realises that what's important is that she's more aware of her responsibility for others now.   |
| When Gerald reveals that there is no Inspector Goole in Brumley, Mr and Mrs Birling see this as an escape from scandal. | Mr Birling; <i>This makes a difference, y'know—</i><br><br>Sheila replies <i>(bitterly) I suppose we're all nice people now. (Sarcasm here also)</i>   | She realises that the Inspector's identity doesn't change what happened and is concerned that her parents don't seem to have learnt from the experience.   |
| When it's discovered that there is no dead girl at the infirmary, Sheila still insists that they have responsibilities. | <i>Everything we said had happened really had happened. If it didn't end tragically, then that's lucky for us.</i><br><br>To Mrs Birling - <i>You began to learn something and now you've stopped.</i> | She has learnt that she needs to be more thoughtful in the future. Eric supports her in this but the older members, including Gerald, see the new information as an escape from responsibility. Does this show that there is more hope for change through the young? |
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### Sheila Birling – Key Points

- During the play Sheila changes from being a rather spilt, pretty girl to accepting her responsibilities.
- Sheila is consistently sympathetic towards the plight of Eva/ Daisy.
- At the start of the play, Sheila shows that she can be vain and jealous (in the way that she reacts to the dress at Milwards suiting Eva better)
- She can also be sarcastic at times.
- She regrets her selfishness in dismissing Eva from Milwards and immediately confesses that she was wrong to use her social influence in such a way. (unlike her parents)
- Sheila has suspected from the start that Gerald had something to hide. When she hears of his affair, she ends the engagement but doesn't condemn him as she realises she has faults herself.
- She tries to stop her parents being obstructive and snobbish towards the Inspector as she has realised that there is responsibility to be faced.
- She has also become increasingly aware that this man is not an ordinary inspector and that he knows all the answers.
- Sheila is honest about Eric's drinking but had kept it secret until the investigation so not to cause trouble between him and his parents.
- Sheila realises that what's important about the Inspector's visit is that it should reveal to each person the truth about his/ her own behaviour. She realises that they must accept social responsibility for others.
- She is angry with those who think it matters if the Inspector is a policeman or not as they are just worried about a public scandal.
- She learns from the Inspector's visit and is a more responsible person at the end of the play, so is Eric (Her parents don't seem to change, neither does Gerald )

### An Inspector Calls – Eric Birling

| <u>Point</u>  | <u>Quote</u>   | <u>Explain</u>  |
|---|--|---|
| Eric is described in the stage directions.  | <i>Not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive</i>   | These different aspects of his personality will be brought out in the play.   |
| As Sheila's engagement dinner ends, Eric has had a little too much to drink.                                    | Sheila describes him as <i>squiffy</i>   | His tendency to drink too much will be important later.   |
| As the Inspector arrives Gerald jokingly suggests that Eric might have been up to something.                    | Eric: <i>(who is uneasy, sharply) Here, what do you mean?</i>  | Eric seems to have a guilty conscience about something.   |
| When he hears of the death of the girl at the infirmary, Eric is full of sympathy.                              | <i>(involuntarily) My God!</i>   | Like Sheila, he is saddened by the news. His parents are concerned only to distance themselves.   |
| Like Sheila, Eric feels that Mr Birling was harsh in sacking the girl and her fellow strikers from the factory. | <i>He could have kept her on instead of throwing her out. I call it tough luck.</i>  | Mr Birling claimed that the girls deserved the sack and could always find other work.   |
| Mr Birling often puts Eric down in public and is dismissive of him.   | When Eric expresses sympathy for the girl, Mr Birling tells him <i>Unless you brighten up your ideas, you'll never be in a position to let anybody stay or tell anybody to go.</i> | He seems to be impatient with Eric and doesn't like to be contradicted by him.  |
| When the Inspector says that he'll be questioning one person at a time, Eric seems to panic.                    | <i>(suddenly bursting out) Look here, I've had enough of this.</i>   | He seems to be worried about being questioned. Another sign of a guilty conscience.   |
| We know that Eric forms an important part of the Inspector's inquiry when he objects to Eric leaving the house. | Inspector: <i>We do need him here. And if he's not back soon, I shall have to go and find him.</i>   | Mr and Mrs Birling are worried about his mood. He seems to be feeling guilty.   |
| Mrs Birling condemns the father of Eva Smith's unborn child.  | <i>Some drunken young idler. He ought to be dealt with very severely.</i>  | She doesn't realise until the Inspector reveals the father's identity that it's Eric.   |
| There is tension when Eric returns to face his family and the Inspector's questions.                            | <i>They wait, looking towards door. Eric enters, looking extremely pale and distressed.</i>  | Mrs Birling has created a very difficult situation by placing all the blame on the father, not realising that she's condemning her own son. |

| <u>Point</u>  | <u>Quote</u>  | <u>Explain</u>  |
|---|---|---|
| Mrs Birling shows her lack of knowledge of Eric as the questioning begins and he confesses to drinking too much.                    | <i>You're not the type – you don't get drunk.</i>   | Eric has been drinking heavily for years but his parents closed their eyes to it.   |
| Eric confesses that he pressurised Eva to sleep with him.   | <i>I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty- and I threatened to make a row.</i>  | So Eric used the fact that she was hungry and had been drinking ,as well as her desire not to cause a fuss ,to take advantage of her.   |
| Eric slept with her again about two weeks later.  | <i>I wasn't in love with her or anything – but I liked her -</i>  | At least this encounter was not as aggressive but there is no emotional attachment. This is different to the girl's relationship with Gerald, which made her happy for a while.   |
| When he hears that Eva is pregnant, Eric does offer to marry her.   | <i>She didn't want me to marry her. Said I didn't love her.</i>   | At least Eric doesn't just run from the situation as other rich young men might.  |
| Eric confesses to stealing money to give to Eva. (This is the only criminal offence in the play. The other offences are moral ones) | <i>There were some small accounts to collect, and I asked for cash -</i>  | When Eva discovers the cash is stolen, she refuses to take it.<br>Mr Birling's instant reaction is that the possible scandal must be covered up.  |
| The incident highlights the lack of closeness between Eric and his father as Eric had felt that he couldn't confess to him.         | <i>You're not the kind of father a chap can go to when he's in trouble.</i>   | Mr Birling has been a strict, distant father. We've seen that his only concern seems to be public perception, not being loving and supportive.  |
| Mrs Birling is shocked when Eric turns on her for refusing to help Eva.   | <i>(nearly at breaking point)Then – you killed her. She came to you to protect me – and you turned her away –</i><br><br><i>(almost threatening her) You don't understand anything. You never did -</i> | Mrs Birling's normally cold emotionless exterior is broken down by the ferocity of Eric's anger. His strength of feeling stresses how uncaring Mrs Birling has been towards the desperate girl and how she has hurt her own son without realising it. |
| Mr Birling remains unsympathetic towards Eric.  | <i>Why you hysterical young fool - Get back- or I'll -</i>  | He seems to be almost threatening to hit him here.  |
| Eric's priorities are totally different to his father.  | <i>What does it matter now whether they give you a knighthood or not?</i>   | Eric is concerned about the dead girl and how his mother refused her help. Mr Birling is still concerned with image.  |

| <u>Point</u>   | <u>Quote</u>  | <u>Explain</u>  |
|--|---|---|
| Eric joins with Sheila in pondering whether the Inspector is a real policeman or not.  | <i>He was our police inspector all right.</i>   | He agrees with Sheila that the actual identity doesn't matter.  |
| While Mr Birling is relieved that there is no Inspector Goole in Brumley, Eric is still distressed.  | <p><i>You're beginning to pretend now that nothing's really happened at all.</i></p> <p>To Gerald: <i>The money's not the important thing. It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters.</i></p>  | Eric's concern is for the wrong they all did but Mr Birling is concerned with recovering his cash and preventing a scandal.                             |
| Eric's disagreement with his father is so strong that their feelings boil over again.  | <p><i>(shouting) And I say the girl's dead and we all helped to kill her – and that's what matters –</i></p> <p>Mr Birling <i>(also shouting, threatening Eric)</i> <i>And I say – either stop shouting or get out.</i></p> | Mr Birling refuses to accept Eric's view, continuing to insist that his son must pay back the stolen money. This is Mr Birling's main concern, not Eva. |
| As the others wonder whether a girl did die in the infirmary, Eric agrees with Sheila that the important part is to be aware of their own selfishness. | <p><i>It frightens me too.</i></p> <p>(Referring to the fact that the others seem to think that the events told to the Inspector don't matter any more)</p>   | The others feel that they have now been let off the hook. Only Eric and Sheila seem to have learnt from the experience.                                 |
|  |   |   |

### Eric Birling – Key Points

- From the start, Eric seems ill at ease as if hiding something. He seems to feel a bit awkward in his family's company.
- He drinks heavily.
- His parents, particularly Mr Birling, seem rather dismissive of him and don't seem to know him well. He's not a hard headed businessman like his father.
- Sheila teases him too at the start of the play, so does Gerald at times.
- He instantly sympathises with Eva Smith's misfortune at the factory and Milwards.
- His own dealings with the girl are selfish and bullying. He uses her but does at least try to support her when she becomes pregnant.
- He steals money from his father's factory accounts to try to support the girl (the only criminal offence in the play).
- He stands up to his father and mother and clashes with them as the events are revealed. He claims that he couldn't have confided in them.
- Eric realises, like Sheila, that their learning of the consequences of their actions is more important than the true identity of the Inspector.
- Like Sheila, Eric learns from his experience with the Inspector and is genuinely sorry.
- Although Eric probably treats the girl more cruelly than any of the others, do we partially forgive him as he's genuinely sorry? We might also sympathise as he doesn't seem to have seen much compassion at home.



## An Inspector Calls – Gerald Croft

| Point  | Quote  | Explain   |
|--|--|---|
| Gerald Croft has just become engaged to Sheila Birling. He is described in the stage directions.   | <i>An attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred man about town.</i>  | Gerald's social ease, as well as the fact that he's a number of years older than Sheila, will be significant later.                         |
| At the very start of the play, Mr Birling is trying to impress Gerald.   | <i>Finchley told me it's exactly the same port your father gets from him.</i>  | Gerald is from a higher class than the Birlings.  |
| Gerald and Sheila's behaviour as the engagement dinner ends is flirtatious.  | <i>The governor prides himself on being a good judge of port. I don't pretend to know much about it.</i><br>Sheila: (gaily, possessively) <i>I should jolly well think not Gerald - --</i> | They seem to be enjoying the occasion, with Sheila especially teasing her fiancé.   |
| There are clues of problems which will soon be revealed.   | <i>-all last summer when you never came near me</i>  | This reference will be significant later.   |
| Gerald's parents seem unhappy with the engagement.   | Mr Birling tells Gerald, <i>It's a pity Sir George and Lady Croft can't be with us -</i>   | The Crofts would probably have liked their son to marry someone of at least the same social status as himself.                              |
| Gerald's father runs a larger, older company than Birling's but seems to have the same outlook.  | When Mr Birling mentions <i>working together for lower costs and higher prices</i> , Gerald responds <i>Hear, Hear! And I think my father would agree to that.</i>                         | This insight into the way Gerald has been brought up will be relevant later.  |
| The romantic mood between Sheila and Gerald is highlighted again.  | <i>And I drink to you – and I hope I can make you as happy as you deserve to be.</i>   | This mood will change very soon with the arrival of the Inspector.  |
| After the others have left the room, Mr Birling confides in Gerald that he realises that the Crofts aren't totally happy with the engagement. He adds that may soon receive a knighthood in the next honours list as long as there's no scandal. | Gerald echoes Mr Birling's smugness at the unlikely idea of there being a scandal.<br><br>(laughs) <i>You seem to be a nice well behaved family -</i>                                      | They seem to share the same outlook and to consider themselves blameless. This smugness will be challenged on the arrival of the Inspector. |
| When Mr Birling is revealed to have sacked Eva Smith and the fellow strikers at the factory, Gerald supports him.  | <i>You couldn't have done anything else.</i>   | This contrasts to Sheila and Eric's disgust at the sacking and will be significant later.   |



| Point  | Quote   | Explain   |
|--|---|---|
| Gerald is uncomfortable with the Inspector's procedure of only showing the girl's photo to one person at a time as well as the suggestion that they may all be involved. | The Inspector – <i>If you've anything to tell me, you'll have an opportunity of doing it soon.</i><br>Gerald (rather uneasily) <i>Well I don't suppose I have -</i> | Gerald tries to tell the Inspector that he has nothing to say about the matter and seems surprised that the Inspector doesn't respect his status, rather like Mr and Mrs Birling. |
| Gerald's reaction when he hears that the girl changed her name to Daisy Renton makes it obvious that he has something to hide.   | Gerald; (Pulling himself together) <i>D'you mind if I give myself a drink, Sheila?</i>  | Sheila realises that Daisy was the reason why he was not available to see her the previous summer.  |
| Gerald tries to persuade Sheila to keep his reaction from the Inspector.   | <i>For God's sake – don't say anything to the Inspector.</i>  | Sheila has already worked out that the Inspector already knows all the answers.   |
| Gerald doesn't want Sheila to stay and hear him being questioned about Daisy Renton.   | <i>You've been through it- and now you want to see somebody else put through it.</i>  | Tension has arisen between them as Sheila resents the impression that Gerald gives that he sees her as vindictive. This contrasts to their earlier flirtatiousness.               |
| Gerald tells the Inspector how he met Daisy at the Palace Variety Theatre.   | <i>She was very pretty- soft brown hair and dark brown eyes.</i>  | He knew that this was a place where prostitutes gathered, so there is a less respectable side to Gerald.  |
| Gerald rescues Daisy from the approaches of Alderman Meggarty and takes her to the County Hotel for a drink.   | <i>The girl saw me looking at her and then gave me a glance that was nothing less than a cry for help.</i>  | Gerald's motives seem kind. He listens to her story and feeds her when he hears she's hungry but would he have cared if she weren't so pretty?                                    |
| When Gerald later finds that Daisy will lose her home, he moves her into a vacationing friend's flat.  | <i>I didn't ask for anything in return.</i><br><br><i>She was young and pretty and warm hearted- and intensely grateful.</i>  | After a short while, Daisy becomes Gerald's mistress. Was this his intention all along?   |
| Gerald admits that he wasn't in love with the girl.  | <i>I didn't feel about her the way she felt about me.</i>   | He cared about her but she was in love with him.  |
| Gerald ends the relationship when it's no longer convenient.   | <i>She told me she'd been happier than she'd ever been before- but that she knew it couldn't last.</i>  | Is Gerald treating her like a possession which he can just get rid of?  |

| Point   | Quote   | Explain   |
|---|---|---|
| Like Sheila, Gerald is upset at the news of the girl's death.   | <i>I'd like to be alone for a while – I'd be glad if you'd let me go.</i>   | Gerald's departure is significant later in the play as he enquires about the Inspector.   |
| As he leaves, Sheila returns his ring.  | <i>Now at least you've been honest.</i>   | Sheila doesn't dislike him but knows that this visit has changed them both.   |
| Gerald returns with news about the identity of the Inspector.   | <i>(slowly) That man wasn't a police officer.</i>   | He tells his news slowly in order to make an impact.  |
| Gerald agrees with Mr Birling that the Inspector's identity is important but Sheila disagrees.  | Mr Birling – <i>it makes all the difference.</i><br>Gerald – <i>Of course!</i><br>Sheila (bitterly) <i>I suppose we're all nice people now.</i> | Although Gerald has probably been the kindest to the girl, he seems to think more like the senior Birlings once he believes that a scandal could be avoided.  |
| Gerald then starts questioning whether there was a suicide at all.  | <i>It's a hoax of some kind.</i><br><br><i>How do you know it's the same girl?</i>  | He points out that everybody saw the photograph separately.   |
| When it's established that there has been no suicide at the infirmary, Gerald celebrates along with Mr Birling and offers Sheila the ring back. | <i>Everything's all right now Sheila. (Holds up the ring) What about this ring?</i>   | He doesn't seem to have learnt that Sheila sees the matter differently and realises that the Inspector's identity doesn't change the fact that they did what they did. His attitude is like that of Mr and Mrs Birling. |

### Gerald Croft - Summary

Gerald is from a higher social class – a titled family.

He enjoys socialising and is confident around others.

He gets along well with Mr Birling who wants to impress him as he's his ideal son in law.

Mr Birling hopes that Crofts and Birlings will eventually merge.

Gerald's parents don't seem to approve of his engagement to Sheila Birling.

Gerald agrees with Mr Birling's sacking of Eva Smith from the factory.

He works hard at the family firm and seems to have the same ideas on business as Mr Birling.

When Daisy Renton is mentioned, Gerald instantly shows his guilt.

He tries to prevent Sheila hearing about his affair but she'd already suspected something had happened the previous summer.

Gerald visits locations where prostitutes gather and met Daisy in a bar.

He rescues her from unwanted advances but how selfish were his motives really?

She falls for him and becomes his mistress.

He is kind to her and makes her happy but ends the relationship when it's no longer convenient. (Does he treat her like a possession?)

He is upset at news of the death but it doesn't stop him investigating the identity of the Inspector.

He is proud of his discovery that there is no Inspector Goole in Brumley.

His attitude to the news is like that of Mr and Mrs Birling, relief at avoiding a scandal.

He has learnt nothing from what the Inspector has said of responsibility and thinks that all will carry on as normal.

Gerald offers Sheila her ring back, as if nothing has changed. Sheila now views life differently to Gerald.



## An Inspector Calls

### Quotes to learn

Mr Birling to Gerald Croft

*"You're just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted."*

Birling wants Crofts and Birlings to work together

*"--- for lower costs and higher prices."*

---

Birling tells his family

*"I say there isn't a chance of war."*

*"unsinkable"*

Birling of the ship, Titanic.

Birling

*"--- a man has to look after his own business and look after himself and his own—and ---"* (The bell rings to announce the arrival of The Inspector)

*"I can't accept any responsibility."*

Birling, on hearing of Eva Smith's death.

Sheila on poor workers

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

*"If I could help her now I would."*

Sheila on dismissing Eva.

Sheila to Gerald of The Inspector

*"he knows"*

*"She was very pretty— soft brown hair and big dark eyes."*

Gerald of Eva / Daisy Renton.

Mrs. Birling on rejecting Eva

*"I did nothing I'm ashamed of."*

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

Mrs Birling's advice to the pregnant Eva

*"--- as if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money."*

Mrs Birling on Eva rejecting stolen cash from Eric.

*" Each of you helped to kill her."*

The Inspector to the characters.

*"We are responsible for each other."*

The Inspector

---

*"He never seemed like an ordinary police inspector"*

Sheila, as they wonder about his identity.

*"Whoever that chap was, the fact remains that I did what I did."*

Eric of The Inspector.

*"You began to learn something. And now you 've stopped."*

Sheila, when her parents think that The Inspector is a hoax.



# **An Inspector Calls**

by J.B. Priestley

*In Act One of 'An Inspector Calls' how does J.B. Priestley use dramatic devices to convey his concerns and ideas to the members of the audience, as well as interest and involve them in his play?*

## **Introduction**

*You need to give some details about the playwright's concerns, as well as the social and historical background to the play. Some ideas you need to comment on are:*

- what it is that the Inspector wants to show or teach the Birlings;
- what Priestley's main concerns were;
- why the dates 1912 (when the play is set) and 1945 (when the play was first performed) are important;
- the genre 'An Inspector Calls' belongs to (the type of play it is).

## **The main part**

*You need to show how the playwright uses a variety of different dramatic devices to influence the audience. The main devices you should write about are:*

- the use of dramatic irony very early on in the play;
- the significance of the lighting at the start of the play compared to the way it changes when the Inspector enters;
- the use of the doorbell as a sound effect;
- the effect the introduction of a new major character has on the rest of the characters;
- the way character exits are used to further the plot;
- the effect of the end of Act One on an audience;
- the fact that much of Act One is actually ironic in retrospect.

## **Conclusion**

*You should write a paragraph which relates back to the question about the effect of the dramatic devices in Act One on an audience. Some ideas you could comment on are:*

- how the playwright changes your opinion of the Birlings during Act One;
- the methods Priestley uses to interest and involve the audience;
- what you think the playwright's message and why it is still relevant today.

#### 4. The Climactic Curtain

The climactic curtain is one of the major features of a well-made play. It is when the end of an act (nee scene) ends on a tense and highly dramatic moment. Are there any climactic curtains in *An Inspector Calls*? Explain each of them.

#### 5. Mistaken Identity

The well-made play thrives on the notion of mistaken identity. The ideas of identity and mistaken identity both play a part in *An Inspector Calls*. Find and explain three examples.

#### 6. Plot

The plot of a well-made play focuses around one major storyline. There is no sub-plot. However, there will be a smattering of complications and crises within the plot of a well-made play, all strategically placed for dramatic effect.

To what extent does *An Inspector Calls* conform to this? Explain your ideas.

#### 7. The Dénouement

The dénouement (or ending) of a well-made play is both logical and plausible. Is this true of *An Inspector Calls*? Explain your ideas.

## An Inspector Calls – J. B. Priestly

### How each character faces up to his / her guilt

#### Mr Birling

- page 14 Tells, without guilt of how he sacked Eva.  
page 16 Tries to intimidate the Inspector by reminding him of his high social connections. This pompous attitude remains unchanged.  
page 17 Tells Sheila that Eva had been causing trouble at the works, so sacking her was justifiable.  
page 21 Concerned with the fact that the Inspector has interrupted the family's celebration rather than worried about Eva's death.  
page 45 Birling is concerned that revelations of Eva's death would jeopardise his chance of + 57 a knighthood.  
page 56 Cracks a little when the Inspector tells him that he'll have to pay for what he's done. Thinks of financial rather than moral payment.  
page 57 Excuses both Mrs Birling and himself  
"..... There's every excuse for what both your mother and I did – it turned out unfortunately, that's all"  
Mr Birling doesn't realise that the existence (or non- – existence) of the Inspector is unimportant. What is important is that his stubborn actions have been revealed. Sheila and Eric are only characters who realise that the Inspector's true identity is irrelevant.  
page 60 Mr Birling tries to bluff, saying the Inspector is a crank.  
page 65 His only concern is to avoid a public scandal.  
page 70 Makes fun of the Inspector's accusations.

#### Mrs Birling

- page 29 Like her husband, she treats the Inspector in a pompous high – handed manner. Sheila tries to warn her, but she doesn't listen.  
page 31 She tries to intimidate the Inspector by telling him of her husband's high social connections.  
page 43 Mrs Birling openly admits that she was prejudiced against Eva.  
page 46 Believed Eva had told 'a pack of lies.'  
Her snobbish nature is revealed as she says of Eva 'she was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.'  
Tries to put all the blame on the child's father. Insists that she was right in rejecting Eva's plan for help.  
page 63 Is proud that she didn't 'give in' to the Inspector.

#### Gerald Croft

- page 15 Supports Mr Birling's decision to sack Eva.  
page 18 Thinks he is out of the Inspector's influence because he has never known an Eva Smith. He's rather smug about this.  
page 25 Reacts strongly when the name Daisy Renton is mentioned.  
page 28 Is very defensive as the Inspector prepares to question him, accusing Sheila of wanting to see him suffer  
page 35 Shows some distress  
'I've suddenly realised – taken it in properly – that she's dead'

- page 36 Helps Eva / Daisy, eventually becomes her lover, treats her well.  
page 40 Is genuinely upset, leaves the room.  
page 66 Is very ready to believe that the Inspector was a hoax.  
Manages to explain away the whole incident – like Mr Birling in this way.

### Sheila Birling

- page 17 Is horrified when she hears of Eva's death and angry at her father's actions.  
Recognises Eva and friends as people.  
page 21 Is upset at seeing Eva's photo.  
page 23 Feels real guilt for causing Eva's dismissal  
page 26 Realises that the Inspector already knows all the answers.  
page 35 Recognises their common responsibility towards Eva 'between us we killed her.'  
page 59 Realises that the Inspector's identity is unimportant.

### Eric Birling

- page 53 Admits to stealing money. Readily admits to his 'crimes.'  
page 55 Accuses Mrs Birling of killing Eva in rejecting her.  
page 64 Realises the Inspector's identity doesn't matter. 'The fact remains that I did what I did.'

## What do we learn of Eva Smith in 'An Inspector calls?'

We never directly meet Eva Smith in the play. We hear of her through the words of others and her diary entries. We first learn of her suicide, then how events led up to it. This engages our sympathy and portrays her as a victim.

As the Inspector uses her to stress that we're all responsible for each other, she could be seen to represent the less fortunate in our society.  
She was 24 years old and from outside Brumley.

The main points we learn about her are:

1. Birling's factory –
  - a good worker.
  - about to be promoted.
  - shows spirit and determination as a strike leader and risks her own job in spite of her good prospects.
  - not afraid to speak her mind says Birling.
  - not re-employed after the strike.
2. Millwards
  - attractive – dark hair and eyes.
  - liked working with pretty clothes.
  - Sheila was jealous that she looked better than her in an item chosen.
  - sacked because of Sheila's comments.
3. Palace Bar / Gerald
  - changed her name to Daisy Renton.
  - forced into prostitution – no money or family.
  - Gerald noticed her attractiveness contrasts to other 'women in town.'
  - let slip out about the poverty accepted money reluctantly to survive.
  - is grateful and loving towards Gerald she's obviously lonely.
  - Is brave and not bitter when Gerald 'drops' her. Doesn't threaten to reveal the relationship just treasures the memory – accepts some cash – not vindictive.
  - Honourable and loyal here.
4. Eric
  - forced to return to the Palace Bar.
  - Tries to resist Eric's advances as he's drunk (doesn't want to take advantage)
  - Honourable when she discovers she's pregnant – wont force Eric to marry her.
  - refuses Eric's money when she realises it's stolen.
  - more mature than Eric whom she views as a silly drunken youngster.
  - has principles.
  - doesn't think of revealing what Eric has done for her own gain.

## The Name

1. Sounds like 'ghoul' – someone who has a morbid interest in death, a spirit which is said to take fresh life from corpses. His existence is as a result of the girl's death.
2. Goole is a seaport town and perhaps suggests that he is going to fish for information.

## Physical Description

An impression of 'massiveness, solidity and purposefulness' is given. He grows and remains solid when each of the other characters break down.

## His Views

He demonstrates how people are responsible for how they affect the lives of others. He sees the world as a community where everyone should be helping each other (Socialism). The timing of his entry (at the point that Birling is saying that every man must look after himself) is very significant. The final speech is important too.

# Inspector Goole

## Catalyst

He makes things happen and allows secrets to be revealed. He controls everyone and their actions, despite the importance of the Birlings and the Crofts in the community.

## Impression

The way he uses the information he holds creates an impression of someone who is both an outsider and omniscient. This makes him appear mysterious and powerful.

## Morality

He represents Priestley's strong moral view. The moral dimension of allowing the others to see they can find forgiveness through future good behaviour makes him different from the normal policeman. He is more concerned with morality than legality.

## Dramatic & Stylistic Features of *An Inspector Calls*

### Well-made play

In many respects, *An Inspector Calls* fulfils the criteria of the well-made play. The well-made play was invented by Eugene Scribe (1791-1861). The formula of the well-made play was (is) an almost guaranteed prescription for a successful piece of drama. Indeed, it has guided more than 150 years of drama. The structure of a well-made play is a carefully crafted in order to arouse suspense and tension.

### Features of a Well-made play

#### 1. Exposition

The exposition (the opening) is meant to serve as a gentle introduction, providing basic information on:

- the main characters;
- the background and context;
- the themes and ideas of the play.

To what extent does *An Inspector Calls* meet these criteria? Find examples and / or quotes to support your ideas in each of these areas.

#### 2. Entrances and Exits.

In order to heighten the suspense and tension, entrances and exits are perfectly timed within a well-made play.

To what extent is this true of *An Inspector Calls*? Find at least three examples of this within the play and explain how they add to the suspense. Who, within the play itself, controls who enters and leaves the dining room?

#### 3. The 'obligatory scene'.

This is when a secret is revealed. Again, this serves to add to the drama. Are there any 'obligatory scenes' in *An Inspector Calls*? Give examples and explanations.

## AN INSPECTOR CALLS

### Is the Inspector more than just an ordinary policeman?

1. The Inspector arrives just as Mr Birling is denying that we all have responsibility for each other  
    “\_\_\_ community and all the nonsense”  
    His entrance at this point is significant.
2. Stage directions at the start of the play say that after the Inspector arrives, the stage lighting should be ‘brighter and harder’ - This is significant – he’ll be shedding light on what they’ve done.
3. Throughout the play, he not only questions but also comments on society – He judges the characters so they’re not innocent until proven guilty!  
    e.g. talks about a lot of poor girls being like Eva Smith p.19  
    ~~says not much difference between respectable citizens and criminals p.22~~  
    p.41 ‘Public men, Mr Birling have responsibilities as well as privileges’  
    To Birling – p.46 ‘Don’t stammer and yammer at me again, man I’m loosing all patience with you people.’
4. The Inspector doesn’t know of Colonel Roberts, the Chief Constable, so he’s unlikely to be a ‘real’ policeman.  
    The Inspectors’ bulk and weighty way of speaking as well as the fact that he’s not intimidated by the Birlings lends weight to his evidence (p.44 ‘You have no hope of not discussing it, Mrs Birling) and suggests he’s more than a policeman.
5. Sheila starts to suspect p.29 ‘I don’t understand about you’ - She realises he knows the answers e.g. warns Mrs Birling p.30  
    p.59 ‘He never seemed like an ordinary Police Inspector’
6. The Inspector’s summing up on p.56 is a philosophy representing J.P. Prestleys and unlike a policeman who would collect evidence only  
    “‘We are responsible for each other \_\_\_”  
    He mentions ‘Fire and blood and anguish’ if we don’t show responsibility. This happened in two world wars.  
    Birling describes him as ‘Probably a Socialist or some sort of crank’ p.60  
    He also decides exactly who will speak and in which order, who sees the photograph etc. He controls the actions of the characters.  
    p.33 ‘He must wait his turn’ when Birling wants Eric to tell his story.
7. The characters mention his manner after he leaves,  
    “‘The rude way he spoke to Mr Birling and me”(p.61 Mrs Birling)  
    An ordinary Inspector would have to treat the upper classes politely.
8. p.62 Gerald’s’ revelation that the Inspector, wasn’t known at the police station and p.70 No suicide at the hospital (also the name Goole – ghost) suggests he’s not ordinary.
9. Sheila and Eric realise that the Inspectors identity doesn’t really matter - they all did what they did and he revealed their sense of responsibility.(p.59)
10. The phone rings – a Police Inspector is on his way to investigate the death of the young girl in a hospital - a sense of déjà vu!  
    So was the Inspector a type of ghost? The voice of social conscience? A representative of the author?  
    Does it matter?  
    Do the Birlings and Gerald learn their lesson?



## Who is the Inspector?

The mystery of the Inspector's identity is one that the play never answers. One answer of course is that he is a dramatic device; without him the play could not happen. But given that the other characters are all believable and realistic, audiences often want to ask about the reality of the Inspector too.

It is Gerald who discovers that the Inspector is not who he says he is. He helps the Birlings unpick the Inspector's story of the girl until there seems to be nothing left of it. Sheila and Eric hang on to the conviction that 'it was anything but a joke' while accepting that there may have been more than one girl and that no girl may have committed suicide.

- Sort out your own ideas about who the Inspector is. Talk through some of these suggestions to get you started:

He's Priestley

He's God

He's the voice of conscience

He's the child Eva Smith was pregnant with

He's a dream

He's a time traveller

He is a real police Inspector

Some of the Inspector's parting words are 'We do not live alone. We are all members of one body.' Priestley himself was particularly interested in the ideas of the famous psychologist Jung, who believed that in our dreams we lose our identity and enter the world of the 'collective subconscious' where we all share ancient, universal experiences and the things we dream of have a common significance.

A particular passage in Jung struck Priestley because of a dream he himself had had. Jung stated that 'Dreams may give expression to... telepathic visions.' Priestley had dreamt of being shot in the person of a much younger man – 'a student or something of that kind' – by uniformed officers. Describing this experience he says 'I will swear that... the blind weakness that washed over me there' was 'somebody's last moments and that my consciousness had re-lived them.'

It is not a great step from such ideas to the notion of time and space travelling telepathically, but the more important idea is that such telepathy is possible because, in our collective subconscious, 'We are all members of one body.' The idea of an individual's identity thus becomes more shadowy and less definite.

It is clear on a number of occasions that the Inspector knows what is to happen.

- Look again at these moments in the play and talk about what they reveal about the Inspector, adding other moments if you can find them.

– at the end of Act Two he says he is 'waiting' (page 48), just before Eric enters

- from the beginning of Act Three to his exit (pages 50–56) it is quite clear that the Inspector is working under terrific time pressure, presumably because he knows that news of a girl's suicide is about to reach the household. But he claims there are limits to his knowledge
- when he has shown Sheila the photograph he professes not to know *why* she is upsetting herself over it: 'That's something I have to find out', he says (page 20)
- has he ever actually lied to them about what he knows and how he knows it, or about the identity of the girl – or girls?
- 'We often do on the young ones. They're more impressionable'. (Page 28). Is the Inspector implying that there are lots of Inspectors? Who are the others?

### The Inspector as a dramatic device

If you think about the play as a whole, the Inspector is central to the structure and narrative of the play. Think about the role the Inspector plays in the following:

- moving the story forward (the dramatic structure)
- creating dramatic tension (moments of intensity or tension on stage)
- presenting Priestley's central themes
- engaging the audience



### Writing suggestions

1. Write about the function of the Inspector in the play as a whole. You should consider the following:
  - what he represents in terms of some of the central concerns of the play
  - the way that he affects the structure and pace of the play
  - his effect on the characters in the play – what he makes them see or what he fails to make them see
  - his effect on the audience, both during and after the play
2. Imagine that Sheila is able to meet the Inspector again. This time she questions him about the visit he paid her family all those years ago in 1912...
3. 'I'd like to ask you a few questions.' Taking two or three characters from the play, write about the questioning techniques of the Inspector. How do the different characters respond to being 'inspected'? (Look back at the notes you made on page 13, 'The Inspector questions Birling'.)

## Dramatic Irony in 'An Inspector Calls'

Dramatic irony occurs when what is said by a character or characters in a play has a different or more serious meaning to the audience who are more aware than are the characters concerned of the catastrophe which will occur.

### Act 1

- page 4 Mr Birling 'I'm not sorry that we're celebrating quietly like this' – of the dinner party. A few minutes later, it will be interrupted by the Inspector.
- page 6 Mr Birling talks about a glowing future (speaking in 1912) 'We're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity'  
'You'll hear some people say that war's inevitable.'  
And to that I say – fiddlesticks! the Germans don't want war \_\_\_\_\_'  
Audiences watching the play for the first time in 1946 would realise how ironically inaccurate these predictions are. Two world wars had taken place by then.
- page 7 The Titanic, which we know sank on its maiden voyage, is praised 'absolutely unsinkable.'  
He tells Gerald that by the 1940's we'll be living in 'a world that'll have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitation's and all these silly little war scares.'
- page 8 Birling tells Gerald that he's in line for a knighthood 'so long as we behave ourselves, don't get into the police court or start a scandal – eh?'  
The Inspector will very soon 'start a scandal.'
- page 9 Birling talks of being selfish.  
'A man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own \_\_\_\_\_'  
at the moment the Inspector rings and proves how wrong this idea is and how much pain it causes.
- page 10 When the Inspector arrives Birling thinks he's calling about a warrant. Gerald says 'Unless Eric's been up to something.' later the Inspector reveals the truth.

### Act 2

- page 30 -32 Mrs Birling automatically assures she has nothing to do with the death of Eva Smith: Later she is shown to be possibly the most hard – hearted of them all. She doesn't realise that this fact will soon be revealed.
- page 46 – 48 Mrs Birling, on hearing that Eva was pregnant, blames the father of the child 'Some drunken young idler'  
She says he should pay the price and publicly confess his crimes. The father is Eric.

### Act 3

- page 55 Eric points out that in refusing Eva, Mrs Birling also causes the death of her own grandchild.

There is also irony in the fact that each member of the family, before having their crimes exposed, condemns the selfish actions of the person being questioned by the Inspector.

# An Inspector Calls

## Essay Questions

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### Act I

1. The mood in this act changes from relaxed to tense. Explore the ways Priestley transforms the tone throughout the Act.
2. How does Priestley hint at the tensions within the group that later become more clear?
3. How does Priestley present the Inspector as an unusual policeman in this Act?

### Act II

4. What do we learn about Eva Smith from Act II? How does Priestley contrast her behaviour with that of the Birling family and Gerald Croft?
5. Act II ends with Mrs. Birling finally weakening. What is the cause of this? How does the Inspector trap her into condemning her own son?
6. Compare and contrast the reaction of Gerald Croft and Mrs. Birling to interrogation by the inspector.
7. How has Eric's guilt been suggested by Priestley in Acts I and II?

### The whole play

8. Write about Inspector Goole's role in the play. How far is he a believable policeman? How does Priestley use the inspector in the play?
9. Write about the way the relationship between Gerald and Sheila develops during the play.
10. *An Inspector Calls* is full of lies and deceit. Write fully about the way Priestley exposes weakness and wickedness, not only in the characters on stage, but also in society.
11. Write fully about ONE of the characters in the play. Take into account what they have done before the play begins as well as their actions, words and attitudes during the course of the play. Write about the way attitudes, moods and opinions change and develop during the course of the action on stage.
12. The Inspector's inquiries make the Birlings quarrel among themselves. How does Priestley develop these internal conflicts during the play?
13. Compare and contrast the attitudes of Birling and the inspector throughout the play.
14. How does Priestley show the confidence of the Birlings in their position?
15. Compare and contrast the reaction of Arthur Birling and Sheila Birling to interrogation by the Inspector.