**An Inspector Calls Model Essay**

**‘Sheila is the most interesting character in the play, because the writer allows her to change and develop’. How far do you agree with this comment?**

**Student response**

As a character, Sheila certainly changes and develops greatly during the course of the play. At first, she seems frivolous and flippant when faced by the Inspector. When he mentions Milwards, she begins commenting ‘archly’ to Gerald about her wedding again. Although she does seem concerned about the girl, the audience is shown that she has a temperamental attitude by her having Smith fired in the first place.

After she sees the picture, however, her attitude changes. She ‘lets out a half-stifled sob’ and admits herself to have behaved wrongly almost immediately. She says to Eric ‘I’ll never do it again to anybody’, showing that she has been affected and accepts a degree of responsibility. She is also very receptive to the Inspector’s influence. She exclaims to Gerald: ‘Why he knows, of course he knows!’, perhaps indicating that she is more susceptible to being changed than the other characters.

By the end of the play, Sheila could be said to be a reformed character. She is keenly aware of what she has done and learned from her actions. When she discovers the Inspector’s deception, she says ‘I suppose we’re all nice people now’, ironically, which shows that she understands that the moral consequences of her actions reach beyond the consequences that apply directly and only to her and her family, such as the arrest of Eric. In this way she proves that she has developed over the course of the play.

This change stands as a striking contrast to the other characters, who have learned nothing. When Sybil is asked why they shouldn’t behave just as they did before, she replies ‘Well, why not?’ Gerald even offers Sheila her ring back, as if he had not had an affair. In this way the older characters show that they have not developed or changed, while Sheila clearly has.

However, there is another character who learns and changes during the course of the play – Eric. From having quite an unformed personality he also shows that he is penitent by the end of the play. While the others are talking about whether their reputation is in danger, Eric cuts in with ‘The girl’s still dead, isn’t she?’ As he says, ‘I’ll never forget’, he shows that the whole affair has changed him. He therefore rivals Sheila in complexity of character.

At the beginning of the play, Sheila seems silly and frivolous. However, the Inspector has a powerful effect on her. By the end of the last act, she has truly learned. The older characters, by contrast, learn nothing. Whether or not Sheila is the most interesting character is debatable, as Eric also develops interestingly during the play. But despite the changes he is still shown to be immature, whereas Sheila ‘s repentance is the equal of his and she has plainly gained more in depth and maturity from the disconcerting experiences she has undergone, even though her own guilt might be seen as much less than that of others.

**Examiner’s comments**

This is a **grade A** answer overall. It has a very perceptive grasp of character, based on a thorough understanding. The examples that are quoted are apt and support the points in a highly effective way. There is a good focus on the question’s requirements throughout. To have secured an A\*, the comparative analysis on Sheila in relation to the other characters should have been developed more strongly; apart from occasional references, we have little focus on what makes them interesting or not.