

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

TIMELINE

YEAR AND MONTH	WHAT HAPPENS	PERSON INVOLVED
September 1910	Eva sacked by Birling & Co.	MR BIRLING
December 1910	Eva employed by Milwards.	
Late January 1911	Eva sacked by Milwards.	SHEILA BIRLING
March 1911	Eva [calling herself Daisy Renton] becomes Gerald's mistress.	GERALD CROFT
Early September 1911	Gerald breaks off the affair.	GERALD CROFT
Eva leaves Brumley for two months.		
November 1911	Eric meets Eva.	ERIC BIRLING
December 1911/January 1912	Eva finds she is pregnant.	ERIC BIRLING
Late March 1912	Mrs. Birling turns down Eva's application for help.	MRS BIRLING
Early April 1912	Eva's suicide/the Inspector calls	ALL

SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although *An Inspector Calls* is set in 1912 it was written in 1944/45 and produced in London for the first time in 1946; it is as much about post-war Britain as it is about the Edwardian period. Audiences at the end of the war would have appreciated the irony of Birling's predictions for the future. Setting the play before the First World War enabled Priestley to make the most of class division and social hierarchy. There are many references to social position: Birling's compared to his wife's, the Birlings compared to Gerald's family, the workers at Birling's factory and the destitute women who go to the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation for help. Birling constantly name drops, talking of Alderman Meggarty and the Chief Constable as well as his own time as Lord Mayor. He tries to impress Gerald with talk of the possibility of his being knighted. Social position is clearly important to him and Priestley

uses Birling to represent the capitalist viewpoint. Birling is concerned about money and what other people think; the possibility of scandal horrifies him.

You may also notice the different attitudes to women in the play. Sheila is seen as someone who needs protecting from the harsh realities of life; both Gerald and Birling try to get her out of the room when Gerald is being questioned. They have a different attitude to women of the town, and to Eva Smith. Mrs Birling adds to this by implying that Eva Smith had ideas above her station. Although both Gerald and Eric see that Eva was different from the usual women in the Palace bar, they are still both prepared to use her in a way which would be unthinkable in a girl of their own social standing.

SUMMARY

ACT 1

The Birling family is celebrating the engagement of Sheila to Gerald Croft, the son of Lord and Lady Croft, who comes from 'an old country family – landed people'. Arthur Birling is in a good mood and makes a number of speeches giving his views about the state of the world, technology and industrial relations. One of his main themes is about everyone being responsible for themselves; he doesn't believe that anyone has a responsibility to others apart from his family.

When Inspector Goole is announced, Birling and Gerald make a joke about Eric who shows his guilty conscience by reacting strongly to this.

The inspector informs Birling about the death of a young woman who has committed suicide by drinking disinfectant. It emerges that Birling had sacked the girl, Eva Smith, two years earlier after she had been one of the ring-leaders in a strike and demanding higher wages.

Sheila Birling is also connected to the girl, having had her sacked from her new job at Milwards. She is horrified by what she did and is genuinely remorseful.

The inspector seems to know details of the family's involvement before they speak and when he tells them that the girl changed her name to Daisy Renton, Gerald's reaction tells us that he, too, knew the girl. When they are temporarily left alone, Sheila warns Gerald not to try to hide anything from the inspector.

By the end of the first act, the audience is expecting the inspector to reveal further connections with members of the Birling family.

ACT 2

Although Gerald tries to get Sheila to leave the room, she insists on staying; Gerald admits to having had an affair with Eva Smith, the girl he knew as Daisy Renton, the previous summer. Sheila is hurt and disappointed in Gerald who had told her he was busy at

the works at that time. After Gerald broke off the affair, Eva/Daisy had left Brumley for a few months. After Sheila has returned her engagement ring to him, Gerald goes out, seemingly genuinely affected by the news of the girl's death.

Despite Sheila's warnings Mrs Birling tries to intimidate the inspector, believing that she could have no possible connection to the girl. When the inspector reminds her of the pregnant girl she turned away from the charity organisation she chaired, Mrs Birling concedes but felt herself to be justified because the girl had lied to her about her name [calling herself Mrs Birling]. She also disbelieved the girl's claim that she had refused the offer of help from the father of her baby because she believed that he had stolen the money. Mrs Birling digs herself deeper into a hole by insisting that the father of the baby should be made to pay.

Eric has been out during this exchange but re-enters right at the end of the scene to expectant faces; we are expecting Eric to be the father of the baby.

ACT 3

Eric immediately realises that they all know and tells them of how he met Eva and of her subsequent pregnancy. Questioned closely by the inspector, he also reveals that he had tried to support the girl by giving her money but he had stolen it from his father's business. The Birlings seem more horrified by this than his responsibility for the girl's condition.

Having done his job, the inspector makes a speech about social responsibility and leaves the Birlings to examine their behaviour.

When Gerald re-enters he has news that there is no Inspector Goole employed by the local police. Birling and Gerald now set about disproving the inspector's case although Sheila and Eric feel that that is not the point. When Gerald confirms that no girl has died of drinking disinfectant by telephoning the infirmary, The Birlings and Gerald are delighted and their mood of jollity and good-humour of the beginning of Act 1 returns.

Sheila and Eric do not feel the same way, continuing to feel guilt for what they have done and are appalled at the behaviour of Gerald and their parents. When Birling suggests that Sheila take back her engagement ring from Gerald, Sheila remarks that it is too soon.

Just at the point where Birling is teasing them for their lack of a sense of humour, the telephone rings and Birling is obviously stunned by what he hears: a girl has died in the infirmary and a police inspector is on his way to ask them some questions.

CHARACTERS

MR BIRLING

Birling is a **snob** and a **social climber**, very aware of his position in society, especially as his wife is higher up the social scale than him, as are the Crofts, Gerald's parents. He tries to impress and **intimidate** the inspector by mentioning having been mayor,

emphasising his connections to the Crofts and his friendship with the Chief Constable. Birling is **pompous** and makes **speeches** revealing a **selfish and arrogant attitude** towards others. His proclamations about the Titanic, the state of the nation and the impossibility of war are all designed to make him look **foolish** in the eyes of the audience who would have the benefit of hindsight. Birling believes that each person is responsible only for himself and his family and denies any collective or social responsibility. More **worried about scandal** and his reputation than other people's feelings, Birling shows a **callous and unsympathetic** attitude towards Eva Smith. He is very **impressed** by Gerald and is **indulgent** towards his affair with Eva Smith even though it is his own daughter who has been betrayed.

MRS BIRLING

An even bigger **snob** than her husband, Mrs Birling is described in the opening stage directions as a 'cold woman, and her husband's social superior'. She is **narrow-minded** and **judgmental** about the 'lower classes' without really understanding how other people live. She has **no insight** and is genuinely unaware that her son is a heavy drinker. Her life is governed by her notion of **correctness** and whilst her daughter is behaving in an appropriate way, she seems to get on with her but when Sheila expresses opinions she doesn't approve of she reprimands her. Her **arrogant** and **patronising** attitude towards the inspector means that she falls a victim to his questioning despite Sheila's warnings. Although she chairs the committee of a charitable organisation, Sybil Birling is **not a charitable person**; she is **smug** and **self-satisfied** and only serves on the committee out of a sense of duty rather than a genuine desire to help those less fortunate than herself. Because she only hears what she wants to, she is **easily offended**. It is because Eva Smith had the impertinence to use the Birling name that Mrs Birling refused to help her. She is delighted when it seems that the inspector is a fraud because she feels that she was the only one who didn't give in to him. She does not change her attitude, has **no sense of empathy** and shows **no remorse** for her role in Eva Smith's death.

SHEILA

At the beginning of the play, Sheila is presented as rather pleased with herself but also rather shallow. She makes **inconsequential remarks** and speaks in a **rather childish** way: she calls her mother 'mummy' and uses words like 'squiffy' and 'jolly well'. However, she is the only one to immediately accept responsibility for her role in Eva Smith's death and she is, therefore, probably the **most sympathetic character** in the play. She is **genuinely remorseful** for her actions and is very affected by details of the girl's terrible death. She shows **perception** in her attitude towards the inspector, realising that he already knows much of what he is asking them and showing **intuition** about what his questioning is leading to. She is the first to realise that Eric is the father of Eva's baby and tries to stop her mother from making it worse for Eric. This intuition is also evident in the fact that before information about Gerald's affair came out, she was **suspicious** about his behaviour when she speaks to him 'half serious, half playfully' about it. Although she acted out of spite and jealousy in getting Eva sacked, she has more of a **conscience** than any of the other characters and we believe her when she says that she will never do anything like it again. She has more **empathy** for Eva, recognising her as a person not just as a worker. She is therefore very different from her father and mother and

nearer to the inspector in terms of her **social conscience**. Of all the characters, Sheila is **most changed** by the inspector's visit. She is more **honest** and **outspoken** than at the beginning of the play, often shocking her mother with her remarks. Sheila **represents hope** that people can change.

ERIC

Eric is rather **awkward** and **ill at ease** with himself and others. He is described as 'half shy, half assertive' **immature** and **weak**. He is presented as a **drunk** who does not stand up for himself against his father. Neither of his parents know him well or understand him and he seems to be lacking their regard and affection. Birling makes it clear that Gerald is the type of son he would have chosen for himself. His liaison with Eva Smith was possibly as a result of his parents' lack of understanding but he did not treat her well at the time and the revelations that he is a **thief** compound our view of him as a weak and spoilt young man. He is, however, **genuinely sorry** about Eva and **horrified** by the revelations that his mother had turned her away. The audience feels a certain sympathy for him, particularly because he does **redeem himself** towards the end of the play when he seems to have learnt his lesson.

GERALD CROFT

Gerald is the upper class fiancé of Sheila Birling; unlike Eric, he is at **ease with himself** and others and has the **self-confidence** of a young man of his class and upbringing. He is more like Mr Birling in his views and outlook on life than he is Sheila or Eric to whom he is nearer in age. He agrees with the way Mr Birling handles the sacking of Eva Smith and when questioned by the inspector, like Mr and Mrs Birling, his **first impulse is to deny** everything. However, unlike them, he **shows remorse** for his actions when he realises what has happened to the girl. He tries to **protect** Sheila from the revelations about his affair with Eva and once he has begun his confession, he admits what he did. However, he is the one who **acts on his suspicions** about the inspector and begins the chain of events which result in the revelation that the inspector is a fraud or impostor. Once he realises this, like the Birlings, he reverts to a light-hearted attitude which shows that he has **not learned anything from the events of the evening**.

INSPECTOR GOOLE

The inspector is described as creating '**an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness**'. As each of the characters part in the death of Eva Smith is revealed, he remains **constant** and unmoving. Although he is described variously as speaking '**calmly**' and '**steadily**', he also speaks '**sternly**' and '**grimly**'. There are several references to his **taking control** and **intervening**. The inspector could be said to be a **mouth-piece** for Priestley's own opinions and as a contrast with the views of Birling; he has also been called merely a **dramatic device** to move the plot along. Certainly it is the inspector who makes things happen and takes control of how and when the revelations occur. He decides the order in which each character is questioned.

The fact that he is quite **ordinary in appearance** underlines the fact that he is not ordinary in the way he asks questions and his attitude towards the other characters. He is **direct** and **takes charge** on a number of occasions. Both Birling and Mrs Birling remark on his rudeness. He is very **single-minded** and seems very **certain** of himself and his facts. He also seems to be **omniscient** [all-knowing] and Sheila is the one who recognises this most. He is a **catalyst** who seems able to get characters to reveal their involvement with Eva Smith because he seems to **already know** what they are going to say. Some critics have argued that he is like a **confessor figure** with the characters revealing their sins to him just as they might to a priest. He does not make things easy for them and he does pass judgment on them aloud, unlike a real police inspector although unlike a priest, he neither forgives them nor punishes them. Goole seems to be working to a very **tight time-scale** and makes a number of remarks about being **in a hurry**.

There are various possibilities for who or what Inspector Goole represents:

- Priestley
- God
- The voice of conscience
- A dramatic device
- A 'ghoul' or evil spirit
- A forewarning of what the characters will face on Judgment Day

The power of Inspector Goole's character lies in not knowing exactly who he is or what he represents. Priestley gives us no clues and deliberately leaves it open at the end because he does not want to impose just one interpretation of the inspector.

When he is uncovered at the end as not being a real inspector, it makes a huge difference to Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald because not only have they avoided a scandal but they are also very aware of status, whereas for Sheila and Eric it makes no difference: 'he inspected us all right'.

THEMES

The themes of the play are closely connected and at times indistinguishable from one another.

SOCIAL MESSAGE

Priestley uses the play to put across a social message that reflected his own views of society:

- The comparison between the Birlings and the contrast with the workers in Birling's factory striking for a few pennies a week more
- The fact that someone like Mrs Birling can have a say in whether the Eva Smith's of the world get help or not
- Mr Birling as representative of capitalism and the Inspector championing the poor
- The inspector counters Birling's selfish attitude by talking about the need to be 'responsible for each other'

RESPONSIBILITY

Priestley shows the attitudes of the different characters towards responsibility:

- Mr Birling does not have a sense of responsibility to his workers, just to making a profit and towards his family
- Mrs Birling has a sense of responsibility to do good deeds by being on the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation but feels no sense of responsibility for what happened to Eva Smith after she turned her away
- Gerald seems to show a responsible attitude when he rescued the girl from the attentions of Alderman Meggarty but then used her for his own purposes, discarding her once she was of no further use to him
- Eric shows little responsibility for his own actions, forcing himself upon Eva when he was in a drunken state and even when he tried to help her, he did it by stealing from his own father
- Sheila does show a sense of responsibility somewhat belatedly, realising that her actions in Milwards had a devastating consequence for one young woman's life

MORALITY

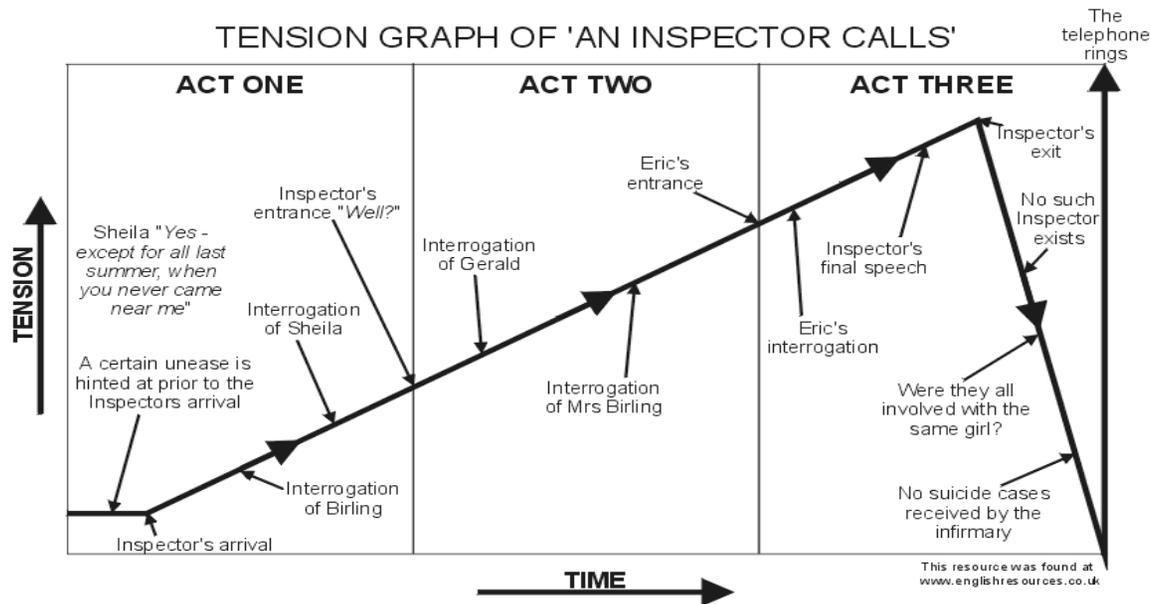
Apart from Eric stealing money from his father, **no crime** has been committed in the play, yet the characters are examined as if it has. What is being put on trial to some extent is the **morality** of their different actions or inactions. Although they may not have acted illegally, could each of the characters be said to have acted immorally in their dealings with Eva Smith, using their relative power over her to have her sacked [twice]; to seduce her and then discard her when she was no longer wanted; to force her into having sex against her will and leaving her pregnant; and refusing her money and turning her away when she was destitute.

POLITICAL VIEWPOINT

The play could be seen as a microcosm of society with different attitudes being shown through the different characters. Through the character of Birling, we are shown the antithesis of everything that Priestley believes in; in the Inspector we get a glimpse of what Priestley would advocate instead. Unlike Birling, Priestley believes that everyone has responsibility towards others. In Inspector Calls, Priestley shows his fear that the country would not stand up to scrutiny, that as a society we might be like Birling although he shows some hope, in the characters of Sheila and Eric, that things might change.

TENSION IN 'AN INSPECTOR CALLS'

- there is a very **compact structure** to the play, nothing is allowed to distract the audience from the central theme. There is **no sub-plot**
- the play takes place in just **one location**; the action is **continuous** and takes place over **one evening**
- Act One begins by introducing the characters and establishing the idea of a happy and united family looking forward to the future with a degree of confidence. In retrospect, there are a number of **hints that all is not as it seems** but these are not particularly obvious until later in the play. There is nothing to warn us of the shock of the Inspector's visit
- events soon gather speed and it is not long before we are being informed of **Birling and Sheila's involvement** with Eva Smith
- tensions increase, firstly as **Gerald's affair** is unveiled (and the scandal it would cause) and Sheila begins to realise that they are all implicated in some way 'he is giving us rope - so that we'll hang ourselves'. As reader/audience we realise that all the characters are going to have secrets to reveal under the clever questioning of the inspector; the **anticipation** of the audience raises the level of tension
- Mrs Birling's attempts to shift the blame for the girl's suicide lead her to **blame the father** of the unborn child. Despite Sheila's attempts to prevent her from digging herself deeper into a hole, **Mrs Birling ploughs on relentlessly** adding to the dramatic tension as the audience waits to see what will happen
- the tension is heightened at this point by the **dramatic entrance of Eric**.
- with the departure of the Inspector it would appear that what follows will be something of an **anti-climax** as the Inspector's identity is put into doubt by a series of observations made by the Birling family and Gerald. Even the existence of Eva is called into question.
- however, the tension remains to some extent as the two generations show a split in their attitudes, confirming **the differences highlighted by the Inspector's questioning** - the moral divide is very great indeed
- the **final denouement**, the phone call announcing that a police inspector is on his way to ask some questions about a girl who has just died in the infirmary, is as **shocking** as it is **surprising** and ensures that the audience will leave the auditorium in a state of real shock



DRAMATIC DEVICES IN 'AN INSPECTOR CALLS'

- **stage directions** are used at the beginning of the play to **give information about the set**; it tells us that the Birlings are well off and middle class [it is 'a fairly solid suburban house' with 'good solid furniture' which is 'substantial and heavily comfortable' rather than cosy]
- stage directions are used at the beginning of the play to **give information about characters**; Priestley tells us not only about their appearance but also about their character [Birling is 'heavy-looking' and 'rather portentous' (it means self-important or pompous); Mrs Birling is 'rather cold', Sheila is a 'pretty girl...very pleased with life and rather excited'; Gerald is an 'attractive chap' whilst Eric is 'not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive'; when the inspector enters, we are told that he 'has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking']
- stage directions are widely used to give information about the feelings or actions of the characters which would help the actors playing the characters ['bitterly', 'distressed', 'after a pause, with a touch of impatience', 'massively taking charge']
- **lighting** is used to create effect – at the beginning the lighting is described as 'pink and intimate'; after the inspector enters there is a reference to his moving 'nearer a light – perhaps a standard lamp'. This suggests that the inspector is shining a harsh light on the Birlings and Gerald Croft
- sparing use of **sound effects** help to enhance the drama – the doorbell in the first act and the ringing of the telephone in the final moments of the play are both highly significant
- Priestley frequently makes use of the **dash** – to show a character's emotional state; the dash represents the fact that the character is speaking in a disjointed rather than a flowing and articulate way [see Sheila's speech on page 29 and Eric's on p.55]

- not all the characters are on stage all the time; **exits and entrances** are cleverly used to create **dramatic tension** [see separate notes about this]with some characters being unaware of what has happened whilst they were out of the room [examples include; the entrance of the inspector shortly after Birling has made his pompous speeches; Mrs Birling's not knowing that the inspector is implicating everyone with his clever questioning techniques and Eric's re-appearance at the end of Act 2 just at the moment when the audience and the characters on stage realise that Eric is the father of Eva Smith's baby]
- **dramatic irony** – this is particularly evident in Birling's speeches at the beginning of the play when he makes pronouncements about war, the state of the nation in 30 years' time and, more immediately, the unsinkable nature of the Titanic; compare this apparent foolishness with the inspector's talk of 'blood and anguish'. An audience seeing this immediately after the second world war with knowledge of the first war would think of Birling as a fool and the inspector as a prophet
- the **major dramatic device** used by Priestley is that of the Inspector himself. He is used to good effect to **move the plot along, controlling the pace of events** and **deciding in which order the characters are questioned**. He is also used to **voice Priestley's socialist views and opinions**
- **contrast** between characters is another effective dramatic device - the **juxtaposition** of Birling and the inspector provides an effective contrast of beliefs; the attitudes of Sheila and her father to the fate of Eva Smith also provides effective contrast
- **symbolism** is a further dramatic device used by Priestley: Birling **represents capitalism** whilst the inspector as a mouthpiece for Priestley himself **represents socialism**. Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald Croft represent the old order of things whilst Sheila and Eric are **symbolic of hope** for the future
- **cliff-hangers** – Priestley uses this device several times to make the audience wait in anticipation for what they know will happen: The end of Act 1 and beginning of Act 2 begin with the inspector saying 'Well?' to Gerald; the beginning of Act 3 is 'exactly as at the end of Act 2'

QUESTIONS

The second question you will answer on An Inspector Calls is a longer question – sometimes an essay style question. You need to choose **ONE** question from a choice of **TWO**. Aim to spend 40 minutes on this question: 5-10 minutes thinking and planning and about **30 minutes** writing. Don't do a long introduction or conclusion.

1. CHARACTER QUESTIONS

a) This might be about an individual character:

How is Sheila Birling presented?

Which character do you have least sympathy for?

OR

b) It might ask you to compare two characters:

Choose two characters in Inspector Calls with different attitudes. How does Priestley present these two characters?

OR

c) You might also be asked about the relationships between two characters:

How is the relationship between Gerald and Sheila presented at different points in the play?

2. EMPATHY QUESTIONS

In this type of question, you are asked to put yourself in a character's shoes and write as if you were them. You need to think about their attitudes, their attitudes to others and their reactions to what has happened. Try to use appropriate language and get the tone right for how they speak.

Imagine you are Eric. At the end of the play, you look back over events. Write down your thoughts and feelings.

3. DRAMA BASED QUESTIONS

These tend to be about the advice you would give to an actor playing a character.

*What advice would you give the actor playing **Arthur Birling**?*

You may be given some prompts but even if you are not, remember to think about **different times in the play**. You might take four different points when giving advice about Birling. For example: the beginning when he is making his speeches, after the Inspector has entered, then when he realises that the inspector does not exist and finally after the telephone call at the end.

4. WHOLE TEXT THEMES/ISSUES

Which character is most to blame for the death of Eva Smith?

How is the theme of responsibility presented in the play?

5. WRITER'S CRAFT

This could be about the structure of the play or about the dramatic devices used by Priestley.

What do you think of the ending of the play?

How does Priestley create and maintain tension in 'An Inspector Calls'?

What do you think of the way Priestley uses dramatic devices in 'An Inspector Calls'?

INSPECTOR CALLS - PAST PAPER QUESTIONS

Here are some of the questions that have been asked over the last few years. This should help you to understand the TYPE of questions asked rather than being useful for practice. You may be able to guess what questions may come up by looking at what has been asked over the last four years.

You will notice that the questions for FOUNDATION and HIGHER tier vary slightly. In the context question the passage is always the same but the questions in the FOUNDATION tier tend to be about one or more of the characters. In the HIGHER tier, the question will focus more on the MOOD or ATMOSPHERE created in the extract. In the longer questions, the FOUNDATION tier will often have prompts. Use these to help you structure your answer.

2005

FOUNDATION

Answer both parts of (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

CONTEXT

a) Read the extract on pp 33-35 Act 2 Beginning of questioning of Gerald 'Inspector: At the end of January last year...'

- (i) What are your thoughts and feelings about Sheila?
(ii) What are your thoughts and feelings about Gerald? [10]

LONGER

- b) Which character changes most as a result of the Inspector's visit, in your opinion?

Think about:

- your chosen character's dealings with the Inspector
- your chosen character's relationships with other characters in the play
- the way your chosen character speaks and behaves at different points in the play
- why you think your chosen character changes most [20]

OR

- c) Give advice to the actor playing Mr. Birling about how he should speak and behave in the following parts in the play:

- at the beginning, before the Inspector arrives
- at the end, after Gerald brings news that there is no Inspector Goole on the police force [20]

HIGHER

Answer (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

CONTEXT

Act 2 Beginning of questioning of Gerald pp 33-35 'Inspector: At the end of January last year...'

- a) With close reference to the extract, show how JB Priestley creates mood and atmosphere for an audience here.

[10]

LONGER

EITHER:

- b) Which character changes most as a result of the Inspector's visit, in your opinion? Show how this change is presented to an audience.

[20]

OR

- c) Give advice to the actor playing Mr. Birling on how he should present the character to an audience.

[20]

2006

FOUNDATION

Answer both parts of (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

CONTEXT

- a) Read the extract on pp.54-56 Act 3 just before the Inspector leaves. 'Inspector: (cutting in) And my trouble is, I don't have much time...'

How does the Inspector speak and behave in this extract? Give reasons for what you say.

[10]

LONGER

EITHER:

b) Imagine you are Sheila. At the end of the play you think back over what has happened. Write down your thoughts and feelings.
You may wish to think about:

- *your relationship with your family*
- *your relationship with Gerald Croft*
- *your feelings about what the Inspector revealed about your involvement with the dead girl*
- *your feelings about what the Inspector revealed about your family's involvement with the dead girl*

[20]

OR

c) For which character in the play do you have the least sympathy? Give reasons for what you say.

[20]

HIGHER

Answer (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

CONTEXT

a) pp.54-56 Act 3 just before the Inspector leaves. 'Inspector: (cutting in) And my trouble is, I don't have much time...'
Look closely at how the Inspector speaks and behaves here. How does the way he speaks and behaves create mood and atmosphere for an audience?

LONGER

EITHER:

b) Imagine you are Sheila. At the end of the play you think back over what has happened. Write down your thoughts and feelings. Remember how Sheila would speak when you write your answer.

OR

c) Show how Priestley creates and maintains tension throughout the play.

2007

FOUNDATION

Answer both parts of (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

(a) Read the extract from the beginning of Act 2 which begins 'SHEILA No, but you haven't finished asking questions – have you?.' pp.27-29. Then answer the following questions:

(i) What do you think of the way Sheila speaks and behaves here? Give reasons for what you say. [5]

(ii) How do you think an audience would respond to this part of the play? Give reasons for what you say. [5]

EITHER

(b) Give advice to the actor playing Mrs. Birling on how she should present the character to an audience.

Think about:

- the way she speaks and behaves with Mr Birling;
- the way she speaks and behaves with Sheila, Eric and Gerald;
- the way she speaks and behaves with the Inspector;

- her response to the news about Eva Smith;
- anything else you think important. [20]

OR

(c) Write about the character of Inspector Goole and his importance to the play.

Think about:

- his arrival;
- the way he speaks and behaves with different characters;
- the impact he has on the Birlings and Gerald Croft;
- anything else you think important. [20]

HIGHER

Answer (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

(a) Read the extract from the beginning of Act 2 which begins ‘ SHEILA No, but you haven’t finished asking questions – have you?.’ pp.27-29. Then answer the following questions:

Look closely at how Sheila speaks and behaves here. What does it reveal about her character?

[10]

EITHER

(b) Give advice to the actor playing Mrs. Birling on how she should present the character to an audience. [20]

OR

(c) How is the character of Inspector Goole important to the play as a whole? [20]

2008

FOUNDATION

Answer both parts of (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

CONTEXT

pp.70 – end Just after Birling has learned that there is no Inspector Goole and that no girl has died that day in the Infirmary.

‘BIRLING (triumphantly) There you are. Proof positive..’

a)

i) What do you think of the way Mr. Birling speaks and behaves here? Give reasons for what you say.

ii) What do you think of the way Sheila speaks and behaves here? Give reasons for what you say.

[10]

LONGER

EITHER:

b) Imagine you are Gerald. At the end of the play you think back over its events. Write down your thoughts and feelings.

You may wish to think about:

- *what happened during the evening of the Inspector’s visit*
- *your relationship with Sheila*
- *your relationship with Eva Smith/Daisy Renton*
- *the effect the evening’s events had on you*

[20]

OR

c) Which character do you think is most to blame for Eva Smith's death? Give reasons for what you say.

[20]

HIGHER

Answer (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

CONTEXT

pp.70 – end Just after Birling has learned that there is no Inspector Goole and that no girl has died that day in the Infirmary.

'BIRLING (triumphantly) There you are. Proof positive..'

a) How does this extract create mood and atmosphere for an audience?

[10]

LONGER

EITHER:

b) Imagine you are Gerald. At the end of the play you think back over its events. Write down your thoughts and feelings. Remember how Gerald would speak when you write your answer.

[20]

OR

c) Inspector Goole says: 'We are all responsible for each other'. How does J. B. Priestley present this theme in 'An Inspector Calls'?

[20]

REVISION TASKS

1. Re-read the text; **there is no substitute** for this. You will notice far more details on a second or third reading.
2. Annotate and highlight your text, either as you go or at the end of each act.

e.g.

pompous Birling: Just let me finish, Eric. You've a lot to learn yet. And I'm talking as a hard-
looks foolish headed, practical man of business. And I say there isn't a chance of war.
dramatic irony

3. Highlight or make a particular note of:
 - how each act starts and ends
 - when the interrogation of each character begins
 - at least two or three key quotes for each character [more if possible]
 - use of stage directions to give information about the set
 - use of stage directions to give information about a character
 - use of stage directions to give information to an actor about how to play the role
 - two or three examples of use of dashes for particular effect

4. Organise all the handouts and notes you have been given. Read through and pick out any points you think are particularly useful and use them for the next 2 tasks
5. **Make revision cards** -use ordinary postcards or index cards [you can get packs of 100 coloured ones from Staples]. On these cards put summarised details of characters, themes etc. Use these to test yourself on the characters. Suggestions include:
 - each of the 6 main characters – words to describe them, relationship with others, select a **few short key quotes**
 - Eva Smith/Daisy Renton – what do we know about her?
 - dramatic devices
 - political/social message
 - tension
6. **Practise exam style questions.** Look back at the sample answers in this revision guide and highlight the key points that have been made. Now do it the other way round. Choose one of the titles from the examples given earlier and spend about 5-10 minutes planning your answer. Finally try writing it as an exam style response in about 30 minutes. Repeat this if you have time, or just write the plans.

TIP: Don't choose a question which has been used recently in the past papers. You might like to consider the following:

- **Imagine you are: Mrs Birling/Mr Birling/Eric – write your thoughts and feelings at the end of the play.**
- **What advice would you give to the actor playing the part of: Sheila/Mrs Birling/Eric/Gerald/The Inspector at different times in the play?**
- **What message is Priestley trying to get across in 'An Inspector Calls'?**
- **Which character do you have most sympathy for in the play? [tip: don't choose Eva Smith!]**
- **Choose two characters and compare how they are presented.**
- **What role does the Inspector play?**

To understand the *context* of the play, it's helpful to know a little about J B Priestley's life and his political views during the early 20th century - a time of great global change. He wrote *An Inspector Calls* after the First World War and like much of his work contains controversial, politically charged messages. Keen to pioneer a new 'morality' in politics, Priestley's chief concerns involved social inequality in Britain and the need for nuclear disarmament.

J B Priestley

John Boynton Priestley was born in Yorkshire in 1894. He knew early on that he wanted to become a writer, but decided against going to university as he thought he would get a better feel for the world around him away from *academia*. Instead, he became a junior clerk with a local wool firm at the age of 16.

When the First World War broke out, Priestley joined the infantry and only just escaped death on a number of occasions. After the war, he gained a degree from Cambridge University, then moved to London to work as a freelance writer. He wrote successful articles and essays, then published the first of many novels, *The Good Companions*, in 1929. He wrote his first play in 1932 and went on to write 50 more. Much of his writing was ground-breaking and controversial. He included new ideas about possible parallel universes and strong political messages.

During the Second World War he broadcast a massively popular weekly radio programme which was attacked by the Conservatives as being too left-wing. The programme was eventually cancelled by the BBC for being too critical of the Government.

He continued to write into the 1970s, and died in 1984.

Political views

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

He believed that further world wars could only be avoided through cooperation and mutual respect between countries, and so became active in the early movement for a United Nations. And as the nuclear arms race between West and East began in the 1950s, he helped to found CND, hoping that Britain would set an example to the world by a moral act of nuclear disarmament.

1912 to 1945

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

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

An Inspector Calls is set in 1912

An Inspector Calls was written in 1945.

Images

An Inspector Calls set in 1912	An Inspector Calls was written in 1945.	Images
<p>The First World War would start in two years. Birling's optimistic view that there would not be a war is completely wrong.</p>	<p>The Second World War ended on 8 May 1945. People were recovering from nearly six years of warfare, danger and uncertainty.</p>	
<p>There were strong distinctions between the upper and lower classes.</p>	<p>Class distinctions had been greatly reduced as a result of two world wars.</p>	
<p>Women were subservient to men. All a well off women could do was get married; a poor woman was seen as cheap labour.</p>	<p>As a result of the wars, women had earned a more valued place in society.</p>	

An Inspector Calls set in 1912	An Inspector Calls was written in 1945.	Images
<p>The ruling classes saw no need to change the status quo.</p>	<p>There was a great desire for social change. Immediately after The Second World War, Clement Attlee's Labour Party won a landslide victory over Winston Churchill and the Conservatives.</p>	

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

Plot

The Birling family are spending a happy evening celebrating the engagement of Sheila Birling to Gerald Croft - a marriage that will result in the merging of two successful local businesses. Yet, just when everything seems to be going so well, they receive a surprise visit from an Inspector Goole who is investigating the suicide of a young girl.

The questions he asks everyone relating to the case reveal that they all have secrets linking them to the *tragedy*.

Act 1a

An Inspector Calls

The Birling family are holding a dinner party to celebrate the engagement of Sheila to Gerald Croft, the son and heir of Mr Birling's rival in business. Although there are a few signs that not *everything* is perfect (Mr Birling is a bit too anxious to impress Gerald, Eric seems rather nervous and Sheila playfully rebukes Gerald for not having come near her the previous summer) there is a happy, light-hearted atmosphere.

When the ladies leave the men to their port, Mr Birling has a 'man to man' chat with Gerald and Eric, advising them that a man needs to look after himself and his own family and not worry about the wider community. As he is telling them this, the door bell rings. Inspector Goole enters, an impressive, serious man whom none of them has heard of.

Act 1b

Mr Birling

Inspector Goole announces that he has come to investigate the suicide of a young working-class girl who died that afternoon. Her name was Eva Smith. After seeing a photograph of her, Birling admits that she used to be one of his employees: he discharged her when she became one of the ring-leaders of a strike asking for slightly higher wages. Birling justifies sacking her by saying he paid his workers the usual rates; he cannot see that he has any responsibility for what happened to her afterwards.

Act 1c

Sheila

When Sheila enters, the Inspector reveals that he would also like to question her about Eva Smith's death. He tells Sheila that Eva's next job was at a big shop called Milwards, but that she was sacked after a customer complained about her. When she too is shown a photograph of the girl, Sheila is very affected. She admits that it was her fault that Eva was sacked: when Sheila had gone in to try on a dress that didn't suit her, she had caught Eva smirking to another shop assistant - in her anger, Sheila had told the manager that if Eva wasn't fired, Mrs Birling would close their account. Sheila is hugely guilty and feels responsible for Eva's death.

When the Inspector then states that Eva, in despair, changed her name to Daisy Renton, Gerald Croft's involuntary reaction reveals that he knew her too. When the act ends, the audience is poised to find out what part Gerald had to play in her death.

Act 2a

Sheila and Gerald

After some tense words between Sheila and Gerald, an attempt by Mrs Birling to usher the Inspector away and the revelation that Eric Birling is a hardened drinker, Gerald admits that he too had known Daisy Renton. He had met her at the local Variety Theatre - known to be the haunt of prostitutes - and had 'rescued' her from the unwelcome attentions of Alderman Meggarty, a local dignitary. When he found out that Daisy was almost penniless, Gerald let her stay in the flat of a friend of his and she became his mistress. He ended the affair when he had to go away on business, giving her some money to see her through for a few months.

Act 2b

Mrs Birling

Sheila is glad to have heard this confession from her fiancé, although Mrs Birling is scandalised. Once Gerald has left to go for a walk and get over the news of Daisy's death, Inspector Goole shows a photograph to Mrs Birling. She grudgingly admits that she had seen the girl two weeks previously, when the girl - now pregnant - had come to ask for financial assistance from the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation.

Mrs Birling was the chairwoman and persuaded the committee to turn down the girl's appeal on the grounds that she had the impudence to call herself Mrs Birling and because she believed that the father of the child should bear the responsibility. She says the girl refused to let the father of the child support her because she believed money he had given her previously to be stolen, yet Mrs Birling is proud of refusing the girl aid. She claims that she did her duty and sees no reason at all why she should take any blame for the girl's death.

Act 2c

Eric enters

Right at the end of the *scene*, as Mrs Birling denounces the father of the child and claims he needs to be made an example of, Sheila (and the audience) realise that Eric is involved. When Eric comes into the room, the *act* ends.

Act 3a

Eric

There is a bitter meeting between Eric and his parents, which the Inspector interrupts so that he can question Eric. Eric tells the *story* of his own involvement with the girl. He had met her in the same theatre bar as Gerald, had got drunk and had accompanied her back to her lodgings. He almost turned violent when she didn't let him in, so she relented and they made love. When he met her two weeks later they slept together again and soon afterwards she discovered that she was pregnant. She did not want to marry Eric because she knew he didn't love her, but she did accept gifts of money from him until she realised it was stolen. Eric admits that he had taken about £50 from Mr Birling's office - at which Mr and Mrs Birling are furious.

Act 3b

Inspector leaves

All the Birlings now know they played a part in the girl's death. Mr and Mrs Birling are concerned about covering up their involvement, whereas Sheila and Eric are more aware of the personal *tragedy* and feel guilty. The Inspector leaves, after delivering a strong message about how we *all* should be responsible for each other.

Act 3c

Family relieved

After he has left, and the family has begun to consider the consequences of what has been revealed, they gradually begin to wonder about the Inspector. Was he real? When Gerald returns from his walk he explains that he also had suspicions about the Inspector and had found out that there is no Inspector Goole on the force, which Birling confirms with a phone call.

They gradually realise that perhaps the Inspector conned them - he could have showed each person a different photograph - and when they telephone the infirmary, they realise that there hasn't been a suicide case for months. Birling is delighted, assuming they are now all off the hook, while Sheila and Eric maintain that nothing has changed - each of them still committed the acts that the Inspector had accused them of, even if they did turn out to be against five different girls.

Act 3d

The telephone rings

Then the telephone rings. Mr Birling answers it, and after hanging up tells the family that it was the police on the line: an inspector is on his way to ask questions about the suicide of a young girl...

Characters

The characters we see as the curtain rises are not the same as those at the plays conclusion. The events of the evening change everyone, as well as their expectations of the future. Inspector Goole is instrumental in disturbing the harmony; a purposeful, mysterious character who forces the characters to confront each other's social responsibility, snobbery and guilt. But is the inspector as genuine as he seems?

All these changes take place because of the visit of Inspector Goole. But who is Inspector Goole? And who is the girl whose suicide he is apparently investigating?

Mr Arthur Birling

Arthur Birling

He is described at the start as a "heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties but rather provincial in his speech."

He has worked his way up in the world and is proud of his achievements. He boasts about having been Mayor and tries (and fails) to impress the Inspector with his local standing and his influential friends.

However, he is aware of people who are his social superiors, which is why he shows off about the party to Gerald, "it's exactly the same party your father gets." He is proud that he is likely to be knighted, as that would move him even higher in social circles.

He claims the party "is one of the happiest nights of my life." This is not only because Sheila will be happy, but because a merger with Crofts Limited will be good for his business.

He is optimistic for the future and confident that there will not be a war. As the audience knows there *will* be a war, we begin to doubt Mr Birling's judgement. (If he is wrong about the war, what else will he be wrong about?)

He is extremely selfish:

He wants to protect himself and his family. He believes that socialist ideas that stress the importance of the community are "nonsense" and that "a man has to make his own way."

He wants to protect Birling and Co. He cannot see that he did anything wrong when he fired Eva Smith - he was just looking after his business interests.

He wants to protect his reputation. As the Inspector's investigations continue, his selfishness gets the better of him: he is worried about how the press will view the story in Act II, and accuses Sheila of disloyalty at the start of Act III. He wants to hide the fact that Eric stole money: "I've got to cover this up as soon as I can."

At the end of the play, he knows he has lost the chance of his knighthood, his reputation in Brumley and the chance of Birling and Co. merging with their rivals. Yet he hasn't learnt the lesson of the play: he is unable to admit his responsibility for his part in Eva's death.

Mrs Sybil Birling

Mrs Sybil Birling

She is described at the start as "about fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior."

She is a snob, very aware of the differences between social classes. She is irritated when Mr Birling makes the social gaffe of praising the cook in front of Gerald and later is very dismissive of Eva, saying "Girls of that class."

She has the least respect for the Inspector of all the characters. She tries - unsuccessfully - to intimidate him and force him to leave, then lies to him when she claims that she does not recognise the photograph that he shows her.

She sees Sheila and Eric still as "children" and speaks patronisingly to them.

She tries to deny things that she doesn't want to believe: Eric's drinking, Gerald's affair with Eva, and the fact that a working class girl would refuse money even if it was stolen, claiming "She was giving herself ridiculous airs."

She admits she was "prejudiced" against the girl who applied to her committee for help and saw it as her "duty" to refuse to help her. Her narrow sense of morality dictates that the father of a child should be responsible for its welfare, regardless of circumstances.

At the end of the play, she has had to come to terms that her son is a heavy drinker who got a girl pregnant and stole money to support her, her daughter will not marry a good social 'catch' and that her own reputation within the town will be sullied. Yet, like her husband, she refuses to believe that she did anything wrong and doesn't accept responsibility for her part in Eva's death.

Sheila Birling

Sheila Birling

She is described at the start as "a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited."

Even though she seems very playful at the opening, we know that she has had suspicions about Gerald when she mentions "last summer, when you never came near me." Does this suggest that she is not as naive and shallow as she first appears?

Although she has probably never in her life before considered the conditions of the workers, she shows her compassion immediately she hears of her father's treatment of Eva Smith: "But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people." Already, she is starting to change.

She is horrified by her own part in Eva's story. She feels full of guilt for her jealous actions and blames herself as "really responsible."

She is very perceptive: she realises that Gerald knew Daisy Renton from his reaction, the moment the Inspector mentioned her name. At the end of Act II, she is the first to realise Eric's part in the story. Significantly, she is the first to wonder who the Inspector really is, saying to him, 'wonderingly', "I don't understand about you." She warns the others "he's giving us the rope - so that we'll hang ourselves" (Act II) and, near the end, is the first to consider whether the Inspector may not be real.

She is curious. She genuinely wants to know about Gerald's part in the story. It's interesting that she is not angry with him when she hears about the affair: she says that she respects his honesty. She is becoming more mature.

She is angry with her parents in Act 3 for trying to "pretend that nothing much has happened." Sheila says "It frightens me the way you talk:" she cannot understand how they cannot have learnt from the evening in the same way that she has. She is seeing her parents in a new, unfavourable light.

At the end of the play, Sheila is much wiser. She can now judge her parents and Gerald from a new perspective, but the greatest change has been in herself: her social conscience has been awakened and she is aware of her responsibilities. The Sheila who had a girl dismissed from her job for a trivial reason has vanished forever.

Eric Birling

Eric Birling

He is described at the start as "in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive."

Eric seems embarrassed and awkward right from the start. The first mention of him in the script is "Eric suddenly guffaws," and then he is unable to explain his laughter, as if he is nervous about something. (It is not until the final act that we realise this must be because of his having stolen some money.) There is another awkward moment when Gerald, Birling and Eric are chatting about women's love of clothes before the Inspector arrives. Do you feel that there is tension in Eric's relationship with his father?

It soon becomes clear to us (although it takes his parents longer) that he is a hardened drinker. Gerald admits, "I have gathered that he does drink pretty hard."

When he hears how his father sacked Eva Smith, he supports the worker's cause, like Sheila. "Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?"

He feels guilt and frustration with himself over his relationship with the girl. He cries, "Oh - my God! - how stupid it all is!" as he tells his story. He is horrified that his thoughtless actions had such consequences.

He had some innate sense of responsibility, though, because although he got a woman pregnant, he was concerned enough to give her money. He was obviously less worried about stealing (or 'borrowing' from his father's office) than he was about the girl's future. So, was Eric, initially, the most socially aware member of the Birling family?

He is appalled by his parents' inability to admit their own responsibility. He tells them forcefully, "I'm ashamed of you." When Birling tries to threaten him in Act III, Eric is aggressive in return: "I don't give a damn now." Do you think Eric has ever stood up to his father in this way before?

At the end of the play, like Sheila, he is fully aware of his social responsibility. He is not interested in his parents' efforts to cover everything up: as far as he is concerned, the important thing is that a girl is dead. "We did her in all right."

Gerald Croft

Gerald Croft

He is described as "an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred man-about-town."

He is an aristocrat - the son of Lord and Lady Croft. We realise that they are not over-impressed by Gerald's engagement to Sheila because they declined the invitation to the dinner.

He is not as willing as Sheila to admit his part in the girl's death to the Inspector and initially pretends that he never knew her. Is he a bit like Mr Birling, wanting to protect his own interests?

He did have some genuine feeling for Daisy Renton, however: he is very moved when he hears of her death. He tells Inspector Goole that he arranged for her to live in his friend's flat "because I was sorry for her;" she became his mistress because "She was young and pretty and warm-hearted - and intensely grateful."

Despite this, in Act 3 he tries to come up with as much evidence as possible to prove that the Inspector is a fake - because that would get him off the hook. It is Gerald who confirms that the local force has no officer by the name of Goole, he who realises it may not have been the same girl and he who finds out from the infirmary that there has not been a suicide case in months. He seems to throw his energies into "protecting" himself rather than "changing" himself (unlike Sheila).

At the end of the play, he has not changed. He has not gained a new sense of social responsibility, which is why Sheila (who has) is unsure whether to take back the engagement ring.

Inspector Goole

Inspector Goole

He is described on his entrance as creating "an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit. He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking. "

He works very systematically; he likes to deal with "one person and one line of enquiry at a time." His method is to confront a suspect with a piece of information and then make them talk - or, as Sheila puts it, "he's giving us the rope - so that we'll hang ourselves."

He is a figure of authority. He deals with each member of the family very firmly and several times we see him "massively taking charge as disputes erupt between them." He is not impressed when he hears about Mr Birling's influential friends and he cuts through Mrs Birling's obstructiveness.

He seems to know and understand an extraordinary amount:

He knows the history of Eva Smith and the Birlings' involvement in it, even though she died only hours ago. Sheila tells Gerald, "Of course he knows."

He knows things are going to happen - He says "I'm waiting...To do my duty" just before Eric's return, as if he expected Eric to reappear at exactly that moment

He is obviously in a great hurry towards the end of the play: he stresses "I haven't much time." Does he know that the real inspector is shortly going to arrive?

His final speech is like a sermon or a politician's. He leaves the family with the message "We are responsible for each other" and warns them of the "fire and blood and anguish" that will result if they do not pay attention to what he has taught them.

All this mystery suggests that the Inspector is not a 'real' person. So, what is he?

Is he a ghost? Goole reminds us of 'ghoul'.

Is he the voice of Priestley?

Is he the voice of God?

Is he the voice of all our consciences?

Do you have any other suggestions?

Eva Smith

Eva Smith

Of course, we never see Eva Smith on stage in the play: we only have the evidence that the Inspector and the Birlings give us.

The Inspector, Sheila, Gerald and Eric all say that she was "pretty." Gerald describes her as "very pretty - soft brown hair and big dark eyes."

Her parents were dead.

She came from outside Brumley: Mr Birling speaks of her being "country-bred."

She was working class.

The Inspector says that she had kept a sort of diary, which helped him piece together the last two years of her life:

However, in Act 3 we begin to wonder whether Eva ever really existed. - Gerald says, "We've no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl." - Birling adds, "There wasn't the slightest proof that this Daisy Renton really was Eva Smith." Yet the final phone call, announcing that a police inspector is shortly to arrive at the Birlings' house to investigate the suicide of a young girl, makes us realise that maybe Eva Smith did exist after all. What do you think?

Think about Eva's name. *Eva* is similar to *Eve*, the first woman created by God in the Bible. *Smith* is the most common English surname. So, *Eva Smith* could represent every woman of her class.

Themes

A theme is an idea that runs through a text. A *text* may have one theme or many. Understanding the themes makes the text more than 'just' a story - it becomes something more significant, because we're encouraged to think deeper about the story and work out what lies beyond the *plot*. In *An Inspector Calls*, the central theme is responsibility. Priestley is interested in our personal responsibility for our own actions and our collective responsibility to society. The play explores the effect of class, age and sex on people's attitudes to responsibility, and shows how prejudice can prevent people from acting responsibly. So, how does Priestley weave the themes through the play?

Responsibility

Everyone in society is linked...

The words responsible and responsibility are used by most *characters* in the play at some point.

Each member of the family has a different attitude to responsibility. Make sure that you know how each of them felt about their responsibility in the case of Eva Smith.

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

One Eva Smith has gone - but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, and what we think and say and do.

The Inspector is talking about a collective responsibility, everyone in society is linked, in the same way that the characters are linked to Eva Smith. Everyone is a part of "one body", the Inspector sees society as more important than individual interests. The views he is propounding are like those of Priestley who was a socialist.

He adds a clear warning about what could happen if, like some members of the family, we ignore our responsibility:

And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, when they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.

What would Priestley have wanted his audience to think of when the Inspector warns the Birlings of the "fire and blood and anguish"?

Probably he is thinking partly about the world war they had just lived through - the result of governments blindly pursuing 'national interest' at all costs. No doubt he was thinking too about the Russian revolution in which poor workers and peasants took over the state and exacted a bloody revenge against the aristocrats who had treated them so badly.

Class

Apart from Edna the maid, the cast of the play does not include any lower class characters. We see only the rich, upwardly mobile Birlings and the upper class Gerald Croft. Yet we *learn* a lot about the lower class as we hear of each stage in Eva's life and we see the attitude the Birlings had for them.

This table looks at the way the Birlings saw lower-class Eva when they came into contact with her, and the way that they see themselves within their own class.

Characters	Attitudes to the lower class:	Attitudes to the upper class:
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Characters	Attitudes to the lower class:	Attitudes to the upper class:
	At the start of the play, this character was:	To this character, Eva was...
Mr Birling	keen to be knighted to cement his hard-fought rise to the upper class	cheap labour
Sheila	happy spending a lot of time in expensive shops	someone who could be fired out of spite
Gerald	prepared to marry Sheila, despite her lower social position	a mistress who could be discarded at will
Eric	awkward about his 'public-school-and-Varsity' life	easy sex at the end of a drunken night out
Mrs Birling	socially superior to her husband, and embarrassed at his gaffes	a presumptuous upstart

The Palace Variety Theatre was a music hall. It was not seen as quite 'respectable' entertainment - probably not somewhere where Sheila would have gone. The **stalls** bar of the Palace Variety Theatre, where Eva Smith met both Gerald and Eric, was the bar for the lower classes and a favourite haunt of prostitutes. We could ask what Gerald and Eric were there in the first place! Alderman Meggarty, a local dignitary, also went there a lot.

Priestley is trying to show that the upper classes are unaware that the easy lives they lead rest upon hard work of the lower classes.

Sex

Eva Smith

Because Eva was a woman - in the days before women were valued by society and had not yet been awarded the right to vote - she was in an even worse position than a lower class man. Even upper class women had few choices. For most, the best they could hope for was to impress a rich man and marry well - which could explain why Sheila spent so long in Milwards.

For working class women, a job was crucial. There was no social security at that time, so without a job they had no money. There were very few options open to women in that situation: many saw no alternative but to turn to prostitution.

Look at these quotations, showing the attitude to women of some characters:

Mr Birling is dismissive of the several hundred women in his factory: "We were paying the usual rates and if they didn't like those rates, they could go and work somewhere else."

Gerald saw Eva as "young and fresh and charming" - in other words, someone vulnerable he could amuse himself by helping.

Mrs Birling couldn't believe that "a girl of that sort would ever refuse money." Her charitable committee was a sham: a small amount of money was given to a small amount of women, hardly scratching the surface of the problem.

Why did Priestley decide to hinge his play on the death of a young working class woman rather than the death of a young working class man?

Age

The older generation and the younger generation take the Inspector's message in different ways. While Sheila and Eric accept their part in Eva's death and feel huge guilt about it, their parents are unable to admit that they did anything wrong. This table looks at these contrasting ideas:

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

Gerald Croft is caught in the middle, being neither very young nor old. In the end he sides with the older generation, perhaps because his aristocratic roots influence him to want to keep the status quo and protect his own interests. Ultimately, we can be optimistic that the young - those who will shape future society - are able to take on board the Inspector's message.

Effects

As you read the play, it is important to imagine yourself watching and listening to the action. It is a drama not a novel! The *stage directions* are important in helping us to imagine exactly what is going on: they can help us picture each character's actions and reactions. In the course of *An Inspector Calls* the Birling family and Gerald Croft change from a state of great self-satisfaction to a state of extreme self-doubt. The play is in 'real time' - in other words, the story lasts exactly as long as the play is on the stage. So, what happens in a comparatively short time to create such a dramatic *contrast*? How is the drama maintained and the audience involved? Think about these points.

Setting and Subtle Hints

The Setting and Lighting are very important. Priestley describes the scene in detail at the opening of Act 1, so that the audience has the immediate impression of a "heavily comfortable house." The setting is constant (all action happens in the same place). Priestley says that the lighting should be "pink and intimate" before the Inspector arrives - a rose-tinted glow - when it becomes "brighter and harder." The lighting reflects the mood of the play.

The dining room of a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a prosperous manufacturer. It has good solid furniture of the period. At the moment they have all had a good dinner, are celebrating a special occasion, and are pleased with themselves.

There are subtle hints that not is all as it seems. For example, early on we wonder whether the happy atmosphere is slightly forced. Sheila wonders where Gerald was last summer, Eric is nervous about something, Lord and Lady Croft did not attend the engagement dinner. This arouses interest in the audience - we want to find out what is going on!

Dramatic Irony and Tone

There is *dramatic irony*. For instance, the audience knows how wrong Mr Birling is when he makes confident predictions about there not being a war and is excited about the sailing of The Titanic: famously, the ship sank on her maiden voyage. This puts the audience at an advantage over the characters and makes us more involved.

There is a lot of *tension* as each member of the family is found to have played a part in Eva's death. New pieces of information contribute to the story being constructed. The audience is interested in how each character reacts to the revelations.

The Inspector

The Inspector himself adds drama:

He controls the pace and *tension* by dealing with one line of enquiry at a time. Slowly the story of Eva's life is unravelled, like in a 'whodunnit'.

He is in command at the end of Act I and the start of Act 2, and the end of Act 2 and the start of Act 3. He is a brooding, inescapable presence, very much in control.

He is very mysterious and seems to know what is going to happen before it does.

Tension and Timing

There are numerous changes in *tone*. For instance, Mr Birling's confidence is soon replaced - first by self-justification as he tries to explain his part in Eva's death, and then by anxiety.

Timing of entrances and exits is crucial. For example, the Inspector arrives immediately after Birling has told Gerald about his impending knighthood and about how "a man has to look after himself and his own."

The Ending

The **ending** leaves the audience on a cliff-hanger. In Act 3 the Birlings believed themselves to be off the hook when it is discovered that the Inspector wasn't real and that no girl had died in the infirmary. This releases some of the tension - but the final telephone call, announcing that a real inspector is on his way to ask questions about the suicide of a young girl, suddenly restores the tension very dramatically. It is an unexpected final twist.