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An Inspector Calls

Revision Guide

AQA English Literature

Text guide and practice exam questions

BEYOND REVISION

YOUR GCSE COMPANION

For grade 9-1
GCSE English Literature

Contents

How to Use This Guide

When revising, knowing where to start can be daunting. Here, you can find out more about what's included in this revision guide and how best to use it.

Who's Who

This section gives a rundown of the play's characters. If you hover over character illustrations or names then question prompts will appear that help develop independent thinking and analysis.

Summary

This section gives a detailed summary of each act. It might seem a long read but it's still quicker than watching or reading the play all over again. Have a copy of the play to hand in case this summary prompts ideas that require you to look at a moment from the play more closely. The Chain of Events summarises the summary by condensing the play's action down to the must-know points. You need to have a solid understanding of the whole plot of the play so you could test yourself by writing your own summary or producing a mind map of events.

There are also thinking points throughout to help you develop thought-provoking responses to events, characters and themes. You could discuss these with a partner (different interpretations – so long as you can evidence them – are like gold dust!) and add ideas to your own revision notes.

Themes

These sections cover the main themes of *An Inspector Calls*. Literature exams demand that you think thematically; in other words, to write primarily about the writer's bigger ideas rather than just what happens in the plot. Each theme is divided into sub-sections to help you develop a thorough understanding.

Context

Within each theme you will find relevant contextual information. Context refers to the circumstances (what was happening in the author's life, what was happening in the wider world, prevailing ideas and influences) that shaped the text. This information will give you a fuller understanding of the play and its themes. For each theme, create a context poster that will help you to remember critical information.

Key Quotes

The more quotations you are able to remember, the easier you will find it to answer whatever question comes up in the exam. These key quotes come with

language analysis, demonstrating what can be done with a few well-chosen words. They are also taken from a range of characters and from different acts – it is useful to do this in your own exam answer to show understanding of the whole play.

Try covering the quotes and writing them from memory as accurately as you can; it doesn't necessarily matter if you're not word perfect, as long as the meaning is precisely conveyed and key words that invite deeper analysis are included. Also, consider how you would analyse any other quotes you already know – if you don't have much to say about them, particularly if you can't pick out powerful words or literary devices, then look for alternatives.

Mini Exams

These questions test your understanding of the theme and encourage deeper thought. You could discuss in a small group of friends to compare and contrast ideas, then either plan a response or write a full answer. It's important to get used to working under timed conditions so give yourself a set time to write, say 15 minutes. Then have a partner read your response and identify where Assessment Objectives (explained in About the Exam) have been met.

Exam Question

The exam questions are written in the same style and format as the one you'll answer in the real exam. Practise by setting yourself a timer of 45 minutes to plan and write a response.

Sample Answers

For each exam question, there are two sample answers provided. The first one is a 'good' response and the second is a 'great' one. Each is colour coded and annotated to explain where different Assessment Objectives have been met. Remember, the examiner wants to see your personal interpretation of the play so these are not 'right' answers, merely ones to learn from. Try applying annotations to your own practice responses, reinforcing what you've done well and giving tips for improvement. This can be difficult to do so don't be shy in asking friends and teachers for help.

Glossary

Being academic sometimes means saying relatively simple things in more impressive terms! Throughout this guide you will find words highlighted **gold** that might impress your examiner. The glossary tells you what these words mean, just in case you didn't already know.

About the Exam

An Inspector Calls appears in Section A of **AQA's English Literature Paper 2: Modern Texts and Poetry**. You will have a choice of two questions; you only need to answer one. The question requires an essay-style response and you are advised to spend approximately 45 minutes on it.

Paper 2: Modern Texts and Poetry	
Section A	Modern prose or drama
Section B	Poetry: AQA Anthology
Section C	Unseen poetry

It is one of 12 texts in this section. The good news is that you can ignore all the others. The other good news is that *An Inspector Calls* is routinely first on the exam paper so no time should be wasted searching for your question.

An Inspector Calls is also an Edexcel and OCR exam text. There are variations in approach but all of the exam questions revolve around the themes of the play so much of the information in this revision guide could be applied to all three exam boards.

Whichever one you are sitting, you won't be allowed to have a copy of the play with you so it's really important that you revise thoroughly.

The Assessment Objectives also remain the same across all exam boards, although they are weighted differently.

The Assessment Objectives

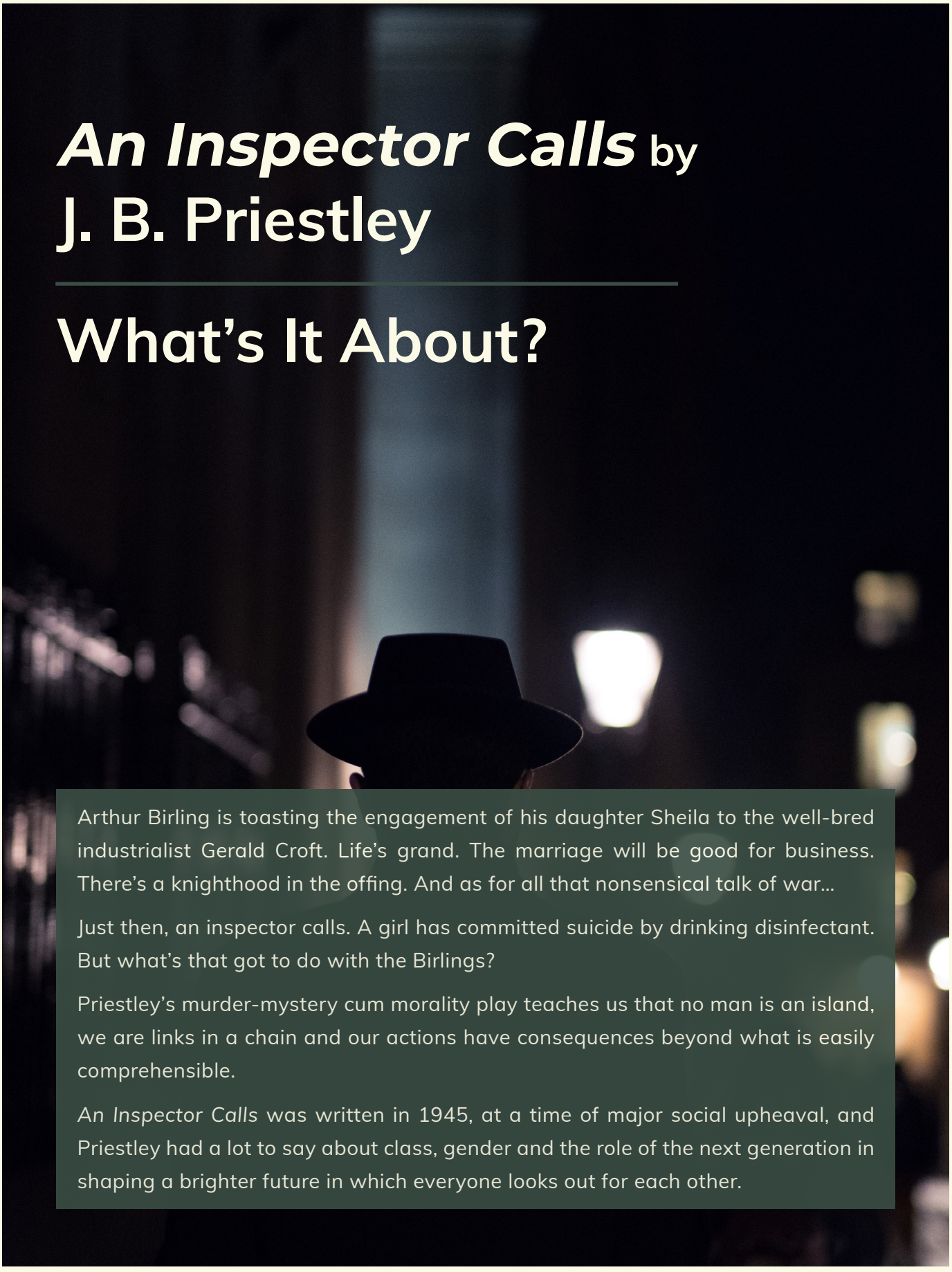
You get marks in the exam for meeting the Assessment Objectives (AOs). The AOs are:

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: • maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response • use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.	AO1 means that you can show you have read and understood the text. You can give your own personal ideas and thoughts about the play and use quotes from the text as evidence to back up your points. The more detailed and developed your ideas are, the more marks you pick up.
AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.	AO2 means that you can talk about the way that Priestley wrote the play. You can analyse the language that Priestley used and why he used it, and you can analyse the way that he structured the play and why he chose to do it the way he did. You can talk about the effects that Priestley's choices make and how the audience would respond to them.
AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.	AO3 means that you can describe how the play's context affects the way it was written. You can show that you understand what life was like at the time the play was written and what events influenced Priestley to write it, and talk about how this affected Priestley's writing. You can talk about how an audience in Priestley's time would have reacted to the play.
AO4: Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.	AO4 means that you can write accurately - there are marks available for correct spelling, punctuation and grammar.

In this revision guide, there are sample answers to GCSE-style questions. These have been highlighted with the colour code above to show where they have met the AOs.

An Inspector Calls by J. B. Priestley

What's It About?



Arthur Birling is toasting the engagement of his daughter Sheila to the well-bred industrialist Gerald Croft. Life's grand. The marriage will be good for business. There's a knighthood in the offing. And as for all that nonsensical talk of war...

Just then, an inspector calls. A girl has committed suicide by drinking disinfectant. But what's that got to do with the Birlings?

Priestley's murder-mystery cum morality play teaches us that no man is an island, we are links in a chain and our actions have consequences beyond what is easily comprehensible.

An Inspector Calls was written in 1945, at a time of major social upheaval, and Priestley had a lot to say about class, gender and the role of the next generation in shaping a brighter future in which everyone looks out for each other.

About the Author

John Boynton Priestley was born in Bradford, Yorkshire on 13th September 1894. His mother died shortly afterwards. Despite such a formative misfortune, Priestley had a comfortable and stimulating upbringing: his father was a schoolmaster who introduced his son to an influential circle of socialist friends.

Priestley opted to leave school at 16, convinced that a wannabe-writer could learn more from the real world than from sitting behind a classroom desk. He therefore got a job as a junior clerk with the local wool firm Helm & Co. while trying to establish himself as, in his own words, 'a writer-poet, story-teller, humorist, commentator, social philosopher'. With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Priestley – aged 20 – joined the infantry and considered himself fortunate to survive the next few years in which he experienced explosions, gas attacks and the many other horrors of front-line service.

On leaving the army in 1919, Priestley read Modern History and Political Science at Cambridge University but academic life didn't suit him and, in 1921, he relocated to London with his newly-wed wife to become a freelance writer. Personal tragedy struck again when his young wife died of cancer (he quickly remarried and would have three wives and many more lovers in his 89 years); however, he also achieved professional success as an essayist and novelist. His career as a playwright began in the 1930s and theatre became the form for which he was best known, with social responsibility being a recurring theme of plays such as *Dangerous Corner* (1932), *The Linden Tree* (1947) and, of course, *An Inspector Calls* (1945).

When the Second World War struck in 1939, Priestley got busy writing and broadcasting his Sunday night *Postscripts* on BBC radio, a series of ten-minute talks and personal reflections on the conditions of wartime. These were immensely popular, with peak audiences of 16 million bettered only by PM Winston Churchill's public speeches. Nevertheless, they were cancelled mid-war, allegedly because they were critical of the government. Priestley's name was also included on fellow writer George Orwell's post-war list of people who were sympathetic to Communist Russia, which came close to making him an enemy of the state.

Anti-establishment affairs continued with Priestley being a founding member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958 and the rejection of a peerage in 1965. However, he did accept the Queen's Order of Merit in 1977, an elite honour recognising distinguished service in the armed forces, science, art, literature or culture. He was also awarded the Freedom of Bradford in 1973 and a larger-than-life statue of him now stands in front of that city's National Science and Media Museum.

Priestley died of pneumonia on 14th August 1984.

Form and Structure

As a play, *An Inspector Calls* is intended to be viewed in performance rather than read. Hopefully you've had the opportunity to experience it as intended. Priestley can be referred to as the playwright, writer or author but if you make the mistake of referring to the text as a novel, a book or a story then you risk irritating the person marking your paper!

The **stage directions** – which indicate how key aspects of performance such as sets, lighting, movement and dialogue should be handled – are imperceptible when watching a play but are noticeable when reading a play script. An abundance of adverbs (*usefully*) guide both actors and readers on what the characters are thinking and feeling.

It is customary to set the scene in a couple of lines but Priestley takes nearly a whole page describing the setting and characters. This is the playwright stamping his mark on the performance so it is worth studying for clues.

Why do you think Priestley stipulates that the lighting be 'pink and intimate' to begin with and what's the effect of it becoming 'brighter and harder' after the Inspector arrives?

One of the reasons Priestley takes the time to set the scene is because there is only one setting: the Birling's dining room. No scene changes are required so it is feasible that the play could run as one continuous act. One of the reasons it doesn't is that Priestley uses the three act structure for effect. Act One and Act Two both end on a cliff-hanger, which is a **convention** of the mystery and detective genres to which *An Inspector Calls* ostensibly belongs. The building to a climax and keeping audiences puzzling certainly adds to the intrigue.

Have you seen any performances that veer away from Priestley's original directions? How could you stage the play in a way that would make it fresh for tired English teachers who've seen it a hundred times before?

An Inspector Calls is also routinely classified as a **well-made play**. In this popular form of nineteenth century theatre, the narrative depends on key information being withheld from certain characters, making it a neat fit with the more conventional murder-mystery genre. The narrative impetus is usually something that has happened before the play's action begins and it is the investigation of this past occurrence through a chain of events that creates suspense. Thus far, *An Inspector Calls* fits the form perfectly. However, Priestley **subverts** the conventions of the well-made play in his **denouement**. Whereas a well-made play usually ends with a tidy resolution and return to order, Priestley's ends with a twist: who was the Inspector and was he even real?

Why might Priestley have used a form that was popular in the nineteenth century?

This thought-provoking conclusion is perhaps more characteristic of a **morality play**, which is another genre that *An Inspector Calls* can be placed in. This classical genre sought to teach morals. Though this often required simplistic narratives that invited an audience to judge characters, better examples also forced audiences to question their own behaviour and to think more deeply about the causes of social problems.

Who's Who

ARTHUR BIRLING

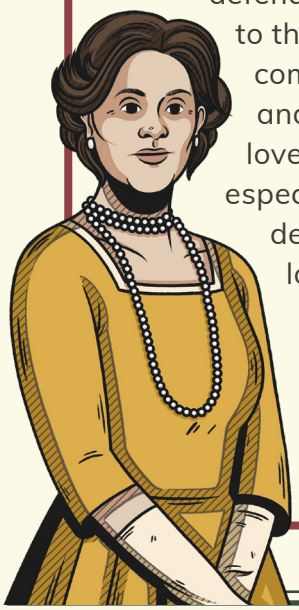
'A heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties with fairly easy manners but rather provincial in his speech.'

Arthur (henceforth referred to as Birling) reckons himself a self-made man, suggesting he comes from a humble background at odds with the luxury lifestyle evident in the play. Despite having been Lord Mayor of Brumley and trying to intimidate the Inspector with his high connections, he still feels second-rate against Sir George and Lady Croft. Nevertheless, Birling is a wealthy man who demands respect but rarely gives it in return. He likes the sound of his own voice but his wayward proclamations on war and the Titanic are dripping in **dramatic irony**. The audience can see his pomposity and wrong-headedness but such self-awareness eludes the man himself.

Key words: **pompous, obstinate, capitalist**

SYBIL BIRLING, his wife

'About fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior.'



Sybil is a prominent member of the Brumley Women's Charity Organization yet seemingly without a charitable bone in her body. Nor is she much of a defender of women's rights! **Propriety** is more important than listening to the thoughts and feelings of her children. She is not a caring and compassionate mother but she does at least seek to shield Sheila and Eric from interrogation, though whether this is out of maternal love or the desire to keep up appearances is open to debate, especially after she inadvertently condemns her son for his role in the death of Eva/Daisy. Similarly, though there is no hint of romantic love, she is supportive of Arthur and his business dealings; she might be her husband's social superior – meaning she was born into a higher class than him – but as a respectable upper-class lady she knows a woman's place (at least according to the pre-**suffrage** etiquette of the early twentieth century, which dictated that a wife was **subservient** to her husband).

Key words: **cold-hearted, condescending, dutiful**

Who's Who

SHEILA BIRLING, his daughter

'A pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited.'

Sheila is the heart and soul of the play. At the beginning she appears quite childish and frivolous but, as the character most receptive to what the Inspector says, she quickly grows into the most **perceptive** and sympathetic member of the family. By the end of Act Two she has developed an assertive streak and is confident enough to oppose her parents and voice her own opinions. She also displays an unexpected degree of maturity and understanding towards her erstwhile fiancé, Gerald.

Key words: **remorseful, perceptive, defiant**

ERIC BIRLING, his son

'In his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive.'

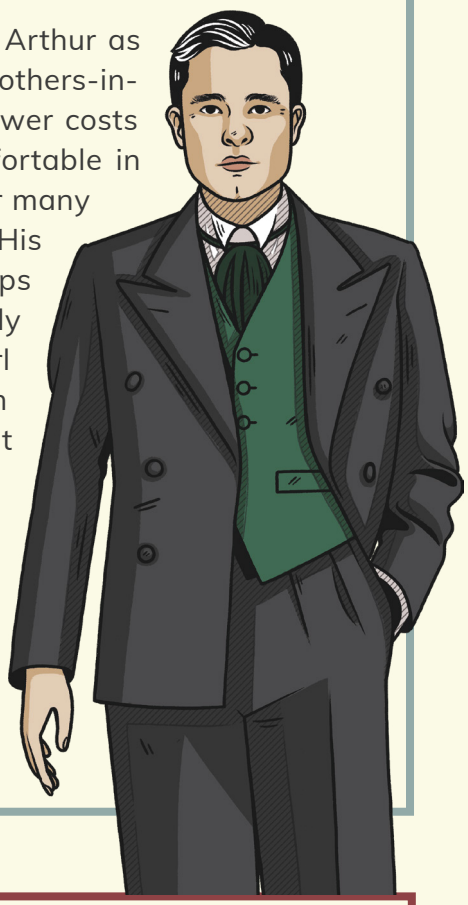
Eric is a disturbed young man, floundering in the shadow of his father. When he does try to assert himself, he is talked down. Alcohol has become his crutch: a dependency that Sheila is more attuned to than his parents but which she, in an unsisterly way, uses as a stick to beat him with. It is only after the Inspector's intervention that the young siblings begin to form a united front. Eric's juvenile drunkenness, his crass treatment of Eva/Daisy (it is implied that he forces himself upon her) and the theft from Birling & Co. to cover his tracks ought to make Eric a deeply unsympathetic character. However, his troubled character can be seen as the consequence of neglectful parenting and Eric ultimately redeems himself with a willingness to accept responsibility for his actions.

Key words: **corruptible, reckless, defiant**

Who's Who

GERALD CROFT

'An attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred young man-about-town.'



Heir of Crofts Ltd, Gerald is as much a catch for Arthur as for Sheila! **Industrialists** in those days were brothers-in-arms, working together for, in Birling's words, 'lower costs and higher prices.' Gerald is confident and comfortable in his surroundings, which probably can't be said for many young men around their prospective father-in-law. His treatment of Daisy Renton also makes him perhaps the play's most complex character. He is the only one who appears to have actually cared for the girl and to have bettered her circumstances, although the difference in class makes it inconceivable that their affair could have blossomed into anything more. However, he is also evasive, a trait that continues into the final act as he endeavours to get himself and the Birlings out of trouble. He even thinks that Sheila might countenance a renewed engagement. Unlike Sheila and Eric, he has not learned from his mistakes and is therefore more closely aligned with the older generation.

Key words: **confident, elusive, entitled**

EDNA, the maid

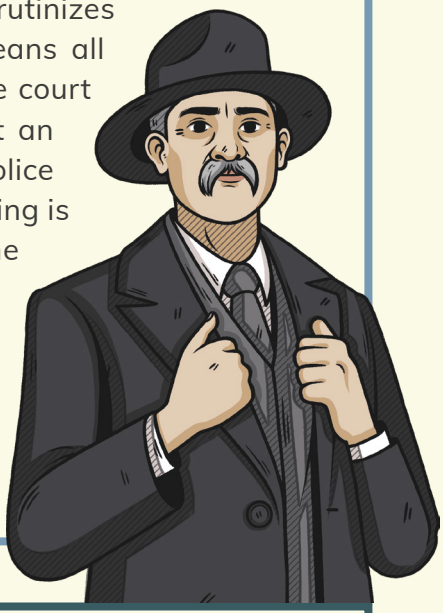
A minor character with four meagre lines, Edna is nevertheless representative of the working class and **stereotypical** women's labour. She is one of the 'millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths' so it is deliciously apt that her dramatic function is to let the Inspector in to the Birling estate.

Who's Who

INSPECTOR GOOLE

'The INSPECTOR need not be a big man but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period. He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking.'

The Inspector calls at the height of Birling's self-congratulation and imparting of life lessons. This timing is not coincidental; he embodies Priestley's socialist beliefs and his arrival symbolises a correction to Birling's capitalist view. The role of police inspector is also **metaphorical**: he scrutinizes character and carries the judicial authority that means all under his watch face a day of reckoning, be it in the court of law or a higher court of morality. But there isn't an Inspector Goole or anybody like him in the Brumley police force, so who is he really? The play's cliff-hanger ending is deliberately ambiguous but the name – a homophone for 'ghoul' – suggests paranormal origins, as does his **presentiment**; the Inspector drives the dramatic action but he actually says and does little of note, his sheer presence is enough to draw the story out of all the other **protagonists**, reinforcing the idea that he is the **personification** of a social conscience.



Key words: **enigmatic, authoritative, sober**

EVA SMITH / DAISY RENTON

Can we count someone we never see as a character in a play? In the case of *An Inspector Calls*, everyone is judged by their interactions with Eva so it would be remiss not to consider her. In some ways she is even more spectral than the Inspector, her spirit rising from the grave to avenge what the Birlings did to her in life. And Eva is certainly spirited, especially if we take Eva and Daisy as the same person, though the Inspector's teaching is that it doesn't much matter since there are millions like her and we're each and every one of us connected. She demonstrates a number of stereotypical working-class qualities, such as boldness and resourcefulness. But she also has the good grace and principles that ironically lead to Mrs Birling damning her. Priestley's moralising makes her a blameless character who is no more rounded than Mr and Mrs Birling but, unlike them, she attracts the audience's sympathies.

Key words: **inscrutable, resourceful, principled**

Summary

Act One

Taking port after dinner, the Birlings are a picture of **bourgeois** contentment. They are toasting Sheila and Gerald's engagement and are in a celebratory mood, though some of the jesting papers over cracks, such as Sheila wondering what happened to Gerald last summer and Eric being '**squiffy**'.

Birling makes a speech that salutes his son-in-law-to-be, focusing more on what Gerald will bring to his business than the happiness he'll bring his daughter. Sheila is satisfied, however, by her fiancé unveiling an exquisite engagement ring. Before the women retire to the drawing-room, Birling makes a second speech. Dismissing talk of strikes and war, he asserts that a time of increasing **prosperity** lies ahead, citing as an example the luxurious and unsinkable new liner, the Titanic!

Left alone, Birling broaches with Gerald the idea that Lady Croft feels her son might be marrying below his social status and reassures him that '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?' Eric returns and Birling proceeds to lecture both young men about the importance of hard work, making your own way and looking out for yourself. He speaks as a hard-headed businessman, not one of those 'cranks' who thinks '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'. And then we hear *the sharp ring of a front door bell...*

What is the effect of the adjective 'sharp'? Why might Priestley have used this word in his stage directions?

An inspector's called. Birling suspects it's related to his official business as a **magistrate**, though Gerald's ribbing that maybe Eric's been up to something gets a nervous retort.

Inspector Goole is welcomed with the offer of a port or whisky which is respectfully but firmly declined. Birling recognises the Inspector as a new recruit and then seeks to impress him with his knowledge of the Brumley police force and an inventory of senior positions he's held. But the Inspector's not interested in all that. He wants information of a different sort.

The Inspector discloses the news that, two hours ago, a young woman died in the **Infirmary** after swallowing disinfectant. Eric is shocked but Birling wants to know what that has to do with them. The Inspector tells of a letter and a diary found at the girl's lodgings; though she'd used more than one name, her real name was Eva Smith. This brings a hint of recognition from Birling but he requires the Inspector to fill in the fact that she used to work in his factory. Birling insists that he can't be expected to keep track of his ever-changing workforce. The Inspector shows him a photograph of the girl but shields it from Gerald and Eric; 'one line of inquiry at a time,' he states.

Birling concedes that he remembers the girl and that he discharged her in the autumn of 1910, nearly two years ago. Given the time lapse he can't see how it had anything to do with her suicide but the Inspector explains it as 'a chain of events'. Eva is recalled as a fine machinist, ready for promotion to lead operator until post-holiday agitation over pay. Birling refused the workers' request for higher rates with the message that it's his duty to keep costs down and they're free to find work elsewhere if they don't like it. When Eric challenges this, he is told by his father to keep out of it. Eric now works for Birling & Co. but didn't back then. Gerald argues that a workers' strike wouldn't last long coming after the holidays: 'They'd all be broke – if I know them.'

What does Gerald's comment imply about the working class? And what does it tell us about Gerald himself?

Indeed, the strike doesn't last long and the workers return at the old rates except for the ring-leaders, Eva among them, who 'had

a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go'. Gerald approves of Birling's actions; Eric thinks it harsh, to which Birling responds that they'd have soon been asking the earth if he'd succumbed. When the Inspector interjects that 'it's better to ask for the earth than to take it', Birling turns on him. But Inspector Goole will not be intimidated by his respondent's golfing connections to the Chief Constable. When Eric again defends the workers' rights, Birling attacks the naivety of his son's public-school-and-Varsity life.

Sheila enters, ignorant of the Inspector's presence. Birling thinks the inquisition is at an end but is contradicted by Inspector Goole, who tells her about the girl's demise. Sheila's shocked response is similar to her brother's. Gerald questions the Inspector's methods on the basis that it's what happened to the girl after leaving Birling's employment that's important, and none of them can help with that. The Inspector says, 'Are you sure?' and gives all three of the younger generation a probing look that makes them uneasy.

None of them are familiar with an Eva Smith but the Inspector reiterates that she changed her name, perhaps having had enough of being Eva. Sheila sympathises and asks the Inspector to tell what happened next... The girl was fortunate enough to get a job at Milwards, an upmarket shop, where she was making a fresh start until a customer complaint led her to dismissal. This information agitates Sheila. She asks what the girl looked like and the Inspector shows her a photograph which produces a half-stifled sob and a hasty exit.

Birling is angry at the Inspector for upsetting his daughter and making a mess of their celebration. The Inspector replies calmly that it's comparable to the mess made of Eva. Gerald and Eric round on him with the reminder that they're 'respectable citizens and not criminals' but the Inspector argues there's not always as much difference as you might think.

A visibly upset Sheila returns and the Inspector takes a rather more gentle approach. He knew of Sheila's involvement from something the girl wrote. Sheila is keen to accept responsibility and recounts

how she got the girl sacked: she'd been in a bad temper, made worse after trying on an ill-fitting dress that she liked the idea of but everyone else was against. When the pretty shopgirl held it up, it suited her. Catching the girl smiling at the assistant enflames Sheila who, as an important customer, insists she is sacked for **impertinence**. The Inspector accuses Sheila of jealousy, a charge she admits to. Her actions haunt her – the staff at Milwards give her 'a sort of look' – and she wishes she could take them back. It's too late for that says the Inspector, who looks at the story so far from the girl's perspective. He doesn't know what name she used at the store but after this she changed her name to Daisy Renton–

The mention of this name elicits a startled response from Gerald. He tries to evade questioning but Sheila pushes back, forcing Gerald to admit (in the Inspector's absence) that he spent the previous summer with Daisy. He says he is sorry but it is all over and he hasn't set eyes on the girl in six months so there's no need for the Inspector to know. Sheila brands him a fool – the Inspector already knows! – a proposition corroborated by their inquisitor's timely return and an arch 'Well?'

Chain of Events: Act One

The Birlings are celebrating Sheila's engagement to Gerald Croft.

Birling is boasting about a knighthood and dismissing talk of war and socialist ideals when *an Inspector calls* with news of a girl's suicide.

Inspector Goole establishes that Birling sacked Eva Smith, though Birling fails to see the relevance of this.

The girl then got a shop job but was sacked after Sheila complained about her. Sheila feels dreadful about this.

The girl changes her name to Daisy Renton – this information incriminates Gerald.

Act Two

Gerald wants Sheila to leave on the **chivalrous** pretext of sparing her more trauma. When she refuses, he unchivalrously accuses her of wanting to see 'somebody else put through it' having already professed her own guilt. The Inspector mediates the lovers' spat by perceiving that Sheila needs to hear more in order to know that the guilt is not all hers to bear.

Mrs Birling enters and addresses the Inspector with a self-assurance that Sheila warns her is hopelessly misplaced. Mrs Birling fails to understand the 'great impression' that the Inspector has made on the younger generation, nor what their responsibility could possibly be for 'girls of that class', nor the 'rather peculiar and offensive manner' in which he is conducting his investigation. As her husband did before her, she references Birling's influential post of Lord Mayor but Gerald advises her this information is meaningless to the Inspector. Mr Birling is at this moment off-stage talking to an over-excitable Eric. Sybil rejects the notion that her son drinks too much but Sheila and Gerald rectify this misconception and are chastised for airing the family's dirty laundry in front of the Inspector.

Birling enters hot and bothered because Eric won't go to bed; the Inspector has told him to stay up. Mr and Mrs Birling can't fathom why the Inspector needs to speak to anyone else but he ominously tells them to wait and see... He picks up the story of Daisy Renton and Gerald's role in proceedings.

Is there any significance to the small detail of Daisy coming from outside Brumley ?

Gerald again tries to deny knowing the girl and to remove Sheila from the situation but it's of no use. He was at the Palace Theatre bar when he noticed a girl who looked out of place and was being harrassed by old Joe Meggarty. Sybil is taken aback to learn that **Alderman** Meggarty is a notorious womanizer and drunkard! Gerald intervened and took the willing girl to a quieter place where they could talk. Although she doesn't tell Gerald much about her personal life, we do learn that she was originally from somewhere outside Brumley

and is facing **destitution**. Gerald has a friend with empty rooms so he installed her in one but points out that he didn't ask anything in return. Still, Daisy naturally showed her gratitude by becoming his mistress and the relationship bolstered Gerald's ego, though his strength of feeling didn't quite match hers. Unlike Sheila, who wants to know whether Gerald was in love with Daisy, Sybil doesn't want 'futher details of this disgusting affair'. Gerald's affection for Daisy is partly evident in his comeback, 'You know, it wasn't disgusting'.

Why was it inevitable that the relationship would end?

Nevertheless, Gerald broke off the relationship before going away on business – both knew it couldn't last and Daisy took the separation better than expected. She vacated the room and Gerald gifted her enough money to see her through a few months. She refused to say what she intended to do next but the Inspector reveals, from her diary, that she went to the coast for two months to reflect on a time that had been better than any she'd previously known, 'just to make it last longer'.

What do you make of the different characters' reactions here?

Gerald excuses himself on the basis that he's more upset than he probably appears. Before he goes, Sheila hands him back the engagement ring, despite Birling's protestations, telling him that she doesn't dislike him as she did half an hour ago – 'in some odd way, I rather respect you more than I've ever done before' – but they're not the same people as they were at the start of the evening.

When Sheila remarks that the Inspector never showed Gerald the photograph of the girl, he takes the opportunity to instead present it to Sybil. And when she claims not to recognize the girl, the Inspector accuses her of lying, inciting anger from herself and Birling. Sheila identifies from Sybil's reaction that she is indeed lying and cautions both parents.

The Inspector establishes that Mrs Birling is a prominent member of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation and that Eva Smith appealed for their help only two weeks previously. Sybil grants that this is true but the girl in front of her did not go by the name of Eva Smith or Daisy Renton, she had the impertinence to call herself Mrs Birling, which **prejudiced** Sybil against her case. The girl had to admit that she had no claim to the name and

Why did 'Eva' fabricate a story?

that the original story she gave – about a husband who'd deserted her – was false. Mrs Birling subsequently used her influence to have the girl's plea denied and feels that she did her duty and shoulders no blame. When she tries to rebuff the Inspector, he rather chillingly proclaims, 'I think you did something terribly wrong – and that you're going to spend the rest of your life regretting it'.

What does the Inspector mean by this?

The Inspector then discloses that the girl was going to have a child. Sheila is horrified. Birling jumps to the conclusion that the child was Gerald's but stands corrected by the Inspector. Sybil tells them what she told the girl: 'Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility'.

The family begin to turn on one another, Birling's primary concern being that this won't reflect well on them at an inquest. His wife fervently reminds him that his actions set all this in motion. She lost patience with the girl's 'claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position'. There was apparently no question of marrying the father – 'silly and wild and drinking too much' – and she didn't want to take more money from him as she suspected it was stolen. Sybil claims that she had no more reason to believe this story than the girl's first and the blame lies elsewhere... With the Inspector identifying the father, to Sybil's agreement, as 'the chief culprit', Sheila puts the pieces together and begs her mother to stop. As Mr and Mrs Birling also begin to grasp what has happened, a pale and distressed Eric enters.

Chain of Events: Act Two

Gerald confesses to an affair with Eva/Daisy. He was able to better her circumstances for a short time.

The girl's plea for help is rejected by Mrs Birling's charitable organisation. It is revealed that she was pregnant when she committed suicide. Mrs Birling blames the prospective father.

The curtain falls as everyone works out that it is Eric who is responsible for impregnating her.

Act Three

Eric miserably asks for a drink. Birling explosively refuses but the Inspector overrules him: Eric 'needs a drink now just to see him through'.

Eric met the girl when he was at the Palace bar, drunk. He bought her some drinks. She was uncomfortable. There is a suggestion that starvation had forced her into prostitution ('There was some woman who wanted her to go there. I never quite understood about that.') Having been heavily **inebriated**, Eric is hazy on details. He thinks he insisted on being let into her lodgings and threatened to turn nasty; he doesn't recall the actual intercourse. Sybil is horror-struck and Birling convinces Sheila to withdraw her mother. The women depart.

Eric continues his story. Two weeks later they met again at the bar; this time the atmosphere appears more good-natured. They talked, Eric took a liking to her and consequently took her to bed again. The next time he saw her, she told him she was having their baby. There was no love between them so marriage was out of the question as far as she was concerned. She was penniless and had little prospect of finding work so Eric insisted on giving her enough to keep her going, about fifty pounds in total.

'Where did you get fifty pounds from?' ask both Birling and the Inspector. Eric "borrowed" the money from company accounts. Birling will need to cover this up. Why didn't his son go to him for help? 'Because you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble.' Birling proves the point by getting angry and calling Eric 'spoilt'. The Inspector cuts in, telling them – not for the first or last time – to sort out family matters and divide responsibility once he's gone.

What is the effect of the word 'spoilt'?

Sybil and Sheila have by now re-entered and the narrative of Eva Smith returns to her being refused help by Mrs Birling's committee. Eric points the finger back at his mother, accusing her of killing the girl and the child – 'your own grandchild'! Eric appears on the verge of striking her until the Inspector breaks the hysteria with

a summary addressing each family member and their role in the girl's death. Even Birling expresses **remorse**, vowing that he'd give thousands to repair the situation. It's the 'wrong time' for generosity, declares the Inspector. He parts with the message that there are other Smiths still with us, their lives 'intertwined with our lives' and if we don't learn to take responsibility for each other then we 'will be taught it in fire and blood and **anguish**'.

What do you think is the most shocking moment of the play and why?

Left to themselves, Birling casts the blame at Eric, bemoaning the public scandal and the ruined chances of a knighthood. Family grievances descend into generational conflict as Mr and Mrs Birling defend their own actions and their children press them to accept responsibility, as the Inspector instructed. It then occurs to them that he arrived as Birling was talking about life being 'every man for himself'. He has now left without bringing any formal charges: was he really an inspector? This idea excites Mr and Mrs Birling but doesn't much matter to Sheila or Eric: 'He was our police inspector all right'.

What does Eric mean by this?

The bickering continues until Gerald returns with new intelligence: there is no Inspector Goole. He described the fellow to a police sergeant, without of course divulging the reasons for his enquiry. Birling rings the Chief Constable who confirms that the man was no member of his constabulary. Birling declares the whole thing a hoax, someone trying to bring him down. He and Mrs Birling criticise Sheila and Eric for being so forthcoming with their confessions. They begin to discuss how to **exonerate** themselves but Sheila and Eric can't leave the matter be: 'Whoever that chap was, the fact remains that I did what I did. And mother did what she did... And it doesn't alter the fact that we all helped to kill her'.

Gerald intervenes again: is it a fact? How do they know that anyone's died? The "inspector" worked from snippets of information and bluffed the rest. Who saw the photograph? There's 'no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl'. Gerald calls the Infirmary... Nobody's been admitted for attempted suicide or for drinking disinfectant!

Gerald and Birling have a celebratory drink; Sybil offers her congratulations to Gerald on his detective work. But Sheila still looks troubled: 'Everything we said had happened really had happened. If it didn't end tragically, then that's lucky for us'. Eric agrees. Mr and Mrs Birling are exasperated that their children can't see sense: 'They're over-tired. In the morning they'll be as amused as we are'. Gerald offers Sheila her engagement ring back but it's too soon for her to consider that. Then *the telephone rings sharply*. Birling answers it...

'That was the police. A girl has just died – on her way to the Infirmary – after swallowing some disinfectant. And a police inspector is on his way here – to ask some – questions–'

As they stare guiltily and dumbfounded, the curtain falls.

Chain of Events: Act Three

Eric admits to his own sordid activities, including getting the girl pregnant and stealing from his father's business.

Eric finds out about his mother rejecting the girl's plea for help and blames Mrs Birling for killing her own grandchild.

The Inspector leaves them with a blood-curdling warning about taking responsibility for each other.

Mr and Mrs Birling fail to heed this warning and are quick to move on when Gerald raises the prospect of the Inspector being a fraud. Only Sheila and Eric are truly sorry.

As Mr and Mrs Birling congratulate Gerald on proving it was an elaborate hoax, the phone rings: an inspector is coming to speak to them about a girl's suicide.

Themes

Social Class

Class can be a complex subject. How exactly do you define one's social class? Is it determined by status of birth, accumulation of wealth or a mixture of the two?

Birling was born to a lower class than his wife but provides the entire family with an **affluent** lifestyle and is in line for a knighthood that would raise him into the realm of nobility. Nevertheless, the **stigmas** attached to the British class system mean that he suffers a sense of inferiority against the higher-born Crofts. Elements of Birling's speech betray his lower origins, although his precise status of birth is unclear: it is difficult to imagine Sybil deigning to marry somebody too far beneath her and he doesn't display any empathy with the working class in either his business practices or his scornful proclamations about community.

Birling is proof that at least some degree of social mobility is possible yet it is not something he supports; he is wholly in favour of sustaining inequalities and protecting his own wealth. At the time of the play's action, Birling and his offspring are firmly upper middle class. They stand in contrast to the working class likes of Eva Smith who suffer at their hands. With this **binary opposition**, Priestley basically eliminates the complexities of defining class.

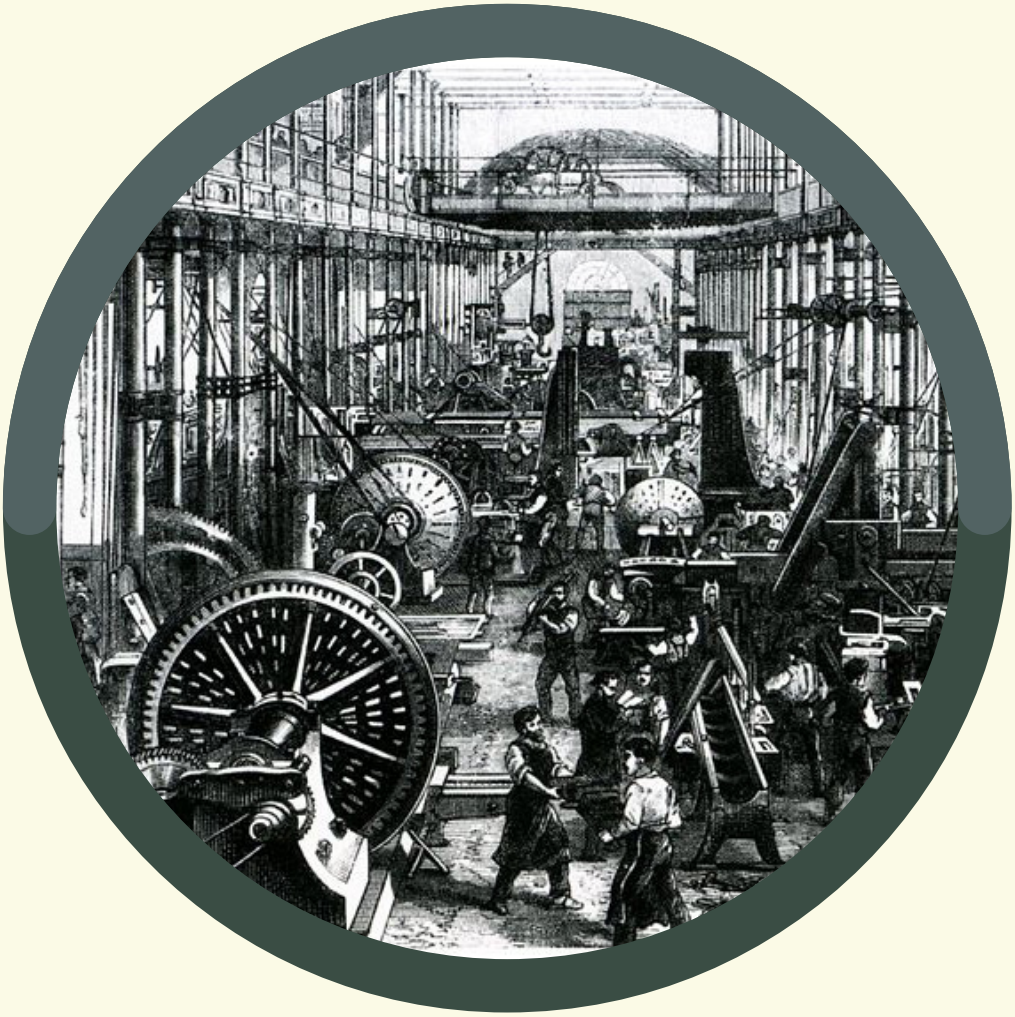
Indeed, Priestley's depiction of class war has been criticised as one-dimensional: upper class = heartless and unsympathetic; working class = blameless victims. On the other hand, *An Inspector Calls* would be ineffective as a morality play if its morals became too clouded by complex, multi-layered characters. Characters are ciphers, intended to represent particular types and elements of society, and the play's fundamental meaning – that all in society are connected and it is the responsibility of the "haves" to look after the "have-nots" – could become lost in a swirl of dense psychological realism.

Challenge: find something likeable about Arthur and unlikeable about Eva.

It also suits Priestley's socialist message that the Inspector is **unequivocal** in his delivery of it. The character might be inscrutable and **enigmatic** but his morals and ethics are not: he is there to teach the Birlings and Gerald that they have a duty of care to the less privileged. As well as imbuing him with authority, it has been argued by some sociologists that the profession of law enforcement stands outside of the class structure so the role of Inspector could also be seen as an objective, impartial commentator on society.

In Brief:

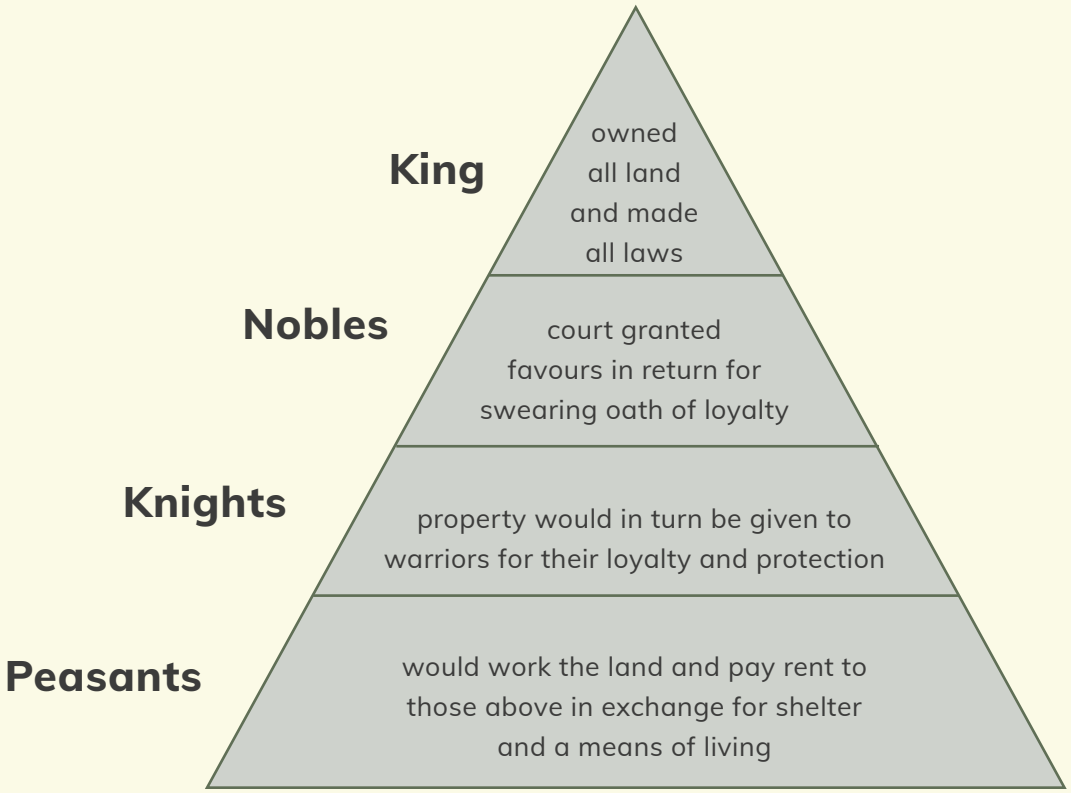
Eva Smith represents the faceless mass of the working class. She is punished for trying to combat the capitalist ruling class, as represented by Birling and his family, who are complacently well-off. The Inspector arrives to teach them that, just because they are in a separate social class to the likes of Eva Smith, they cannot live their lives in separation. Instead, we are 'bees in a hive' and have a responsibility to work together for the good of society as a whole.



Context

Making sense of the conflict between capitalism and socialism requires a history lesson in the European socio-political system spanning centuries. For mid-level grades it is probably sufficient to know that **capitalism** is the standard Western system of governance in which trade and industry is controlled by private owners for profit, whereas **socialism** advocates production and distribution being controlled by the state with the intention of benefiting wider society, and some such as Priestley felt that World War II would (or should) be the death knell of capitalism and class division since everybody had been “in it together”. If you’re aiming for higher grades then read on.

The British class system is deeply entrenched, dating back to the medieval system of **feudalism**. This was a **hierarchical** pyramid which gave wealth and power to the few at the top, while the many at the bottom toiled to survive and were denied rights.



Though social divisions are not as crude now as they were then, 'For the Many, Not the Few' was the slogan to the 2017 Labour Manifesto, demonstrating that inequality remains rife in the twenty-first century. Variations on this phrase have appeared throughout history, including in the Percy Bysshe Shelley poem *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819) and in the Poll Tax protests of the early 1990s. Such repetition aligns with Priestley's use of time, implying that humanity is destined to repeat the mistakes of the past: just as Birling, Sybil and Gerald fail to heed the Inspector's warnings and are therefore threatened with a repeat of their ordeal in the play's final dramatic twist, the Inspector's prophecy of a violent day of reckoning would have resonated with contemporary audiences for whom both the First World War (1914-18) and the Second World War (1939-45), the tail-end of which coincided with the play's production, were within living memory.

The **Industrial Revolution** of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries first allowed men from more humble origins to rise up the social ladder. Those who invested in the coal, iron, steel, pottery and textiles industries, such as Birling, made considerable fortunes. This new economy swallowed up the wealth of aristocratic land-owning families who were otherwise bankrupt, leading to marriages of convenience between old money and new, giving birth to the upper middle class and fortifying the social standing of both sets.

The Industrial Revolution also gave rise to more perilous working conditions in hazardous mines and factories. The Labour Party, founded in 1893, evolved out of the trade union movement to meet the needs and demands of the expanded urban working class who had been **enfranchised** by the Representation of the People Act 1884.

And it was the Labour Party that met the needs of a post-war United Kingdom. The notion of a **welfare state** – in which the government protects the economic and social well-being of its citizens – began with **liberal** thinking in the Victorian age. Indeed, some industrialists genuinely looked after the welfare of their employees, a notable example being the Cadbury family who built the model village of Bournville to house workers from the nearby chocolate factory. However, the governing philosophy until the Second World War was **laissez-faire**, a French phrase translating as "let do" and which valued individual freedoms above state intervention. In 1945, a war-ravaged populace demanded a welfare state and it is this socialist ideal that Priestley was promoting when he wrote *An Inspector Calls*.

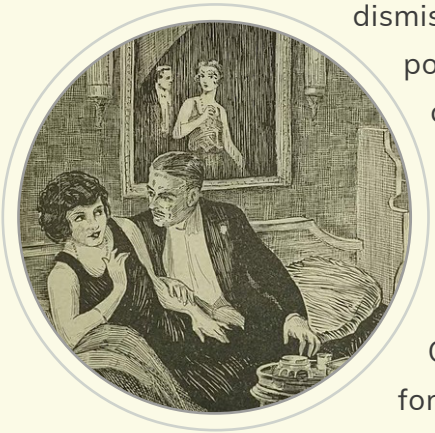
Bournville Cottages, Birmingham

The circumstances of war also provided an interesting location for the premiere of the play. With the Blitz taking its toll on London's West End theatres, Priestley sent his finished script to Russia, where it enjoyed simultaneous runs in Moscow and Leningrad. Russia was a fitting place for a first performance having become the world leader in socialism following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

Original poster from the Leningrad Comedy Theatre, 1945. The title translates as 'You Will Not Forget' and the wronged woman provides the central image.

The play received its UK debut a year later, in October 1946, at the New Theatre, London. By this time, Labour's Clement Atlee had replaced Conservative war hero Winston Churchill as British Prime Minister and his post-war government introduced a slate of welfare reforms, the pinnacle of which is widely considered to be the National Health Service Act. This came into effect in July 1948, establishing the NHS as a free healthcare provider for all.

Russia's Communist brand of socialism soured in the post-war period and the UK welfare state was in decline by the 1970s, though the NHS remains a cherished institution. Correspondingly, *An Inspector Calls* fell out of fashion for a long period, dismissed as a bourgeois "drawing room" drama (a popular Victorian-style of play in which all the action takes place in that one room) by people who somehow failed to read its less-than-subtle subtext! But, as Priestley demonstrates, history repeats itself and well-received revivals from the 1990s onwards and the play's place on the GCSE syllabus have put the Inspector back at the forefront of the national consciousness.



Key Quotes

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

BIRLING, Act One

Birling heartily approves of Sheila's match with Gerald because of what is does for his own status. The Crofts are an aristocratic family, higher up the social ladder than **nouveau riche** families like the Birlings.

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

SHEILA, Act One

Birling justifies his treatment of Eva with the economic logic that she led the workers' appeal for higher rates. Sheila, on the other hand, has the humanity to see beyond business practice and class labels.

'You see, we have to share something. If there's nothing else, we'll have to share our guilt.'

INSPECTOR, Act Two

In this quote the Inspector **alludes** to class division and the perceived selfishness of the upper class: the shared guilt is punishment for their not sharing anything else at an earlier opportunity. The pronoun 'we' is indicative of his belief in collective responsibility.

'Please don't contradict me like that. And in any case I don't suppose for a moment that we can understand why the girl committed suicide. Girls of that class–'

MRS B., Act Two

The courteous 'please' is actually a signal of authority, Mrs Birling speaking to the Inspector as if he were one of her children. As a member of the upper class, she is accustomed to being **deferred** to and looks down on those who work for a living. She habitually 'supposes' but fails to 'understand' and believes that the unspeakable 'girls of that class' are unknowable, even though she is about to stereotype them.

'We don't live alone. We are members of one body.'

INSPECTOR, Act Three

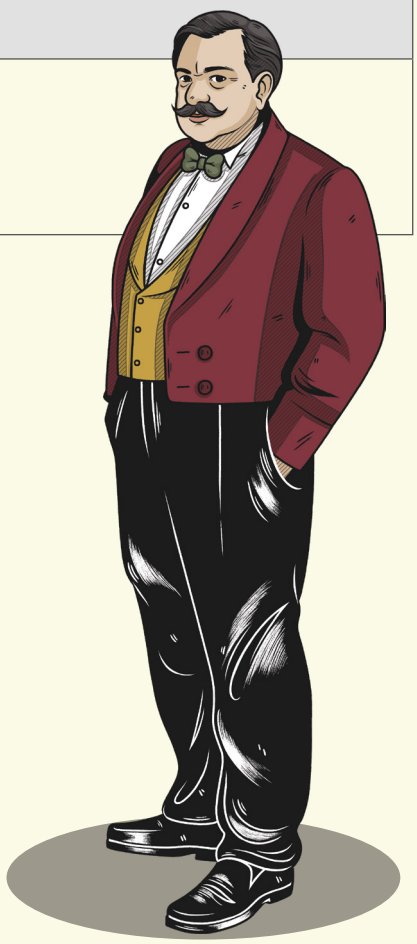
Shut away in their sumptuous suburban house, it is easy for the Birlings to ignore the plight of others. The Inspector's socialist principles are a riposte to Birling's earlier assertion of laissez-faire, 'that a man has to make his own way – has to look after himself'.

Mini Exams

Question 1
To what extent do you sympathise with Birling?

Question 2
How is Eva Smith representative of the working class?

Question 3
Who is the classiest character in the play? Explain your answer.



Q Exam Question

How does Priestley present social class in the play? Write about:

- how Priestley presents the Birlings;
- how he uses these characters to explore ideas about class.

Don't forget to plan your response. You should spend approximately five minutes organising your thoughts. This will help you to structure your answer, as well showing the examiner where you were headed should you run out of time (which of course you won't if you manage your time wisely).

1. Mr Birling
   'You're just the kind of son in law...'
- self made
- pretentious

CONTEXT: Industrial Rev
- Social Mobility

2. Mrs Birling
- Social superior
  'A girl of that sort...'
- Class affects treatment of Eva

3. Sheila + Eric
- Privileged, Inspector makes them realise social responsibility
- Members of one body
- You and I aren't the same people

CONTEXT: WWII

Compare

Intro – an overview statement that directly addresses the question

Point – Evidence – Analysis (PEA) paragraphs are an efficient way of meeting AOs

P Echo key words in question e.g. One way in which Priestley presents social class is . . .

E Memorise quotations – those that address more than one theme are particularly precious

A Explore the effect of language/structure/context in your evidence

Aim to write at least three

Conclusion – summarise your main point(s)

Sample Answer

Good Response

Priestley presents the Birlings as being upper-middle class and rich. Mr Birling is really snobby and calls working class people "these people", like they are different to him because they come from a different class. He wants to mix with people of a higher class which is why he is pleased about Sheila marrying Gerald, because Gerald comes from a really posh family where his dad is a lord. Mr Birling thinks he is going to get knighted, which is why he is so cross when the inspector arrives and starts to stir things up because he thinks then he won't get it after all.

Quick to illustrate and explain point – interpretation is extended across paragraph but is lacking analysis. Could have explored Birling's attitudes in context of class.

Mrs Birling says about Eva Smith "a girl of that sort would never refuse money". This shows that she thinks the dead girl doesn't have any standards and when she says she is "of that sort" she is saying she is not very good and not like them. Mrs Birling doesn't really change in the way she feels and the inspector doesn't really change her mind.

Uses characters to structure responses – attempts to home in on key words but response is limited to interpretation.

Sheila says "you mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl". This shows she knows that they are just the same even though they come from different classes and they have more money. Sheila changes from the beginning of the play and realises that social class isn't everything. Eric is the same and he realises that he has made mistakes and should change.

Awareness of writer's structuring does not constitute analysis.

Priestley wrote the play because he thought it was unfair the way society is divided by class and some people get more than other people. After World War II people thought that there weren't really classes

Contextual knowledge linked to authorial intent but straightforward explanation rather than exploration.

any more because everyone had fought together. But Priestley thought there were still classes and things were still unfair and he wanted to show that to people in his play. Eva Smith represents the working class, and The Birlings all abuse her in different ways. The Inspector says that "there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths". He repeats millions to show just how many working class people there are that deserve better treatment.

Closest we get to language analysis. Could go further: for example, what is the effect of the names chosen by Priestley?

Summary paragraph again shows good basic understanding but opportunities to develop analysis are missed, e.g. further comment on the apocalyptic symbolism of 'fire and blood and anguish'.

The Inspector says "we are responsible for each other" and he is trying to make the Birlings see that Eva Smith is just as important as they are, even though she didn't come from the same background. Priestley makes the Inspector warn the family that they will learn their lesson in "fire and blood and anguish" which is a warning about the war which is coming up. But it doesn't work and only the young ones see that you shouldn't treat people differently just because they are from a different class to you.

This student has a firm grasp of the author's intentions and the attitudes that the characters represent. Their response demonstrates clear engagement with and understanding of the text, supported by relevant textual references. However, the selected quotations do not invite in-depth language analysis and there is no use of subject terminology. Similarly, there is clear awareness of the relationship between text and context but it is only explored in cursory detail. This student would benefit from a more structured approach and academic tone, with greater focus on the effects of language and context.

Great Response

In An Inspector Calls, J.B. Priestley presents us with different levels of social class: there is the Birling family and Gerald, who are upper class; and much further down the social spectrum there is the ambiguous Eva Smith.

When I say ambiguous I mean that Eva Smith may in fact not be one person at all. She could be a representative of the whole of the working class, particularly the female element. The Inspector says in Act Three, "... there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths," the repetition of "millions" emphasises not only the fact that there are a lot of people that could be influenced by one persons' generosity, but also the scale of the working class, as compared with the upper class, which is far more about the privileged few. Eva appears as a shop assistant, a factory worker, a prostitute and as a single parent, giving Priestley the opportunity to show his audience several interactions between people at different stages within the working class and upper class.

Sophisticated and thoughtful response.

More detailed analysis considers alternative interpretations and structural effect.

Similarly, whilst the Birlings are obviously only one family unit, in the way that Eva Smith may not be, Priestley is still using them to represent his feelings for the whole upper class. And again, through them he is able to show off different strands of that class: business owner, committee leader, and privileged individuals who have hardly had to work at all and yet have been given everything they need.

Priestley deliberately presents an unflattering perspective of the upper classes. At each level of the Birling family interaction with the working classes they have managed to wrong Eva Smith (or by association the whole of the working class). Priestley is using this to comment on the rich and privileged community of his time. He blames the upper class for the failures that he sees in war-time Britain. His opinion is that it is their greed in pursuing their own selfish wants, and

Considered contextual detail woven into response.

their failure to look after the general population that has led to banks collapsing and revolutions, which in turn have plunged the world into war.

We can see this in microcosm at various points throughout the play. It doesn't lead to war in this story because it is all about relationships between individuals, but it does lead to pain, suffering and death. The language that the inspector uses in Act Three, "fire and bloody anguish" creates the image of warfare. As Priestley wrote it, he could well have been imagining his own experience of trench warfare during the First World War, during which time he was badly injured. This is something else that will have led to his anger at what he perceived as an unjust class structure.

Different contextual element.

So, the first interaction between upper and lower classes is when Mr Birling tells his tale of Eva Smith having worked in his factory: "It's my duty to keep labour costs down." Mr Birling is able to fire her on a whim because he doesn't like the way she comes across. That he describes this as a "duty" is sickening to the audience since we can see that Eva Smith was a good worker and deserved to be paid a fair salary. This is Priestley's first dig at the upper classes - they don't have to follow the rules, they're not obliged to feel compassionate, they can just devastate the lives of those who are less fortunate than they are and not even worry about consequences. I think Priestley starts the play with the example of Mr Birling, because it is a very obvious way of showing the balance of power between rich and poor. The rich own the factories, the poor rely on them for work.

Brief structural analysis – textual references don't always have to include quotations.

The idea of the rich taking advantage is similar with Sheila's revelation. The manager of Milwards is so reliant on his rich customers that he will do anything, including firing a shop assistant who is perfectly competent, in order to make Sheila happy - "there was nothing wrong with the way she was doing her work." Again, Sheila doesn't need to worry about what she has done or what the consequences of her actions are.

Gerald and Eric both had sexual interactions with Eva Smith. They were able to get what they needed from her - Gerald a short-term relationship to make him feel better about life - "she was young and pretty", adjectives that suggest Gerald's lustful, shallow feelings - and Eric, a one-night stand (that turned into something that he regretted) - and then cut her off.

Concise explanation of language effect.

Ironically Mrs Birling blames Eva's pregnancy on her bad choices when in fact it is her upper class son who has created her unwanted circumstance.

In each of these cases the rich and privileged person in the equation gets what they want out of the poor, working female, and then is able to turn their back and let her deal with the consequences. It is not a glowing recommendation for the upper class.

It is interesting that as the play moves towards its closing moments Priestley appears to concede that both Eric and Sheila are able to show a sense of guilt and responsibility. Perhaps he is admitting that the upper classes are capable of compassion, it's possible that he felt a small amount of optimism that the world had learnt from the experience of being at war. But the story ends with a confirmation of a death at the infirmary which is a downbeat conclusion in spite of the potential optimism. We could infer that there is still a long way to go - from the rich feeling guilt about the poor, and the rich actually taking positive action to change society.

Neatly concludes response developed throughout answer.

This is not a perfect answer – better planning might have made it tighter and more succinct; judicious quotation choices would have allowed for more advanced language analysis – but you can't be expected to produce perfection in exam conditions. The student maintains a critical style and develops an informed personal response with mature analysis of language and structure and a deeper understanding of how social and historical context informed the writing.

Themes

Gender Roles

Despite Sybil being his social superior and a woman who knows her own mind, Birling is clearly still the head of the house. His dominance is evident from the outset, with the cast list headed by him and every subsequent family member defined by their relationship to him, beginning 'SYBIL BIRLING his wife' who is then designated MRS B. throughout the play script. The world revolves around Birling.

And the world inhabited by Birling was heavily **patriarchal**. This means that society was organised in a way that favoured men over women. Early twentieth century patriarchy is evoked by the following details:

Do these reflections of patriarchy mean that Priestley thinks men are superior to women?

- Eric is the heir to Birling & Co. and has taken on a junior role at the factory. His sister has presumably never worked, even though she appears older and more capable.
- The different domains occupied by men and women are shown physically and metaphorically when the women retreat to the drawing-room to discuss 'clothes again', leaving the men to talk business.
- Men at the Palace bar are portrayed as predatory; this is a male space and women are only present to fulfil male desires.
- Women are protected from outside affairs. For example, Sybil is shocked to learn how "respectable" men like Alderman Meggarty conduct themselves in different spheres. Though the younger Sheila is wiser to what goes on, she too is viewed by the men in her life as a fragile creature who needs sheltering, as when they try to shield her from the Inspector. The fact that she breaks free from this stereotype of femininity suggests that Priestley wished to give a more progressive representation of women. Her rejection of Gerald's engagement ring could also be construed as a step towards independence.

- Similarly, Eva/Daisy is noted for her looks and is used by men but is also strong-willed and resourceful. She is a good worker, although she works out of necessity and the type of work is confined to women's professions.
- The existence of a Brumley Women's Charity Organisation indicates the normality of women finding themselves downtrodden and in need of aid. However, rather than being a feminist support network, the experience of Eva/Daisy suggests that it pays no more than lip service to the problems of working class women and exists primarily to bolster the ego of upper middle class women like Mrs Birling who are otherwise unemployed.
- Sheila initially wants to know if the dead girl was pretty – as if this is the natural way to appraise and value a woman – and is threatened by the easy attractiveness of the shop girl she has dismissed. However, she does come to express solidarity with Eva, albeit more from recognition that her class has a responsibility towards Eva's than a strong sense of sisterhood.

In Brief:

The women in the play are different in almost every other way – class, age, etc – but are united as servants of a patriarchal system in which men hold the keys to power. **Sybil, Sheila and Eva/Daisy all possess strengths but are ultimately all at the mercy of men.**

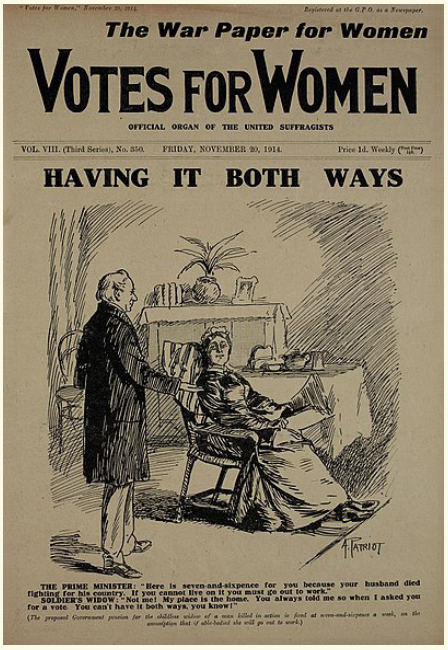
Context

Historically, gender divisions are as deeply entrenched as class ones. They can be tracked all the way back to a male god creating Eve as a companion for Adam. It is unlikely pure coincidence that Eva is a variation on Eve. Likewise, Smith is the most common Anglo-American surname, originating from the occupational name of a man who works with metal and meaning “to smite or strike”, so its class connotations also suggest that Priestley’s choice of name is not accidental. The line ‘members of one body’ could be applied equally to class and gender distinctions.

Tip

There is some degree of crossover in all themes. It is important to answer the question but most questions can also be angled to include what you know best.

At the time Priestley was writing *An Inspector Calls*, the **war effort** was changing perceptions of what "a woman's place" was. With men called to fight on the front line, millions of women stepped into the breach and filled roles in heavy industry and public service that had hither to been the preserve of men. Rising to the challenge, these women enjoyed newfound freedoms that came with paid work and proved that traditional gender roles were largely a social construct rather than a biological fact. The prevailing mood was gratitude and admiration for what women had accomplished mixed with unease at how gender roles would realign after the war.


The War Paper for Women

VOTES FOR WOMEN

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE UNITED SUFFRAGISTS

VOL. VIII. (Third Series). No. 350. FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1914. Price 1d. Weekly

HAVING IT BOTH WAYS

THE PRIME MINISTER: "Here is seven-and-sixpence for you because your husband died fighting for his country. If you cannot live on it you must go out to work."
SOLDIER'S WIDOW: "Not me! My place is the home. You always told me so when I asked you for a vote. You can't have it both ways, you know!"

A similar shift had occurred during the First World War, with **female suffrage** being achieved in 1918 partly as a result of the significant contribution made by women on the home front. However, any employment gains were short-lived and it remained the **dominant ideology** that women were domestic servants. In other words, the struggles of Eva, Sheila and all other early twentieth century girls amounted to little more than the want of a good husband. As well as being unable to vote, at the time the play is set women were not allowed to open a bank account, serve on a jury or drink unaccompanied in a pub! **Feminism** – the ideology that seeks to establish equality of the sexes – gained greater traction in the second half of the century so, as an outspoken working woman, Eva could be seen as something of a trailblazer (as perhaps could Priestley for his subtle challenging of traditional gender roles).

Key Quotes

'Is it the one you wanted me to have?'

SHEILA, Act One

As pleased as Sheila is by the engagement ring, the passive phrasing reveals Gerald to be the decision-maker and her assuming the pre-ordained role of **submissive** wife. This makes her almost as much of an ornament as the ring so it is meaningful that she rebuffs this striking symbol of servitude at the play's close.

'Clothes mean something quite different to a woman. Not just something to wear – and not only something to make 'em look prettier – but – well, a sort of sign or token of their self-respect.'

BIRLING, Act One

This **superficial** and patronising view of women shows that Birling has scant understanding of the opposite sex, even though he is in the process of lecturing Eric about them. The implication is that men have higher concerns, whereas women are objectified and have no measure of self-respect beyond their appearance. However, the stuttering – represented by the dash and filler words 'well' and 'sort of' – suggest he doesn't really know what he's talking about.

'You're forgetting I'm supposed to be engaged to the hero of it.'

SHEILA, Act Two

Sheila presses Gerald to tell his part of the story, despite his and Sybil's protests that she should be protected from such unpleasantness. Her sarcastic casting of Gerald as 'hero' **lampoons** male supremacy and 'supposed' has the subtle effect of her making the choice to **annul** their engagement. This is significant in an age when women couldn't divorce men, even on the grounds of adultery.

'I suppose it was inevitable. She was young and pretty and warm-hearted – and intensely grateful.'

GERALD, Act Two

He's a man of high standing, she ticks the right boxes, so it's 'inevitable' that Gerald makes Daisy his mistress. And she, of course, is 'grateful' for such attention!

'She was pretty and a good sport-'

ERIC, Act Three

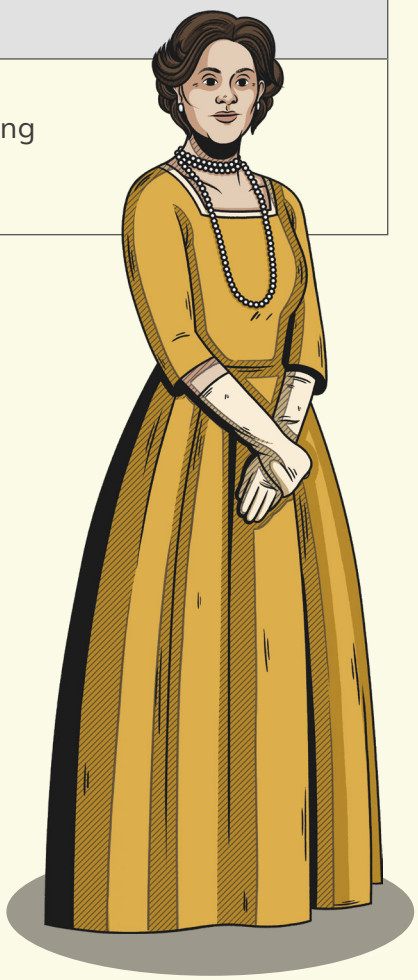
Like Gerald before him, Eric judges the girl primarily by looks. Being 'a good sport' suggests she was willing, probably through no other choice, to be part of Eric's fun and games that would ultimately lead to her death.

Mini Exams

Question 1
Which member of the Birling family would make the best boss of Birling & Co.? Explain your answer.

Question 2
How significant a part does Eva Smith's gender play in her tragic fate?

Question 3
To what extent does Priestley show women to be strong and men to be weak?

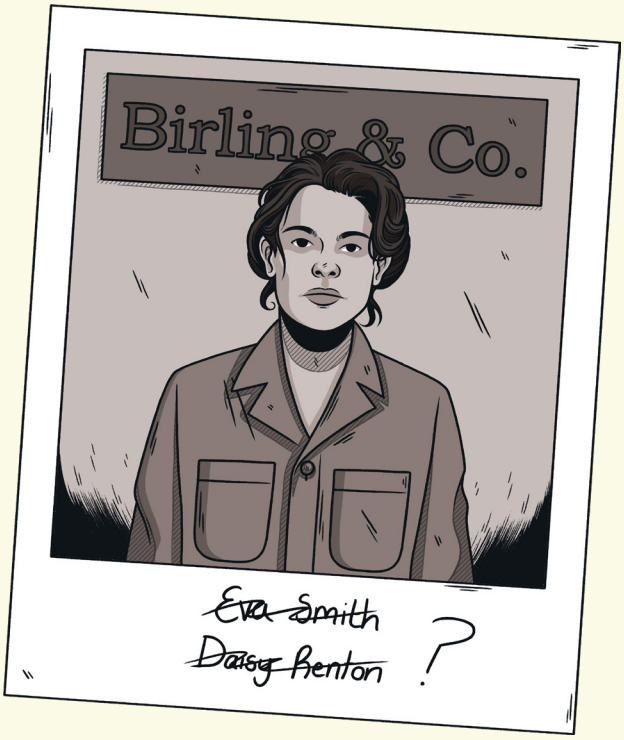


Exam Question

How does Priestley use gender stereotypes in the play? Write about:

- how Priestley presents Eva Smith as a victim of the patriarchal system;
- how he uses other characters to explore ideas about gender.

Don't forget to plan your response.



Sample Answer

Good Response

Contextual information...

...informs response

Back when the play was set, women weren't able to vote and they were only allowed to work in certain professions. They were stereotyped as the weaker sex and Priestley uses this stereotype to show how Eva is trapped in a system of patriarchy where men hold all the power.

To begin with, Eva is employed as a machinist at Birling's factory . Working at a sewing machine is quite a stereotypical job for a woman to have had. And even though she is good at her job, Birling sacks her because she campaigned for higher wages. "She had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go." Birling's description of Eva fits another stereotype of women – that they like to talk a lot!

Then she gets a job at Milwards, which again is quite a stereotypical profession for a girl, working in a clothes shop. This time it is Sheila's turn to cause trouble for Eva. She has her sacked for impertinence. In this way, Sheila fulfils the stereotype of catty girls who easily turn on each other. Sheila is an interesting character because she starts off in the role of wife-to-be but by the end of the play she rejects Gerald's engagement ring and is showing a lot more independence. For instance, when she says "I want to get out of this. It frightens me the way you talk." This is her rejecting Birling's ideas and ways of doing things, which would have been unusual for a young girl from a good family. Priestley does this to perhaps show that attitudes were beginning to change.

Meaning linked to structure. Could be better developed by exploring context or the symbolism of the ring.

The men then take over again. First Gerald takes

Detailed response supported by quote.

advantage of her situation and then Eric. Eva (or Daisy – all working class women were treated the same) meets them both at the Palace Bar where sleazy men go to pick up girls. Gerald says "She was young and pretty and warm hearted – and intensely grateful". This shows that Daisy/Eva is supposed to be 'grateful' for the attention of a wealthy male, and is expected to make it worth his while in return. She becomes his mistress but Gerald holds all the power, even though he is in the wrong because he is cheating on Sheila at this time. Eric is even worse because there is even the suggestion that he forces himself on Eva, which again shows that men are the stronger and meaner of the two.

Alternative viewpoints show a more thoughtful response.

However, Mrs Birling shows that women can be cruel and heartless too. She rejects the girl's plea for help because she doesn't believe her story. In this sense, Mrs Birling does hold some power, but she only has her place at the head of the women's charity because of her husband's importance. Throughout the play it is Birling who takes control and asserts authority, whereas Mrs Birling is initially sent to another room to talk about clothes with Sheila while the men talk business!

Overall it can be seen that women are the play things of men. Eva pays the heaviest price for this but Sheila and Sybil are also treated as lesser beings. This is Priestley trying to show that the world was unfair, even though he was a man himself.

This is a thoughtful answer with hints of greater complexity. The chronological narrative approach provides a useful structure but is also relatively simple rather than sophisticated. And having laid the contextual groundwork, the relationship between text and context is then barely mentioned.

Great Response

In the play *An Inspector Calls*, Eva Smith is never seen as an actual character, but the whole play revolves around her. Her suicide was due to her horrific life as a victim of the patriarchal system and the poor treatment of the working class. Although both Gerald Croft and Eric Birling used Eva for their greedy desires, it is accepted and cast aside as excusable by Mr and Mrs Birling- they only care that it might wreck their reputation. Mrs Birling, when Sheila finds out her fiancée was cheating on her for a whole summer with Eva Smith/ Daisy Renton, says, "but you must understand that a lot of young men..." This use of stereotyping clearly shows that Gerald playing with Eva's heart is just counted as ordinary, because in those times men's selfish endeavours were put above women's feelings. In 1912 (when the play is set), men were seen as more important than women: they were paid more, they could vote, they could have an opinion and they were seen as the more powerful person in a marriage. However, in 1945, although there were still a lot of people who thought men were more important, women were allowed to vote, their salary was raised and they had contributed a lot of strength and effort into the war, often taking on men's jobs due to their absence. This meant that the 1945 audience of the play would have scorned at the poor treatment of Eva Smith and the way the men take advantage of her.

Stimulating response drawn from subtle quotation.

Contextual relevance explored in greater detail.

Mr Birling also took advantage of Eva Smith and the rest of the women that worked in his factory. Eva and a group of women went on strike in order to get a pay rise, because the money they earned was barely enough to live on, and he blatantly tells the Inspector, "I refused, of course". Mr Birling's dismissive behaviour implies that this was simply what happened in those days, and he expects that everyone in the room will understand his denial of her small request. He says,

Simple but effective quotation, thoroughly explained.

"she'd had a lot to say- far too much- so she had to go", demonstrating again the lack of acceptance of women having voices and opinions. The decision Mr Birling made led to the downward spiral of Eva's life, making her vulnerable and in need of a home, which made her more likely to take up Gerald's offer, and less likely to be in a position to push Eric away. Priestley may have made the decision to make Eva a victim of the patriarchal society in order to show the audience how awful life was when women weren't accepted, and to make sure that society never became like that again.

Identifying a countertype adds complexity to response.

Although Eva Smith did fall victim to the patriarchal system, there is one female in the play who makes a stand and ignores the system. Sheila Birling starts off as a typical privileged woman who has just become engaged to an upper class gentleman. After realising that her whole life she has been selfish and difficult, and that this behaviour has led to a young woman's death, Sheila begins to defy the system and voices her opinions. When Gerald reveals that he kept a mistress and lied to her for months, Sheila ignores her parents' protests and breaks off their engagement. This action is symbolic of Sheila finally becoming independent and strong without the benefits of having a man in her life. Most of the women in 1912 would have accepted that their partner was dishonest, and lived in an unhappy marriage for the rest of their days, but Sheila chose her happiness. This shows to the women in the audience that they can refuse to be in unhappy marriages, and makes the audience respect the character of Sheila over the rest of the characters.

Audience response linked to context.

Analytical point would benefit further still from having a quotation that enabled language analysis.

At the beginning of the play, there is a moment in which the women are dismissed from the room and the men are left to discuss politics and business. This particular moment is very much typical of the time, and highlights to the audience the assumption that women just wouldn't understand anything important.

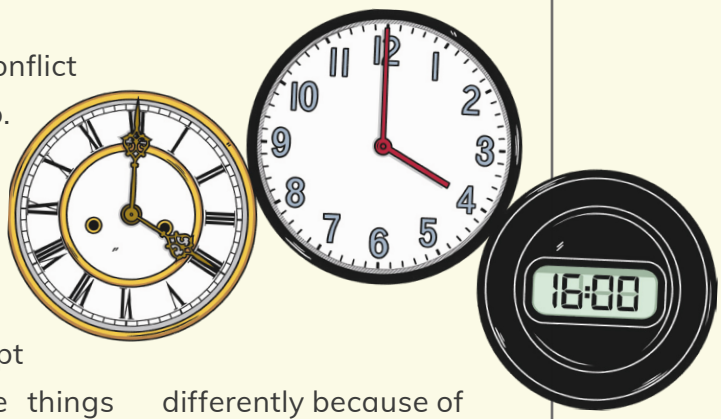
The men go on to discuss the importance of clothes to women, Eric says, “Women are potty about ‘em” and Mr Birling agrees with him and explains to him what he thinks is a thoughtful emotional analysis of women, saying, “Not just something to wear...a sort of sign or token of their self-respect”. This conversation yet again provides a sexist gender stereotype, assuming that all women are obsessed with clothes and that they have no self-respect without being materialistic. Priestley used this conversation to portray the extent of how oblivious men could be when understanding the feelings of women.

In conclusion, Priestley makes use of his characters in order to portray to the audience the importance of breaking gender stereotypes. At the end of the play, the characters who the audience despise most are the people who are adamant that your place in society should be decided by gender, and the characters the audience end up liking are the characters who take responsibility for their actions and recognise that gender shouldn’t decide how people are viewed.

Very strong on AO3, with meaning and audience response consistently and convincingly linked to context. Detailed explanations show excellent understanding of events. Though this answer maintains an analytical tone, some more focused language analysis would have made it even better.

Themes

Age and Time



The generational divide creates conflict just as class and gender divisions do. Mr and Mrs Birling represent the old guard: stuck in their ways, sure of their position in life and unwilling to take on new ideas. They contrast with Sheila and Eric who are willing to accept their wrongdoing and begin to see things differently because of the case put before them by the Inspector. Gerald – a decade or so older than the Birling children – is somewhere in between: he shares Sheila and Eric's compassionate and empathetic response to Eva's demise but ultimately sides with the older generation in wanting to forget the whole affair and sweep it under the carpet. This is because, as a member of the aristocracy, he has a **vested interest** in maintaining the **status quo**.

The increasingly fraught interactions between the different Birling generations show that authority and influence might come with age but **benevolence** and wisdom, sadly, do not. Priestley uses the younger generation's agreement with the Inspector's socialist viewpoints to indicate that this is the way of the future: the laissez-faire attitude, it is suggested, belongs to the past and will die out with antiquated relics like Mr and Mrs Birling who think they know it all but are wrong on so many levels. In presenting the younger characters as attentive and understanding, Priestley counteracts Birling's stereotypical view of youth as naïve and impulsive, although Eric's past behaviour does conform to the less sympathetic representation of adolescent immaturity. Nevertheless, audiences forgive Eric's drinking, womanising and **embezzlement** because he is able to recognise the error of his ways, whereas this realisation eludes the supposedly wiser Birling and Sybil right to the end.

In Brief:

The Birlings are divided into the older generation who fail to recognise their responsibility for Eva and the younger generation who are repentant for their part. Eric and Sheila adopt less selfish attitudes, which is Priestley's way of presenting hope for the future. This optimistic perspective would have been powerful in 1945 when society faced a post-war rebuild. Conversely, Birling is shown to be pig-headed and hopelessly out of touch with his false prediction that 'there isn't a chance of war'.

In the thirty-three years that elapsed between the play's 1912 setting and its 1945 staging, Mr and Mrs Birling would have entered their dotage if, that is, they survived two world wars to make it to the grand old age of 80-something. And Eric and Sheila would by then be approximately the same age that their parents were in 1912. Following the informal laws of family governance, that would make Eric master of his own domain, assuming he wasn't part of the generation lost to war. Would he have continued the family business? Would this have turned him into a 'hardheaded practical' man of business like his father before him? Would he have given his parents grandchildren? For audiences of all generations, the play gives cause to reflect on the past as well as look to the future.

If you were to write the next act, what would the future hold for each of the characters?

Priestley wrote a number of dramas during the 1930s and '40s which came to be known as his **"Time Plays"** because of the way the plot is constructed around a concept of time. In *An Inspector Calls* the action unfolds in real time; there are no **temporal elisions**, the duration of the play is exactly as long as it takes for the Inspector to arrive and to hold them to account. Yet, as well as exploring the recent past through the events leading to Eva's suicide, Priestley looks to the future and utilises a range of temporal perspectives:

- the characters' perspective from 1912
- the contemporary audiences' perspective from 1945
- the perspective of a modern audience aware of events post-1945

The time-bending elements of the drama could even invite an unconventional interpretation of the mysterious Inspector as a Doctor Who-style time traveller repeatedly having to rectify the messes made by humanity! And in a twenty-first century that's witnessed globalisation, pervasive technological connectivity, climate change and the coronavirus pandemic, the notion of being 'members of one body' could take on a much wider meaning.

Who do you think requires a visit from the Inspector today? Could a modern Inspector be female?

Context

“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room.”

Though this sounds like something Birling might have said, it is actually attributed to Socrates (469-399 B.C.). The point being that elders have always criticised youth whilst also expecting the next generation to defer to them. This was particularly true of the strict **Victorian moral code** that Arthur and Sybil would have grown up under. This code promoted family duty, discipline and propriety, which Eric and Sheila are guilty of violating, much to their parents’ bewilderment.

Just as Mr and Mrs Birling can be seen and understood as products of their time, their children belong to the emergent twentieth century, an era of more liberal and permissive attitudes. More significantly, Sheila and Eric represent the post-war rebuilders. Audiences in 1945 would have invested a good deal of hope in a more progressive future, although presumably Priestley didn't intend his contemporary audience to blame the young Birlings for the failures of a generation who sleepwalked into the Second World War having failed to heed the horrors of "the war to end all wars". The other lesson to be learnt from Socrates (and Priestley) is that history has a habit of repeating.

"The war to end all wars" was a famous phrase applied to the First World War by English author H. G. Wells, one of those socialist 'cranks' referred to by Birling. His most notable works included the science-fiction novels *The Time Machine* (1895), *The War of the Worlds* (1897), *The First Men in the Moon* (1900) and *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933). Though Priestley adopts a largely **social-realist** mode of drama, it is telling that he aligns his thinking with a renowned **futurist**. Wells' fellow crank, who Birling implores the youngsters not to listen to, is George Bernard Shaw. Shaw was best known for the **polemical** plays *Man and Superman* (1905), *Pygmalion* (1912) and *Saint Joan* (1923), which raised issues of class and social responsibility that Priestley also clearly related to.


THE NEW YORK HERALD.

THE TITANIC SINKS WITH 1,800 ON BOARD; ONLY 675, MOSTLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN, SAVED

MOST APPALLING DISASTER IN MARINE HISTORY OCCURS WHEN WORLD'S LARGEST STEAMSHIP STRIKES GIGANTIC ICEBERG AT NIGHT

Scores of World's Most Widely Known Persons, Including Colonel John Jacob Astor and His Wife, William T. Stead and Isidor Straus Among Those Whose Fate Is in Doubt.

Priestley most obviously plays with time in his use of **dramatic irony**. He uses the audience's advanced knowledge to emphasise Birling's faults, as when he declares the RMS Titanic – a ship that would famously sink on its maiden voyage – unsinkable! The Titanic is symbolic of Birling himself: a flashy colossus headed for trouble. His dismissal of 'nonsense' war talk and the Inspector's apocalyptic image of 'fire and blood and anguish' would have resonated particularly deeply with anyone who'd lived through one world war, let alone two.

Timeline

1760-1840
The Industrial Revolution

1876
Invention of the telephone

1901
Queen Victoria dies

1914-1918
First World War

1912
RMS Titanic sinks

1912
***An Inspector Calls* is set**

1918
Women get the vote

1922
BBC founded

1926
General Strike

1948
NHS founded

1944-1945
***An Inspector Calls* is written**

1939-1945
Second World War

1953
Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II

Does it surprise you that the BBC is older than the NHS?

Themes: Age and Time

Key Quotes

'You seem to have made a great impression on this child, Inspector.'

MRS B., Act Two

The use of the term 'child' reinforces the generation gap and shows that Mrs Birling considers herself superior to her **susceptible** daughter, the implication being that the Inspector will fail to have any impression on her.

'He's only a boy.'

MRS B., Act Two

Mrs Birling appears unaware that her son has developed into a young man capable of heavy drinking and womanising. This demonstrates how little she knows her own child and is typical of her **infantilising** Eric and Sheila throughout.

'You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner here.'

SHEILA, Act Two

Sheila's statement to Gerald is an **affirmation** that she has grown and changed, even in such a short space of time. The older characters, meanwhile, are resistant to change.

'You're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble.'

ERIC, Act Three

Birling doesn't offer the nurturing parental support that one might expect from a father. His **authoritarian** approach instead creates a barrier between him and his more sensitive, troubled son.

'Why, you hysterical young fool – get back – or I'll–'

BIRLING, Act Three

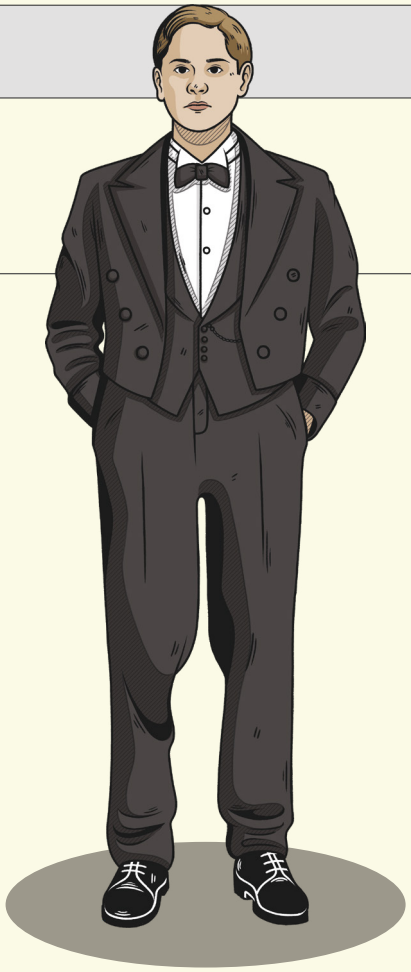
Birling belittles his son's high-wrought emotions as hysteria, suggesting Eric isn't in control of his thoughts or actions. The adjectival phrase 'hysterical young fool' seems to suggest that foolishness and hysteria are consequences of youth. Yet, ironically, the older man is also on the verge of losing control and resorting to physical violence.

Mini Exams

Question 1
How does Priestley differentiate between young and old characters?

Question 2
How might an audience in 1912 have responded differently to An Inspector Calls?

Question 3
How does Priestley use time to structure his play?

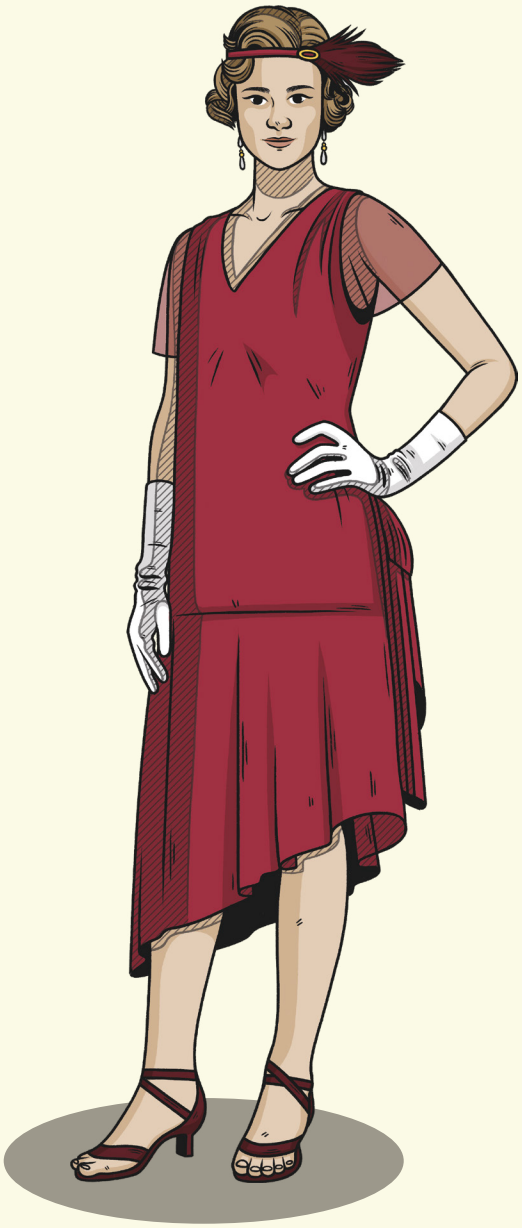


Exam Question

How does Priestley use the characters of Sheila and Eric to express ideas about generational conflict? Write about:

- how Sheila and Eric differ from Sybil and Arthur;
- how he uses these characters to explore ideas about youth and age.

Don't forget to plan your response.



Sample Answer

Good Response

Structural points with sound understanding but limited analysis of effect.

Sheila starts off in the play being quite like her mum and dad. She is going to marry Gerald and she agrees with Mr Birling that she is making a good choice because Gerald has lots of money. She has the same values as her parents. But when the inspector comes and she realises that she has helped to kill Eva Smith she changes her mind and realises that her parents are wrong. Mrs Birling calls her a "hysterical child" but at the end Sheila is the clever one because she knows she has to change. So we see that younger people are more likely to change their minds about things but older people are stuck in their ways.

Effect of dramatic device is clearly understood but analysis could again be deepened.

Mr Birling thinks that Eric has an easier life than he did so he is hard on him which makes Eric act silly sometimes. Sheila and Eric are patronised a lot by Mr Birling who tells them all sorts of things like the Titanic is unsinkable, which is dramatic irony because the audience know he is wrong and the Titanic did sink. Mr Birling calls them "youngsters" which shows he doesn't really respect them or think they are important.

Constant engagement with text and meanings, supported by relevant textual references.

Mr Birling tries to boss his children around all the time and when he finds out that Eric has stolen money from his business he is really angry and says he has to pay it back and that he is ashamed of him. But Eric says "I'm ashamed of you as well". This shows that Eric realises that his parents are not good people and that he wants to be better than they are.

At the end of the play Sheila and Eric are together and realise that things have to change, but there is conflict with their parents who are an older generation and do

Contextual understanding of both setting and time of writing.

not see why anything has to be different. They have brought their children up to be dutiful and obedient, because this is how people were expected to behave in those days but Priestley is writing at a later date when two world wars have destroyed the order of things and people yearn for change. Sheila says "you are ready to go on in the same old way" which shows what the playwright felt about the older generation. He felt that they weren't willing to learn from their mistakes and to change. But Mr Birling calls Sheila and Eric "the famous young generation who know it all" which makes him sound arrogant because we know that he has been wrong about loads of things like the war and the Titanic. The playwright makes him look stupid to show that old people should try to learn from young people and change the way they think.

This response shows a strong understanding of the play's meaning but could go into more analytical detail about how Priestley achieves effects. Nevertheless, all assessment objectives are met to some extent.

Great Response

As with class and gender, age is a source of conflict in Priestley's play. The writer uses the Birling family as a microcosm of society to show that old-fashioned attitudes such as those held by Mr and Mrs Birling have had their day and it is the younger generation, represented by Sheila and Eric, who will take responsibility for building a better post-war future.

Response to question is focused and clearly laid out in introduction.

Birling, in particular, is contemptuous of any ideas or beliefs that conflict with his own. In Act One he says that "there's a good deal of silly talk about these days" and advises the children to pay no heed to "socialist cranks" like H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw who claim that we are "like bees in a hive... all mixed up together". Birling is a capitalist who views socialist thinking as a threat to the status quo and his enviable position of wealth and authority – this is why he dismisses it as "silly", though the fact that there's "a good deal of it" shows that such thinking was gaining in popularity and Birling has no answer to this threat but to deride it. Priestley clearly sides with the likes of Wells and Shaw, fellow respected authors who likewise wrote philosophically about society and humanity's place in it. The simile "like bees in a hive" is intended to provide an image of communal productivity but, given the declining bee population, it could also now be read as symbolic of workers who are essential to our ecosystem but are in danger of being condemned by the selfish actions of those above them in the natural hierarchy.

Thought-provoking interpretation prompted by analysis of language.

The high point of Birling's own nonsense talk is his reference to the "unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable" Titanic. The dramatic irony of this statement is emphasised by the repetition and the absolutism that signal his own certainty. Priestley characterises Birling as an obstinate and officious fool and, although modern audiences might laugh at his pig-headed inaccuracies,

Analysis of language and structure...

his inability to see what's in front of him also marks him as dangerous in light of the two world wars that came between the setting and the performance of the play. It is no coincidence that Inspector Goole arrives just as Birling is pooh-poohing the notion of war and leaves them with the metaphorical image of "fire and blood and anguish", representing the oncoming war but endowed with even greater meaning to an audience in 1945 who were living with the horrors of World War II. The Inspector's lessons bounce off Birling though; he and his wife are solely concerned with their status and not the wider picture.

...is interwoven with effect and meaning in consideration of context.

The younger generation of Sheila and Eric contrast with this. In Victorian times, children were expected to be seen and not heard and this is broadly what Mr and Mrs Birling expect of their children. They certainly don't credit their children with having minds of their own, even though they're not children any more but young adults. Mrs Birling is oblivious to Eric's heavy drinking habit and says of Sheila's mature and compassionate response to Eva's death and the part she played in it, "You seem to have made a great impression on this child, Inspector". Indeed, in a very short space of time the Inspector becomes more of a moral guide to Sheila and Eric than their actual parents have ever been! The play begins with a toast to Sheila and Gerald's engagement, yet she is still classified as a "child" by her mother despite being old enough to marry and drink. This is typical of the older generation in the play, thinking themselves inherently superior and with nothing to learn from others.

In fact, Priestley presents Sheila and Eric as superior to their parents because of their ability to learn and change. Eric has arguably behaved worse than anyone else by forcing himself on Eva and then stealing money to cover the consequences of his misconduct. However, audiences sympathise with Eric more than they do his father because he ultimately proves himself the bigger

man by accepting his responsibilities.

The play concludes with Birling saying, “Now look at the pair of them – the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can’t even take a joke-” The difference between them is that the younger generation know that what happened to Eva Smith (or whoever it might have been) was most definitely not “a joke”. Because of the older generation’s failure to understand this, the dash represents the interruption of the telephone call to confirm that a girl really has died. Will they learn the next time round? The evidence of all that’s gone before suggests not but hope rests with the next generation, which would have been comforting to an audience traumatised by war.

The introduction establishes an overall viewpoint that is explored and developed with reference to language, form, structure and context throughout. At the halfway-point it appears that the candidate might be veering too far from the question specifics (the theme of generational conflict through the characters of Sheila and Eric) but it refocuses on those named and all analysis of the older Birlings remains relevant to the theme. This demonstrates how interpretation of questions can be widened to incorporate knowledge but it’s advisable in time constraints to remain as focused as possible.

Themes

Morality and Legality

Responsibility is a central theme of the play, stretching across the divisions of class, gender and age. Inspector Goole reveals to each character their responsibility for Eva, which they all eventually acknowledge even if they're unwilling to accept the importance of it.

The drama of Act Three revolves around the distinction between immoral and illegal, and the bearing this has on responsibility. With each revelation – the Inspector was not a real inspector; the girl might not have been the same one; no-one has committed suicide – Birling, Sybil and, to some extent, Gerald feel relieved of guilt. They are still concerned by the damage that a public leak could do to their reputations but, as far as they're concerned, they've done nothing wrong. It was not illegal to sack the girl; indeed, there was firm business logic behind it. It was not illegal to seduce her; in fact, this was the happiest time of her life. And it was not illegal to refuse her charity; Mrs Birling is chair of the organisation so that must make her a good person, right? And anyway, she had good reason for not believing the girl's story.

Laws are written in black and white but morality is a grey area. To Sheila and Eric, it doesn't matter whether laws were broken, they know that they've done wrong by the girl and feel consumed by guilt, whatever the outcome. As Eric points out at the start of their suspicions, 'the fact remains that I did what I did. And mother did what she did. And the rest of you did what you did to her. It's still

Rank the characters from most moral to least. How does this compare with where the characters would place themselves?

the same rotten story whether it's been told to a police inspector or to somebody else'. Eric's matter-of-fact reasoning clashes with his parents' equally clear-cut belief that they are above blame. In the ensuing dispute, Birling practically bullies his son with the observation that Eric has most to fear as the only one who has committed a criminal act, namely embezzling funds from Birling & Co. Eva – or whoever the girl was – assumes the moral high ground by not taking stolen money. In a tragic irony, this honesty helps to seal her fate because Sybil's class prejudice dictates that she must be lying – 'As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!' By this stage of the play, morality has become gravely mixed up.

The Inspector is only interested in the theft in so much as it affects Eva. In reality, a girl's suicide might necessitate an inquest but the police would be unlikely to investigate leads from her diary relating to employment and relationship matters. But it is evident from Act One that Inspector Goole does not operate under standard police procedure. More concerned with enforcing moral law than criminal law, Goole plays by his own rules. As Eric concludes, it doesn't matter if the Inspector is showing photographs of a different girl, the charges remain the same.

In Brief:

Inspector Goole is not a law enforcer but an inspector of morals. Mr and Mrs Birling are adamant that they have broken no laws but Sheila and Eric comprehend that the concept of right and wrong goes deeper than legal statutes.

Context

As well as the belief in socialism, the **harm principle** could be seen as the guiding moral of *An Inspector Calls*. This philosophy broadly states that one is free to do as they please, so long as it doesn't cause harm to anyone else. It is an idea most commonly associated with the nineteenth century theorist John Stuart Mill, although Mill used it to argue against state intervention, so he didn't share Priestley's socialist views. By showing that trivial-seeming but selfish actions can have unforeseen but serious repercussions further down the line, Priestley scrutinises the harm principle. His interpretation is closer to France's *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, which dates all the way back to 1789: 'Liberty

consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights. These limits can only be determined by law.'

The legal framework for the play is provided by facets of the **justice system**. As a magistrate, Birling is responsible for ensuring that the law is upheld. Initially, he thinks that the Inspector's call must be 'something about a warrant'. Though it is still the case that a magistrates' court (dealing with minor offences and civil cases) can issue warrants, the informality of an evening call to the Birling residence indicates that individual magistrates held more sway then than they do now. Today, anyone aged between 18 and 65 can apply to be a magistrate if they are free of convictions and conflicts of interest. In the early twentieth century, however, it would have been inconceivable that a working class person, even of good character, would be made a magistrate. The 'bench' was instead filled with wealthy men consolidating their power base in the name of community service.

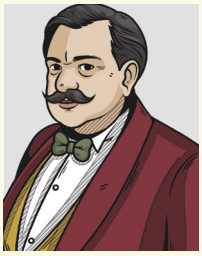
Birling has held a string of such roles, including alderman. This is a council position next in status to mayor, its title derived from the Old English word meaning "elder man". Chosen by committee rather than elected by popular vote, the power of aldermen was curtailed by the Local Government Act 1972 which abolished their voting rights on county councils. In 1912, Birling thinks he can use his rank to manipulate the justice system. Anyone trying the same today would hopefully be struck off and face disciplinary proceedings.

Eva campaigns for **workers' rights** and has no legal recourse for unfair dismissal. In the nineteenth century, trade unions took the first steps towards protecting workers but essentially employers could do as they chose. The Labour party first came to power in 1924 but lasted only ten months as it didn't have a majority in the House of Commons. The General Strike of 1926 opposed wage reductions and worsening conditions, which facilitated Labour replacing the Conservatives again in the 1929 General Election, but progress remained slow-going and employees were granted little security, hence hard-working women having to make way for men at the end of the war. The Contracts of

Employment Act 1963 legalised many rights we now take for granted, although employment law can still be incredibly murky.

Perhaps even more disturbingly, until 1961 Eva's suicide itself would have been deemed a criminal offence. "Self-murder" became a crime under common law in England in the thirteenth century but long before that it was condemned as a **mortal sin** in the eyes of the Church. Punishment did not end with death. Rather than being viewed as desperate souls driven to despair, those "committing" suicide were denied a Christian burial and, until 1822, surviving family members would be stripped of their possessions by the Crown. Until the second half of the twentieth century, when society gradually became more **secular**, the Church was the authority on morality though we know in hindsight that the clergy were not without sin, just as the lawmakers were not above the law.

Key Quotes



(*angrily*) 'Look here, Inspector, I consider this uncalled-for and officious. I've half a mind to report you. I've told you all I know – and it doesn't seem to me very important.'

BIRLING, Act One

The tone indicated by the stage direction suggests Birling has no time for the Inspector and is losing patience with a matter that he considers trivial. The threat to 'report you' is one of many examples of Birling leaning on the Inspector to quieten him.

'We're respectable citizens and not criminals.'

GERALD, Act One

Gerald makes the assumption that 'respectable citizens' never commit crimes. In his world, only the working class are felons and the ruling class are above the law. The Inspector corrects this misjudgement with the comeback, 'Sometimes there isn't as much difference as you think'.

'No hushing up, eh? Make an example of the young man, eh? Public confession of responsibility, um?'

INSPECTOR, Act Two

The Inspector's **rhetorical questions** taunt Mrs Birling for shifting the blame, unwittingly, to her own son. The repeated references to publicising Eric's guilt show that he knows the Birlings prize public honour above personal integrity.

'He was our police inspector all right.'

ERIC, Act Three

Eric uses 'inspector' in the general sense of one who scrutinises and ensures that standards are upheld. It doesn't matter to him or Sheila whether the law is involved since they know they were morally wrong.

(*jovially*) 'But the whole thing's different now. Come, come, you can see that, can't you?'

BIRLING, Act Three

Birling is quick to laugh off the whole incident and revert to a jovial manner when he thinks it a hoax. He is not remorseful for his behaviour once there are no legal repercussions and even mocks his children for not seeing it the same way. His failure to 'see' his moral obligations necessitates the coming of a real police inspector.

Mini Exams

Question 1

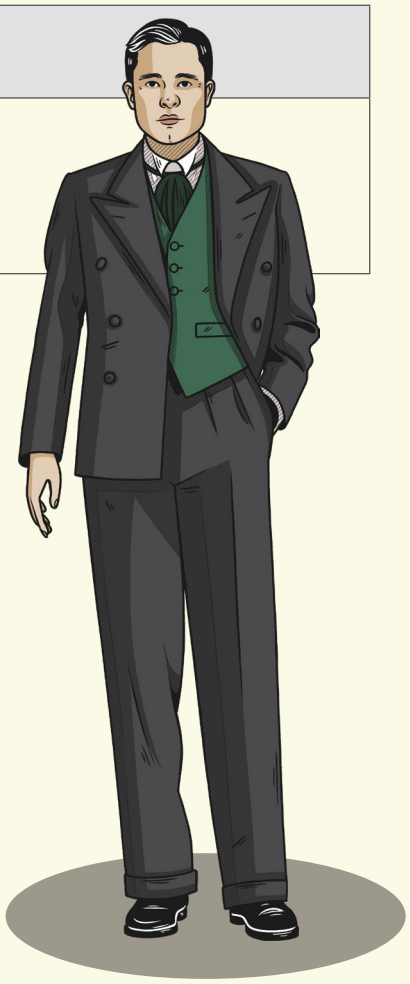
In what ways does Inspector Goole **not** act like a police inspector?

Question 2

To what extent can Mrs Birling be described as a moralistic character?

Question 3

How might the play be different if Gerald were more morally responsible?

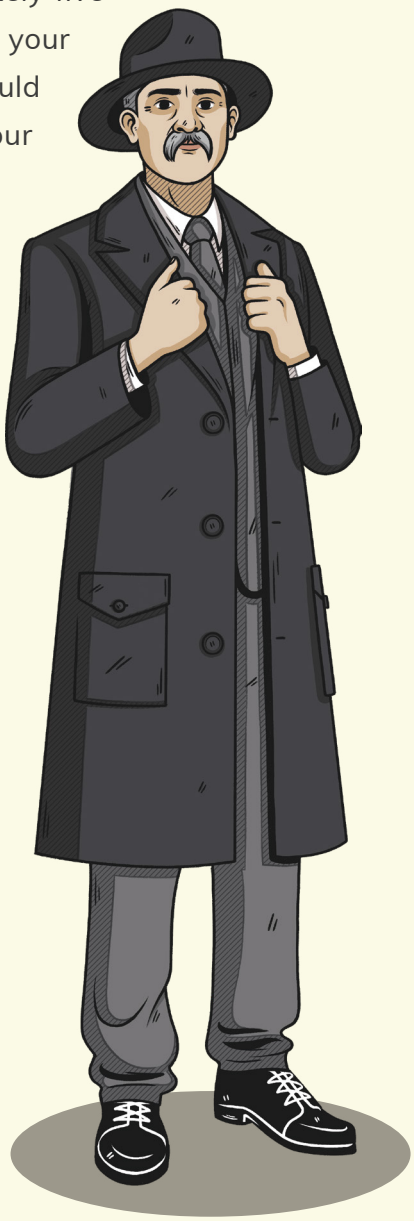


Exam Question

How does Priestley use the character of Inspector Goole to convey ideas about morality? Write about:

- how Priestley presents the Inspector;
- how he uses the character to explore ideas about morality and social responsibility.

Don't forget to plan your response. You should spend approximately five minutes organising your thoughts. This will help you to structure your answer, as well showing the examiner where you were headed should you run out of time (which of course you won't if you manage your time wisely).



Sample Answer

Good Response

Priestley uses Inspector Goole to show the Birlings (and Gerald) the error of their ways, although only the younger ones are ready to admit that they've done anything wrong.

Recognises significance and effect of structure. Second quote supports response but the simile cries out for further language analysis.

The Inspector arrives just as Birling is telling Gerald and Eric that every man has to "mind his own business and look after himself". This is important because it sums up Birling's selfish ideas about life – as long as he's ok he doesn't see that it's his responsibility to look after anybody else. The Inspector comes to teach him that this isn't the case and that we are "all mixed up like bees in a hive".

Birling is a capitalist whereas the Inspector is a socialist. Though it is not immoral to make money, there is the biblical saying that "money is the root of all evil" and Birling thinks that Eva Smith's death has nothing to do with him, even though her troubles began with his refusal to pay a fair wage. He says that if he hadn't come down sharply on her and the other workers "they'd soon be asking for the earth". The Inspector replies "Better to ask for the earth than to take it". The implication is that Birling is hoarding money and resources for himself, whereas the Inspector's socialist view is that wealth should be shared more freely and that Birling was wrong to deny their requests.

Well-chosen textual references illustrate understanding that verges on analysis.

As another capitalist, Gerald agrees with Birling that he was perfectly right not to give in to a workers' strike and to sack Eva. At the time, workers had few rights so factory owners such as them were doing nothing illegal protecting their own interests but the Inspector

Small contextual detail leads into an interesting consideration of topic.

wants them to see that there is a grey area between what's illegal and what's immoral. That's why he says "we have to share something. If there's nothing else, we'll have to share our guilt". Gerald is also guilty because of the way he conducted an affair with Daisy, which was a form of adultery. Adultery is another cardinal sin that would have had more impact on God-fearing people in the early twentieth century than it might have now. Gerald also acts badly by lying and pretending not to know who Daisy was but there is no point lying to Inspector Goole because he is practically omniscient, like a God, and nothing gets past him. In fairness to Gerald, he treated the girl quite well but he only liked her for her looks, which the Inspector points out that she had lost by the time he saw her lying on the mortuary slab. This sort of no-nonsense approach is typical of Inspector Goole – he is a man of few words but he uses images that have a shocking effect. Most of the time he lets the characters tell their stories, as if they are confessing and exploring their conscience with just a little prodding from him.

Broad but effective analytical point. Zoom in on an example for greater credit.

However, by the end of the play the Inspector has lost patience with Birling. His insistence that "we are all members of one body" is a summary of the socialist idea that we are all connected and all responsible for one another – the use of the metaphorical body is more powerful because of what happened to Eva Smith's body. Inspector Goole warns that she is one of many and her fate could be shared by any of them "in fire and blood and anguish". This is a vision of war. One of Priestley's aims is to convince the audience of 1945 that they should build a welfare state after the Second World War, which is partly a political message but also a moral one because he wants everybody to look after each other, which is clearly the right thing to do. This is made clear by the phone call. Mr and Mrs Birling want to ignore what the Inspector's said because they think it was a hoax but Sheila and Eric recognise that,

Effective reflection contains subject terminology.

Understanding of how context influenced text.

even if it was, they are still responsible for their actions and they know they did wrong by Eva. If Mr and Mrs Birling had recognised this, it might have spared a life but because they have failed to do so the play's dramatic finale reveals that a girl really has died and an inspector is on the way to question them. They will pay for what they've done wrong one way or another.

Contains elements of a 'great' response but for the most part this student is grappling with the focus of the question. Carefully structured and clearly defined paragraphs make it easier for an examiner to credit where assessment objectives are met and could elevate this into a higher band.

Great Response

Inspector Goole is the social conscience of *An Inspector Calls*, with Priestley using the character to investigate the social, economic and political conflict between capitalism and socialism. It is obvious that Priestley sides with the Inspector, both from the play's dramatic action and the contextual details of Priestley's life and times.

Introduction acts as a mission statement, clearly signposting main points.

Priestley was writing at a time of huge unrest, in a world devastated by two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century. Having fought in the First World War as a young man, Priestley knew that he was lucky to survive. Even before this, his father had introduced him to socialist ideals but Priestley's war time experience cemented the idea that we each bear a responsibility for the lives and wellbeing of those around us. It is this socialist belief – that we are "all members of one body" – that the Inspector seeks to impose on both the characters and the audience of the play.

Context (and its implications) developed across paragraph.

The timing of the Inspector's arrival in the play is significant. It comes at a moment when Arthur Birling is advocating the need for each man "to look after himself". This individualistic approach to life has worked for "hard-headed" capitalists such as Birling but there are many circumstances, the Inspector wishes to teach us, in which people are not able to look after themselves, through no fault of their own. This message would have carried particular weight in the aftermath of World War II, when the suffering of returning soldiers, many with disabilities and post-traumatic stress disorder, helped persuade the UK to introduce a welfare state, including the foundation of the NHS. Birling's beliefs contrast with these so it is fitting that the Inspector arrives at this point to correct him (or at least attempt to – Birling is highly resistant to what the Inspector, and by extension Priestley, have to say).

Analysis of play's structure linked to both meaning and context.

Priestley presents the Inspector as a clear moral authority. His character description says that 'The Inspector need not be a big man but he creates at once an impression of massiveness... he has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking'. Just as Eva Smith is representative of millions more like her, the Inspector's appearance is ordinary enough that he could be just about anyone, signalling that power lies in the collective rather than in one formidable person. However, his presence and manner are unnerving in the unusual way that he conducts himself. Birling is used to being deferred to so it is deeply unsettling for him – a magistrate and former Lord Mayor – to be questioned and contradicted by a humble police inspector. In the way that Birling tries to use his power to influence proceedings, Priestley shows that high status does not equate to high morals. Similarly, there were big moral questions facing those in power at this time too and everybody was involved in post-war soul-searching so the Inspector's ability to look inside people applies to the audience too.

Topic sentences explicitly address question and provide basis for the detailed explanations and analysis that follow.

A lot of Inspector Goole's power and authority stems from his omniscience. Surely there is no higher moral power than God (cynical atheists might disagree!) and Goole is God-like in his ability to somehow know and understand everything. It is notable that he often behaves more like a Priest inviting confession than a police interrogator, letting the characters speak for themselves, reinforcing the impression that he represents an inner conscience. His final words also sound like those of wrathful deity: "We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Good night." The apocalyptic image of "fire and blood and anguish" alludes to the subsequent wars and the fact that the Inspector can predict this makes him seem all-powerful and able

to punish men for not sharing his morals. Here and throughout the play, the Inspector routinely uses the pronoun "we", as opposed to the "I" of Birling, which is again indicative of his more socially responsible viewpoint. And the salutation "Good night" shows that he is a benevolent spirit, even if he has just threatened the destruction of mankind! The Goole/ghoul homophone – the significance of which only becomes apparent at the play's close – further gives the impression that the character is a spiritual presence, here to show the way and teach moral lessons just as the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future do to Scrooge in A Christmas Carol.

Language analysis plus subject terminology.

To conclude, the Inspector is the play's moral compass but in a complex world he is unable to get everyone pointing in the right direction, necessitating a destructive punishment in the vein of a biblical plague.

Perceptive reiteration of key points.

General understanding is comparable to the 'good' response but the academic organisation, slightly more focused language analysis and imaginative phrasing take this answer to a higher level.

Glossary

affirmation n.
statement in confirmation of something

affluent adj.
wealthy and prosperous

Alderman n.
council rank next in status to Mayor; a position also held by Birling

alludes v.
hints or suggests at (particularly with reference to something else)

anguish n.
severe mental or physical pain and suffering

annul v.
to declare invalid or void

authoritarian adj.
strict; dictatorial

benevolence n.
a quality of goodness and generosity

binary opposition n.
a pair of terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning and set off against one another

bourgeois adj.
characteristic of the upper middle class and their conservative, materialistic values

chivalrous adj.
behaviour that is courteous and gallant, particularly from a man to a woman

convention n.
a way in which something is usually done; conventions help us to identify genre

deferred v.
bowed down to as a mark of respect and superiority

denouement n.
the final part of a narrative in which plot strands are drawn together and resolved

destitution n.
a state of poverty

dominant ideology n.
values, beliefs and morals shared by the majority of people in a society

dramatic irony n.
the gap between a character's understanding and that of the audience, usually achieved by the audience knowing something that characters don't

embezzlement v.
stealing of funds placed in one's trust (usually from an employer)

enfranchised v.
given the right to vote

...

enigmatic adj.
mysterious and puzzling

exonerate v.
relieve of duty or blame

futurist n.
an artist or thinker who explored possibilities and made predictions about what the future held

hierarchical adj.
describes something arranged in order of rank/status

impertinence n.
cheekiness; lack of respect

industrialist n.
a person involved in the management and ownership of heavy industry

inebriated adj.
drunk

infantilising v.
treating someone as if they were a child

infirmary n.
small hospital, possibly part of a workhouse

lampoons v.
ridicules; makes a mockery of

liberal adj.
open to new ideas and favouring social freedoms

magistrate n.
civilian officer who administers the law; a job referred to in the text as being 'on the bench'

metaphorical adj.
describes something that is being used figuratively or symbolically

nouveau riche n.
"new rich" – people who have recently acquired money, perceived as lacking class and taste

perceptive adj.
showing sensitivity and insight

personification n.
the representation of an abstract quality in human form

polemical adj.
strongly critical (usually in a political sense)

portentous adj.
bombastic and self-important

prejudiced v.
influenced in a biased or unfair manner

presentiment n.
intuitive feelings about what's coming; a sense of foreboding

propriety n.
the need to meet accepted standards of behaviour

prosperity n.
a state of wealth, success and general good fortune

protagonists n.
main characters

provincial adj.
describes small-town, unsophisticated attitudes

remorse n.
regret for a sin committed

...

rhetorical questions n.
questions asked without expectation of an answer

secular adj.
disconnected from religion and spirituality

social-realist adj.
describes an artistic movement that aimed to draw attention to the real struggles of the working class

squiffy adj.
slang term for being a bit drunk

status quo n.
Latin for the existing state of things

stereotypical adj.
describes a commonly held, often simplified image or idea of a particular group

stigmas n.
marks of shame or disgrace (usually used metaphorically)

submissive adj.
weakly obedient; ready to concede to the will or authority of others

subservient adj.
unquestioningly obedient

subverts v.
to overturn or destabilise

suffrage n.
the right to vote in political elections (British women were denied this until 1918, and even then it was limited to women over the age of thirty who met minimum property qualifications)

superficial adj.
relating to the surface; skin-deep

susceptible adj.
easily influenced or harmed

temporal elisions n.
jumps in time; the omission of actions and events

unequivocal adj.
clear and explicit; leaving no doubt

vested interest n.
a self-serving reason for involvement in or agreement with something (usually financial gain)

About the Authors

Beyond Secondary Resources is a segment within Twinkl Ltd. dedicated to the creation of high-quality resources for secondary school education from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 5.

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