

Plot
<b>Act 1 - Exposition:</b> The Birlings, their lifestyle and attitudes introduced. We see that pride/self-satisfaction is Mr Birling's fatal flaw (an aspect of his personality that causes his downfall). The Inspector interrupts Gerald & Sheila's engagement party to investigate the death of Eva Smith. Mr B & Sheila interrogated; Sheila accepts responsibility following encounter in the department store and urges others to do the same. Ends on a <u>cliffhanger</u> , as the audience anticipates the interrogation of Gerald, now he has admitted to Sheila that he knew 'the girl.'
<b>Act 2 - Development:</b> Gerald is interrogated & confesses to affair with 'Daisy Renton'; Gerald departs; Mrs Birling is interrogated. She refuses to accept any responsibility.
<b>Act 3 -</b> Eric interrogated; confesses to forcing himself on her & stealing from the company to support her; confirms Eva's story that she refused marriage & financial support. Inspector delivers his <u>prophetic</u> message about the future, then departs. Characters react to his departure, showing how the young change while the elder Birlings remain concerned with the 'public scandal' that will ensue. Gerald returns: no new inspector in Brumley, confirmed by Birling who contacts the chief constable; G calls the infirmary, no death - the older Bs & G talk of hoax. Mr B is triumphant, S & E won't be consoled as they continue to accept responsibility for their actions. The phone rings 'A girl has just died [...] inspector is on his way here...'

Themes: Responsibility
The play is concerned with both <b>personal responsibility</b> and <b>social responsibility</b> . Responsibility is arguably the most important theme in the play. The words 'responsible' and 'responsibility' appear many times.
At the beginning of the play, Mr. Birling gives his interpretation of 'responsibility' in his speech: " <i>a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own</i> ". Towards the end of the play, the Inspector gives his alternative interpretation: "We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other." These speeches reflect the opposing viewpoints in the play:
Individual responsibility vs. collective responsibility Conservatism vs. Socialism
Think about how Priestley makes it clear that he supports one view and opposes the other: "millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths [...] their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering, and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives."

Themes: Gender
The vulnerability of women creates sympathy, which supports Priestley's belief in gender equality and community as "one body". Even upper class women had limited choices and were under the control of men. The situation was even worse for working class women. Eva Smith stands for this inequality. Her life is heavily influenced by the men she encounters. In the play, all the women are portrayed as delicate characters- particularly Sheila who the men protect from many things including that Eva Smith committed suicide. Mrs Birling was also protected from outside affairs, such as the knowledge that many upper class men visited prostitutes and that her son drank excessively. This leads to conflict within the family. Priestley includes a strong range of female characters in An Inspector Calls from an upper class snob, through a vain daughter to an oppressed factory worker, showing he wanted to convey women from all types of social backgrounds.

Themes: Class (1)
Class influences the Birlings behaviour and makes them treat people differently. Priestley shows how the upper classes have a limited sense of responsibility.
Priestley uses the play to reveal the unfairness of the class system. He uses the Birlings to show all that is wrong with the ruling classes. Priestley saw the working class as victims of the class system – Eva's story is unique but the miseries she suffered were common – EVA SMITH COULD HAVE BEEN ANYONE.
Priestly suggests that the higher classes didn't question the class system as it worked for them – this is also why they don't recognise Eric's drinking and womanising – they don't want to know.

Themes: Class (2)
Birling thinks his position of authority makes him more important. He has been Lord Mayor and is now a magistrate who dishes out judgements on people – IRONIC AS HE HIMSELF HAS ACTED SO IMMORALLY.
When Mrs Birling says she does not recognise Eva it is because to her she has no identity – she does not exist because she is lower class. Eric and Sheila – they change by the end of the play and turn against their own class. Priestley uses them to say that it doesn't matter what class you are from, you can break out and choose to act differently.
The Inspector does not fit into the class system – he wants everyone to be treated equally.

Characterisation
<b>Arthur Birling</b> ✓ Capitalist ✓ Arrogant ✓ Verbose ✓ Stubborn ✓ Industrialist ✓ Static and immovable
<b>Sybil Birling</b> ✓ Judgemental ✓ Old money ✓ Traditional ✓ Insincere ✓ Controlling ✓ Static and immovable
<b>Sheila Birling</b> ✓ Intelligent ✓ Feminine ✓ Emotional ✓ Transformative ✓ Empowered ✓ Perceptive ✓ Changes and evolves
<b>Eric Birling</b> ✓ Irresponsible ✓ Spoilt ✓ Reckless ✓ Immature ✓ Transformative ✓ Changes and evolves ✓ matures
<b>Gerald Croft</b> ✓ Aristocratic ✓ Secretive ✓ Traditional ✓ Privileged ✓ Evasive
<b>Eva Smith</b> ✓ Working class ✓ Determined ✓ Vulnerable ✓ Emblematic ✓ Allegorical
<b>Inspector Goole</b> ✓ Priestley's mouthpiece ✓ Impressive ✓ Commanding ✓ Social justice ✓ Omnipotent

## Themes: Generations

In the play, the older generation (Mr. & Mrs. Birling) seem incapable of real change. They are set in their ways and see Sheila and Eric as “foolish” “children”.

They have little sympathy for Eva Smith and are only sorry that she has died because it could impact on their lives.

Priestley uses Mr. & Mrs. Birling to represent old-fashioned ideas. He discredits them, and what they represent, by making them look foolish and by catching them out at the end.

## Themes: Generations

In the play, the younger generation (Eric and Sheila) show that they are capable of change. The express sympathy for the strikers in Act 1 and they also show greater sympathy for Eva Smith. Through the play, they are honest about their actions and refuse to go back on what they have learnt.

Sheila and Eric’s ability to change means that Priestley can end the play with an element of hope. It is possible that the next generation can make society better.

The children can think for themselves without their parents influence:

Sheila doesn’t know if she will marry Gerald anymore, she wants time to decide for herself.

Eric says his mother doesn’t “understand anything” and that Birling is not “the kind of father a chap could go to for help”.

## Key Themes List

Responsibility  
Gender  
Treatment of Women  
Family  
Generations  
Youth and Age  
Class  
Community  
Family  
Guilt  
Marriage  
Morality  
Socialism  
Women  
Inequality

## Key Terms and Stylistic Features

Capitalism  
Cliff - hanger  
Climax  
Contrasts  
Dramatic Irony  
Denouement  
Exposition  
Foreshadowing  
Historical  
Juxtaposition  
Metaphor  
Pace  
Stage  
Directions  
Three Act Structure

## Prompts for Analysis:

### How is this character used to create conflict / tension?

“Priestley uses the Inspector to...”

“Priestley uses the conversation between Mrs Birling and the Inspector to create a sense of...”

### How does Priestley use a character’s actions or words help to present his ideas and themes?

“Priestley uses the entrance of the Inspector to upset the happy mood at the start of the play.”

“In Act Three, Priestley uses Eric and Sheila to emphasise the older generation’s refusal to accept responsibility.”

### How does Priestley use a characters words or actions in a symbolic way? (think of Eric’s drinking; Sheila returning the engagement ring to Gerald).

“In Act One, Priestley uses Eric’s excessive drinking to foreshadow his troubled emotional state.”

“Sheila’s act of handing the engagement ring back to Gerald symbolises her loss of innocence: she now understands exactly the kind of person Gerald is.”



## Historical Context

**Priestly wrote An Inspector Calls at the end of World War 2 in 1945. However, the play is set in 1912, two years before World War 1.**

**Priestly was very concerned about the consequences of social inequality. In 1942 he co-founded the Common Welfare Party which later merged with the Labour Party.**

**He was influential in developing the concept of the welfare state.**

**In the play we can see the strict class and gender boundaries that, at the time, seemed unlikely to change. However, these distinctions had started to dissolve by 1945, when WW2 ended. Priestly wanted a better, more equal society.**

**An Inspector Calls presents the conflicting views between Capitalism and Socialism.**

## Key Phrases

An important theme for Priestley is...

Through the character of \_\_\_\_\_ Priestley presents the theme of...

This is evident where...

This idea is developed where...

This is in contrast to...

Through the use of \_\_\_\_\_ Priestley encourages the audience to...





**Dramatic irony**  
Birling's views related to war, the Titanic, labour force strikes  
Mrs Birling's statements about the father of Eva's baby (Eric)

**Demonisation/Ridicule of the capitalist system**

**Corruption**

**Decency and Acceptability**

**Responsibility**

**Social vs individual**

**Influence**  
Social  
Moral  
Power  
Abuse of power  
Hierarchy

**Truth and lies**  
Trust  
Lies  
Secrecy  
Honesty

**Moral/ethical**  
Class  
Individual  
Social

**Value**  
Commodity  
Reputation

**Morals**  
Weakness  
Power  
Influence



**Using the play as a vehicle for his views** - Priestley's play is heavy in political and social commentary. He uses Eva/Daisy's storyline to explore social inequality and injustice.

**The need for change** - Priestley believed that society was highly corrupt and capitalist regimes did little to support the weak

**J.B. Priestley - views and beliefs**

**Lower classes as victims** - Priestley experienced the futility death on the WW1 battlefields. He strongly believed that the upper classes were protected (due to officer rank) whilst the lower classes were sent to fight and almost certainly die.

**Socialism** - Priestley believed society had to change. The weakest and poorest in society needed help and support from those who were in a position to do so.

Through the Inspector, Priestley vocalises his attitude and opinions towards society and its need for reform



**Inspector Goole**  
'There are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths'  
'An impression of massiveness'  
'He speaks carefully, weightily'  
'She was pretty, very pretty'

**Doorbell interrupts Birling's capitalist speech and marks the introduction of socialism embodied in the Inspector**



**Dramatic device**  
The doorbell  
Departures - characters/symbolic removal of ideas  
Introduction of new characters

'He will learn it in blood and fire and anguish'  
'We are responsible for each other'

Seeks to find the truth. Asks each character in turn, causing them to admit their guilt

**An Inspector Calls**



'A cold woman'  
'I did my duty'

'She's impertinently made use of our name'  
'She was giving herself ridiculous airs'

Head of the church Charity organisation. Prejudiced towards Eva due to her lying (and immoral position - unmarried and pregnant)

Owner of factory. Strong opinions that are not always true. Sacked Eva due to her involvement in strike action

The victim. Her life is affected by all other characters, but we never see her on stage. Her life is reported to us by the Inspector



'A hard headed, practical man of business'  
'Unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable'

'Has to look after himself and his own'  
'I'd pay thousands, yes thousands'  
'To that, I say - fiddlesticks'



Eva as a universal victim

Eva as a symbol for the lower classes and how they are abused  
Her silence as a statement about gender roles (women in this society)

Claimed to save Daisy from men at the music hall. Kept Daisy in a set of rooms and had an affair



Tries to hide his actions from the Inspector -> 'we can keep this from him'  
'Easy, well-bred young man-about-town'  
'I was sorry for her'  
'Everything's alright now Sheila (holds up the ring) What about this ring?'

**Redundancy of the aristocratic system**

**The potential for change within the younger generation**

Got Eva Smith pregnant. Tried to support her using stolen money

Had Eva fired from Milwards due to her own jealousy



'Rather too manly to be a dandy'  
'I don't come in to this suicide business'

'Suddenly guffaws'  
'I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty'

Accepts responsibility -> 'The fact remains that I did what I did'  
'Half shy, half assertive'  
'squiffy'



'At least I'm trying to tell the truth'  
'excited with life'

'Oh, how horrible'  
'I know what I did. I am ashamed'



Facilitates an ordered structure to questioning (and the play)  
Building tension amongst characters and for audience

Shown by the Inspector to one character at a time  
Sense of intrigue



Interrupted by doorbell