



AN INSPECTOR CALLS



Plot

1. An inspector arrives at the Birling house. He tells them how a girl called Eva Smith has killed herself by drinking disinfectant - he wants to ask them some questions.
2. The Inspector reveals that the girl used to work in Arthur Birling's factory. He had her sacked for going on strike. Mr Birling refuses to accept any responsibility for her death.
3. The Inspector then reveals that Sheila thought that Eva had made fun of her and so she got her sacked. Sheila is deeply ashamed and feels responsible for the girl's death.
4. The Inspector forces Gerald to confess to an affair he had with Eva. Sheila respects Gerald's honesty but returns the engagement ring he gave her.
5. It is revealed that Sybil Birling had refused to help the pregnant Eva.
6. It turns out that it was Eric who got Eva pregnant, and stole money from his father to help her.
7. The Inspector leaves. The family ring the infirmary; there is no record of a girl's suicide.
8. The phone rings; Mr Birling answers. The call reveals that a girl has just died from drinking disinfectant; the police are on their way to question the family. The play ends.

Characters

Mr Arthur Birling

Mr Birling is the head of the Birling household. He has made himself very wealthy by being a 'hard-headed' business man.

Mrs Sybil Birling

Mrs Sybil Birling is Arthur Birling's wife and from the opening of the play she is cold-hearted and snobbish despite being a prominent member of local women's charity.

Sheila Birling

Sheila Birling is Arthur and Sybil's daughter and is in her early 20s. At the start of the play she is celebrating her engagement and she is giddy, naïve and childish.

Eric Birling

Eric is the Birlings' son and is in his early twenties, he is described as being 'not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive'. In other words, he lacks confidence.

Gerald Croft

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

Inspector Goole

The Inspector arrives whilst the Birlings are celebrating. The stage directions state that he 'need not be a big man' but he creates an 'impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness'.

Eva Smith/Daisy Renton

We never meet Eva Smith during the course of the play, but she is a very important character. It is her death that is the cause of the Inspector's investigation which in turn drives the drama.



Context Timeline

- 1894: Priestley born in Bradford to middle class parents.
- 1912: The Titanic sets sail and sinks. The year in which the play is set.
- 1914: Start of the WW1. Priestley serves in the army
- 1918: End of WW1: 10 million dead. Women vote for first time in UK.
- 1936: The Great Depression. Mass unemployment.
- 1939: Hitler starts WW2.
- 1942: Welfare State proposed
- 1945: End WW2. 55 million dead. Priestley writes 'An Inspector Calls'.

Themes

Social responsibility

The play was first performed just after the end of WW2, in 1946. It was a time of great change in Britain. Priestley wanted his audience to be responsible for their own behaviour for the welfare of others.

Age

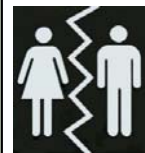
The older characters' opinions and behaviours are stubbornly fixed. Mr and Mrs Birling refuses to learn. Eric and Sheila however are younger - they accept their mistakes and offer the chance for a brighter future.

Gender

As many men went away to fight in WW2, their positions in work were filled by women. This helped change existing perceptions. Men had to acknowledge the fact that women were just as capable as them. As a result of this, many women enjoyed a newfound freedom that working allowed them.

Class

Before WW2, Britain was divided by class - the wealthy factory owners and the poor workers. The war helped bring these classes closer together. The war effort also meant that people from all classes were mixing together.





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Mr Arthur Birling

Mr Birling is the head of the Birling household. He has made himself very wealthy by being a 'hard-headed' business man.



Points (words to describe Mr Birling)

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| • Powerful | Arrogant |
| • Selfish | Thoughtless |
| • Confident | Foolish |
| • Patronising | Controlling |
| • Domineering | Hard-headed |

Top 10 quotations

1. "It's exactly the same port your father gets."
2. "the Titanic... unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable"
3. "there'll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere."
4. "There's a fair chance that I might find my way into the next Honours List. Just a knighthood, of course."
5. "a man has to make his own way – has to look after himself – and his family too"
6. "the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everyone else..."
7. "as if we were mixed up together like bees in a hive– community and all that nonsense."
8. "(*angrily to Eric*) You're the one I blame for this."
9. "I've got to cover this up as soon as I can"
10. "(*pointing to Eric and Sheila*) Now look at the pair of them – the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke –"

- J B Priestley believed in socialism, the idea that we should all look after one another.
 - **Mr Birling** represents greedy businessmen who only care for themselves.
- Priestley uses him to show that the Eva Smiths of the world will continue to suffer if people like Birling remain in positions of power.

Mrs Sybil Birling

Mrs Sybil Birling is Arthur Birling's wife and from the opening of the play she is cold-hearted and snobbish despite being a prominent member of local women's charity.



Points (words to describe Mrs Birling)

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| • Arrogant | Dismissive |
| • Superior | Judgemental |
| • Dismissive | Patronising |
| • Proud | Unconcerned |
| • Unmoved | Condescending |

Top 10 quotations

1. "You're looking tired dear. I think you ought to go to bed – and forget about this absurd business."
2. "Girls of that class–"
3. "(*with sudden anger*) Well, come along – what is it you want to know?"
4. "(*with dignity*) Yes. We've done a great deal of useful work in helping deserving cases."
5. "naturally that was one of the things that prejudiced me against her."
6. "I did nothing I'm ashamed of."
7. "I accept no blame at all."
8. "As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!"
9. "I wish I'd been here when that man first arrived. I'd have asked him a few questions before I allowed him to ask us any"
10. "I was the only one that didn't give in"

- In wartime Britain there was rationing; all classes were eating & dressing the same.
- **Sybil Birling** represents a middle-class snobbery that existed prior to the World Wars.
- Priestley hoped these attitudes would die out; he uses Mrs Birling to show how they can lead to cold and thoughtless behaviour.



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Sheila Birling

Sheila Birling is Arthur and Sybil's daughter and is in her early 20s. At the start of the play she is celebrating her engagement and she is giddy, naïve and childish.



Points (words to describe Sheila)

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| • Shallow | Jealous |
| • Naive | Ashamed |
| • Childish | Remorseful |
| • Crestfallen | Intelligent |
| • Enlightened | Fearful |

Top 10 quotations

1. "I felt rotten about it at the time and now I feel a lot worse."
2. "*(miserably)* So I'm really responsible."
3. "if I could help her now, I would –"
4. "he's giving us the rope - so that we'll hang ourselves."
5. "I behaved badly too. I know I did. I'm ashamed of it. But now you're beginning all over again to pretend that nothing much has happened!"
6. "I suppose we're all nice people now"
7. "You're beginning to pretend all over again."
8. "*(passionately)* You're pretending everything's just as it was before."
9. "You began to learn something. And now you've stopped. You're ready to go in the same old way."
10. "I remember what he said... it frightens me the way you talk, and I can't listen to any more of it."

- **Sheila**, like **Eric**, allows Priestley to show his opinions on youth.
- He felt that there was hope in the young people of post-war Britain.
- This is seen in how Sheila is deeply affected by Eva's death, she accepts responsibility straightaway and promises to never behave in such a way again.

Eric Birling

Eric is the Birlings' son and is in his early twenties, he is described as being 'not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive'. In other words, he lacks confidence.



Points (words to describe Eric)

- | | |
|-----------|-------------|
| • Awkward | Embarrassed |
| • Nervous | Deceitful |
| • Selfish | Aggressive |
| • Guilty | Frustrated |
| • Fragile | Ashamed |

Top 10 quotations

1. "*not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive.*"
2. "By Jove, yes. And as you were saying, Dad, a man has to look after himself."
3. "He could have kept her instead of throwing her out."
4. "You know, don't you?"
5. "*(bitterly)* You haven't made it any easier for me, have you, Mother?"
6. "Oh – my God! – how stupid this all is!"
7. "Because you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble."
8. "You're beginning to pretend now that nothing's really happened at all...The girl's still dead, isn't she?"
9. "But don't forget I'm ashamed of you as well – yes both of you."
10. "*(shouting)* And I say the girl's dead and we all helped to kill her – and that's what matters –"

- Priestley uses **Eric**, like **Sheila**, to suggest that the young people of a post-war Britain would be the answer to a hopeful future.
- With Eric, Priestley addresses concerns he had about the dangers of immoral behaviour.
- Through Eric, he shows that excessive drinking & casual relationships have consequences.



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Gerald Croft

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



Points (words to describe Gerald)

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| • Confident | Self-assured |
| • Sycophantic | Traditional |
| • Secretive | Caring |
| • Sorrowful | Disloyal |
| • Nonchalant | Triumphant |

Top 10 quotations

1. "All right, if you must have it"
2. "*(distressed)* Sorry— I – well I've suddenly realized— taken it properly— that she's dead"
3. "I didn't install her there so that I could make love to her"
4. "*(hesitatingly)* I didn't feel about her as she felt about me"
5. "I wasn't telling you a complete lie"
6. "She didn't blame me at all. I wish to God she had now. Perhaps I'd feel better about it."
7. "As I'm rather more – upset – by this business than I probably appear to be – and – well, I'd like to be alone for a while."
8. "I don't think he was an Inspector at all"
9. 'Everything's all right now Sheila'
10. "what about this ring?"

- Priestley uses **Gerald** to attack the upper-classes of post-war Britain.
- He shows that this class of people were still capable of questionable behaviour.
- Priestley also suggests that they saw themselves above the problems of the working-classes - Gerald tries to get himself and the Birlings out of trouble.

Inspector Goole

The Inspector arrives whilst the Birlings are celebrating. The stage directions state that he 'need not be a big man' but he creates an 'impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness'.



Points (words to describe the Inspector)

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| • Confident | Methodical |
| • Careful | Purposeful |
| • Thoughtful | Self-assured |
| • Abrupt | Powerful |
| • Imposing | Prophetic |

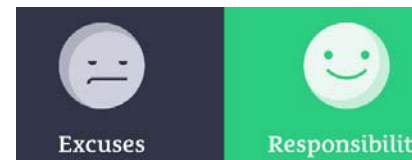
Top 10 quotations

1. "*he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness.*"
2. "He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking."
3. "It's the way I like to go to work. One person and one line of inquiry at a time. Otherwise there's a muddle."
4. "After all it's better to ask for the earth than to take it."
5. "I'm waiting... To do my duty"
6. "Each of you helped to kill her"
7. "there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us"
8. "all intertwined with our lives"
9. "We don't live alone. We are members of one body".
10. "We are responsible for each other."

- **Inspector Goole** sheds a light on all the concerns that Priestley had at the time of writing An Inspector Calls around age, gender, class and social responsibility.
 - Priestley uses the Inspector to make the audience question their own behaviour.
 - The issues the Inspector highlights are just as relevant to a modern day audience.



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Character	How do they behave at the beginning?	How do they react to the inspector?	How have their opinions and attitudes changed?
Mr Birling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arrogant, egotistical, only cares about himself. - Feels everyone is responsible for themselves, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not used to being questioned. - Rude to the inspector. - Refuses to accept any responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Still feels he has done nothing wrong. - Unconcerned for Eva Smith and other workers. - Still confident.
Mrs Birling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cold. - Treats Eric and Sheila like young children. - Dismissive of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shocked by the Inspector's questioning. - Rude towards him. - Refuses to accept responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thinks the responsibility lies with the father. - Agrees that she was prejudiced against the girl. - Please with her self
Sheila	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Naïve. Doesn't seem to understand the world. - Excitable. Concerned with material things, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is a ashamed of her behaviour. - Recognises that she is responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regrets what she has done - Claims she helped kill Eva. - Wants to change and wants her family to accept responsibility.
Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A bit of a drunk. - Argumentative. - Doesn't understand his father. - Awkward - not at ease with his family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Also ashamed of his behaviour. - Regrets his behaviour and wishes he hadn't done what he'd done. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is angry with his family for failing to recognise what they have done and the part they have played in Eva's death. - Understands that he was responsible
Gerald	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Typically upper classes. - Similar to Mr Birling. - Sycophantic. Trying to impress Birling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admits to knowing Daisy, eventually. - Appears to have some feelings for her 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appeared to have felt guilty but is then triumphant when he thinks the Inspector was a hoax. - Celebrates 'getting away with it'.

I won't change my mind.

Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.
- George B. Shaw

You've changed, man.

