

Common Misconceptions – *An Inspector Calls*



Gerald did nothing wrong

The Inspector says that Gerald 'at least had some affection' for Eva (Daisy). However, the uncomfortable truth remains that his behaviour was predatory. He took advantage of Eva's desperate circumstances and embarked on a relationship with her knowing that it couldn't possibly last. He's no 'fairy prince', despite what he might like to think.

Birling is stupid

Birling's incorrect predictions about the future don't necessarily show that he's stupid. Limited, perhaps, but not stupid. However, they do highlight his arrogance. He speaks with a misplaced confidence and won't entertain Eric's (reasonable) attempts to challenge him – 'You've a lot to learn yet.'

Birling did nothing wrong

In a legal sense, Birling did nothing wrong. He acted within his rights as an employer. However, his dismissal of Eva for causing 'trouble' is morally questionable. As Eric points out, his father could've 'kept her on instead of throwing her out' – particularly because, by his own admission, she was a 'good worker'.

Sheila is naive

Sheila might appear to have very little understanding of the wider world around her and, to an extent, this is very much the case. However, she does possess more knowledge than it initially seems. For example, she's suspicious of the reasons behind Gerald's absence and she is fully aware of the double-lives lived by men like Alderman Meggarty.

Socialism is communism

Socialism is about the inequalities that arise within capitalist societies; the aim of socialists is to reduce those inequalities. In a communist country, there are no private businesses and no private property. The Inspector might be a 'crank', according to Birling at least, but he is not a communist.

Edna is unimportant

Edna is unimportant in the sense that she has few lines in the play and only appears a handful of times on stage. However, her understated presence at the beginning of the play – 'just clearing the table' – signifies the Birling family's wealth and acts as a reminder of the rigid social hierarchy of Edwardian England.

Eric's drunkenness excuses his behaviour

Eric was 'in that state when a chap easily turns nasty'. However, his drunkenness in no way excuses what he did. The issue is around consent: he pressurises her into having sex by threatening 'to make a row'. The Inspector calls it out when he says that Eric used her 'as if she was an animal, a thing, not a person.'

Extracts from *An Inspector Calls* and J B Priestley's political journey

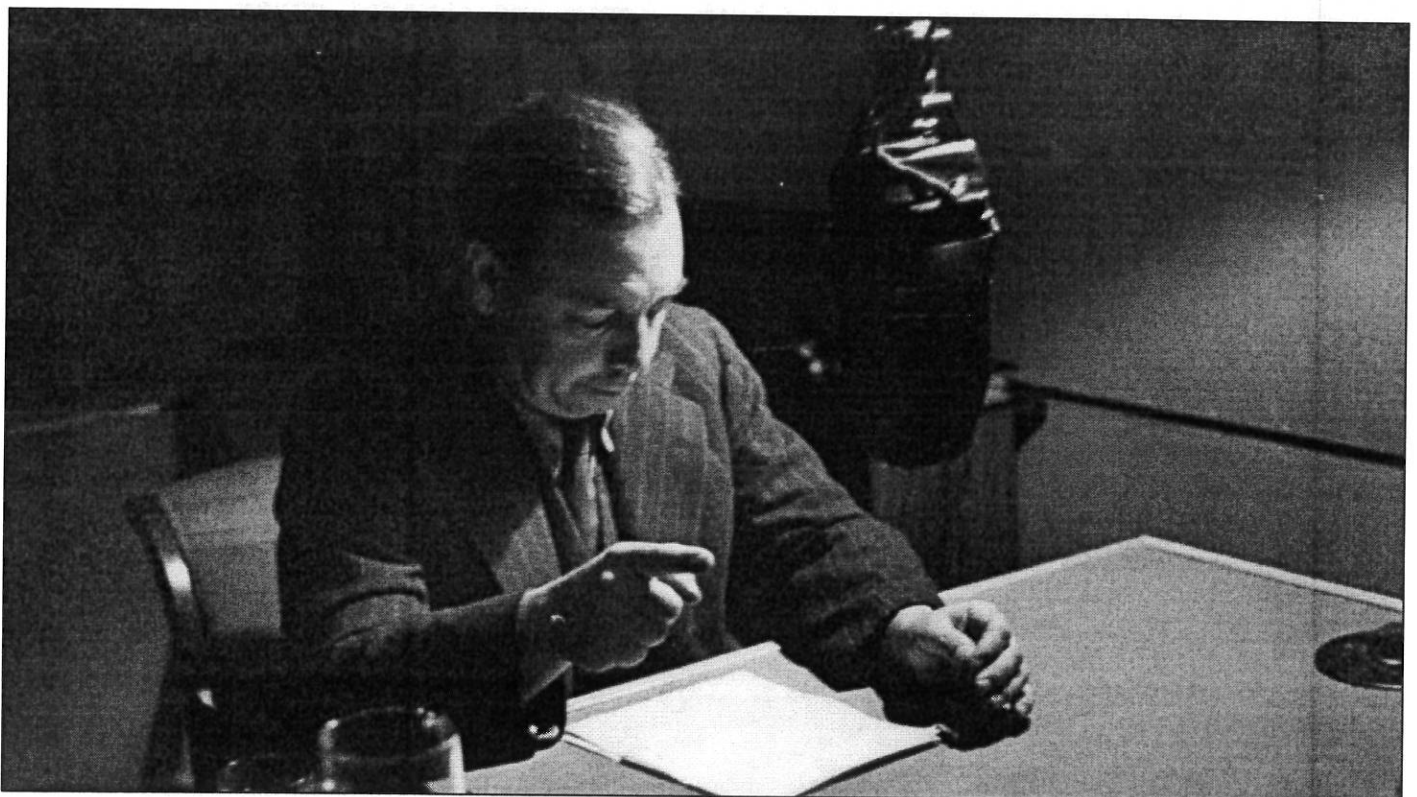
Source: <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-inspector-calls-and-j-b-priestleys-political-journey>

An Inspector Calls poses troubling questions: how can people live together? To what extent are individuals responsible for others? Gareth Lloyd Evans described the play as 'perhaps the clearest expression made by Priestley of his belief that 'no man is an island' – the theme is guilt and social responsibility'.

An Inspector Calls was born out of this tumultuous wartime debate about society, though Priestley had first thought of using a mysterious inspector years before. He had then mentioned the idea to a theatrical director, Michael MacOwen, who reminded him about it during the autumn of 1944. Priestley was enthused by the idea, found it in his 'little black notebook', and quickly wrote a playscript based around it. No suitable theatre was available in London, so in May 1945 Priestley sent the script to his Russian translator to see if there was any interest (his work was already popular in the Soviet Union). *An Inspector Calls* was thus first seen in productions by the Kamerny Theatre and the Leningrad Theatre in Moscow, followed by a European tour ending at the Old Vic in London.

Priestley and his wife Jane later travelled to the USSR, as guests of the Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries; he wrote about his experiences for the Sunday Express, his articles being reprinted in the pamphlet 'Russian Journey'. Priestley found the Russian people highly congenial and wrote sympathetically about a country that had recently been Britain's wartime ally. Later, he was to realise more about the nature of the regime.

The play embodies Priestley's reasons for calling for the 'new and vital democracy' by showing the personal consequences of a selfish society, and the future that would result if lessons were not learned about being 'responsible for each other': 'If men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in blood and fire and anguish'. This future might be the Great War which Priestley's 1945 audiences knew was just two years ahead for his 1912 protagonists, or it might be a terrible revolution yet to come: his Russian audiences had seen just that when the frustrations of an unequal society had led to violent revolution and terrible suffering. Such ambiguities Priestley leaves in the play, along with its origins in his own past and his deepest beliefs, allowing it to work for audiences worldwide ever since, despite its historical origins in a complacent 1912 and his bleak yet hopeful 1945.



Extracts from *Programme note by J B Priestley about An Inspector Calls*

Source: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/programme-note-by-j-b-priestley-about-an-inspector-calls>

This note provides an insight into J B Priestley's thoughts on *An Inspector Calls*, and the play's impact since its premiere in 1945/46. It was written by Priestley for the programme to accompany the 1972 Mermaid Theatre production. Priestley highlights the play's popularity around the world, noting that audiences' reactions were 'almost always exactly the same'. The play's success is due largely to its finely balanced combination of social comment on the one hand, and mystery and suspense on the other. Priestley received 'innumerable letters' from students demanding to know 'who or what the Inspector was'. In this note, Priestley writes: 'the particular year in which the action is supposed to be happening was not chosen at random: it is significant and is indeed another key to the play'. Set in 1912, shortly before the First World War, *An Inspector Calls* was a powerful warning to a 1945/46 audience still reeling from the horrors of the Second World War. Just as the Birlings come face-to-face with their future at the end of the play, the present-day audience are faced with the mistakes of their past and can also choose to act differently to create a fairer, safer world. This message is brought home by the Inspector's words, which warn of violence and destruction: 'If men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish'.

PROGRAMME NOTE

An Inspector Calls has had a curious history. It was written during the winter of 1944-5, and the Red Army being much in our minds at that time, I sent a copy to Moscow. It was immediately translated and soon two famous Russian companies were playing it simultaneously in Moscow. The Old Vic produced it later in 1945. Then it began to go all over the world (it had 1600 performances in Germany alone), and became equally popular on both sides of the Iron Curtain. I saw it myself, chiefly by accident, in London, Moscow, New York, Paris, and several other cities, and I mention this because, while we are all supposed to be so very different, the reaction of audiences was almost always exactly the same. Even during the last 10 years I have had innumerable letters, from graduates, undergraduates, high school students, from everywhere, demanding to know who or what the Inspector was, there having been furious arguments about him. (Oddly enough, they never asked about the second Inspector who was on his way, though this is not simply a dramatic twist but really the key to the play) If Mermaid audiences do not relish the play, then I shall be sorry, but I can hardly grumble because this is one play of our time that certainly has had its share of attention. A last point. The particular year in which the action is supposed to be happening was not chosen at random: it is significant and is indeed another key to the play.

Extracts from *An Overview and Key Productions*

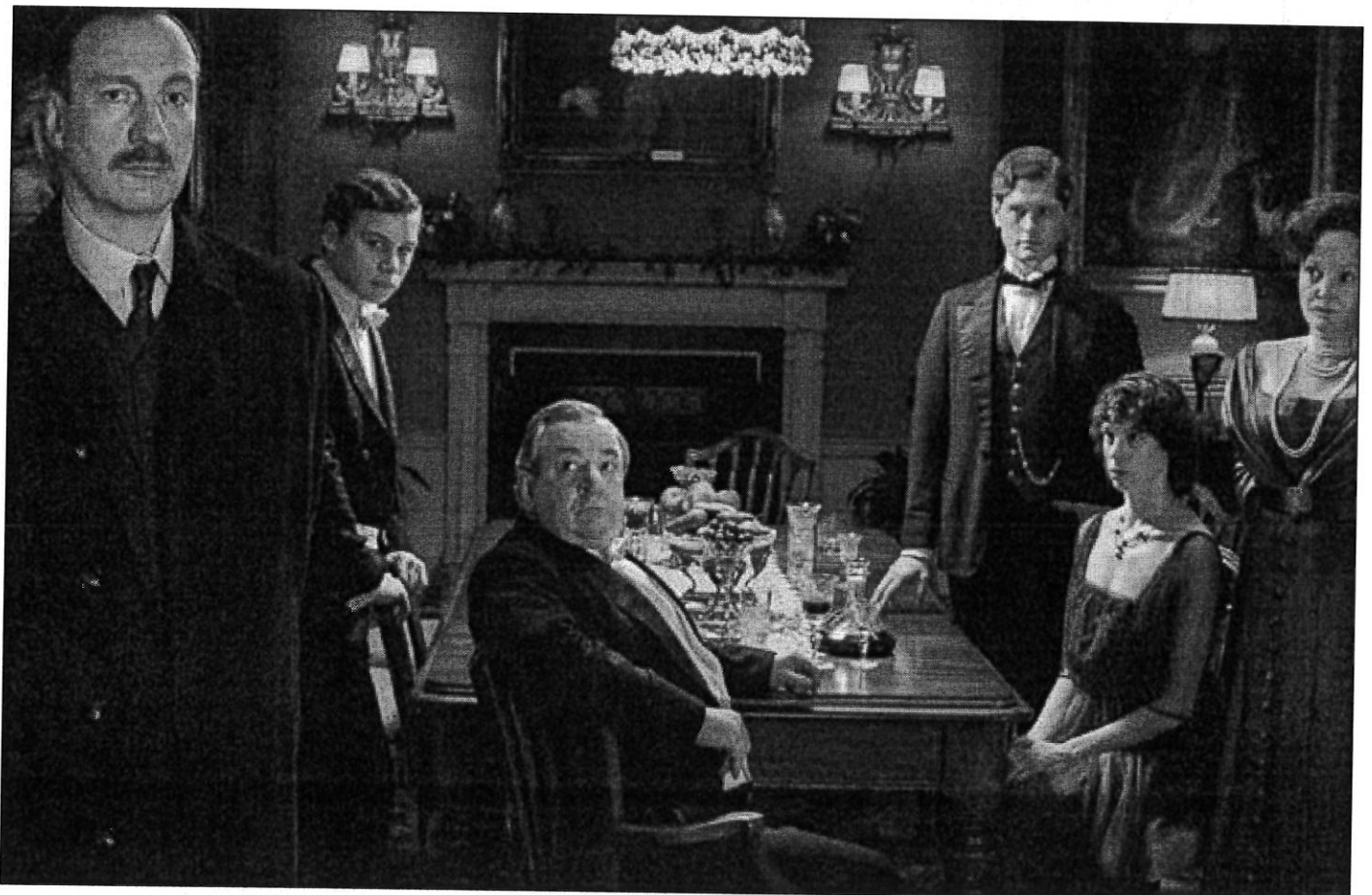
Source: <https://www.bl.uk/works/an-inspector-calls>

An Inspector Calls is J B Priestley's most performed play. It's set in the household of a prosperous northern manufacturer, Arthur Birling. It's 1912 and the Birling family are celebrating the engagement of daughter Sheila, when a stranger, who introduces himself as Inspector Goole, shows up at their door. He's there to question them about the death of a young working-class woman, Eva Smith, who killed herself by drinking disinfectant. As Goole interrogates the family – Birling, his wife Sybil, his son Eric, Sheila and her fiancé Gerald – it comes to light that they have all, to some extent, been responsible for the young woman's decline in circumstances. They may not have killed her, but through action – and inaction – they all played a role in the events that led to her death. Arthur dismissed her from her job at his mill, Sheila contrived to have her fired from her new post in a department store, both Gerald and Eric slept with her and Sybil denied her charity when she came to her in desperation.

After Goole departs, Birling becomes suspicious and calls the chief constable. He discovers that there is no Inspector Goole and there have been no recent suicides. Birling and his wife see this as cause for celebration, but their children are more chastened by the night's events. The ending twists things further, concluding with a phone call to the Birlings telling them that the police are on their way to talk to them about the death of a young woman in a suspected case of suicide.

An Inspector Calls is scathing in its criticism of middle-class hypocrisy. The play gives voice to Priestley's strong socialist principles, and carries a clear moral message, stressing the importance of social responsibility: 'We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other'.

The play was first performed in Leningrad in 1945, before being produced in the UK in 1946. The role of Inspector Goole was written for Ralph Richardson, who starred in the original London production.



Extracts from meeting notes about the set and staging of *An Inspector Calls* (1992)

Source: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/meeting-notes-about-the-set-and-staging-of-an-inspector-calls-at-the-national-theatre-1992>

The Birlings' house is described in the notes as 'a dolls house..not full size', so that the characters have to 'stoop to get through doors', and the furniture is 'specially made and scaled down .. also made to break specifically'. The effect created when the house tipped forward and collapsed was made all the more dramatic by the sound of falling crockery which, according to the notes, 'must smash'. The spectacular nature of the staging was further intensified with the use of heavy rain, a complex special effect which posed its own challenges.

May 28, 1992

AN INSPECTOR CALLS SYNOPSIS OF MEETING 2715/92

Written 1944/45

Set in Edwardian times as the ideological changes then were similar to those taking place in 1944.

Edwardian "Wasteland" (T.S.Elliot)

Edwardian period and 1944/45 on stage at the same time.

1st production in Moscow

Symbolist movement

Chorus of 20 plus children.

Heavily underscored musically

Possibly start with the iron in
then

Full Edwardian curtain revealed which will fly separately

Full false prosc. which will not tour.

There will be action in front of the curtain concerning the children.....then

The curtain will go up VERY slowly in time to the music.

Behind the curtain there will be rain and a landscape peopled with children.

Mud pits and rubbish

Raked floor (1 in 12)

House in a hole..a bomb crater.

Guttering to carry the rain

Pile of rubble sr

Street lamps

usr a perspective house..may be used by the children..perspective wrong for the adults.

Flooring into sl wing at the moment..also the cyc into the sl wing..at the moment.

Black legs in sr wing

Extracts from *An introduction to An Inspector Calls* – Part 1

Source: <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-an-inspector-calls>

Priestley's play revolves around a central mystery, the death of a young woman, but whereas a traditional detective story involves the narrowing down of suspects from several to one, *An Inspector Calls* inverts this process as, one by one, nearly all the characters in the play are found to be guilty. In this way, Priestley makes his larger point that society is guilty of neglecting and abusing its most vulnerable members. A just society, he states through his mysterious Inspector, is one that respects and exercises social responsibility.

Social responsibility is the idea that a society's poorer members should be helped by those who have more than them. Priestley was a socialist, and his political beliefs are woven through his work. There are many different types and degrees of socialism, but a general definition is as follows: an ideal socialist society is one that is egalitarian – in other words, its citizens have equal rights and the same opportunities are available to everybody; resources are shared out fairly, and the means of production (the facilities and resources for producing goods) are communally owned. Therefore, socialism stands in opposition to a capitalist society, such as ours, where trade and industry is mostly controlled by private owners, and these individuals or companies keep the profits made by their businesses, rather than distributing them evenly between the workers whose labour produced them.

An Inspector Calls is a three-act play with one setting: the dining room of 'a fairly large suburban house belonging to a fairly prosperous manufacturer'. The year is 1912, and we are in the home of the Birling family in the fictional industrial city of Brumley in the North Midlands. In the dining room five people are finishing their dinner: four members of the Birling family and one guest. Arthur Birling is a factory owner; his wife Sibyl is on the committee of a charity, and is usually scolding someone for a social mistake. Their adult children are Sheila and Eric, and their guest is Gerald Croft, Sheila's fiancé, who is from a wealthier manufacturing family than the Birlings. One other person is present: Edna the maid, who is going back and forth to the sideboard with dirty plates and glasses.

Priestley's description of the set at the beginning of the play script stresses the solidity of the Birlings' dining room: 'It is a solidly built room, with good solid furniture of the period'. But a later section of this scene-setting – on the walls are 'imposing but tasteless pictures and engravings', and the 'general effect is substantial and comfortable and old-fashioned but not cosy and homelike' – suggests that although the Birlings have wealth and social standing, they are not loving to one another or compassionate to others. The setting of the play in a single room also suggests their self-absorption, and disconnectedness from the wider world.



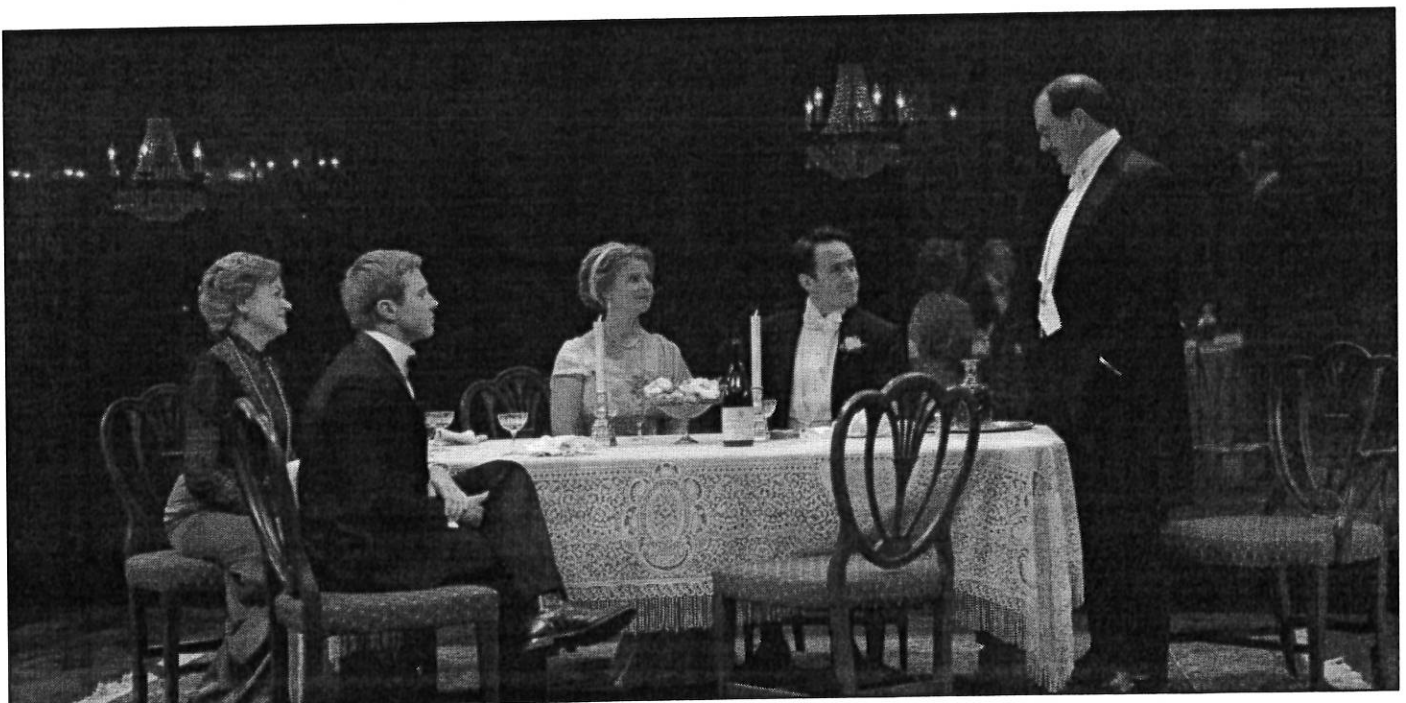
Extracts from *An Introduction to An Inspector Calls* – Part 2

Source: <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-an-inspector-calls>

Priestley has some fun using this opening section to show how wrong Arthur Birling's opinions are, thus positioning the play as anti-capitalist. He does this through the use of dramatic irony, having Arthur state opinions that the audience, with the advantage of hindsight, knows to be incorrect. He goes on to describe an ocean liner that is clearly meant to be the Titanic (which sank in April 1912) as 'unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable', and suggests that in time, 'let's say, in the forties', 'all these Capital versus Labour agitations and all these silly little war scares' will be long forgotten. In fact, as audiences in 1945 would have been keenly aware, the period between 1912 and 1945 saw a huge number of strikes, including the monumental General Strike of 1926, and not one but two global conflicts, the second of which had only recently ended. Dramatic irony is rarely a subtle technique, but Priestley's use of it is exceptionally blunt. This could be considered clumsy, but it underlines the fact that *An Inspector Calls* is a play with a point to make, and a character whose sole job is to make it.

When Inspector Goole arrives everything changes. He tells the Birlings and Gerald that a young woman, Eva Smith, has committed suicide by drinking disinfectant, and he has questions about the case. Over the course of the next two acts he will lay responsibility for Eva Smith's death at the feet of each of the Birlings and Gerald Croft, showing how their indifference to social responsibility has contributed to the death of this young woman. Or is it young women? He shows each person an identifying photograph of the dead woman one by one, leading Gerald to later suspect they were all shown photographs of different women.

But who is the Inspector? In the play's penultimate twist, he is revealed not to be a police inspector at all, yet, as Eric states, 'He was our Police Inspector, all right'. Details about him are scant. He says he is newly posted to Brumley, and he is impervious to Arthur Birling's threats about his close relationship with the chief constable 'I don't play golf', he tells Birling. 'I didn't suppose you did', the industrialist replies: a brief exchange that makes a clear point about class, and the battle between egalitarianism and privilege. Beyond these sparse biographical details, the Inspector seems less like a person and more like a moral force, one which mercilessly pursues the wrongs committed by the Birlings and Gerald, demanding that they face up to the consequences of their actions. His investigation culminates in a speech that is a direct expression of Priestley's own view of how a just society should operate, and is the exact antithesis of the speech Arthur Birling made in Act 1.



Extracts from *An Introduction to An Inspector Calls* – Part 3

Source: <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-an-inspector-calls>

Throughout the course of the Inspector's investigation, and the testimony of Gerald and each of the Birlings, the supposedly respectable city of Brumley is revealed to be a place of deep class divisions and hypocrisy. As Arthur Birling's behaviour towards Eva makes clear, it is a place where factory owners exploit their workers as a matter of course – part of his 'a man has to look after himself' philosophy. Eric accuses his father of hypocrisy for sacking the dead girl after she asked for higher wages, because the Birling firm always seeks to sell their products at the highest possible prices.

This exploitation is not limited to the factories. In the testimony of Gerald, and later Eric, the Palace Theatre emerges as a place where prostitutes gather, and where the supposedly great and good of the town go to meet them. When Gerald first met Eva, as he describes it, she was trapped in a corner by 'Old Joe Meggarty, half-drunk and goggle-eyed'. Sibyl Birling, scandalised, asks 'surely you don't mean Alderman Meggarty?' An unsurprised Sheila tells her mother 'horrible old Meggarty' has a reputation for groping young women: the younger characters are either more knowledgeable or frank about the dark secrets of the city, whereas the older Birlings live in a dream world of respectability, or hypocritically turn a blind eye to any disreputable behaviour by supposedly respectable people.

The play begins with the characters' corrupt, unpleasant natures safely hidden away (a respectable group in a respectable home, enjoying that most respectable event, an engagement party); it ends with naked displays of hypocrisy. When it is confirmed that Goole is not really a policeman, Arthur, Sibyl and Gerald immediately regain an unjustified sense of outrage. 'Then look at the way he talked to me', Arthur Birling complains. 'He must have known I was an ex-Lord Mayor and a magistrate and so forth'. Once it is confirmed, in the play's penultimate twist, that there is no suicide lying on a mortuary slab, they forget the immoral, uncharitable behaviour they were recently accused of – things, remember, that they undoubtedly did – and begin talking about getting away with things. Only Sheila and Eric recognise and resist this hypocritical behaviour. 'I suppose we're all nice people now!' Sheila remarks sarcastically. Earlier she broke off her engagement to Gerald, telling him 'You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner here'. Likewise, Eric angrily accuses his father of 'beginning to pretend now that nothing's really happened at all'. Priestley's vision is cautiously optimistic insofar as the youngest characters are changed by the Inspector's visit, while the older Birlings and Gerald appear to be too set in their beliefs to change them.

The play leaves open the question of whether Eva Smith is a real woman (who sometimes uses different names, including Daisy Renton), or multiple people the Inspector pretends are one. There is no right answer here, and in terms of Priestley's message it is beside the point: because his socialist principles demand that everyone should be treated the same, in his opinion abusing one working-class woman is equivalent to abusing all working-class women. Eva Smith is, therefore, not an individual victim, but a universal one. This helps explain the effectiveness of the play's final twist. Having discovered that Inspector Goole is not a real policeman, and that there is no dead woman called Eva Smith at the Brumley morgue, a phone call announces that a woman has killed herself, and an inspector is on his way to question the Birlings. The invented story Inspector Goole related has now come true. This seems a bizarre coincidence with which to end the play, but if we consider *An Inspector Calls* as a moral fable, and not as naturalistic theatre, it begins to seem much more like a logical, even inevitable, conclusion. The characters have been confronted with the error of their ways; some have repented, some have not. Now is the time for judgement, and for the watching audience to ask themselves, according to Priestley's design, are any of these people like me?



Acts				
Act 1	<p>The Birling family and Gerald celebrate the engagement; the stage lighting is 'pink and intimate' until the Inspector arrives.</p> <p>The Inspector arrives and questions Birling; he is unremorseful about firing Eva; Sheila is ashamed that she used her social influence to get Eva sacked.</p> <p>The Inspector reveals that Eva Smith changed her name to Daisy Renton; Gerald is 'startled' to hear her name mentioned.</p> <p>Gerald admits that he had an affair with Daisy; Sheila hands the engagement ring back to him.</p> <p>The Inspector questions Mrs Birling; Sheila forcefully encourages her mother to be honest and open; Mrs Birling does not feel that did anything wrong.</p> <p>Mrs Birling eventually realises that Eric was the father of Eva's unborn child.</p> <p>Eric recounts the details of his relationship with Eva; he admits stealing money from his father.</p> <p>The Inspector reminds the Birling family and Gerald that they 'do not live alone' and then leaves.</p> <p>Gerald believes that he and the Birling family have been 'had' and the Inspector is swiftly dismissed as a hoaxer; the phone rings and Birling answers...</p>			
Act 2				
Act 3				
Key Characters		Key Themes		Historical Context
	Responsibility			
Mr and Mrs Birling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrogant Unremorseful Selfish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priestley was a socialist See: Birling's speech on 'bees in a hive' See: Inspector Goole's final speech 		<p>The play was first performed at the end of World War II, which was a time of remarkable social and political change. Clement Attlee was elected as Prime Minister in 1945 by a significant majority. The Labour campaign was based on the slogan 'Let Us Face the Future'.</p> <p>By contrast, the play is set in 1912, which was a time of rigid social divisions. Women were still unable to vote and the tensions that eventually lead to the Russian Revolution were becoming increasingly visible.</p>
Sheila and Eric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impulsive Regretful Distraught 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gerald and Mrs Birling are from the aristocracy Birling hopes to be awarded with a knighthood Eva and Edna represent the working classes 		
Gerald	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreeable Influential Apologetic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birling uses Eva as 'cheap labour' Gerald and Eric are predatory Mrs Birling fails to empathise with Eva 		
Inspector Goole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forceful Resolute Confident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a clear divide between the generations Mrs and Mrs Birling do not change Eric and Sheila offer hope for the future 		
Eva Smith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vulnerable Capable Victimised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brumley is a place of class divisions and hypocrisy See: Alderman Meggarty See: Mrs Birling's naivety 		

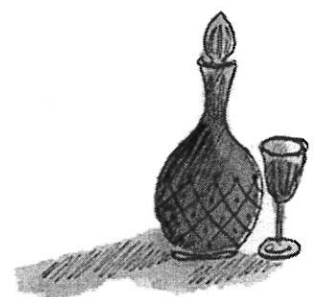
Review of Act One

1. In which year is the play set?
2. How should the stage be lit prior to the arrival of the Inspector?
3. How is Gerald described in the stage directions?
4. What have the Birling family and Gerald had to drink, and what are they about to drink?
5. Which character says, 'Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things'?
6. Why are Lord and Lady Croft absent from the celebration?
7. Which character says, 'You can drink to me'?
8. Birling says, 'We've passed the worst of it' – what is he alluding to?
9. In which year did Birling serve as Lord Mayor?
10. Is it Lord Croft or Lady Croft who feels that Gerald 'might have done better' for himself 'socially'?
11. How should the lighting change when the Inspector enters?
12. How should the Inspector be dressed?
13. How does the Inspector say that Eva died?
14. In which year did Birling fire Eva Smith from his factory?
15. Which character says, 'Look – there's nothing mysterious – or scandalous – about this business'?
16. How much did Eva and the workforce want to earn?
17. What is the name of the Chief Constable who Birling plays golf with?
18. Which character says, 'They'd all be broke – if I know them'?
19. How old was Eva Smith before she died?
20. What is the name of the shop that Eva found work in after she was fired by Birling?
21. How long was it before she was taken on?
22. Why was she considered to be 'lucky'?
23. Which character claims to have a headache and says, 'I think I'd better turn in'?
24. What did Eva Smith change her name to?
25. How does Gerald react when he hears the name announced by the Inspector?



Review of Act Two

1. Which character **speaks** first at the start of act two?
2. Which **character** says, 'He means I'm getting hysterical now'?
3. How does Priestley **describe** Mrs Birling's movement as she enters the scene?
4. How is her **tone** of voice initially described?
5. Which **character** says, 'You're looking tired, dear'?
6. Which **word**, used by Mrs Birling, does Sheila believe is 'silly'?
7. Which **character** is 'still a magistrate'?
8. Which character has Mr Birling been **persuading** to go to bed?
9. Sheila says that she doesn't 'want to get poor Eric into trouble' – what does she **reveal**?
10. In which month did Eva leave Milwards?
11. What is the name of the **theatre** where Gerald meets Daisy Renton?
12. How does Gerald describe the **appearance** of the 'women of the town'?
13. By contrast, how does he **describe** the appearance of Daisy?
14. Which **character** says, 'You were the wonderful Fairy Prince'?
15. What is the name of the **alderman** who had 'wedged' Daisy 'into a corner'?
16. What is the name of Gerald's friend who gives him the key to 'a nice little set of rooms'?
17. Which **character** says, 'Were you in love with her'?
18. Sheila says to Gerald, 'You must have adored it, Gerald' – what is she **referring** to?
19. In which **month** did Gerald end the affair?
20. Which **character** says, 'I don't understand you, Inspector'?
21. What is the name of Mrs Birling's **charity** organisation?
22. What **name** did Eva use when she appealed to the charity for help?
23. On what **grounds** was Eva turned down by Mrs Birling?
24. Which **character** says, 'Mother – stop – stop!'
25. Which character is **implicated** in the suicide just before the act ends?



Review of Act Three

1. Which character speaks first at the start of act three?
2. Which character says, 'Besides, you're not that type – you don't get drunk'?
3. What does Eric drink before engaging with the Inspector's questions?
4. In which month did Eric meet Eva?
5. How much money did Eric give Eva?
6. Which character says, 'Your trouble is – you've been spoilt'?
7. Which character speaks with 'calm authority'?
8. Which character is 'nearly at breaking point'?
9. How much money does Birling say he would give to Eva if he had the chance?
10. How many 'Eva Smiths and John Smiths' does the Inspector say there are?
11. Which character says, 'there'll be a public scandal'?
12. Which character is the first to suspect that the Inspector might not be entirely 'ordinary'?
13. Which character says, 'Probably a Socialist or some sort of crank'?
14. Edna has a single line in act three – what is it?
15. Which character declares that Inspector Goole 'wasn't a police officer'?
16. Who does Birling call to verify that the Inspector is a 'fake'?
17. Which character says, 'I suppose we're all nice people now'?
18. On what page does Sheila say her parents 'don't seem to understand'?
19. On what page does Sheila say 'won't bring Eva Smith back to life'?
20. What evidence does Gerald have for suggesting that Eva Smith might actually be 'four or five different girls'?
21. Why doesn't Eric think it matters if this is the case or not?
22. Who does Gerald call to check if 'there's a dead girl'?
23. Which character says, 'The whole story's just a lot of moonshine'?
24. Which character recalls the Inspector's reference to 'Fire and blood and anguish'?
25. Which character says, 'And a police inspector is on his way here – to ask some – questions'?



Quick Questions on An introduction to *An Inspector Calls*, by Chris Power

Source: <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-an-inspector-calls>

'Priestley's play revolves around a central mystery, the death of a young woman, but whereas a traditional detective story involves the narrowing down of suspects from several to one, *An Inspector Calls* inverts this process as, one by one, nearly all the characters in the play are found to be guilty.'

1. How did Eva die? Retrieve a short quotation.
2. In which order are the characters questioned by Inspector Goole?
3. In what ways are each of the characters 'guilty' of playing a part in the death of Eva Smith?

'In this way, Priestley makes his larger point that society is guilty of neglecting and abusing its most vulnerable members. A just society, he states through his mysterious Inspector, is one that respects and exercises social responsibility.'

1. Birling says to the Inspector, 'It's a free country, I told them.' How does Eric respond? Retrieve a short quotation.
2. After questioning Birling, what does the Inspector reveal about how Eva spent 'the next two months'?
3. Why was Eva 'lucky to get taken on' at Milwards?

'Social responsibility is the idea that a society's poorer members should be helped by those who have more than them. Priestley was a socialist, and his political beliefs are woven through his work.'

1. How do Birling's views on social responsibility differ from the Inspector's views? Retrieve a short quotation.
2. The Inspector says to Birling, 'it's better to ask for the earth than to take it.' Which page is the quotation on?

'Socialism stands in opposition to a capitalist society, such as ours, where trade and industry is mostly controlled by private owners, and these individuals or companies keep the profits made by their businesses, rather than distributing them evenly between the workers whose labour produced them.'

1. Gerald says to Birling, 'Hear, hear! And I think my father would agree to that.' What is Gerald talking about?
2. Birling says, 'And we're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity.' Which page is the quotation on?
3. By how much did Eva and the workers want their 'rates raised'? Retrieve a short quotation.

'When Inspector Goole arrives everything changes.'

1. How should the stage be lit before the Inspector arrives?
2. How should the lighting change when he enters during act one?

'But who is the Inspector? He says he is newly posted to Brumley, and he is impervious to Arthur Birling's threats about his close relationship with the chief constable 'I don't play golf', he tells Birling.'

1. What is the name of the chief constable?
2. Mrs Birling says to the Inspector, 'my husband was Lord Mayor'. Which page is the quotation on?

'Throughout the course of the Inspector's investigation, and the testimony of Gerald and each of the Birlings, the supposedly respectable city of Brumley is revealed to be a place of deep class divisions and hypocrisy.'

1. Which character is referred to as a 'notorious womanizer'?
2. Mrs Birling says, 'we *are* learning something tonight.' What does she mean?
3. Mrs Birling also says, 'It's disgusting to me'. What does she mean?

An Inspector Calls

Wider Reading Booklet

The Life of J. B. Priestley

An Inspector Calls and J B Priestley's political journey

Programme note by J B Priestley about *An Inspector Calls*

An Overview and Key Productions

Extracts from meeting notes about the set and staging of *An Inspector Calls* (1992)

An introduction to *An Inspector Calls* (Parts 1, 2 and 3)

All extracts taken from the British Library website

<https://www.bl.uk/works/an-inspector-calls>



Extracts from *The Life of J. B. Priestley*

Source: <https://www.bl.uk/people/j-b-priestley>

The novelist, playwright and broadcaster, John Boynton 'J B' Priestley, was born in Yorkshire in 1894. At the age of 16 he took a job as a junior clerk at a local wool firm and started writing at night. During the First World War, Priestley was posted to France and was badly wounded. After the war he rarely spoke of these experiences. When he returned to Britain, he attended Cambridge University and started to write again, mainly short pieces for local periodicals, before embarking on a career as a freelance writer in London. By the age of 30 he was well established as an essayist, critic and a novelist. His biggest success as a novelist was 1929's *The Good Companions*.

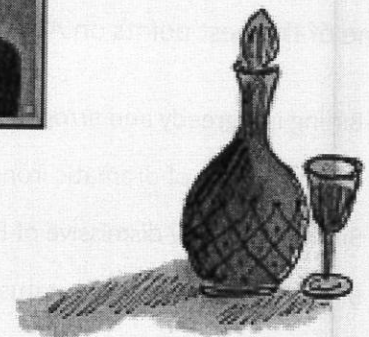
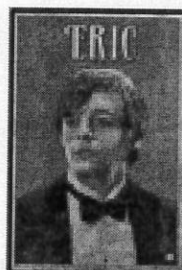
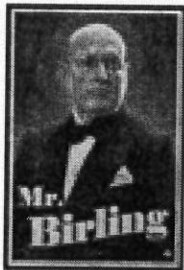
During the Second World War Priestley was a regular and influential broadcaster on the BBC. His Postscripts began in June 1940 in the aftermath of the Dunkirk evacuation, and continued throughout that year. They were popular with the public, but Priestley's strong socialist beliefs did not go down well with some politicians and commentators. The broadcasts were eventually cancelled.

An Inspector Calls, his best-known and most-performed play, was written at the end of the Second World War. As there was no theatre available in London at that time, it premiered in Russia before opening in London in 1946. Ralph Richardson played Inspector Goole, the stranger who visits the affluent Birling family and confronts them with their complicity in the suicide of a young woman. It has been revived a number of times, most famously by Stephen Daldry in a 1992 production for the National Theatre. Following Daldry's revival, there was something of a reassessment of Priestley's legacy as a dramatist, and revivals of less well-known plays followed.



Reflection Lesson

Pick **two** characters from the play and write about how they are presented by Priestley.



The best answers had several common features:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| • No (or very few) spelling, punctuation and grammar errors | Effect: Accuracy |
| • Paragraphs were accurately used | Effect: Accuracy |
| • Handwriting was neat | Effect: Pride and effort signified |
| • Literary terminology was correctly used | Effect: Clarity and precision |
| • Short quotations were embedded | Effect: Supported points |
| • A clear point of view was established | Effect: Clarity |
| • Responses were focused | Effect: Content to reward |
| • Responses were developed (roughly a page and a half) | Effect: Enough content to reward |

Some of the best points on *An Inspector Calls* are listed below:

- Birling is a **greedy** and **arrogant** character who appears to care more about money than he does his own family
- Priestley's use of dramatic irony emphasises Birling's **arrogance** (the audience know his predications are wrong)
- Birling is unfairly **dismissive** of Eric and he openly tries to **flatter** Gerald
- Birling has a lower social status than his wife and this appears to causes him some **anxiety**

- Mrs Birling's 'rather cold' persona is shown when she **reproaches** Birling for wanting to thank the cook

- Eric's loud 'guffaw' indicates that he might be drunk and shows that he is an **awkward** presence at the table
- Eric's tendency to speak in **exclamation** is another indication that he might be drunk
- Eric and Sheila's **relationship** is shown to be fairly good through their constant teasing of each other

- Sheila is presented as a **cheerful** and **optimistic** character who appears to be genuinely in love with Gerald
- Sheila's **delight** at being presented with the engagement ring is shown through the stage directions – 'smiling'
- Sheila's **immaturity** is shown through the language she uses to address her parents – 'Mummy' and 'Daddy'

- Gerald's **dominance** in his relationship with Sheila is shown through this **control** over the choice of engagement ring
- Gerald is **charming** and does his best to be agreeable to everything that Birling says during their conversations.

Act 1 Reflection Tasks

Either

How is the character of Mr Birling presented by Priestley in *An Inspector Calls*?

or

How does Priestley present the lives of the working class women in *An Inspector Calls*?

Review of the Assessment

Quality of written expression

You write really well most of the time, folks. However, there were a few silly errors. Here are a selection:

- *Berling*
- *Priestly*
- *eva*
- *Hes / shes*
- Unpunctuated sentences
- No paragraphs

Best points from the Mr Birling essay

The time we spent together planning was obviously a good investment: the points you put forward were insightful and developed. Here are a few of the best:

- Birling is a greedy and selfish character who cares primarily about himself
- Birling is presented as a heartless entrepreneur and 'hard-headed business man'
- Priestley's use of dramatic irony emphasises Birling's arrogance (the audience know his predications are wrong)
- In the early stages of the play, Birling gives Gerald preferential treatment and is unfairly dismissive of Eric
- Birling does not seem shocked or upset about the suicide of Eva Smith (unlike Sheila)
- Birling tries – and fails – to use his social connections to intimidate the Inspector
- The stage directions reveal that Birling is irritated by the Inspector's presence
- When Birling realises that other members of his family are implicated, he almost seems to be relieved
- Fundamentally, Birling does not accept responsibility for the suicide of Eva Smith.

Best points from the lives of working class women essay

This was a trickier task. However, those of you who tackled it did so with a great deal of thought and attention to detail. Here are some of the best points:

- Edna is a compliant character who reminds the audience of the Birling family's wealth and social status
- The rigid social conventions of Edwardian England are highlighted when Birling is reproached by Mrs Birling
- Eric highlights the limited opportunities that working women had in 1912
- Gerald condescendingly implies that Eva and other working class women are reckless with their (limited) wages
- Birling treats his workers as 'cheap labour' and believes that it is his duty to keep 'labour costs down'
- Eric exposes a double standard by asking why workers like Eva shouldn't campaign for higher wages
- The Inspector highlights the precarious nature of Eva's life – 'few friends, lonely, half-starved'
- Eva Smith is a character who represents all working class women – 'there are a lot of young women'

What now?

We need to think hard about Priestley's message... What would he have wanted a contemporary audience to think about life in 1912 and why might this be important?

Also, look back at the list of silly errors... I don't want to see those mistakes again.

GCSE English Literature

An Inspector Calls

Summative Assessment

0 1

How and why does Sheila change in *An Inspector Calls*?

Write about:

- how Sheila responds to her family and to the Inspector
- how Priestley presents Sheila by the ways he writes.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

Question 2

0 2

How does Priestley explore responsibility in *An Inspector Calls*?

Write about:

- the ideas about responsibility in *An Inspector Calls*
- how Priestley presents these ideas by the ways he writes.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

Quality of written expression

- It's important to write **legibly** and **accurately**... I want you to benefit from the halo effect in the 'real' exam.
- Remember that you've got lots of **vocabulary lists** in your book... Use the words.
- The focus for next few weeks has got to be on using a wider range of **reporting and analysing verbs** – see the grid below.

Quality of analysis

- Same as always: the key is to be **selective**, so zoom-in on what you know best.
- You clearly know **act one** of the play well, particularly with regard to how Birling and Sheila are presented.
- Remember to cover **acts two and three** in equal depth.
- You need to be sharper when you write about the play's **context** – 'bolt-on' points that are weakly linked aren't mark-worthy.
- Finally, be mindful that the play was written to be **performed**, so explore the significance of the stage directions.

Takeaways

Key points on the presentation of Sheila

- Sheila is **immature** and (understandably) **excitable** at the start of the play.
- Sheila is particularly **agreeable**: She is **submissive** towards her parents and gratefully **accepts** the ring presented by Gerald.
- Sheila is clearly **upset** when she hears about Eva's suicide; she becomes distraught when she learns of her role.
- Sheila's relationship with Gerald **changes** significantly at the end of act one: she becomes far more assertive.
- Sheila **accepts responsibility** and is deeply **remorseful**.
- Sheila is **disgusted** at how her parents react.

Key points on the exploration of responsibility

- There is a clear generational **divide**.
- Gerald seems genuinely **upset** about his role in Eva's suicide, but ultimately sides with the older Birlings.
- Birling's speech about 'man' having to 'look after himself' **contrasts** with the Inspector's final speech.
- Birling's **excitement** and **relief** at the Inspector being a 'fake' reveals that he has learnt nothing.
- The Inspector's real identity is, in some ways, unimportant: it's the reaction of the different characters that **counts**.
- Through Eric and Sheila, Priestley offers **hope** for the future.

Vocabulary

Implies	Foreshadows	Demonstrates	Emphasises	Amplifies
Suggests	Shows	Conveys	Highlights	Contrasts