Stewards Academy

Revision Guide

– An Inspector Calls -

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Example Essays:

The Setting of the play:

An Inspector Calls is set in the fictional industrial city of Brumley. The action takes place on one evening just before the First World War, in the home of a prosperous factory owner, and shows us the difference in lifestyle between those who owned the factories, and who had money and power, and those who depended on them for work.

- 1906 The Labour Party is founded after the success of the Labour Representation Committee in the General Election
- 1914– 18 First World War. Aged 20, J. B. Priestley joins 10th Duke of Wellington's Regiment, and serves on the front line in France. He is wounded and gassed
- 1919 J. B. Priestley is awarded a place at Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge, to study literature, history and political science
- 1922 J. B. Priestley begins work in London as a journalist writing for publications such as The Times Literary Supplement and The New Statesman. He publishes his first collection of essays under the title Brief Diversions
- 1926 The General Strike hits British industry
- 1929 The American economy is hit by a slump and the Wall Street Crash
- 1934 J. B. Priestley uses his travels through the poorer parts of Britain to write English Journey
- 1939– 45 Second World War. J. B. Priestley makes regular wartime broadcasts on BBC Radio; his radio talks are published as Britain Speaks
- 1945 J. B. Priestley writes An Inspector Calls; Churchill's wartime coalition government resigns; a Labour government is formed under Clement Attlee after a landslide victory in the General Election; atomic bombs are dropped on Japan

Structure of the text:

Act One:

- The Birling family and Gerald Croft are celebrating Sheila's engagement to Gerald.
- Mr Birling makes pompous speeches outlining his views on the advances in science, new inventions and the relationship between bosses and workers, and saying they should ignore the 'cranks' who claim everybody has a responsibility to care for everybody else.
- The evening is interrupted by the arrival of a police Inspector named Goole making enquiries about the suicide of a young woman, Eva Smith.
- Shown a photograph of the girl, Mr Birling admits he employed her in his factory but sacked her for being one of the leaders of a strike for higher wages.
- Sheila and Eric both feel their father has acted harshly, while Gerald supports Mr Birling's claim that he acted reasonably.
- Sheila is shown the photograph and she realises that, driven by jealousy and ill temper, she later had the girl sacked from her job as a shop assistant.
- When Gerald hears the girl changed her name to Daisy Renton, his reaction shows he too has known the girl.
- The Inspector suggests that many people share responsibility for the misery which prompted Eva Smith/ Daisy Renton to end her life.
- Left alone with Gerald, Sheila warns him not to try to hide anything from the Inspector.

Act One is full of dramatic irony:

- The joy of the Birling family will soon end
- Sheila will find out that her playful claims that Gerald was distant will be revealed as an affair
- Eric's casual drinking will become heavy, and reflect his dependency upon alcohol
- Arthur's belief that he will gain a knighthood if nothing happens, almost invites the revelations
- The historical context: two World Wars (Priestley fought in WW1 and lived through WW2), the Titanic sunk and Russia overthrew the tsar, and was the first explicitly social government in the world.

These instances of dramatic irony have two effects. First, they are morbidly funny, as they point out the characters' naïveté and the audience's knowledge of history and psychology. Second, they cause the audience to sympathise with and to better understand the play's characters.

Priestley sets in motion the problems that will combine to form the play's dramatic tensions. But these problems are not announced from the beginning. Instead, they are insinuated, revealed through the characters' words and the how those words are said. The play's lack of narrator and its revelation of plot only through dialogue means there is no third person who announces their intentions. The closest the play will come to this kind of organising presence is the Inspector, but even he primarily asks questions. He does not feel it is necessary to answer them, and, as Sheila notes, he appears aware of the truth already, and more interested in getting the other characters to admit to it.

Act Two:

- Gerald admits he had met Daisy Renton in the spring of the previous year and that she was his mistress for six months.
- Sheila is hurt and angry at Gerald's involvement with the girl, yet she feels a certain respect for the openness of his admission.
- Mrs Birling tries to bully the Inspector and to control events.
- Sheila realises that the Inspector's enquiries are well founded, and that her mother might also have had some dealings with the girl.
- While Eric is out of the room, Mrs Birling is forced to admit the girl asked for the help of a charity that she worked for and was refused.
- It is revealed that the girl was pregnant, and Mrs Birling lays the blame for the girl's death on the father of the unborn child.
- There is a suspicion that Eric might have been the father of that unborn child.

It is a credit to Sheila that she can accept some of the good in Gerald, even while recognising the selfishness of his affair and the part that Gerald has played in the death of Eva/Daisy. And Sheila is willing to do this even after Gerald has accused her of being spiteful. This is further evidence that Sheila is the play's emotional core, willing to admit to her faults, and willing to look past the faults in others. In this sense, Sheila demonstrates the feeling of collective human connection that the Inspector insists on before leaving the Birling house in Act Three.

Gerald and Sheila each serve as voices of reason in this play. Gerald wishes to leave the house to clear his head and think more clearly about what has been said. Although he wonders if Sheila is becoming "hysterical," Gerald also seems to recognise that Sheila, in contrast to her father Arthur, wants to confront and process her guilt about Eva/Daisy's death. Neither Gerald nor Sheila, once the truth is revealed, wishes to shy away from it. Though they accept the truth in different ways, they genuinely desire to accept it, to learn from the experiences of the play, and not simply to pretend nothing has happened.

Arthur and Sybil, however, demonstrate in this sequence their insistence that the family has done nothing wrong in order to keep up appearances. Arthur believes that firing Eva/Daisy was the right thing to do, and he is willing to reason away Sheila's behaviour that resulted in Eva/Daisy getting fired from Milward's. Although Arthur and Sybil are deeply upset and saddened to learn that Gerald has been unfaithful to Sheila, they are even more scandalised by the thought that Gerald's affair could become public.

Arthur is even willing to accept that men characteristically have affairs. He thinks that Gerald's actions, though lamentable, should not paint him as a bad person, nor should they get in the way of the wedding Arthur wants to desperately to occur for his own social advancement. Although Sybil is offended at the idea that Gerald might not be the utterly upright young-man he presents himself to be, she seems far more offended by the Inspector's continued presence than this. The Inspector, Sybil says, is rude and "impertinent," and his questions that get to the heart of the family's misbehaviour are not fitting for a stranger to ask.

Act Three:

- Eric confesses that he got the girl pregnant and that he stole money from his father's firm to support her.
- Learning that the girl had appealed to his mother for help and been turned down, Eric blames his mother for the girl's death.
- The Inspector makes a dramatic speech about the consequences of the sort of social irresponsibility that Mr Birling was preaching at the end of the dinner.
- The Inspector, having shown that each had a part in ruining the girl's life, leaves.
- Between them Gerald and Mr Birling gradually prove that the man was not a real police Inspector.
- A telephone call to the Chief Constable establishes there is no Inspector Goole on the police force.
- A telephone call to the Infirmary reveals that there has been no recent suicide.
- Eric and Sheila continue to feel guilty about what they have done, but the others now shrug off any guilt.
- Mr Birling answers the telephone: a young woman has just died on her way to the Infirmary and an Inspector is on his way to make enquiries.

The end of the play is a source of much productive disagreement. Arthur blames his son Eric as the primary cause of Eva/Daisy's and the family's misfortune. But Eric points out that all share the blame, and Sheila notes this, too. Sheila is the most willing to accept what she has done and becomes increasingly unmoored as she realises that Arthur and Sybil want only to pretend that the night has not happened at all.

Sheila notes that if the girl who dies at the end of the play really is Eva/Daisy, or even if she is someone else entirely, it does not change the behaviours that have brought about her death. For Arthur, the distinction between public and private life is a crucial one, since private life allows for the hiding of mistakes. But for Sheila, this distinction is meaningless where moral matters are concerned. What is important to Sheila is the guilt the family must sort through and face.

On the one hand, this means that the possibility of Eva/Daisy's reality and the factual nature of her death would reinforce the characters' conclusions. But this also means that the question of Eva/Daisy being real might also be used to judge the immorality of their actions. This kind of judgment, where "all's well that ends well" even if people's motivations were selfish, impure, and criminal, is the judgment Priestley's Inspector speaks out against. For the Inspector, immoral acts are immoral absolutely because they violate the fabric of social togetherness. It should not matter, then, whether Eva/Daisy is real. The suffering the family members have caused *is* real, and that must be addressed.

Although it seems not to be borne out in the text, Edna disappears at the close of the play, and there is no indication given as to her whereabouts. The openness of the ending means that anyone, including Edna herself, might be Eva/Daisy. That is, any person in a working-class situation, who is dependent on a capitalist system of labour to survive, could potentially lose everything and be forced to the brink of death. In the world that Priestley paints of free capitalist enterprise, there are very few mechanisms in place to protect the poor, the enfeebled, or those who have lacked representation in the past.

The Character of Mr Arthur Birling

The importance that Mr Birling attaches to his possible knighthood shows us what men in his position feel is necessary to prove their value in society. He knows that there must be no hint of scandal attached to anyone being considered for a reward in the Honours List but cannot seriously believe that he or his family can be in any danger of that. J. B. Priestley shows us how superficial the honours system can be when being a "sound useful party man" counts so highly towards gaining Mr Birling his knighthood. It is important to show how Mr Birling is characterised as a hypocrite because he is happy to accept the community's reward of a knighthood while his speech shows that he does not believe in the community. Moreover, although Arthur does seem somewhat upset at the idea that he contributed to Eva Smith's death, he is more upset that his family's implication in the scandal would become public. This would mean that the knighthood might be withheld, and that Birling would no longer continue his social ascent.

Arthur's opinion, that men ought only to look after themselves as individuals, is a strictly capitalist mentality, in which owners of capital value only profits, and do not care for workers' rights. As Sheila says in Act Three, the Inspector calls just as Arthur tells Eric and Gerald that they must put their own interests before anyone else's, and that socialist ideas of human brotherhood are strange and not to be trusted. Sheila wonders if the Inspector's visit was meant to prove to Arthur that people's lives are very complexly intertwined.

Mr Birling is almost a comical character, Priestley is the puppeteer and Birling the puppet which plays into the arms of socialism, by having the symbol of capitalism in the play as such an idiotic, portentous snob, this ridicules the capitalist views and morals and causes the audience to become empathetic towards socialism

The Character of Mrs Sybil Birling

May 2017 - How far does Priestley present Mrs Birling as an unlikeable character?

The matriarch of the Birling family. Sybil is described in the play's stage directions as "cold" and "her husband's social superior". Though she is pleased her daughter Sheila is engaged to be married, she tends to ignore any potential discord in the family. Sybil serves on a charitable committee in the town and busies herself with social events befitting a woman whose husband is a business success. She protects what she perceives to be the family's good image and standing in the community.

We are brought almost up-to-date with the girl's story when we learn that Mrs Birling saw her only two weeks before her death. We would expect the members of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation to be gentle, caring and sympathetic towards women in trouble: Mrs Birling showed none of these qualities. Mrs Birling has a strong sense of how people of different classes should behave. Her prejudice towards the girl seems based on a belief that an unmarried working-class girl who has become pregnant could never behave in a noble way – which is what the girl may be said to have done when she refused to take money from the child's father because the money was stolen. Mrs Birling's prejudice and dislike of the girl's manner echo Mr Birling's attitude when he said, "She'd had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go" and Sheila's anger because the girl had been "very impertinent".

Each had used their power and position to harm the girl.

The Character of Miss Sheila Birling

The Inspector does not spare Sheila's feelings. When he again describes Daisy as a "pretty, lively sort of girl" the audience is reminded of the comparison between her and Sheila. His description of Daisy and her miserable death adds to Sheila's feelings of guilt. The Inspector seems to understand Sheila's feelings in a strange, almost unnatural way, and this adds to the mystery which surrounds him.

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

Sheila is understandably upset when she learns of Gerald's relationship with the girl. She becomes increasingly sarcastic with Gerald, whom she calls "the hero" of the story they are listening to, and later she tries to ridicule him saying the girl saw him as "the wonderful Fairy prince", acting to suggest her own feelings for Gerald as well as showing that life with Gerald could only be a fantasy for a girl like Daisy. Towards the end of this act, Sheila's attitude towards Gerald has softened again. By accepting her own blame for having the girl sacked from the shop, and by accepting Gerald's good intentions when he first saw the girl, Sheila sees events in a different way. She returns the engagement ring because she feels that she and Gerald are only just beginning to get to know each other. Both she and Gerald show they are prepared to start over again, and this holds out hope for their future.

Sheila is aware that they must not try to hide from what they have done. It is clear that she believes her mother has something to hide, and that if her mother tries to hide it she will only be "making it worse" and she will be sorry in the end. It seems that Sheila is the only one who appreciates the Inspector's power to reveal secrets they have never even realised were hidden. The Inspector has come to find out who was to blame for the girl's suicide, and Sheila's summary of events reminds us of the greed, jealousy and selfishness they have shown. Mr Birling and his wife still try to use their respected place in the community to remind the Inspector of his relatively humble social status. Sheila clearly believes that social status has nothing to do with what is happening that evening, and her advice to her mother that she might as well admit being involved in the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation can be seen as advice that she might as well admit whatever involvement she had with the girl.

Sheila is used by J. B. Priestley to remind us of the way Mr Birling, Sheila and Gerald had mistreated the girl. This strengthens our confidence in the truth of the Inspector's accusations and in his knowledge. The more times the chain of events is repeated, the more our belief in it grows and the more faith we have in the Inspector.

Sheila is the conscience of the Birling family. She realises very soon after the Inspector's arrival that her anger at Milward's resulted in Eva's dismissal, and that, because Eva went on to commit suicide, Sheila played a role in her demise. She seems genuinely upset and lost, and reminds the rest of her family that they, too, have acted wrongly. She wants the family never to forget what they have done, despite their desire to proceed as though nothing is amiss.

Sheila's position is, broadly, an empathetic one. Although she does not seem to care much for the Inspector's implicit critique of capitalism, she does believe that humans are responsible for one another's good will. She is despondent that she cannot undo what she has done but is committed to the idea that the family can change going forward.

The character of Eric Birling

May 2018 - How far does Priestley present Eric as a character who changes his attitudes towards himself and others during the play?

The audience is given small details and hints of Eric's drinking from the offset of the play. In Act One he has drunk more than he should during the dinner. Sheila describes him as being "squiffy", a slang expression which seems quite humorous, although Mrs Birling appears to be shocked by it and the audience later learn that Eric has a reputation as someone who "does drink very hard" – thus preparing the audience for the later revelations about his drunken behaviour towards the girl.

In Act Three, as soon as Eric enters, he realises that they all "know" what he has done – thus reflecting his own internal guilt. Moreover, his reaction to the news that his parents know about his heavy drinking is not that of a mature adult; he becomes upset and doesn't realise that Sheila told them to make things easier for him when the truth comes out. Eric's request for a drink, and the Inspector's insistence that he be allowed a drink, show us how dependent Eric is on alcohol. This little incident shows the even-handed way that the Inspector treats people. Eric sees a drink as something to help him overcome his problems, when it is really the cause of his troubles. The fact that neither of his parents had known about his heavy drinking also shows the weakness of the relationships within the family. As Eric's guilt is exposed, we see the unpleasant nature of his relationship with the girl. He explains how he insisted on going with her to where she lived, forced his way in and had sex with her. He is careful how he describes what he did and simply says "that's when it happened". Eric's brutish behaviour is closely connected with his excessive drinking.

Eric's first encounter with the girl is very different from Gerald's, and his later meetings with her seem cold and uncaring. Eric's account of how he met the girl again, and of how he had told her his name but had learnt very little about her, suggests there was little real communication between them. Eric admits he wasn't in love with her, although he liked her. His reasons for liking her, that she "was pretty and a good sport", reflect a shallow aspect of his character. His relationship with her is a purely a physical one and something he sees as a game, a bit of fun. Eric's admission that the girl didn't want to marry him and that he felt that she treated him like a child, shows that despite his good education and his privileged upbringing he was immature.

Eric's position is similar to his sister's, in that he, too, is wracked by guilt after learning of the Eva/Daisy's suicide. But Eric's addiction to alcohol and his moodier, wilder temperament keep him from reasoning as succinctly as Sheila does at the play's end. Eric believes that he behaved justifiably in stealing from the family business to help Eva/Daisy. And, when he learns that his mother refused Eva/Daisy from her charity despite being pregnant, he is aghast at his family's lack of sympathy.

Different characters interpret Eric's alcoholism in different ways. Arthur sees it as a sign of weakness, an indication that Eric is lazy and was spoiled as a child. Sybil refuses to acknowledge that Eric has a drinking problem, despite Sheila's protestations. And Gerald, though he wants to believe that Eric's drinking is "normal" for a young man, admits that very few young men drink the way Eric does.

The character of Gerald Croft

J. B. Priestley is careful that the men use euphemistic language such as “Daisy Renton, with other ideas” and “women of the town” to imply prostitution. People would have had to do this in 1912 so as not offend the ladies. When Gerald sees Daisy in the bar of the Palace music hall, or theatre, he clearly recognises that she is out of place. Gerald’s description of the unattractive “hard-eyed, dough-faced women” emphasises Daisy’s prettiness and her vulnerability. As a result, the audience are more likely to blame Gerald for what happens, even though they can appreciate his motives for rescuing her from Alderman Meggarty. The mention of the Alderman, a senior local Councillor, shows that anyone can become mixed up in scandalous behaviour. It is a warning to Mr Birling. As the Inspector tells Gerald how, after he had ended the relationship, the girl went away “to be alone, to be quiet, to remember all that had happened”, we see that Gerald had brought something pleasant and memorable into the girl’s sad life – although she probably placed more importance on the relationship than he did.

Gerald understands that his affair will now be revealed to the family. He knows it will hurt Sheila, and initially he lashes out at her, believing Sheila wants to see him suffer as she has suffered. Gerald does have a hard time understanding that Sheila will be more accepting of the affair once she has heard all about it from his own mouth. For Sheila admits that knowing or guessing only a bit of the story is harder than find out about it all at once. This, the audience will later learn, is uncharacteristic of Gerald, who appears a kind and conscientious person. Even the Inspector agrees, later in the play, that Gerald’s behaviour to Eva/Daisy has not been overly cruel. Their relationship was illicit, and Gerald was dating Sheila and lying to her while it was ongoing. But Gerald was not cruel to Eva/Daisy, and he appears to have genuinely wanted to help her.

The Character of Inspector Goole

May 2017 - How does Priestley use the character of the Inspector to suggest ways that society could be improved?

The Inspector is physically imposing, and he has no trouble articulating his frustration with the Birlings and with Gerald. Over the course of his questioning, the Inspector reveals that each of characters has, in some sense, contributed to Eva Smith/Daisy Renton's demise. The Inspector implies that the other characters care primarily for themselves, that they are angry and impulsive, and that they cannot control their sexual appetites or their intake of alcohol. He also says that they cannot change what has happened to Eva/Daisy, because she is no longer alive and capable of accepting their apologies. But the Inspector, too, is a curt, direct man, and his motivations are not readily comprehensible. His apparent socialist sympathies at the end of the play might account in political terms for some of his anger, but the Inspector's desire to see justice through, in this case, is left unexplained.

Throughout his questioning, the Inspector takes on the role of a professor or guide. He interrogates the Birlings and Gerald, and he wants them to admit culpability for Eva death. Further, he wants them to learn what they have done wrong, and to change. His "inspection," as Sheila realises in Act Three, is designed to encourage them to interrogate themselves, to consider when in their lives they have behaved immorally, and how they might improve as family members, friends, and citizens. Sheila, Gerald, and Eric have a different relationship to the lessons they've learned. Gerald admits that he was wrong to have an affair, but on further inspection realises that he does not exactly regret his relationship with Daisy. Sheila knows that she was wrong to have Eva dismissed, but will consider forgiving Gerald, or at least forgetting his actions, and to think about ways their relationship might be reborn. Eric's drunkenness causes him to forget much of what he does, even as he's doing it. But the shock of the Inspector's visit does cause him and his family to admit that his drinking has overshadowed his life.

The Inspector is seen as being more and more in command of the situation. He begins giving his opinions more clearly, and his comment "a nasty mess somebody's made of it" can be linked to his comment "if it was left to me" to suggest he is setting himself up as a judge. This changes his position, giving him the authority to state that his enquiries are being made so that all concerned might try to understand why the girl had to die. By letting the Inspector sum up what has so far been revealed about the involvement of Mr Birling and Sheila, J. B. Priestley reminds us of how events are developing. Sheila's hysterical laugh when she warns Gerald, "Why – you fool – he knows. Of course he knows. And I hate to think how much he knows that we don't know yet" shows how she has come under the Inspector's power. J. B. Priestley tells us that Gerald is "crushed", and this shows a very different side

of him from the self-assured young man we saw at the beginning of the play. When the Inspector returns, his one-word question "Well?" at the end of Act One raises his position to that of an all-knowing inquisitor. It adds to our sense of mystery as to where the Inspector has got so much detailed knowledge.

The Inspector has already used the photograph to establish the girl's identity, and the "rough sort of diary" provides Priestley with a convenient device to explain the Inspector's close knowledge of events. Together with the characters, the audience too become impressed by how much the Inspector knows and begin to see how far-sighted Sheila was when she said "Of course he knows. And I hate to think how much he knows that we don't know yet". Sheila's words can be viewed as making the Inspector appear a more powerful and knowing character. As the play progresses, he changes from a police officer doing a simple job of making enquiries about a suicide, into a symbol of righteous vengeance, someone who stands for what is right and good, who will not tolerate hypocrisy and who will avenge the wrongs done to those who are weak and helpless.

The Inspector's final speech has a powerful didactic message: we all have some responsibility for looking after one another. In comparison to Mr Birling's speeches in Act One where he proclaims that from his experience "a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own".
The Inspector warns of future trouble, mimicking the voice of a prophet in the way he speaks, suggesting he is more than an ordinary police Inspector. J. B. Priestley use the Inspector as a mouthpiece to convey his own ideas about moral responsibility.

The characters on stage notice something strange about the Inspector. His arrival, just as Mr Birling was making his speech about a man looking after himself, now seems remarkably well timed. When Sheila states that "he never seemed like an ordinary police Inspector" the audience are reminded of how all-knowing he seemed. This is strengthened by Sheila's assertion that they "hardly ever told him anything he didn't know". Sheila has been puzzled by the Inspector's knowledge, firmness and concern for the girl. These things mean nothing to her parents who see his behaviour as odd only because he failed to show them the respect they expected and had been "rude – and assertive". As far as Sheila is concerned it is not who the Inspector is that is important; it is what he has achieved. She goes over their treatment of the girl, and her conclusion that it is what they did that is important, not whether they admitted it to a real police Inspector, is quickly refuted by her parents who are concerned about their reputation, not the fate of the girl. To Mr and Mrs Birling the possibility that he might be an imposter is exciting because only a real police officer can damage their reputation.

The Character of Eva Smith/Daisy Renton

A character who does not appear onstage in the play, but who is the absent figure around which the action spins. She is referred to as Eva Smith, Daisy Renton, and "Mrs. Birling." She may be a combination of these young women, or a different person, or a fiction. Whether she is real or not, Eva/Daisy is a stand-in for the girls that Arthur, Sybil, Sheila, Eric, and Gerald have wronged, either separately or together.

- Eva/Daisy worked for a low wage, and Arthur fired her for attempting a strike.
- Sheila had her fired for impertinence.
- Eric and Gerald both had affairs with her, and though Gerald cared for her, Eric's relationship to her was more vexed, and required him to steal money for her.

If Eva/Daisy is a real person, as the last phone call suggests, then the family's guilt might really knot them together. But if she is not one person, and rather a set of people, this makes her no less substantial as an organisational principle for the work. Priestley demonstrates how selfish, or economically motivated, or jealous behaviour can ruin people's lives. Eva/Daisy is the lesson each character must learn individually.

Key Themes

Responsibility:

Most of the characters have a narrow view of what it means to be responsible, but the Inspector provides us with a much broader one. Mr Birling feels his responsibility is to make a success of his business. This means making as much profit as possible, even if he is harsh in his dealings with those who work for him. As a family man he has a responsibility to provide for the material needs of his family, yet it is clear that Eric does not see him as the kind of father to whom he could turn when in trouble. Mrs Birling accepts her responsibility as chair of the Women's Charity Organisation but sees only a responsibility to help those that she feels are deserving of help. She allows her personal feelings to prejudice her decisions. Sheila belatedly recognises that as a powerful customer she has an obligation not to let her personal feelings and ill-temper lead to misery for people who have no power, while Eric has little sense of responsibility at all. He drinks far more than is good for him and he forced the girl into a relationship which had disastrous consequences. He attempted to help her by stealing from his father. Gerald showed some sense of responsibility when he rescued the girl from the unwelcome attentions of another man, fed her and found her somewhere to live. Yet he gave in to his own desire for personal pleasure and eventually abandoned the girl without knowing, or very much caring, what happened to her.

Guilt:

Arthur, Sybil, Sheila, Eric, and Gerald must come to terms with their guilt, leading to Eva/Daisy's demise. The Inspector wants the family to accept the pain it has caused Eva/Daisy. In this way, guilt plays an important role in the Inspector's politics. Although he does not describe his politics explicitly, he appears to be a socialist, and for him, socialism demands that human beings look out for one another, do their absolute best to avoid harming each other. When people do wrong, they must then explain, to themselves and others, the wrongness of their actions.

Sheila is the most willing to see that she has erred, in having Eva/Daisy removed from her job at Milward's. Gerald, too, understands that his relationship with Eva/Daisy has caused her pain, and that that pain might have brought her to suicide. Arthur and Sybil, however, are far less willing to accept their guilt. Arthur is more concerned with the family's good name, and Sybil believes that in denying Eva/Daisy charity, she did what any person in her position should have done. Eric feels some version of Sheila's guilt, but his drunkenness shades his emotions somewhat. He is disturbed to know, however, that there are parts of his relationship with the girl he does not even remember, on account of steady inebriation.

The play's final, perplexing scene, in which Arthur learns that a girl really has committed suicide, again raises the question of culpability among the characters. By the end of Act Three, Gerald and Arthur, for their own reasons, have convinced themselves and the other Birlings that the Inspector has fooled them completely. They think that, though they have done wrong individually, these wrongs have not added up to cause one person's death. But if, the playwright implies, the dead person at the close of the play is the same person with whom each character has interacted, then their guilt is no longer individual, but instead collective, although only Sheila seems to understand this fully. Priestley leaves this question open as the play ends.

Suicide:

The act of killing oneself, or of losing oneself entirely, is central to the play's events. The play's predicament is the supposed death of a girl named Eva Smith, or Daisy Renton. Eva/Daisy has killed herself, the Inspector argues, because all society has abandoned her. Her only remaining choice was to end her life. The Inspector sees suicide as the response to a culture of selfishness, which he believes to permeate capitalist society. No one was willing to lend Eva/Daisy a hand, and the Birlings discarded her when she was no longer compliant or useful to them. She had no friends or family to fall back on.

There is a larger "suicidal" idea in the play, not in the literal sense of one person's death, but on the social plane. The Inspector implies that if men and women continue to behave callously to one another in the industrialised countries of the West, then those countries, as entities, will "commit suicide." That is, the Inspector's warning to the Birlings foreshadows the cataclysms of the World Wars One and Two, which the audience in 1946 would understand to follow quickly upon the events of the play.

Time:

J. B. Priestley wrote the play for an audience just coming out of the horrors of the Second World War, yet he set his play in 1912, two years before the start of the First World War: this brings us to a consideration of J. B. Priestley's use of time as an element of his plays. At the end of the play we are left with a sense that the events are going to start all over again. The audience wonders whether things will be different and how the characters will behave. One 'time' theory suggests that when we die we re-enter our life and live it all over again, and only by doing things better can we escape that cycle and begin a new life in which we do not repeat our mistakes. Another theory states that you could be given the gift of seeing forward in time as well as looking back. This would mean that, just as you can look back and see what actions led to your present situation, you could look forward and see the consequences of your actions. So, if you wished, you could change those actions and avoid the consequences. *An Inspector Calls* contains elements of these time theories. The Inspector, arriving before the suicide is a reality, offers each character a chance to see the consequences, to change the future, to break the circle. Eric and Sheila seem prepared to face up to their past actions and to improve themselves, but the others do not. The reflections on the past, and the possibilities of the future, highlight the importance of caring for others, of taking responsibility for our actions and of considering the consequences of them.

The Inspector's knowledge of events, apparently before they happen, his steady revelation of the characters' pasts and their links to the dead girl over a two-year period. These things give him a mystical, unworldly quality. The Inspector's departure leaves the characters free to decide their future, while at the end we are left to wonder how they will cope with reliving the close scrutiny of their dealings with others when the cycle of questions begins all over again. By setting the play in 1912 and presenting it to a later audience, J. B. Priestley has covered an era which includes both world wars. The failure of the older characters to learn anything reflects the failure of generations to learn from the mistakes of the recent past. There is dramatic irony in that characters talk of hopes for peace and prosperity, but we know these will not happen. By 1945, J. B. Priestley was hoping that the second time around the world might learn from past mistakes and we might see such hopes realised if we, the audience, can accept the challenge to be caring and socially aware.

Love:

The play presents a variety of thoughts about love, the nature of love and different people's interpretation of love. Sheila and Gerald appear to be in love, and their engagement seems to bring them happiness as they contemplate their future together. After each of them has confessed to their shameful behaviour towards Eva Smith/ Daisy Renton, Sheila realises that they do not really know each other well and that trust is an essential ingredient in a loving relationship. We are left wondering if their love will survive these events. Mr Birling's remark about the engagement of his daughter bringing the two family firms into a closer working relationship gives us an indication of his attitude towards love and marriage. He sees marriage as a convenient way of progressing up the social and economic ladder. This makes us wonder whether love played any real part in his marriage to the socially superior Sybil Birling and whether her coldness to others, including her own children, does not have its roots in a loveless marriage. Both Gerald and Eric have been involved with the girl, yet each of them denies that they loved her – their relationships were prompted by physical attraction. The girl took up with Eric out of necessity, but she does, however, seem to have felt a genuine love for Gerald. Gerald's ending of the affair may be seen as being callous in view of her love for him. The Inspector preaches a form of love, a sort of true 'charity' which is a deep care for our fellow human beings. This is quite alien to Mrs Birling who is prepared to devote time to 'charity' while having no real care for others.

Sheila and Gerald show considerable affection in the early part of the play. They joke with and tease each other. When the engagement ring is presented, Sheila speaks in a way which is full of emotion, her sentences broken up, disjointed and incomplete. When Gerald realises that the girl is dead, he speaks in the same broken, disjointed way. This may suggest his genuine affection for Daisy Renton. Sheila's language to Gerald is different when she feels her love has been betrayed. Then she is more in control, and we see the fury of a woman scorned. The conversations between Mr Birling and his wife lack any of the emotion we see in Sheila and Gerald. Suggesting an emotionless, cold marriage or perhaps the easy and undemonstrative manner of a couple who have been married for a long time.

The Birling family – contrasting characters:

Sheila's light-hearted, excitable and enthusiastic manner is very different from Eric's behaviour. Having drunk too much, Eric lacks control, suddenly laughing, speaking "rather noisily" and making comments which lead to Sheila calling him "an ass". Although the scene centres on the celebration of Sheila's engagement, there are moments which foreshadow later revelations. J. B. Priestley drops in the information that Gerald "never came near" Sheila the previous summer, which is strange if the couple were so very much in love. Doubts are raised about their love, and about how truthful the characters are, when Sheila responds to Gerald's explanation with "that's what you say", hinting that there might be another explanation.

Mr Birling enjoys playing the host. We see how his life centres round his business, and he regards his family as another way of increasing his business interests. His background as a local politician is suggested as he can't resist making speeches, but when, in these lengthy monologues, he talks about the future, about peace and prosperity and about "Capital" and "Labour" working together, the audience can see that his extreme confidence is misplaced.

Mrs Birling never really enters the general conversation. When she speaks, the audience see a person who is very self-controlled and rather cold. She clearly disapproves of young people drinking, and she places a high value on things being done in what she considers to be the right way.

Mrs Birling is anxious to prove she behaved in a reasonable way. To remove any blame from herself, she insists that the girl told lies, including using the name Mrs Birling, and so was not what would have been called a "deserving" poor person. She states that the father of the unborn child is to blame for what has happened, and she uses his immoral behaviour in fathering the child and his theft of money to show his guilt. Mr Birling is worried that his wife had seen the girl so recently. He is angry when he learns that the girl had applied to the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation using the name "Mrs Birling". Mr Birling is relieved once he has made sure that the child wasn't Gerald Croft's, but his wife's treatment of the girl's application for help worries him. Once again, his concern is only that there might be a scandal when the story is revealed at the inquest. Sheila's reaction to her mother's involvement with the girl shows genuine concern. She is shocked by her mother's defiant admission that she was prejudiced against the girl. When the Inspector mentions the girl's body in the Infirmary we see how Sheila's vivid imagination has enabled her to visualise the sad scene. The news that the girl was pregnant, and so an innocent unborn child has also died, fills Sheila with horror.

Once the Inspector leaves the family turn on each other. It seems that the Inspector's words have not changed the way some of them think. Mr Birling clearly feels that Eric is the only one who has behaved in a way which might be seen as directly causing the girl's death. It is not surprising that Eric feels the responsibility is shared equally by them all. Eric's attitude takes us back to the Inspector's "chain of events" which is also, of course, a chain of characters. Sheila is dismayed by the attitudes shown by her father and mother. Mrs Birling declares that she had not been intimidated by the Inspector who "didn't make me confess – as you call it" while Mr Birling claims the younger ones had "allowed [them] selves to be bluffed" as if they had been playing a game. During this section of the play both Eric and Sheila seem more willing and able to stand up to their father. Mrs Birling notices this and accuses them of wanting to help the Inspector instead of them.

Sheila has faced the truth about herself and her actions rather better than her parents have done. She is amazed and disappointed that there has been no real change in their attitudes. Like Eric she sees no importance in whether the Inspector was a real police officer or not. For her the important thing is that his visit should make them think about, and accept, their responsibilities. In contrast, Mr Birling sees their confessions as rash and weak behaviour. He can excuse his own admissions since he feels he sacked the girl for what anyone would accept as good business reasons. Mrs Birling simply returns to her claim that she did nothing wrong. By showing these differences between the generations, J. B. Priestley is suggesting that if after the Second World War society was to change for the better and become fairer (something that failed to happen after the First World War), then the younger generation must be looked to in order to make such changes. It seems in the play that it is the young who are "more impressionable" and so more likely to take up the ideas of justice and responsibility Priestley puts forward.

Mr and Mrs Birling join Gerald in trying to improve their situation by discrediting the Inspector. Several times they congratulate Gerald on his good work. Although he is close in age to Eric and Sheila, Gerald's own position in business is reflected in the way he is seen to be on the same side as Mr Birling. Gerald, Mr Birling and Mrs Birling see themselves as free of any guilt. Mr Birling even puts forward the idea that it might be a trick thought up by a business rival – business is the only really important thing to him. All three of them quickly accept the idea of a trick, which reduces the seriousness of the admissions they have made. Eric and Sheila take a rather different view. They do not share the relief felt by the others. They have been so deeply affected by the evening's events that the truth of the Inspector's identity makes no difference to them. Whether it was the same girl they mistreated or two different girls, for Eric and Sheila the guilt and shame remain the same. These two younger characters accept they have done wrong and they cannot easily forget what they have done.

Social status

May 2018 - How does Priestley explore the importance of social class in An Inspector Calls?

The family's wealth is suggested by the formal nature of the dinner party. In his stage directions, J. B. Priestley describes how the set should look so that the family's privileged lifestyle is made clear. The solid furniture, the champagne, port and cigars all reflect a very comfortable lifestyle where luxury is taken for granted. The hard furniture also suggests a lack of family warmth and homeliness, despite the luxury. The references to business and to the Croft family's higher social standing and greater wealth indicate the things that Mr Birling considers important. Although he comes from a modest background, Mr Birling sees the future wedding of Sheila to Gerald as the beginning of a powerful business empire. Mr Birling's toast wishing the happy couple 'the very best that life can bring' (p. 4) seems to suggest that they all think it is natural that life should be good to them. J. B. Priestley is preparing us for the contrast we will see between the way of life enjoyed by the wealthy and the hardships endured by those who work for them.

Eva Smith does not appear, yet she is central to the developing action of the play. Her diary and letter give the Inspector the information he needs to follow his chain of events. By detailing his record as businessman and local politician, and by referring to friends such as the "Chief Constable", Mr Birling tries to intimidate the Inspector. The Inspector remains calm and pushes ahead with his questions. The audience see how Mr Birling looks down on ordinary workers, and he has no loyalty to those who work for him. It is ironic that Mr Birling sacked Eva Smith for showing qualities of leadership – the same qualities for which he was earlier prepared to promote her. J. B. Priestley makes her case through the Inspector. Like Eric, the Inspector is sympathetic towards the girl, and so we feel that J. B. Priestley too is sympathetic towards her. Such sympathy is in clear contrast to the feelings expressed by both Mr Birling and Gerald, the two men of business.

It is important to understand that, in 1912, social position was very much dictated by a person's family connections or wealth. The Birlings belong to the important, wealthy group of people who would expect to run things in a town like Brumley. A Police Inspector was regarded rather like a servant of such people, but Inspector Goole shows no fear of Mr Birling's importance in the town. He takes the moral high ground, reminding Mr Birling that men who hold public office 'have responsibilities as well as privileges' (p. 41). Consider how, by emphasising the ideas of duty and responsibility, the Inspector suggests the family's lack of such qualities. It makes the audience question their "right" to consider themselves superior to working people such as the Inspector and the girl.

Reputation:

When Eric reveals his fraud, Mr Birling is immediately aware of the risk of scandal. We are reminded of the joking conversation he had with Gerald early in the play, and we see that what they thought of as humorous and impossible is in fact very possible and very serious. Mr Birling's hopes for a knighthood will be ruined if news of Eric's behaviour gets out. What Eric has done is bound to be discovered when people who have paid their bills in cash to Eric receive a bill showing that they still owe the money. To avoid this, Mr Birling must cover up what Eric has done. He too is prepared to behave dishonestly. Despite Mr Birling's earlier claims that they are respectable people who have nothing to be ashamed of, we see that Eric could not turn to his father for help when he most needed it. Mr Birling is "not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble". The girl finds out that Mrs Birling is not the kind of woman that a girl could turn to when in trouble, despite the fact that the girl's trouble has been made worse by her attempts to protect Eric and her refusal to take money she knew was stolen by Mrs Birling's son.

The Birlings and the Crofts – Ambition and Money:

It is interesting that, despite his wealth, Mr Birling fears that Lady Croft (Gerald's mother) sees his family as being socially beneath her. He suspects that Lady Croft believes Gerald "might have done better" by choosing a future wife from a better family. Gerald denies this, leading us to understand that having money is now more important in society than coming from land-owning gentry. Mr Birling's hope for a knighthood shows that he is someone who is going up in the world. We notice that Mr Birling confides his news to Gerald, allowing Gerald to drop a hint to Lady Croft, although Mr Birling knows that he should keep this news secret until it is officially announced. Although Mr Birling is happy to benefit from whatever he can take from the community, he ridicules the idea that we might all be "mixed up together like bees in a hive", living as a community in which everyone looks after each other and works for the common good.

The female:

Mr Birling is more concerned that his daughter has been upset than by any feelings of guilt for what they have done to Eva Smith. Sheila has shown that she can be jealous, petty and spiteful. She used her power as the "daughter of a good customer" to have the shop girl sacked. Sheila's description of the girl as pretty and looking "as if she could take care of herself" shows Sheila's superficial judgement. We already know something of the family's involvement with the girl and that the Inspector had not come just to see Mr Birling. Gerald's interest in seeing the photograph prepares us for his reaction to hearing she had changed her name to Daisy Renton. He clearly knows the name. We have also been told that the girl had "decided she might try another kind of life" and we realise what sort of life this was when we hear how Gerald came to meet her. Sheila's regret seems genuine, and we feel she has learnt a valuable lesson and is determined never to act so unfairly again. When she expresses her wish that she could help the girl now, the Inspector is not gentle with her; he uses three short, sharp sentences: "Yes, but you can't. It's too late. She's dead". Towards the end of the section, Sheila realises that Gerald's lack of attention to her the previous summer was because he was having an affair with Daisy Renton. Gerald has to admit the truth, but clearly believes that because he has not seen Daisy for six months he has nothing to do with the Inspector's investigation. Notice how Sheila is beginning to identify with the Inspector's point of view, and how her belief in him leads her to warn Gerald not to try to fool him.

Gerald was careful earlier to use expressions such as "women of the town" so as not to offend the ladies. Eric avoids saying he had sex with the girl by simply saying "that's when it happened", and Mr Birling has done what he can to prevent his wife and daughter hearing anything unsavoury. Once the women have left the room the Inspector feels free to ask if Eric and the girl "made love", and Mr Birling asks if Eric "had to go to bed with her". These are still euphemisms, but in 1912 this was strong language. Eric is even more free in his speech. He suggests that as a bachelor he is free to associate with the women some of his father's "respectable friends" are seen with, and he refers to the women as "fat old tarts" – an expression he would never use in his mother's presence. There is hypocrisy in the way the men regard women.

Priestley delicately avoids any direct reference as to why the girl returned to the bar of the Palace Theatre, but we are led to believe that she was out of work and in desperate need of money. It is important to understand that she has changed: she had been unable to accept the approaches of Alderman Meggarty, but now she has to accept Eric's drunken advances. Since Eric, the father of her child, has told her his name, it may be seen as quite natural for her to use his name when applying for help from the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation. Significantly, combined with her unwillingness to accept stolen money, it makes Mrs Birling's refusal to help her seem even more petty and unjust. The effect that her use of the name Mrs Birling is substantial and reflects how differently she might have been treated if she was a member of that family.

Symbols

The engagement ring:

In Act One, Gerald gives Sheila an engagement ring as a symbol of their love and impending marriage. But after Gerald reveals his affair in Act Two, Sheila returns the ring to him and says they will need to start their relationship from the beginning, after the night's events are over, to see if they can forge a life together.

The engagement ring thus marks not only Sheila and Gerald's relationship but the idea of romantic love in the play more generally. Apart from Arthur and Sybil, whose marriage appears both strong and romantically cold, the other love-relationships in the play are illicit, involving people who are not married. Thus the engagement ring follows only those relationships receiving general social sanction. Relationships that could bring on "public scandal" receive no ring at all and are only revealed on the Inspector's questioning.

Disinfectant:

The Inspector reports that Eva/Daisy has killed herself by drinking "disinfectant," which has ravaged the inside of her body. This disinfectant should, symbolically, make her "clean," but it destroys her. In the same way, the Inspector's questions should "make clean" the family, by bringing people's secrets into the light of day. But these secrets nearly tear the family apart, too. Even after Gerald and Arthur question the Inspector's legitimacy, the last phone call and the renewed presence of disinfectant again bring up the idea that there is dirt that must be cleaned away by the asking of questions.

The bar:

As a counterpart to the room in which the play takes place, "the bar" is a scene in the novel of secret activity, often relating to illicit romantic love. Both Gerald and Eric meet Eva/Daisy in the bar, and Eric reports that other men in the community stalk those same bars to pick up women, some of them prostitutes. Even when characters who do not normally drink heavily, like Gerald, frequent the bar, they become embroiled in events they will need later to explain or perhaps forget.

Motifs:

Calls:

Calls, in-person and over the phone, announce important events in the play. The Inspector, of course, "calls" on the family, and he does so in person, allowing the story of Eva's death to unfold over many hours. As a bookend to the Inspector's call, Arthur receives a phone call at the close of the play, informing him that a girl really has committed suicide, and that an Inspector will be coming to the house to ask questions. The audience does not know who this Inspector will be, and whether this girl is Eva/Daisy, thus making this last call the play's most troubling.

Arthur uses the phone, for his part, to verify information. He calls the police precinct in Act Three, to find out if there really is an Inspector named Goole on the force. There is not. He also calls the hospital to learn if a girl was brought in recently, as a suicide. The hospital has no record of it. Thus, when Arthur makes a phone call, the information he receives tends to verify what he hopes to be true. But when Arthur and the Birlings receive calls and phone calls, the lessons they learn are neither easy nor pleasant.

Alcohol consumption:

The play begins with a party for Sheila and Gerald. Arthur offers everyone port, and they drink. Eric, accustomed to heavy drinking, has more than his fair share, and throughout the play the subject of his possible alcoholism arises. But every character has had at least something to drink by the time the Inspector arrives—except for the Inspector himself, who refuses because he is "on duty."
Eric's and Gerald's relationships with Eva/Daisy begin with alcohol consumption, and when questioned by the Inspector, Eric asks whether he might have another drink to steel his nerves. At the play's end, Arthur might be reaching for the port once more if it weren't for the final phone call informing the family of a suicide. Alcohol marks events of social importance in the family, and moments the family might rather forget. It is a means for the Birlings to interact with one another, and to feign intimacy when, as the audience learns, each family member has been leading his or her own life separately.

Rudeness, or "impertinence":

Sybil believes that the Inspector has rudely barged in on the family's celebration, and Arthur, too, wonders if the Inspector is obeying the rules of decorum the police department sets for its officers. To the Birlings, the Inspector's behaviour is the height of rudeness, because it upends the social norms on which the family operates. The Inspector asks questions the family would rather not answer, and he does not stop his questioning once he has begun. The rules that govern polite conversation do not govern the Inspector.

But the Inspector demonstrates that the Birlings, who are so aware of social norms, violate social conventions on their own time, and in more serious ways. Arthur, Sybil, and Sheila are defiantly uncharitable to Eva/Daisy, even in her time of need. And Eric and Gerald alternately treat Eva/Daisy kindly and dismissively, eventually leaving her to fend for herself. The Inspector thus shows that "rudeness" is itself a construct, and that apparent politeness can be a mask for total lack of concern or morality.

Criticisms –

Marxist theory:

Karl Marx

- Society is capitalist as it is based on making profit, rather than by the interests of all people.
- The proletariat (working class) make money for the bourgeoisie (upper class) who control the means of production.

Marxist theorists may argue that …

- Eva Smith represents the proletariat, who has been exploited by the bourgeoisie.
- Mr. Birling represents capitalist ideas and the belief that profit is key.
- The Inspector hints at social revolution when he speaks of 'fire and blood and anguish' if the bourgeoisie do not change their behaviour.

Feminist theory:

Simone de Beauvoir

- Gender is different from one's biological sex and is a social construction. Society expects each gender to behave in a distinct way.
- Women are oppressed as they are only valued for their looks and their societal functions as wives and mothers. This is a restrictive gender role.
- Women are 'the second sex' as they are seen as less powerful and important to men.
- Society is therefore patriarchal (male dominated).

Feminist Literary Critics may argue that …

- Mr. Birling expresses shallow and patronising opinions of women, claiming that clothes are a 'token of their self-respect', and refers to women who for him as 'girls' believing that thy would not have the resolve to keep their strike.
- Gerald and Eric both express a mixture of disdain and attraction to the prostitutes who work in the bar and objectify them in their descriptions of the older women.
- When Gerald keeps Eva in his friends 'rooms', she stays for the six months that is convenient for him, treating Eva as if she is a commodity, dismissing her when it is no longer easy for him to do so.

Psychoanalytical theory:

Sigmund Freud

- Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis suggests that the human psyche (personality) has three parts.
- The id is with us from birth. This part wishes to satisfy every urge it has immediately, regardless of the consequences. This is why babies cry to be fed, will snatch toys etc.
- The ego develops next. It is the decision-making part of our psyche and works by reason and strategy.
- The superego develops last. It reflects the values and morals of society which are learned from our parents and others. It is our conscience and means that we experience guilt.

A Psychoanalysist may argue that …

- Eric's character experiences all three stages: his initial treatment of Eva is the result of his id, he wishes to satisfy his sexual urges without any consideration to Eva's feelings;
- when faced with the dilemma of unplanned fatherhood, Eric's ego uses logic to steal from his father's work in an attempt to resolve his problems;
- in the end, when he hears of Eva's death, Eric's superego experiences deep and sincere guilt- unlike that of Gerald or Mrs. Birling

Constructing your essay

Key paragraph examples:

An Inspector Calls, written by J.B. Priestley, is a psychological thriller that explores socialism and capitalism and the impact on society. The play contains the themes of death, responsibility and family and contains a warning tone (which mimic Priestley's own socialist views).

Paragraph can be used for questions on:

Stage directions, the Inspector, Priestley's viewpoint, Socialism.

At the beginning of the play, Priestley sets a picturesque family scene. The lighting is "pink and intimate" reflecting the calmness and grandeur of the Birling family. Priestley's opening stage directions are integral to set the tone of this play, the adjective "pink" itself is stereotypically a feminine colouring – an ironic statement considering the masculine power presented in the play itself, reflective of this patriarchal male Edwardian society. It could also be seen to subtly foreshadow the horrors to come, where a young female takes her life and a further comment on the forthcoming death of a foetus (where pink is a common colour associated with babies). Furthermore, the adjective "intimate" is a strange word choice. Primary connotations are romantic, and thus could be seen to reflect the engagement of Sheila Birling and Gerald Croft. Significantly, however, "intimate" reflects the relationship that both Gerald and Eric had with Eva and again acts to foreshadow future events – but in a subtle manner. Reflective that we as society are subtly responsible for each other. Birling comments to the Inspector that we cannot act as though we are "like bees in a hive", that we are not responsible for each other – Goole however conveys the socialist view that we should follow this simile, that our actions have a direct impact on the lives of others, even if we do not realise it – it is subtle, we must work together like bees in a hive to make a fruitful society. The intimacy of the opening stage directions are broken the moment that the Inspector arrives, and alters to a "brighter and harder" lighting – symbolically reflecting how the Inspector's arrival will literally shed light on the actions of each character on stage, but more significantly the "pink and intimate" lighting reflects the romantic connections and the foetus. The lighting shift to "brighter and harder" could in the same manner reflect the lighting of the infirmary – where Eva and her foetus now lay dead. Moreover, the clinical style lighting reflects the Inspector's methodical approach to questioning. Priestley hands over many options to directors for the staging of the play, but not the lighting. Its significance is without question – and thus Priestley conveys, through the use of artificial lighting, that we are all responsible for each other as our own metaphorical light that is cast by our actions can be as quickly altered by our actions on others.

Essay inspired by examination questions on:

Sheila, responsibility, young vs old, the Birling family, social class

As the play develops the audience is made aware of the actions of each individual Birling family member. Significantly a division is created within the family, where the older generation continue to follow the capitalist beliefs that "Girls of that class-" are entirely separate from the bourgeoisie of this era. Furthermore, one can evidently see that this prejudice is inbuilt where the noun "girls" is plural, and thus Mrs Birling categorises all lower class females the same, moreover the term "girls" is patronising and reflects not only the extensive class division but the power of the older generation over the younger generation. This condescension is reflected throughout by the Birling children themselves where they both seek approval from their parents. At first, Sheila is conveyed to be a stereotypical upper-middle class female, she references her parents as "Mummy" and "Daddy" reflecting her innocent and childish demeanour – echoed further by her calling her brother "squiffy" in her early speech. This condescending and spoilt characterisation is further heightened through her outburst and actions at Milwards. Sheila's actions were driven by innate jealousy, admitting to the Inspector that "if she'd been some miserable plain little creature" she wouldn't have probably acted the same way. The complexity of Sheila's character is first highlighted to the audience through this interrogation scene. Prior, her father was inspected by Goole and consequently Goole tells Sheila that men like her father see "young women" who live "that existence" as "cheap labour" - adamantly Sheila responds to the Inspector's comments that "these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people". Fundamentally here Sheila chooses the same noun choice as her mother "girls", thus reflecting an inbuilt view that these "young women" are in fact less developed than women of a higher class. Sheila could have easily followed the Inspector's noun choice of "young women" thus reflecting how these views are inbuilt within the class system. Sheila however is more malleable than her parents – portraying that the younger generation are more susceptible to change.

This change is evident when Sheila hears of Birling's actions in sacking Eva Smith, she instantly changes the noun from "Daddy" to "Dad" reflecting her maturing viewpoint, nonetheless even after she alters the manner in which she addresses her father she still identifies Eva as a girl, thus reflecting that at this point in the play Sheila is able to alter her viewpoint of the Upper-middle class values but is unable to shift her own condescending view of these "girls" – despite her understanding that it is "horrid" that she committed suicide.

Responsibility is taken by Sheila, although the reason for her own personal sense of responsibility is shown to be that of humiliation rather than innate guilt. After Sheila leaves Milwards, Sheila had spoken to her father, who "didn't seem to think it amounted to much" she continues to state that she felt "rotten about it at the time" – significantly here is her use of the preposition "at" that reflects how her sense of responsibility ended once her "daddy" had told her she was not in the wrong. Sheila, however, does take responsibility once the Inspector informs her of the girl's suicide "So I really am to blame?" The childish nature in which Sheila says this, echoed through the noun "blame", symbolises how Sheila, at the start of the play, has yet to find her own position in society – she is yet to become the adult that she develops into through the course of the play. The audience witness Sheila's developing character when confronted by the affair of Gerald and Daisy Renton. It is Sheila that deciphers Gerald's body action to indicate that he had "come to know this girl". Gerald initially

dismisses her claims and becomes curt towards Sheila – but Sheila knows that they "haven't much time" and her speech begins to take the form of a series of short declarative sentences, thus demanding that Gerald confess the truth. Interestingly here, Sheila takes on the role of the Inspector – forcing Gerald to take responsibility for his actions, which he does. Sheila notably thus acts as the moral core of the Birling family.

At the beginning of the play, Mr and Mrs Birling are presented as the prudent family members. Mrs Birling chastises Mr Birling on how he addresses the lower class (Edna) and Mr Birling addresses the family with his views on how "the Germans don't want war" and gloats about his future (possible) "knighthood" and his many roles in society, such a "lord mayor". It is however Sheila that understands the role of the Inspector, and understands his mindset – she acts to protect her family, "Mother – I begged you and begged you to stop-" whilst supporting the Inspector's role to get society to understand their responsibility to each other.

Her emotional development into adulthood is evident further when her mother accuses her of being "childish" when Sheila states that it should not matter whether the police inspector was real or not. Here Priestley uses the simple stages direction "(flaring up)" to convey Sheila's growing voice and sense of purpose: "It's you two who are being childish" – this role reversal from child to teacher, reflects the true transition of Sheila. This change is cemented further when Sheila echoes the Inspector's didactic speech when addressing her family, "Fire and blood and anguish" when they choose to pretend that the reality of there being no real Inspector and no real suicide appeases their crimes – the very use the syndetic list heightens the Inspector's message again to both her family and the audience. The message acts as a threat through Priestley's use of dramatic irony. The noun "fire" acts symbolically on many levels: biblically related to hell, but more significantly to the Cherubim's flaming sword that guards the entrance to the Garden of Eden – a reminder that man's sin has cast us from paradise: metaphorically it references also the tragic events of both World War One, and World War Two – notably, this includes the reference to the Blitz, which would have directly impacted the majority of the contemporary audience. The noun "blood" and "anguish" act to reflect the future deaths that will take place if society chooses not to accept that we must help each other. The very name "Eva" links to the biblical reference again to The Garden of Eden (Eve) and thus reflects how Eva could be any woman of the lower class – hinted at further by Edna's own disappearance at the end of the play. The openness of the ending of the play, means that anyone, including Edna herself, might be Eva – thus any person in a working-class situation, who is dependent on a capitalist system of labour to survive, could potentially lose everything and be forced to the brink of death. It is Sheila that understands the significance of the Inspector's message, even the stage direction "flaring" has connotations of fire – a representation that if the older generation do not learn from their mistakes of the past, the younger generation will be taught in "fire" and they were. Priestley therefore uses Sheila, and the Inspector, as a voice piece to the 1942 audience, that can learn from the mistakes of those before them.

Sheila's change from child to teacher is clear through her frustrated dialogue, "you don't seem to have learnt anything" – and the audience therefore see the child who sought approval from her own parents now chastise and try to teach her own family. One can therefore argue, that as the lesson was failed to be "learnt" that "fire and blood and anguish" was forced to occur at the end of the play - a final direct message to all that society must change. Although Priestley was not a Marxist,

prior to the creation of *An Inspector Calls,* Priestley broadcast a series of 'Postscripts' on BBC radio to war-torn Britain; his most outspoken Postscript came in October 1940 and focused on the 'idle-rich'. Priestley himself described this broadcast as 'the stuff of Christian sermons' and yet the content and working is almost exactly the same as Karl Marx's famous, 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs' (to the extent that Priestley was removed from the air) – and this sense of social revolution is spoken by the Inspector (and Sheila) "fire and blood and anguish" where the Inspector hints that if the bourgeoisie do not change, than the consequences on the middle class will be dire. Therefore, Marxist theory suggests that the Inspector's role, and Sheila's, is to attack the middle-class and their actions. Sheila is not just teaching her family, but the middle-class contemporary audience, who would be the only ones who could afford theatre tickets.

How does Sheila's character develop during the course of the play?

Sheila's character develops a great deal during the course of the play, as she grows from a naïve and child-like figure into a confident young woman.

At the start of the play, the audience see that Sheila is a dutiful daughter and that she acts in a way that is respectful and good natured towards both her parents. When Mrs Birling rather needlessly says to Sheila that she must 'be careful' with her new engagement ring, Sheila responds to this overbearing remark with innocent passion, saying she'll 'never let it go'. Then when Mr Birling is giving one of his speeches he pauses, saying 'Are you listening, Sheila?' and she sweetly replies 'I was'. What these exchanges show is that even though Sheila is in her early twenties, and soon to be a married woman, she is still very much a child in the eyes of her parents and what is more, she is comfortable being perceived this way.

This parent/child dynamic starts to change very rapidly after the Inspector's arrival and Sheila's natural curiosity seems to help facilitate the transformation. Upon entering the drawing room and catching the tail end of one of the Inspector's comments, Sheila asks six questions during her next five lines. Her natural reaction to the news is to become 'rather distressed' but she also continues to ask the Inspector very pertinent questions such as, was the girl 'Quite young?' and 'pretty?'. By asking all these questions, Sheila is active in developing her own character, she doesn't wait to be told all the news or dragged into the situation, she takes the initiative and involves herself. The fact that she addresses the questions to the Inspector shows that she wants to hear the truth directly from the main source, rather than through the filtered language that her parents might use.

When the Inspector turns his investigation directly towards Sheila, she shows a very mature attitude, in that she tells her story frankly, and is ready to accept her blame. Sheila admits that she'd already had misgivings about what she'd done and tried to discuss them with her father, but that he 'didn't seem to think it amounted to much'. Afterwards she felt 'rotten' about her behaviour, so it is unsurprising that she is so ready to reveal everything to the Inspector. Mr Birling brushed Sheila's concerns aside and made them seem trivial and childish, whereas Goole takes her confession seriously.

Up until Goole's visit, Sheila has been meek and happy to accept her role as child, but when the Inspector starts to question Mrs Birling, Sheila has to change the dynamics of her relationship with her mother. She takes on the role of the parent as she perceives the danger of the situation long before Mrs Birling does. Sheila can see that Goole is leading Mrs Birling into blaming Eric and like any responsible adult, Sheila tries to warn against the danger, saying things like 'Mother – stop' and 'don't you see?'. Mrs Birling is too hard-headed to take advice, especially from her daughter, whom she still thinks of as a child and does indeed fall into the trap of blaming Eric.

By the end of the play both Sheila and Eric have grown up a great deal. Unlike the others, who cling to the hope of it having been a hoax, both siblings retain their sense of shame at the events and this is what fuels them to want to become better people. Sheila despairs at the attitude of her parents, saying 'you don't seem to have learnt anything.' As the parents try to salve their consciences with excuses, Sheila persists in trying to make them feel genuine remorse. Mrs Birling's response to this is to accuse Sheila of being 'childish'; here she is trying to use her language to regain the former status-

quo, reminding Sheila of her place in the family hierarchy. By now, Sheila has grown too much to back down. She turns the tables on her mother and says that in fact, Mrs Birling is the one who is 'being childish'.

Mr Birling then tries to send Sheila out, again very much like a parent would with a naughty toddler, and again, Sheila takes the initiative, saying she'll be 'going anyhow in a minute or two', showing that she now feels empowered to make her own decisions.

If the audience is struck with how Sheila grows in relation to her parents then they can't help but be impressed by how she deals with Gerald.

At the start of the play, Sheila seems set to become Gerald's obedient wife and gladly accepts his proposal despite her misgivings about the time he 'never came near me'.

When Goole turns his attentions to Gerald, Sheila realises that she is about to hear her suspicions confirmed. A lesser character might react with rage or sorrow in this situation, but Sheila is extremely mature. She urges Gerald to tell the truth because Goole already 'knows'. After Gerald has revealed his story, Sheila hands him the engagement ring, saying that they will 'have to start all over again'. Her response is composed, she doesn't automatically want to break-up but she does acknowledge that they need to reflect on what's happened before they can consider any kind of life together.

At the end of the play, Gerald shows that he hasn't really listened to what Sheila said. Feeling smug that the whole thing's been a hoax, he offers Sheila the ring again. Sheila is strong enough now to refuse the offer and says 'It's too soon'. Sheila is so poised in the face of Gerald's unbearably boorish behaviour and it is clear that she has grown beyond her former fiancée. Sheila grows from a timid girl into an assertive adult, someone who is ready to admit to past mistakes, make amends and strive for a better world. She is the role model for behaviour and an embodiment of Priestley's message.

How does Priestley use the character of Eva Smith/Daisy Renton to explore the theme of responsibility in the play?

Priestley crafted the character of Eva in order to obtain maximum impact from her character. Firstly it is important to note that Eva is never seen on stage, therefore the audience can't be entirely sure if she was the same person or several women. Not only does this device keep the audience intrigued on a superficial level, it also allows the character to ascend to a symbolic status. Eva becomes representative of all working-class people and this allows Priestley to teach the audience his message of social responsibility.

In a society that has deep capitalist roots, Priestley knew that he would have to work hard to change peoples' attitudes towards issues of exploitation and social equality. Priestley uses several methods to get the audience on his and Eva's side quickly and efficiently by accentuating Eva's youth, attractiveness and innocent nature.

Priestly ensures that the audience knows that Eva was young, making the Inspector refer to her as a 'young woman' several times. Gerald also reinforces the image of Eva's youth when he describes her as 'young'. This is effective because the emphasis about Eva's youth makes her seem very vulnerable and this encourages the audience to feel protective towards her.

Eva is described as being 'very pretty' by Sheila. The notion that Eva was good-looking romanticises her and attracts the audience to the character. Gerald reveals specific details about her beauty, saying she had 'soft brown hair' and 'big dark eyes', again, such features give her a vulnerable quality, which endears the character to the audience. Priestley manipulates the audience with Eva's youth and beauty, so that they feel an instant and strong attachment to her. He sets up the audience's feelings so that they side with Eva, feel sorry for her and are receptive to the underlying socialist message.

Not only does Priestley charm the audience with Eva's youth and attractive looks, he also makes the audience admire her for her principles. When Eric tries to support her financially, she begins to refuse his money after she realises that it was 'stolen'. Even though she was in a desperate situation, she maintains her morals and this is behaviour that the audience can't help but respect and admire.

Consider, how different the play would have been if Eva's character had been old, unattractive or unscrupulous. The social 'crimes' that the family commits against her would be no less reprehensible, and yet it would be so much harder for the audience to side with her and this would reduce the potency of the theme of responsibility. Priestley is very calculating in the way he created Eva Smith and in doing so, he has crafted an emotive, romantic, honourable character, who functions to draw in an audience whole-heartedly.

Priestly quickly establishes the audience's attachment to Eva and is then free to use her character to explore the theme of social responsibility. Every character has an impact upon Eva's life, and through such interaction, Priestley comments that society needs to change its attitudes.

Mr Birling complacently feels that he has met his social responsibility by ensuring that his workers earn the 'usual rates'. When the strike happens, he is irritated by it, rather than recognising that his workers are desperate enough to put their jobs in jeopardy in order to try and earn a more

equal standard of living. Here, Priestley is teaching the audience that it is not good enough to match what others are doing or paying, you need to look around you, at society in its wider context, in order to understand your true responsibilities.

Ignorance is not an excuse for ignoring our social responsibilities either. Sheila naively thinks that Eva will be able to 'take care of herself', and assumes she will find other employment. When Sheila learns the truth and the details of the bigger picture during the Inspector's visit, she is horrified at her part in the events. Priestley is pointing out that if Sheila had been more socially responsible, she would have known that petulant outburst at Milwards would have serious consequences.

Although Gerald financially supports Eva for a while, he only does so because it suits him to keep a mistress rather than because he wants to help those living in poverty. Priestly is teaching the audience that they should examine their motives in order to see if their behaviour truly is responsible or just a by-product of their own desires and aims.

This idea is developed through the character of Mrs Birling. On the surface, it appears that Mrs Birling does have a sense of social responsibility because she works for a charity. When, however, she refers to Eva as a 'girl of that sort' she betrays her true feelings, stereotyping all poor people with loose morals and showing she feels revulsion and disgust towards them. Because Mrs Birling feels prejudice against the working class and assumes that what they say is a 'pack of lies', it leads her to make a poor judgement in the Eva case. Priestley is showing that it is not good enough to go through the motions of helping and that unless you commit, body and soul, to a cause, people can end up doing more harm than good.

Eric is initially reckless in his behaviour towards Eva, but does show a growing sense of social responsibility even before the Inspector arrives. He tries to support Eva, albeit with stolen money and does offer to marry her, however, she rejects these gestures. This suggests that Priestley is commenting that sometimes our irresponsible behaviour can't be undone and therefore we should be more careful in the first place.

The lessons that Priestley conveys through the character of Eva are hard to accept and embrace; being socially aware and responsible is not an easy path, and yet, Priestley teaches us that it is better than living in a society of greed, ignorance and selfishness.

Explore how far Priestley presents Inspector Goole as a believable character:

Priestley ensures that the Inspector has a whole arsenal of qualities and strategies so that he can carry out his investigation in an effective manner.

One of his key qualities is that he is a rather uncanny character. The pun used to name him immediately sets up the idea that there is something preternatural about him. Not only does his uncanniness help him to unsettle the other characters, it also functions to keep the play alive in the minds of the audience. You could argue that the timing of his 'call' is too well placed to be just coincidence – he gives his 'sharp ring' at exactly the moment when Arthur Birling is waxing lyrical about how 'man has to mind his own business'. The stage directions then go on to say that Goole has a 'disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking'. In normal conversation silences are often thought to be uncomfortable, so when these pauses happen on stage they seem even more intense.

At the end of the play, when Birling reports that 'a police inspector is on his way' and it seems like all of the action is going to come full circle, this adds to Goole's uncanny effect. The audience never finds out if it is Goole who returns, but this structure has prompted people to theorise about the nature of the Inspector, suggesting that he could be a time-traveller, a clairvoyant or supernatural in some way. The audience never gets a straight explanation and but because they never stop wondering about him, this helps to keep the play and its message alive.

Goole's otherworldliness is augmented by the fact that he is clearly not interested in the trappings and treats of a typical middle-class life. Goole admits that 'I don't play golf', turns down a glass of expensive port and is not impressed by titles. When Birling informs Goole that he was 'Lord Mayor two years ago', Goole's stolid reply is, 'Quite so'. Priestley creates Goole so that he is resistant to all the weaknesses of mortal men. He takes no pleasure in sport or drink and cannot be impressed by social status; all Goole is interested in, is agitating the other characters in order to make the truth come out.

Goole is characterised by purposefulness and Priestley ensures that he never swerves from his investigations. The Inspector is impervious to all the emotions that he provokes during his investigations. Neither Shelia's tears, Mrs Birling's aggressiveness nor Eric's anguish stop Goole from following his lines of inquiry.

Priestley makes Goole question just one character at a time, this makes him effective because by isolating each character, Goole makes them more vulnerable. When characters try to make Goole deviate from his course they find him implacable. After the Inspector has shown Sheila the photograph, Gerald says 'I'd like to have a look at the photograph now', in order to try and take some control of the situation. Goole responds with 'All in good time' and despite the mild tone, it is clear that he means to stick to 'one line of inquiry at a time'. These upper class people are not used to being told what to do, so they find it very destabilising to be put in their place, making them even more vulnerable. From an audience's point of view the one line of inquiry keeps them in suspense much longer as the details only come out little by little.

The Inspector is extremely clever in the way that he uses 'evidence' to manipulate the others. By only allowing one person to see the photo at a time, the characters never have a chance to confirm whether the case really does pertain to the same girl or not. Goole quickly takes such a command of the situation that he doesn't even need to produce his other piece of 'evidence'. When Gerald questions the Inspector how he knows about Daisy's life, Goole comments that 'she kept a rough sort of diary', and it is surprising that Gerald accepts such an equivocation. The fact that Gerald meekly responds 'gravely´ with 'I see' is testament to the spell Goole has cast upon the situation. Goole mixes a heavy dose of emotion into the investigation and refers graphically to the painful death Eva suffered. Comments such as 'burnt her inside out' play upon the characters' emotions. When Eric hears what has happened, he is so shocked his words come out 'involuntarily' and Sheila is 'rather distressed'. As ever, through Goole, Priestley also manipulates the audience as well as the characters. By describing such a violent death, Priestley is tapping into man's grisly fascination with all things macabre. Priestley ensures that while the other characters become more and more emotional, Goole never loses his temper. At times he uses aggression by 'cutting in, sharply' to bring other characters back round to focus on the investigation, but it is clear that he is always in control. That is not to say that Goole is emotionless himself, throughout the investigation the audience gets the sense that he cares very deeply about the rights of the poor. His final speech is delivered with intense passion and as he talks about how people are 'members of one body', the tone becomes almost rapturous, rousing the audience to take up his cause. Priestley's masterstroke is to have Goole leave the family well before the end of the play, as this allows the family to show their true colours and proves that he has had a lasting impact on Sheila and Eric. The Inspector also has a lasting impression in the audience as they now view Mr and Mrs Birling's attitude as callous, heartless and even monstrous. Through a combination of personal qualities and investigatory strategies, the Inspector achieves his aim and delivery's Priestley's socialist message.

Explore how Priestley presents the different views of Mr Arthur Birling and Inspector Goole:

Priestley makes Mr Birling the complete opposite to the Inspector, as he uses the tension between these characters to expose the flaws that he perceives in society.

One of the biggest differences between the two characters is their attitude towards society. Mr Birling is conservative in his world view; he believes that everyone should 'look after himself' and if you can't swim, then you should be left to sink. The Inspector is a socialist and believes that everyone should work together because we are 'members of one body'.

When Mr Birling talks about his involvement with Eva Smith, he feels that he has nothing to hide because there's 'every excuse' for how he treated her. His actions are not monstrous, in fact, at first they seem quite plausible; he explains he was paying the 'usual rates', people are free to choose where they work and he only sacked the 'ring-leaders'. It seems natural that a businessman would protect his interests. As the head of a successful company, Mr Birling's attitudes about having a 'duty to keep labour cost down', will be familiar to members of the audience - both at the time of the first performance and even more so today. Our society remains dominated by capitalist values, where, even if we're not 'big business' people, we certainly indulge in purchasing extraordinarily cheap goods from famous high street shops: it stands to reason that somewhere along the line, someone like Mr Birling, has been doing his duty in keeping the 'cost down'.

Significantly, there's always a price to pay and if the businessman and the consumer aren't paying it, then someone else is. It takes a character like the Inspector to point out the real cost to Mr Birling, and by doing so, educates the audience. When the audience realises that they have so much in common with Birling's attitudes, it's shocking because nobody wants to be aligned with such a selfish, ignorant character. On the surface, Mr Birling seems like a normal, if a little pompous, kind of man; it's only when he's shown in opposition to the Inspector, that the audience can appreciate that he is, in actual fact, extremely flawed.

By opposing Mr Birling with the Inspector, Priestley shows the audience how unwholesome Birling's values are. This is done, not only by giving them opposing ideologies about society, but also through their language. It is natural that the Inspector will use accusatory language and in opposition to this, Birling's words are often on the defensive. Even before the Inspector arrives, Birling has to defend his family's status because Lord and Lady Croft have not deigned to join the engagement celebrations. Birling says the party 'couldn't be nicer' and that 'it can't be helped' in order to cover up the fact that they have been snubbed by the more well to do Crofts. Directly after dinner, Birling makes another speech where he explains his world view and in doing so, is implicitly defending his values. This could suggest that deep down, he knows there is something wrong with his lifestyle, which is why he constantly feels the need to give long speeches that justify his existence and behaviour. He waxes lyrical to Eric and Gerald, about how 'a man has to make his own way', he develops the idea that it is every man for himself and this speech leaves the audience in no doubt about the kind of man Birling is. Once the Inspector arrives, Birling's language becomes increasingly defensive. He quickly resorts to mentioning that Colonel Roberts, the chief constable, is 'an old friend', as a way to shield himself from the Inspector's questions. When the Inspector counters this tactic, Birling starts to talk

'rather angrily', as he in not used to anyone having more power than he does. After the Inspector has left, Birling shows that he is still feeling defensive, accusing his own family of making the situation worse by 'letting everything come out like that'. His defensive language also shows that he has learnt nothing, as he says his involvement in the case 'turned out unfortunately, that's all'. He is still not taking any responsibility and blames the intangible agency of bad luck and fortune for the events that occurred. Whereas the Inspector makes short, incisive comments in order to provoke confessions from the other characters, Birling makes long-winded speeches, this shows that the Inspector is interested in listening to others, while Birling craves people listening to him. Priestly gives the Inspector assertive, brisk language while making Mr Birling sound blustering, pompous and verbose. By giving these two characters very different language, Priestley makes it very easy for his audience to see which character has more worth and therefore, who they should aspire to be more like. It is a clever move to create such opposition between Birling and Goole. In many respects they have a lot in common, they are both white, British, middle-class men in their fifties and taken at face value, they should be evenly matched in terms of power. When it becomes evident, that despite all these similarities, Goole commands the situation at every step of the way, it makes Birling look even weaker. Technically, Birling should be able to stand toe to toe with Goole and then use his high ranking connections to gain the advantage, and yet he fails at every plot twist. Priestley has set up a fair fight, between two evenly matched opponents and when Goole and his socialist values triumph, Priestley's message holds up under scrutiny. It has been a valid test and the results are conclusive, to be compassionate like Goole is better than being authoritarian like Birling.

To what extent does Priestley present Gerald as an irresponsible character?

The very essence of Priestley's play is to highlight how many people act in ways that are irresponsible, with the intention of educating the audience on how to become more responsible. It is not reasonable to say that Gerald is the most irresponsible character in the play, but it is useful to explore how Priestly uses the character of Gerald to explore the theme of responsibility.

The audience soon discovers that Gerald has been irresponsible towards his new fiancée, Sheila, by visiting her so little 'last summer' that she 'wondered what had happened' to him. Sheila makes this comment 'half serious, half playful', showing that she suspects that something isn't quite right. Sheila's intuition proves correct and she, along with everyone else, discovers that Gerald had been having an affair. Gerald clearly didn't take his responsibilities towards Sheila very seriously. Instead of forging a strong relationship with his future wife, Gerald was behaving in a way that prepared the foundation for much unhappiness.

Gerald's character knows that he can act this way with impunity because Edwardian society was perfectly happy to accommodate pillars of the community having affairs and frequenting prostitutes. When Gerald reports that he'd seen 'Old Joe Meggarty' wedging Daisy into a corner, Mrs Birling is shocked and has to check to see that Gerald means 'Alderman' Meggarty. Gerald confirms this, and Mrs Birling is astounded that someone of such high social standing would act in such a way. The point is that Alderman Meggarty has been able to enjoy his affairs and lascivious behaviour as there is a culture of silence, protecting rich men so that they are free to act in any way they want. The same code of silence is applied to Gerald; he makes full use of the liberty this affords him, conducting his affair with Daisy Renton, whilst also courting Sheila Birling. His irresponsible behaviour is condoned by the most powerful members of society so there is no need for him to check his actions. Through Gerald's affair, Priestly is showing the audience that it is not just the individual who is being irresponsible, it is society as a whole.

As well as being irresponsible towards Sheila, Gerald treats Daisy in a manner that is most reckless. He sets her up in a fairy tale situation, by paying her an allowance and lets her live rent free. On the face of it, this seems to be an act of compassion, until the audience considers the details more closely. Gerald first meets Daisy in March, and within a few days has given her the keys to a flat owned by one of his friends. Gerald explains that his friend had gone away for 'six months'. Prompted by the Inspector, Gerald then admits that he breaks up with Daisy in September, six months later. While Gerald can accommodate Daisy for free, he enjoys seeing her, but once the six months is up, he shows that he feels no responsibility towards her at all and turns her out of her home and breaks off their affair.

Sheila challenges Gerald about his feelings for Daisy and he admits that what really kept him interested was the fact that he was Daisy's 'Fairy Prince'. He agrees that he 'adored' playing the saviour and revelled in being the 'most important person' to Daisy. However, without any true affection for Daisy, Gerald's interest wanes and by the time the six months is up, Gerald has tired of playing house.

If the audience was feeling generous towards Gerald, they could argue that even though he eventually ended the affair, at least he gave Daisy six months of comfort and a certain amount of

attention. In all likelihood, if Gerald hadn't supported Daisy during this time, she would have had to work as a prostitute, entertaining the likes of Alderman Meggarty and his 'fat carcass'. If audience members are feeling less charitable towards Gerald, they could argue that Daisy's happiness and comfort is merely a by-product of Gerald's desires. They might also argue that even though Gerald took care of Daisy's physical comforts, she was still in emotional distress. She knew that his feelings were not sincere or eternal and that even though she had a roof over her head, deep down, she was still unhappy. To combat the inevitable doom she 'saved a little money', proving she knew that at some point her 'Fairy Prince' would turn into a slimy toad and that she would again have to fend for herself. Gerald can't even begin to defend his actions as purely altruistic and here, Priestley is challenging the audience to check and see if their own so called good deeds are actually as shallow and self-serving as Gerald's.

Gerald's only saving grace, in a catalogue of irresponsible behaviour, is that he does seem genuinely 'upset' when he thinks of Daisy being dead. He asks to be alone for a while and the Inspector allows him to leave in order to collect his thoughts.

While gathering his thoughts, Gerald finds a local policeman and enquires about Goole's credentials. When Gerald returns to the house, he is excited as he imparts the news that the local bobby 'swore there wasn't any Inspector Goole'. He becomes positively gleeful, 'triumphant' even, as he starts to pick apart Goole's case and in doing so begins to excuse himself from wrongdoing. Gerald feels so confident towards the end, that he phones the infirmary to see if a girl really was taken there. After hearing the news that there hasn't been a 'suicide for months', Gerald smugly accepts the celebratory drink that is offered to him by Mr Birling. Gerald's last act in the play is to say to Sheila 'What about this ring?', showing he has learnt nothing and feels he can go on behaving as before. The audience can see that Gerald's hopes are laughable and ultimately, people do not want to identify with such a reckless, irresponsible buffoon.

How far does Priestley present Mrs Birling as a cruel character?

Priestley uses the character of Mrs Birling to show his audience that you don't have to be an arch villain to cause misery or pain, and that ordinary people are capable of inflicting suffering day in, day out. He shows that Sybil finds it easy to justify her actions, and like most people, she genuinely believes she is doing the right thing. She doesn't set out to cause harm and yet she does, because her world view has become clouded by her prejudices. She is snobbish, proud and cold.

Sybil is a member of the Brumley Women's Charity and this reflects the fact that many people from the upper classes took an interest in charity work during the Edwardian era. The fact that Sybil works for this charity makes her a slightly more sympathetic character. Even though the group choose not to help Daisy, it is in the business of giving help to some 'deserving cases' and it is undeniable that Mrs Birling would have spent time and money supporting the cause, for her to be recognised as a 'prominent' member. The fact that she is willing to put effort into charity work suggests that she is not 'evil', but neither does she go about this commitment in a saintly manner.

The problem is, Sybil undermines all her good work because her snobbish attitudes dominate her thinking. She admits to feeling 'prejudiced' against Daisy's case because Daisy had the 'impudence' to call herself 'Mrs Birling'. Sybil is disgusted at the idea there was any connection between this young, unmarried woman in her scandalous pregnant condition and her sacrosanct family name. Her snobbishness will not allow her to see past the fact that Daisy probably did just call herself 'Mrs Birling' because it was the 'first she thought of'. It is more accurate to say that Mrs Birling rejects Daisy's case, not because she is evil, but because she is a snob and prejudiced against people from the working classes.

By creating a character that is so easy to hate, Priestley is engaging his audience in order to keep their attention long enough to deliver his message. Priestly then goes a step further and makes Sybil not just a fascinating character in her own right but also symbolic of the upper class as a whole. This can be seen in the attitude Sybil has towards Daisy. Sybil is proud of the fact that she interrogates Daisy and discovers that the 'story she told at first' wasn't true. Sybil judges Daisy to be an out-and-out liar, rather than someone acting rashly because they are in a desperately difficult situation. Sybil assumes this because she believes that all working-class people are lesser than people like her, and that they are prone to lying. This would have been a commonly held view, and not an attitude restricted to just Mrs Birling, making her representative of the upper classes.

As Sybil's involvement with Daisy unfolds, she explains that Daisy had come to the charity because she didn't want to accept stolen money in order to support herself. Regarding this, Sybil comments that Daisy's objections to taking stolen money were 'simply absurd'. It is almost as if Sybil is suggesting that working class people can't afford to have principles or 'scruples' and that Daisy should have taken the stolen money and left her charity unburdened. The idea that working class people shouldn't have the same rights as everyone else and that they can't afford to act in a dignified and moral way is a dark suggestion indeed. Mrs Birling justifies her decision because her charity has 'a great deal' of 'cases' and that with only a finite amount of time and money, they have to draw the line somewhere. Mrs Birling judges and rejects Daisy not because she is evil but because society has allowed her to be this way. As a private individual, Sybil isn't evil but Priestly suggests that the society in which she operates is.

What makes Mrs Birling seem more of a monster is not how she treats Daisy at the time but how she reacts when Gerald returns to the house and reveals that the Inspector's visit seems to have been a hoax. When Gerald absolves the family from any wrongdoing, Sybil says to him that he's 'argued' against the Inspector's case 'cleverly'. She speaks like a guilty client congratulating their barrister after winning a court case… a case that's been won through cleverness rather than because justice has prevailed.

When Sheila tries to persuade her mother that, hoax or not, they should all examine their behaviour, Mrs Birling glibly brushes Sheila's warnings aside. She pronounces that Sheila and Eric are 'overtired' as if they were still children, with the implication that their newly awakened social consciences are infantile.

Here it is useful to make a comparison between Mrs Birling and that truly evil literary person, Iago. Iago, from Shakespeare's 'Othello', is unquestionably evil. He is the architect of misery and death, carrying out his deeds without any remorse. There are many motives (jealousy or racism for example) that could underpin Iago's behaviour, but these are never clarified in the play and it is more likely that he enjoys the process of causing harm for its own sake.

Mrs Birling also causes misery and contributes to death and like Iago, she doesn't feel any remorse for the part she's played, the only difference is that she doesn't actively seek to cause harm or conduct evil practices in the name of entertainment.

It is perhaps too simplistic to say that Mrs Birling is evil but Priestley shows us that her proud and snobbish attitudes are unwholesome in the extreme and that regardless of our upbringing, it is imperative that we check our moral compass from time to time to ensure that evil is kept at bay.

To what extent does Priestley present Eric as a character that embodies the spirit of reform and progress in the play?

It is both dramatically thrilling and also vital to the message of the play that the audience sees Eric's journey from reprobate to reformed individual.

Eric seems the most unlikely character to make any progress when we first encounter him. Even though everyone has been drinking in order to celebrate Sheila and Gerald's engagement, Eric has taken it too far and has drunk to the point where he is making silly and indiscreet comments.

When Gerald gives Sheila the engagement ring and they share a kiss, Eric quips 'Steady the Buffs!' rather than congratulating the couple. This could suggest that he is emotionally immature, and with his silly comment he tries to cover up the fact that he finds it difficult to see his sister entering into the adult world.

Eric's other comment at this point is more telling. He says to Gerald that Sheila's 'got a nasty temper' and the audience soon discovers that this is indeed true as Shelia's treatment of the shop-girl unfolds. No matter how true it is, it is indiscreet to blurt something like this out just as the happy couple are getting engaged. With comments such as these, Priestley is shaping the audience's opinion of Eric, encouraging them to think that although he doesn't seem nasty, he is weak and immature.

By the end of the play, we see that Eric has made a vast amount of progress in terms of his relationship with his sister. Instead of making immature comments and sniping at her, he is now in total agreement with her. When Sheila tries to persuade her parents that, hoax or not, the Inspector's message was important, Eric supports her, saying, 'I agree with Sheila'. Eric has become a better brother and a better person.

It is satisfying to see Eric grow into a better brother but for the audience, it is even more interesting to watch how he reflects on his poor treatment of Daisy and how he reforms his character as a result.

Eric's initial treatment of Daisy is disgusting. The first time he meets her at the Palace Dance Bar he admits that he 'insisted' that they went back to her lodgings but when Daisy said she didn't want that, Eric 'threatened to make a row'. Eric also confesses that he was in a mood where he could 'turn nasty' and through this rather understated language the audience can see that Eric had been aggressive towards Daisy, forcing her into things she didn't want to do. By this point, the audience realises that Eric is not just an annoying yet harmless brother, he's also capable of being an abusive drunk.

To appreciate just how terrible Eric is at his lowest point, it is worth comparing him to Gerald in terms of how they treat Daisy when they first meet her. Gerald is by no means a saint but when he first encounters Daisy, he saves her from Alderman Meggarty, buys her dinner, talks to her about her life and learns that she is hungry and 'desperately hard up'. Eric gets her almost as drunk as he is then aggressively forces his way into her home.

After his first drunken encounter with Daisy, Eric can't 'even remember' her or the evening, but runs into her two weeks later at which point they begin to see each other on a regular basis. Eric

concedes that he ‘wasn’t in love with her’, but that she was a ‘good sport’, meaning she was willing to have a sexual relationship with him.

Having shown the audience all of Eric’s character flaws, Priestley is then able to start building him up in order to show how he reforms himself. Despite his initial bad behaviour towards Daisy, when Eric finds out she is pregnant, his natural reaction is to propose to her to save her from being an unmarried mother, something that would have been greatly frowned upon at the time. This tells the audience that Eric does have the ability to think responsibly.

Daisy refuses the proposal but Eric insists on ‘giving her enough money to keep her going’. Admittedly, Eric has to obtain this money in an underhand way by calling in some of the ‘small accounts’ from his father’s business, but he says that he did intend to ‘pay it back’. When Daisy discovers that Eric’s money is stolen, she refuses to take any more and their relationship comes to an end. Eric has no other way to make amends for the trouble he’s caused. It is likely that Eric continues to reflect on what happened and regrets his actions, which is why he is so ready to accept blame and heed the Inspector during the investigation.

In the wake of the Inspector’s exit, Mr Birling’s reaction is to start berating Eric, fearful that he will lose his chance of a knighthood. To this, Eric stands up to his father and questions ‘what does it matter’ regarding the knighthood. This shows the audience that he has learnt that such titles are nothing in comparison to living a socially responsible life.

Mrs Birling then joins in the attack and says she’s ‘absolutely ashamed’ of Eric. Eric accepts this judgement and doesn’t make any excuses for himself, showing he’s grown into a better person, ready to accept the consequences. Eric then adds that ‘I’m ashamed of you as well’ and here, he demonstrates strength of character by standing up to his parents as he expresses his feelings in a straightforward way.

Eric’s last line in the play is when he agrees with Sheila that their parents’ attitude towards the whole affair ‘frightens’ him. Try as they might, the siblings can’t make their parents see the error of their ways.

Eric’s journey is from immature, misogynist drunk to someone ready to accept blame and make amends. Priestley is showing the audience that it is never too late to change for the better, no matter how bad you have been. If Eric can become a better person, then so can everyone else.

How does Priestley use structure to ensure that high levels of tension are maintained throughout the play?

Priestley harnesses the structure of the play in order to ensure that levels of tension are kept high and keep the audience focused on his message.

Priestley starts the play with all the family enjoying the engagement party but immediately, he begins to hint that all is not well. Mrs Birling 'reproachfully' tells her husband off when he compliments the cook; she is wincing at his provincial manners and this shows that deep down, she feels superior to him. Sheila then 'half serious, half playful' makes a comment about Gerald not spending any time with her 'last summer', with the implication being that she suspects he was with another woman.

Lord and Lady Croft don't deign to join the celebrations, suggesting that they really do think Gerald 'might have done better'. Eric, meanwhile, 'suddenly guffaws' apparently at nothing, making it apparent that he is drunk. Not long after, Eric reveals that Sheila has got a 'nasty temper sometimes', indicating that she is not as sweet and fresh as she might at first appeared.

Throughout all these tantalizing clues to the underlying dysfunctional nature of the family, Mr Birling makes it clear that he is a fool, with comments such as 'there isn't a chance of war'. By giving the audience all these hints right at the start of the play, Priestley is immediately raising the tension, leaving the audience keen to know more.

Once Priestley has allowed the characters to introduce themselves, the time is ripe for Goole to enter. Just as Mr Birling is waxing lyrical about how he thinks it's ridiculous that 'everybody has to look after everybody else', Goole rings the door-bell. Without Goole's investigations the family's secrets would remain hidden, so it is essential Priestley structures the play in order for the Inspector to begin his work.

Goole's preferred method is to follow 'one line of inquiry at a time', by doing so, he functions to keep the tension high, as the details only come out little by little, consequently leaving the audience always eager to hear the next snippet of information.

Mr Birling and Shelia give their confessions, satisfying the audience's need for information but the play would become too mechanical if the rest of the characters gave their accounts in the same way, therefore, Priestly now uses the structure to make the play even more tense.

Goole coolly mentions that Eva 'changed her name to Daisy Renton'. Gerald confirms Sheila's suspicions but tries to evade giving details. Goole then re-enters and his final word of Act One is 'Well?' The audience are left in no doubt that Goole will get the truth from Gerald, but they will have to wait for the interval to elapse before they get the full facts, thus increasing tension levels.

As Act Two progresses, details of Gerald's affair are revealed and then it comes to Mrs Birling's turn. Here, Goole questions her to the point where she states that the father of Daisy's unborn child is mainly responsible and that he 'ought to be dealt with very severely'. At this point, Priestly structures the play so that Shelia, 'with sudden alarm' realises the truth. Sheila tries to stop her mother from further condemning Eric, but Mrs Birling ploughs on, oblivious to the implications of what she is

saying. The dramatic irony is palpable as she calls for the man in question to be 'compelled to confess in public'. By the time that Mr and Mrs Birling realise that the man in question is Eric, the damage has been done. Priestley directs that at the end of this act, the 'Curtain falls quickly' and the audience is left desperate to know what will become of Eric.

At the end of Act One, the tension was high enough but by the end of Act Two it is even higher because it has become a matter of life and death in a much more direct way for the Birlings. As the situation stands, they have potentially lost a grandchild because of their selfish and arrogant behaviour.

Act Three begins with Eric's sorry confession, and once the details are out, Goole gives his final, speech before bidding the family a good night and leaving. It is essential that the play is structured so that the family has time in private and without Goole so that they can explore the new family dynamics.

Up until now, the audience have been kept on high alert, as every sordid detail of the case has been exposed, but it is arguably even more interesting to see how they behave afterwards. The attitude of Mr and Mrs Birling, plus Gerald is astonishing, and now the audience hopes that Sheila and Eric will be able to persuade them to their way of thinking. By showing the soul searching and recriminations tear the family apart, Priestley ensures that the tension levels continue to rise.

Just when it seems that Gerald's own little investigation into Goole's background will undo a lot of the Inspector's hard work, 'The telephone rings sharply', reminiscent of the 'sharp ring' Goole gives before he enters. It is clear that Priestley has formed a cyclical structure and all of a sudden the characters find themselves back in trouble. Birling answers the phone then reports back to the family that 'a police inspector is on his way'. By having the climax of the drama end literally seconds before the final curtain, Priestley ensures that the tension lasts beyond the end of the play. Without another scene, the audience have to now decide for themselves what will happen. By structuring the play in such a tense way and leaving the ending open, Priestley ensures that his audience is captivated at all times, but more importantly, that they leave the theatre, having to solve the ending for themselves. This means that the play stays with the audience and they take its message with them, out of the theatre and back into the real world.

How does Priestley use language to create tension in the play An Inspector Calls?

Priestley weaves jokes, self-betrayals, warnings and threats into the language of the play in order to create tension and drama.

Priestley builds tension carefully throughout the play so that it continuously rises; therefore, it begins in quite a subtle way in order to provide a baseline. As Regan says in King Lear 'Jesters do oft prove prophets', and in the initial party scene, Priestley employs 'jokes' to hint at the trouble to come, thus starting to create tension. When Sheila 'jokes' about how Gerald 'never came near' her the previous summer, he brushes it aside saying he was busy at work, but Sheila's jibe piques the interest of the audience. Immediately, they begin to suspect that there may be another explanation regarding his absence, and all is revealed when Gerald later confesses that he did indeed spent the time with his mistress, Daisy Renton.

During the party scene, Eric also jokes that Sheila has got a 'nasty temper' and this might at first appear to be just the words of a drunk, slightly annoying brother, but the audience can't help wondering at his words. Later, the audience comes to understand the prophetic nature of Eric's line when they discover that Sheila's temper was the reason Eva got sacked from Milwards.

It is interesting to note that sometimes, Priestley makes the characters betray themselves with lines of speech that seem to come out involuntarily. When the male characters are left to their cigars and port, they start discussing how women use clothes as a sign of 'self-respect' and suddenly Eric says 'Yes, I remember – (but he checks himself)'. Gerald voices the audience's feelings at this point, saying that Eric's comment 'sounds a bit fishy'. Eric's unthinking comment hints that he's been involved with a woman but that he can't talk about her, and this increases tension as the audience now want to know who the woman is and why she's a secret.

Towards the end of Act One, Gerald also betrays himself when he can't help but react to the mention of the name Daisy Renton with a '(startled) What?'. In that one word, Gerald admits that he is involved in the case. This admission builds on Sheila's earlier suspicions and signals to the audience that Gerald will now have to reveal all the juicy, scandalous details about what he really was doing last summer, thus increasing the excitement and tension.

One of the most tense conversations in the play is when Goole turns his attention towards Mrs Birling. Sybil feels so secure in her social position that she freely admits, in front of everyone, that she was 'prejudiced' against Eva. It's shocking for the audience to see a character talking in such an imperious and careless way and the tension levels rise as they can't wait to see Goole put Sybil in her place. Priestley ensures that Mrs Birling digs her grave nice and deep with comments about Daisy being a liar, without morals and deserving of her fate. Sybil acts as if she is impervious to the law and haughtily states to Goole that if he thinks he can implicate her, 'you're quite mistaken'. Even Mr Birling is a little shocked at his wife's statements and says 'dubiously' that her part in the affair is going to be hard to explain in court. Sybil, however, will not be counselled by anyone, and her arrogance blinds her to the fact that Goole leads her step by step towards the condemnation of her own son. Mrs Birling is categoric in her statements that the father of Daisy's unborn child should 'be dealt with very severely'.

It is Sheila who, 'with sudden alarm' realises that the father of the child is in fact Eric. She tries to warn her mother to 'stop' pronouncing her judgements upon the guilty man, but her words fall on deaf ears. Here Priestley creates a few lines of short exchanges between Mrs Birling and Sheila where Sheila tries to warn Sybil, but her mother just tells her to be quiet. Mrs Birling then resumes her sentencing of the young man, going into detail about how Goole should do his 'duty' and punish the father. By now the audience, along with Sheila, will be fully aware that Sybil is talking about her own son and the tension is caused because it is fascinating to see just how long it will take Sybil to realise that she has been hoisted by her own petard. When Sybil does finally grasp what she's done, her language breaks down and is full of half-finished lines, as she struggles to comprehend the damage of her words. The tension has risen to a crescendo here and the curtain falls on the 'agitated' Mrs Birling, who is now lost for words.

The action peaks again in Act Three when the Inspector gives his final speech. Priestley ensures that Goole's words are filled with passion and feeling in order to promote his socialist message. The Inspector's words are emotive and he talks of how all the John and Eva Smiths feel 'hopes', 'fears', 'suffering' and 'happiness' in order to emphasize their humanity and raise them above the level of faceless, working class stereotypes. He then cautions the family that they are 'all intertwined' and here it is arguable that the audience knows that even though Goole is on stage with the Birlings, he's really talking to the people sitting in the theatre now. Suddenly, the tension is not so pleasant, as it's not being caused by wondering what the Birlings will do next; suddenly, the audience realise that there is real tension within themselves, as they start to question whether they act in a way that is socially responsible.

When Goole ends with his threat of learning lessons through 'fire and blood and anguish' the audience can see he's very far from joking, but possibly no less prophetic than the comments made in jest at the start of the play. Now the tension is truly uncomfortable for the audience as they consider Goole's final words in the context of their own lives and the real world.

Was Priestley right to set his play in 1912?

By setting the play in 1912, Priestley may have run the risk of creating a quaint period drama, however, this is not the case and Priestley uses the historical context to great advantage.

One of the most powerful effects of Priestley setting the play in 1912 was that the audiences in the 1940s (and ever since) can apply the power of hindsight to the action. Merely minutes into the play, Mr Birling proclaims that 'The Germans don't want war'. To an audience still suffering from the devastation of not just one, but two wars with Germany, such a statement is both laughable and terrifying. The effect is that Mr Birling is set up to look like a fool, forcing the audience to feel distain for him and consequently reject all that he says and stands for, including his Capitalist values. The audience can laugh at Mr Birling for believing such ideas but it is also terrifying because the result of brushing threats aside, mean that they don't get dealt with and the results really can be 'fire and blood and anguish', just as the Inspector warns before he exits the stage for the final time. The first audiences to see the play in the late 1940s would have been harbouring a lot of anger and resentment from their experiences before and during the wars, and Priestley tapped into that in order to stir peoples' emotions and get them involved in the message of the play. Before the Great War, Britain had seen a rise in strikes and social unrest. Groups such as miners and dock workers were campaigning for better pay and conditions. Mr Birling refers to such trouble as 'wild talk', when in fact it was a very serious matter. The police force was stretched thin, with officers being used to put down strikes in mining centres such as Tonypandy in South Wales. Elsewhere in the country, transport strikes meant that food supplies were drying up, especially in the big cities, and police found themselves having to guard and escort food deliveries against an increasingly hungry population. For a worker to hear their desperate calls for better pay and conditions dismissed as 'wild talk' would be infuriating as it undermines the real struggles they faced. By getting the audience to cast their minds back to a time of desperate poverty, it rouses them and spurs them into evaluating whether they have achieved their aims. Priestley's point is that although some progress had been made, socialist ideals still needed to be worked upon. When war broke out in 1914, it suddenly seemed unpatriotic to strike and for a while the war effort was more important. Many employers took advantage of this, pushing their workers to the limit in terms of pay and conditions. It appeared that the rich were making a profit, while the poor continued to see a decline in their living standards. Many workers accepted such harsh treatment, as the alternative was to join the army and men were terrified of being sent to the Western Front. Once conscription was introduced in 1916, men were forced to leave their jobs, terrible or otherwise, and fight instead. Once at the Front, conditions did not get better for the working class man. Trench warfare subjected men to living in appalling conditions and while there was a certain degree of cross-class camaraderie, the British army came to be described as "lions led by donkeys". In other words, the brave working class men (lions) had to submit to the often out-dated and ill-judged orders of the upper class officers (donkeys). The head of the British army, Field Marshal Haig, earned the nickname "The Butcher of the Somme" because of the death toll caused by his strategies and Punch magazine would publish cartoons ridiculing his military decisions. Referring back to the war, would have provoked an intense emotional reaction in audience members who had survived, or had known people who died. To see a buffoon like Mr Birling saying 'fiddlesticks' to war would be deeply offensive and upsetting and it is likely that Priestley was banking on high emotions to make his play memorable and therefore effective. Priestley's socialist message promotes the idea of equality for all but it is

interesting to note that he made his ghostly catalyst female. The figure of Eva is particularly vulnerable, as not only is the character working class, she would have been, as a female, without a vote or voice. In 1912, the women's suffrage movement was in full swing, with various factions using a range of strategies -some peaceful and some more aggressive. One of the famous Suffragette posters shows that a woman may be a 'mayor', 'nurse', 'mother', doctor or teacher' or 'factory hand' and 'yet not have the vote, while a man may be a 'convict', 'lunatic', proprietor of white slaves', 'unfit for service', or a 'drunkard' and 'yet not lose the vote. It is arguable that by setting the play in an era when women were still without the vote would show the audience just what can be achieved. Clearly, true equality between the sexes had not been reached by the 1940s; indeed, it still hasn't in the 21st century, and yet great progress had been made and if women could push for greater equality, so could the working classes.

The play's view of humanity is at times very dark, however, the setting helps to counter this. When audience members could fall into despondency at the neglect man suffers at the hands of his fellows, the setting shows how much progress has been made. In 1912, the Labour party was in its infancy and yet by the 1940s it had overtaken the Liberals to become the main opposition to the Conservatives. Priestley was showing his audience that change can and does happen if people actively pursue their ideals.

The historical context adds emotional depth, supports Priestley's message and is anything but a cosy costume drama.