

An Inspector Calls

Why?

This module assesses your ability to read, understand and respond to texts through the study of the classic J.B. Priestley play, *An Inspector Calls*. Through our study of the play, you will be expected maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response, using textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations. As we stop to closely analyse each character, you will develop confidence in analysing the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

Characters

Inspector Goole	Priestley's mouthpiece; advocates social justice; serves as the Birlings' conscience
Mr. Arthur Birling	Businessman; capitalist; against social equality; a self-made man (new-money)
Mrs. Sybil Birling	Husband's social superior; believes in personal responsibility
Sheila Birling	Young girl; comes to change views and pities Eva; feels regret
Eric Birling	Young man, drinks too much; forces himself on Eva Smith; regrets actions
Gerald Croft	Businessman; engaged to Sheila; politically closest to Birling
Eva Smith	Unseen in play; comes to stand for victims of social injustice (changes her name to Daisy Renton)

Key Concepts:

Characterisation – through the characterisation of the Birling family and the Inspector, Priestley seeks to illuminate and criticise elements of life during the period.

Setting – as *An Inspector Calls* is a play, we must ensure we focus on any stage directions regarding the Birling household that can offer an insight into their lives.

Context – Priestley's play acts as a political diatribe; it aims to criticise the avaricious Capitalist mindset of the Birling family.

Family – throughout the play the dynamics of the Birling family are examined.

Social Justice – the play aims to illuminate the disparity between the lives of the bourgeoisie (the Birling family) and the downtrodden proletariat (Eva Smith).

Social Reform – Priestley uses his play as a vehicle to advocate for his socialist views.

Gender – throughout the play we are faced with the exploitation of a female protagonist by the male members of the Birling family.

Key Vocabulary:

Hypocritical	behaving in a way that suggests one has higher standards or more noble beliefs than is the case
Injustice	lack of fairness or justice.
Conscience	a person's moral sense of right and wrong, viewed as acting as a guide to one's behaviour.
Penitent	feeling or showing sorrow and regret for having done wrong; repentant.
Influential	having great influence on someone or something.
Domineering	asserting one's will over another in an arrogant way.
Morality	principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour.

ACT		Order of the Inspector's Questioning	Key Notes	Character Quotes	
Act 1		Sheila and Gerald's engagement is celebrated.	Priestley asks his audience to examine their individual and collective responsibility to society. He wants a welfare state .	Birling's Confidence	"We're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity"
Act 1		Birling says there will be no war; references Titanic	The hypocrisy of middle-class Edwardian society is uncovered: appearance & reputation matter more than reality & morality .	Birling on society	"The way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else"
Act 1		Inspector arrives; a young girl has committed suicide.		Sheila's recognition	"but these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people"
Act 1		Birling threw her out after strike; Sheila had her fired for laughing.	Priestley criticises the selfishness of capitalism and wants a fairer, socialist future after the horrors of two world wars..	Sheila's regret	"It's the only time I've ever done anything like that, and I'll never, never do it again to anybody"
Act 2		Gerald had an affair with Daisy Renton		Sheila on the inspector	"we all started like that – so confident, so pleased with ourselves until he began asking us questions"
Act 2		Mrs. Birling refused to give charity to Eva; blames father.	Priestley shows the older generation to be set in their ways, while the young are open to change .	Sheila on Eric	"he's been steadily drinking too much for the last two years"
Act 3		Eric's involvement revealed; possible rape hinted at.	Eva Smith is the embodiment of young, working-class women who were oppressed by the middle/upper classes .	Inspector on guilt	"I think you did something terribly wrong – and that you're going to spend the rest of your life regretting it"
Act 3		Inspector leaves. Gerald returns; met policeman, no Inspector G	The play demonstrates that when workers do not have full employment rights they cannot fight back	Mrs Birling defends herself	"she was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position"
Act 3		Telephone rings; an inspector is coming.		Eric explains	"I'm not very clear about it, but afterwards she told me she didn't want me to go in but that – well, I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty – and I threatened to make a row"
				The inspector says	"but each of you helped to kill her. Remember that"
				Inspector's message	"there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering, and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, with what we think and say and do. We don't live alone."
Thematic Quotes					
Social responsibility		"We are responsible for each other" Inspector "Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities" Inspector "It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that mattered." Eric			
Capitalism		"These silly capital vs labour agitations." Birling "A man has to make his own way" Birling			
Class		"A girl of that class" Mrs Birling "Well, we've several hundred young women there, y'know, and they keep changing." Birling			
Age		"the famous younger generation" Birling "What's the matter with that child?" Birling "Just keep quiet, Eric" Birling			
Gender & attitudes to women		"I hate those hard-eyed dough-faced women" - Gerald "And you think young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?" Inspector "She had far too much to say, far too much" Birling			
AN INSPECTOR CALLS Quotes - J.B. PRIESTLEY					