



An Inspector Calls

by J.B. Priestley

Revision

This Booklet Belongs to

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Key Quotes

Mr Birling

"The **Titanic... unsinkable...** absolutely unsinkable" Act 1

"There's **nothing** mysterious or **scandalous** about this business" Act 1

"*Heavy-looking, a rather **portentous** man*" Stage Directions Act 1

"Working together for **lower wages** and higher prices" Act 1

"I can't accept any **responsibility**" Act 1

Mrs Sybil Birling

"Simply because I've done **nothing wrong**" Act 2

"He certainly didn't make me confess" Act 3

"I didn't like her manner. She **impertinently** made use of our name" Act 2

"I've done **nothing wrong** – and you know it." Act 2

Eric Birling

"And I didn't even remember – that's the **hellish** thing" Act 3

"Then – **you killed her**. She came to you to protect me – and you turned her away – yes , and you killed her – and the child she'd have had too – my child – your own grandchild – you killed them both – damn you, damn you –" Act 3

Sheila Birling

"Oh, how **horrible!** Was it an accident?" Act 1

"No, not really it was **my own fault.**" Act 1

"And if I could **help her** now, I would" Act 1

"I know I'm to blame – and I'm **desperately sorry**" Act 2

Gerald Croft

"I'm so **sorry Sheila** it was all over and done with last summer, I have not set eyes on another girl in the last six months" Act 2

"**Everything's alright now**, Sheila. [*holds up the ring.*] What about this ring?" Act 3

"just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted." - Mr Birling about Gerald, Act 1

Eva Smith

“a good looking girl, country-bred” - Mr Birling, Act 1

“She was a very **pretty girl** too -with big dark eyes - and that didn’t make it any better” - Sheila, A2

“She was **very pretty** and looked as if she could take care of herself” - Sheila, Act 2

“She was **very pretty**, soft brown hair and big dark eyes” - Gerald, Act 2

The Inspector

“He behaved, in a very **peculiar** and suspicious manner” Mr Birling, Act 3

“**Coolly**, looking hard at him” SD Act 1 - when telling Gerald he can’t look at the photo

“an impression of massiveness, solidity and **purposefulness**” Act 1

“she died in **misery** and **agony**” Act 1

“Listen to me. I don’t need to know any more. Neither do you. This girl killed herself - and died a **horrible** death. But each of you helped kill her” Act 3

“**Remember** what you did” (repeated x2 - Act 3)

“We don’t live alone. We are members of **one body**. We are **responsible** for each other” - Act 3

Key Vocabulary

An Inspector Calls words - practise writing sentences about the play using these words.

1. Bourgeoisie
2. Capitalist
3. Conscience
4. Hierarchy
5. Individualist
6. Microcosm
7. Misogynistic
8. Omniscient
9. Proletariat
10. Patriarchy
11. Social class
12. Socialist
13. Welfare State

Themes

Make sure you have learnt quotes and contextual analysis for each of these themes. You might get a question on any of them.

- Social Responsibility
- Age
- Gender
- Class
- Poverty and Wealth
- Capitalism vs Socialism (the rights of workers)
- Power
- Guilt
- Suicide

Context

Priestley invites his post-war audience to examine their individual and collective responsibility to society. He advocates for the introduction of a welfare state.

The play can be seen as a microcosm for Edwardian Society.

Priestley explores the hypocrisy of middle-class Edwardian society; appearance and reputation matter more than reality and morality.

Eva Smith is the embodiment of young, working class women who were often oppressed by middle/upper classes.

Mr Birling is an archetypal profit-driven capitalist.

“The Inspector presents an idealistic vision of socialism“

Priestley criticises the selfishness of capitalism and wants a fairer, socialist future after the horrors of two world wars.

The play demonstrates that when workers do not have full employment rights they cannot fight back.

Capitalism: Business should make money no matter the human cost; we are responsible only for ourselves.

Age: Priestley shows the older generation (Mr and Mrs Birling) to be set in their ways, while the young (Sheila and Eric) are open to change.

Within the patriarchal system of the early 20th century, attitudes to women often led to chauvinism and misogyny.

Practice Questions

Use this list to practice writing your own answers. Remember to try to use the quotes, key vocabulary, contextual understanding and a clear structure.

1. What roles does Sheila play in 'An Inspector Calls'?
2. In what ways does Priestley present conflict between the generations in 'An Inspector Calls'?
3. In 'An Inspector Calls', what do you think Priestley intended to convey about family relationships and how does he do it?
4. The action of 'An Inspector Calls' takes place on just one evening, and in just one room of the Birling's house. What do you think the play gains or loses as a result?
5. In what ways does Priestley manage to make Mrs Birling such a dislikeable character, in 'An Inspector Calls'?
6. To what extent is it possible to feel sympathy for Eric, in 'An Inspector Calls'?
7. What is the importance of Gerald in 'An Inspector Calls'?
8. Looking at different parts and aspects of the play, what do you think Priestley wished to achieve through his character, Inspector Goole, in 'An Inspector Calls'?
9. What do you think Priestley wished to achieve in his play?
10. Eva Smith does not appear on stage. What are the dramatic benefits of this and how does it help Priestley Develop his themes, in 'An Inspector Calls' ?
11. How does Priestley show the differences between 'The Haves' and 'The Have-nots' in 'An Inspector Calls'? You should consider the dramatic techniques, the characters and the setting.
12. What evidence can you find for saying that Priestley constructed 'An Inspector Calls' primarily as a plea for change?
13. 'An Inspector Calls' is said to be a play of mystery and suspense. Explain how Priestley achieves this, referring to the structure of the play, characterisation and dramatic impact.
14. How does Priestley explore responsibility in An Inspector Calls?
15. How does Priestley use dramatic irony in 'An Inspector Calls' and consider the purpose of its use.
16. How are ideas about being moral portrayed in 'An Inspector Calls'?

Exemplar Student Answers

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

Exemplar Answer

Priestley explores ideas about responsibility through the way the Birlings behave towards Eva Smith. Arthur Birling explains the family's philosophy when he says 'a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own' which suggests that he feels that he only has responsibility for his own family and himself. This is reinforced by the way the Birlings treat Eva Smith. First of all Arthur fires her from his factory to make an example of her because she asks for higher wages and dares to take responsibility for others by speaking up on their behalf. Arthur's prime motive is to keep wages down so that he could make more profits. Priestley reinforces this through Arthur's constant repetition of 'hard headed man of business', to remind the audience that he is representative of capitalism and the damage it causes. Priestley is showing the audience that a blind belief that generating profits and prosperity for the good of everyone is fundamentally wrong as it causes innocent people to suffer tragic consequences.

Although all the Birlings are responsible for Eva's mistreatment and death in some way, they react differently when they find this out from the Inspector. Mr and Mrs Birling do not change and are only concerned about their reputation the possible 'scandal' or Arthur's 'knighthood'. However, Sheila and Eric do recognise that they have behaved badly by the end of the play and therefore Priestley is suggesting that it is the younger generation that have the responsibility for adopting more socialist principles. Through their attitudes Priestley suggests that socialism is the modern way and that it is young people who will change society for the better.

Question: How are ideas about being moral portrayed in *'An Inspector Calls'*?

Exemplar Answer

Priestley demonstrates his views on the lack of morality he saw in a society bound by rigid class divisions. This is demonstrated through the depiction of Arthur Birling at the beginning of the play when he lectures his family on man needing to "mind his own business". The noun "business" highlights Birling's preoccupation on material wealth. Furthermore, the pronoun "own" illustrates the selfishness and avarice that Priestley saw within society. Priestley uses Birling to demonstrate the immoral and unfair behaviour of many members of the wealthy during the Edwardian era to get across his simple message: "we are members of one body".

Furthermore, Priestley displays the lack of care and integrity that he viewed within society and warns the audience of the repercussions of this when Birling is interrupted mid-speech '*We hear the sharp ring of a front doorbell*'. It is very important to note the intentional timing of this interruption. Birling is forced to stop when he is talking about man needing to look after himself. The '*sharp ring*' is symbolic of the Inspector's first warning to the Birlings of their need to change. Priestley uses the Inspector as a literary construct to represent the need for change within humanity as a whole. He criticises many of the

wealthy for their lack of regard for 'community' and the immense lack of morality he viewed amongst them.

The concept of being moral is at the centre of the play. Each member of the Birling family has done something immoral and is now being made to face the consequences of their actions. This is particularly evident within the younger generation of the Birling family. Sheila's reaction to being confronted with her immoral actions is a demonstration of Priestley's encouragement to the audience that change is possible "I know I'm to blame". The noun "blame" highlights Sheila taking responsibility for her actions and facing up to what she has done. As a younger member of society she is more "impressionable" and embodies Priestley's beliefs in change being achieved through the younger generation.

In stark contrast to this is Priestley's view of the older generation who not only exhibit a lack of morality, but also fail to see the reality of the world around them. Mrs Birling, when confronted with the fact that Eric is the father of Eva's child says "I don't believe it. I *won't* believe it". The contraction "won't" demonstrates her lack of willingness to see the truth. Unlike Sheila and Eric, Mrs Birling refuses to acknowledge that Eric is the father just as she refuses to acknowledge his drinking and ultimately, she refuses to accept any responsibility for Eva Smith's death.

Priestley uses the Inspector as a mouthpiece to voice his concerns about the capitalistic hubris he saw amongst many of the upper echelons of society (as represented through the Birling family). He does this particularly towards the end of the play when he gives a speech, almost a sermon, preaching to the Birlings about humanity taking responsibility: "There are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths". The repetition of "millions" highlights how widespread the struggles of the working class were in Priestley's eyes. Furthermore, the common nouns "John Smiths and Eva Smiths" demonstrates how many ordinary, everyday people Priestley saw as being affected by the callous treatment of the upper classes. The nouns also strike a chord with the audience who undoubtedly know of people with such names thus making the Inspector's words more of a reality.

Overall, we can see that Priestley is conveying a message about the need for change within humanity to become more moral. He uses the Birlings as an example of the harshness of the wealthy who exploit the poor and sends out a strong warning as to the repercussions of choosing to behave immorally. Furthermore, Eva Smith is symbolic of the struggling working class. She embodies the difficulties faced day to day by those who are exploited and used.