

An Inspector Calls

<p>Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♣ A play in three acts set in Brumley, an English manufacturing town in the north of the Midlands, in 1912. ♣ Set in 1912, before the beginning of the First World War, but was written during the winter of 1944/45, first reaching the stage in 1945, the year in which the Second World War ended. ♣ It champions socialism – a political system that means the production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole. After WWII, the Labour Party (a socialist party at that time) won the general election in a landslide victory against Churchill. ♣ 1945 was probably the most crucial period in domestic British politics this century” - a time when people were asking, “Do we want to go back to the Edwardian period or to create something vital and new, a romantic vision of the future?” ♣ Priestley fought in WWI and saw the horrors. At the end of the WWII he saw the class, age and gender divides all broken down and campaigned for the country to keep it like that, rather than go back to Edwardian attitudes of 1912. 	<p>Key Characters</p> <p>Arthur Birling Represents the capitalist class that controls the wealth and means of production: more concerned with material gain and conventional attitudes. He is a wealthy factory owner in his mid-50s.</p> <p>Sybil Birling Arthur’s wife of a higher class. An unsympathetic woman who represents the bourgeois (female) upper class. More than any other character, she is adamant that she is blameless in Eva Smith's suicide.</p> <p>Eric Birling Same age and of the same mind as his sister. He is adolescent in his manner ('half shy, half assertive', according to Priestly) and drinks too much, perhaps because he has not yet found a meaningful role in life.</p> <p>Sheila Birling Early twenties, bright, lively and optimistic. Unlike her parents and fiancé, she expresses deep regret for her role in Eva Smith's suicide.</p> <p>Gerald Croft represents the aristocracy, the highest class of society, comprised of rich land owners and people who inherit their wealth from their parents. Engaged to Sheila</p> <p>Inspector Goole A mysterious figure. His name evokes the word 'ghoul', meaning evil spirit or phantom. He doesn't officially exist, and appears to have supernatural powers of perception and persuasion. Reflects socialist point of view.</p>
<p>Key Themes</p> <p>Responsibility INSPECTOR: “Each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it. (He looks from one to the other of them carefully.) But then I don't think you ever will” (Act 3)</p> <p>Age BIRLING: “Now you three young people, just listen to this... by the time you'll be living in a world that'll have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitators and these silly little war scares”</p> <p>Gender BIRLING: "...not only something to make 'em look prettier - but - well, a sort of sign or token of their self-respect.”</p> <p>Class BIRLING: “you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive.”</p>	<p>Act 1</p> <p>The family are celebrating the engagement of Sheila and Gerald. Inspector Goole arrives announcing the suicide of Eva Smith. Mr Birling threw her out after a strike; Sheila had her fired for laughing. Eva changed her name to Daisy Renton.</p> <p>Act 2</p> <p>Gerald admits to the affair with Daisy. We discover Mrs Birling refused to offer Eva charity. It is revealed that Eva was pregnant. Suspicion turns to Eric.</p> <p>Act 3</p> <p>Eric admits guilt and also having stolen money. The inspector leaves, lecturing the family on the need for social responsibility. Gerald discovers the inspector was a fake and there is no recorded death of Eva Smith. Then the phone rings...</p>
<p>Key concepts</p> <p>Priestley asks his audience to examine their individual and collective responsibility to society. He wants a welfare state.</p> <p>Class: Upper and lower social classes are segregated Eva Smith is the embodiment of young, working class women who were oppressed by middle/upper classes.</p> <p>The play demonstrates that when workers do not have full employment rights they cannot fight back.</p> <p>Capitalism: Business should make money no matter the human cost; we are all responsible only for ourselves. Priestley criticizes the selfishness of capitalism and wants a fairer, socialist future after the horrors of two world wars.</p> <p>The hypocrisy of middle-class Edwardian society is uncovered; appearance and reputation matter more than reality and morality.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Attitudes: to women are patriarchal, leading to misogyny.</p>	<p>Top quotes to learn.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Birling: the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense. (Act 1) 2. Birling: Still, I can't accept any responsibility. If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody we'd had anything to do with, it would be very awkward, wouldn't it? (Act 1) 3. Inspector: (massively) Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges. (Act 2) 4. Inspector: One Eva Smith has gone – but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us (Act 3) 5. Sheila: But these girls aren't cheap labour- they're people. (Act 1) 6. Mrs B: I'm sorry she should have come to such a horrible end. But I accept no blame for it at all. (Act 2) 7. Eric: (bursting out) ... You're beginning to pretend now that nothing's really happened at all. And I can't see it like that. This girl's still dead, isn't she? (Act 3)