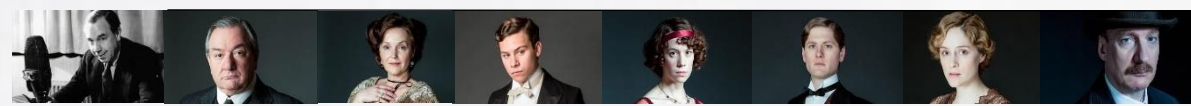


'An Inspector Calls' by J.B. Priestley – Knowledge

Organiser



a) Act One:

- The play begins with Sheila and Gerald's engagement party where the mood is optimistic.
- Sheila is presented as a frivolous, childish character who seeks her mother's approval. Eric is clearly uncomfortable and drunk (foreshadowing his later issues).
- Gerald and Birling discuss business more than love and Birling delivers lengthy monologues about the unsinkable Titanic and that there is no chance of war. Birling is talking about how a "man has to make his own way" when the Inspector arrives.
- The Inspector's arrival immediately causes tension: the lighting changes from "pink and intimate" to "brighter and harder" and he creates an impression of "massiveness, solidity and purposefulness".
- Birling is interrogated first and reveals he fired Eva Smith as she requested more money.
- Sheila is the next to be interrogated, she has an initially selfish response ("I wish you hadn't told me" and "runs out") but then has a moment of realisation (anagnorisis) and takes responsibility..
- The Inspector reveals Eva changed her name to Daisy Renton and Gerald appears to recognise the name - Sheila notices and encourages Gerald to tell the truth.



b) Act Two:

- Gerald tries to encourage Sheila to leave before he is questioned but she refuses. Gerald admits his relationship with Daisy Renton and then, apparently upset by the revelation, asks to leave.
- The Inspector then turns his attention to Mrs Birling who pretends to not recognise the girl. We learn that Mrs Birling is a "prominent member" of Brumley Women's Charity Organisation who refused Eva Smith help when she needed it the most as she called herself "Mrs Birling".
- Mrs Birling refuses to take responsibility for her actions and is quick to blame "firstly the girl herself" and then the father of the child. Tension builds as Mrs Birling labels the father a criminal and says he should be made an example of.
- The audience and Sheila work out that the father is Eric but Mrs Birling is oblivious – dramatic irony



c) Act Three:

- Eric enters. He reveals he met her at the Palace Bar and she was pregnant with his child. He admits to stealing from his father to help support Eva but she refused his help. Eric is angry at his mother for her role and blames her.
- Birling attempts to salvage his reputation offering "thousands" to try and fix it.
- The Inspector makes it clear that this is not his priority. He then delivers his final (very socialist) speech where he uses Eva as a symbol for the working classes and delivers his true message: that "we are responsible for each other". He uses metaphorical language to describe how if people will not learn their lesson, they will be taught in "fire and blood and anguish", arguably foreshadowing the impending world wars.
- The Inspector leaves and Birling worries about his knighthood.
- Sheila criticises her parents for not having learned anything from the Inspector and Mr and Mrs Birling question whether he was a real Inspector. Gerald returns and reveals that there is no Inspector Goole on the police force.
- The phone rings and it is revealed a young girl has committed suicide and there is an Inspector on his way to question the Birlings.

d) Context

- *An Inspector Calls* was written in 1944, first performed in Russia in 1945 but is set before the outbreak of WWI in 1912.
- In 1912, rigid hierarchical divisions were everywhere in society: you were either a member of the proletariat (lower/working class) or the bourgeoisie (upper class, the elite).
- Women were subservient to men and their life options were limited (whatever class you were in): if you were a wealthy woman you were to marry and raise a family, if you were poor you were a commodity and viewed as cheap labour.
- At this time there was no NHS system nor any form of benefits to support society's most vulnerable.
- Priestley was determined that something needed to change.
- In 1945 people had endured two horrific world wars and many people wanted change. This desire for change was reflected in the 1946 general election, Atlee's Labour party were victorious over Winston Churchill's Conservatives.
- In 1948, the National Assistance Act was passed which abolished the Poor Law system and established a social safety net for those who did not pay National Insurance contributions (e.g. the homeless, the handicapped, unmarried mothers).
- J.B. Priestley's socialist politics and beliefs strongly mirrored those he wrote for his character, Inspector Goole.

e) Key Vocabulary

1. **anagnorisis** - a moment in a plot or story, specifically a tragedy, where a character either recognizes or identifies his/her true nature or discovers the truth
2. **aristocracy** - the highest class in certain societies
3. **bourgeoisie** - the middle class, with stereotypical materialistic value/selfishness
4. **catalyst** - a person or thing that causes/develops a situation or makes it worse
5. **capitalism** - an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state
6. **echelon** - a level or rank in an organization, a profession, or society
7. **Edwardian** - relating to the reign of King Edward VII.
8. **mouthpiece** - one that expresses or interprets another's views
9. **proletariat** - working-class people regarded collectively
10. **socialism** - public rather than private ownership or control of property and natural resources.

<p>e) Mr Birling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A staunch capitalist, the antithesis of Priestley's ideals. • Fired Eva Smith from his factory after she requested a raise, she had "too much to say" so "had to go". • Arthur Birling is the father figure in the patriarchal society of 'An Inspector Calls'. 🔗 He "hard headed" businessman, a capitalist • He is a well known owner of a factory and prides himself in being a self made middle class man. • He is pleased with the arrangement of Sheila marrying Gerald Croft since this also means a rise in social status for himself. • He attempts to intimidate the Inspector as he is used to being in control. • He fails to take responsibility for his actions and is incredibly worried about his reputation, suggesting he would "cover up" what happened to Eva. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "A man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own." • "I'm speaking as a hard headed practical man of business." • "If you don't come down hard on these people they'll soon be asking for the earth" • "The famous younger generation who know it all"
<p>f) Mrs Birling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A traditionalist matriarch who refuses to acknowledge her role in Eva's death. She is elitist and the prospect of mixing with lower classes is disgusting and inappropriate to her. • "used [her] influence" to refuse Eva help when she appealed to Mrs Birling's charity for support. Mrs Birling disliked how Eva called herself "Mrs Birling" saying she was "impertinent". 🔗 Sybil Birling is an astoundingly unsympathetic character. • Mrs Birling is the chairwoman of a charitable organisation that gives money to the more unfortunate. • She sees herself as doing her duty and caring for the poor but, she judges them harshly. • She accuses Eva/Daisy of being dishonest, greedy and immoral. • Mrs Birling is a "cold woman" and her "husband's social superior" meaning that she was born into a more socially superior family than her husband. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money", • "that was one of the things that prejudiced me against her case" • "I accept no blame for it at all" • "He should be made an example of" • "I did nothing I'm ashamed of"
<p>g) Sheila</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergoes the most rapid transformation in the play. Has a moment of anagnorisis and seemingly becomes a socialist convert. 🔗 Sheila visited Milwards in a "furious temper" and thought Eva was mocking her whilst she was trying on a dress. Sheila used her influence to get Eva fired from her employment. Ultimately, Sheila was jealous. • Sheila begins the play very much like her parents, she is frivolous, materialistic and naïve. • She reacts in a rather childish manner upon first learning of her connection to Eva but then appears to be genuinely sorry and encourages the rest of the family to be truthful. She seems to understand the role of the Inspector early on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "But these girls aren't cheap labour, they're people." • "You mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl. If you do, then the Inspector will just break it down." • "Look Mummy isn't it a beauty?" • "it frightens me the way you talk"
<p>h) Eric</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eric is presented as an outsider from the very outset of the play as he seems to be uneasy at his sister's engagement 🔗 Eric met Eva in the Palace Bar and went back to her lodgings and "insisted" that he went in despite Eva's refusal. They continued to meet and Eva revealed she was pregnant. Eric offered Eva £50 he had stolen from his father' – she refused • He is an alcoholic and clearly a troubled young man. He has a poor relationship with his father and remains in the shadows for most of the play. • Unlike his father, Eric takes responsibility for his actions and, by the end of the play, is unafraid to criticise his parents for their role in Eva's death. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "not quite at ease", "half shy, half assertive", • "I wasn't in love with her or anything. She was pretty a good sport ." • "You're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble."
<p>i) Gerald</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gerald is an upper-class aristocrat from a very noble family. He is engaged to Sheila and like Mr Birling, is a wealthy capitalist. 🔗 Knew Eva as Daisy Renton and met her at the Palace Bar, 'rescued' her from Joe Meggarty. Gave her food, money and shelter. She became his mistress. Broke it off with her before going on business. • Gerald Croft is the son of Birling's business rival. He comes from a good, upper-middle-class family and Arthur Birling is very pleased that Gerald has at last made the engagement to Sheila Birling official. • He lied to Sheila took Eva Smith/Daisy Renton as his mistress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "well-bred young man about town", • "I did keep a girl last summer. I've admitted it." • "I didn't install her there so that I could make love to her." • "everything's all right now Sheila...what about this ring"
<p>j) Inspector Goole</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspector Goole can be seen as the central character of the play (protagonist). 🔗 the moral, socialist voice of the play and argued mouthpiece of JB Priestley himself. His role is to unearth the truth of Eva's death and encourage the Birling's (and Gerald) to take responsibility for their actions. • The entire play could be described as a morality play in which the Inspector forces the other characters to come to terms with their actions. • IG represents the progressive few post WWII who actively sought change and for the class system to be abolished. • He is also Priestley's way of controlling the play as he dictates who speaks when and frequently interrupts characters to keep them on track. • The question as to who IG really is remains deliberately ambiguous and unclear: A ghost/ghoul? The Birling's moral conscience? God? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "(Cutting in massively)" • "We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other." • "Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges." • "you're offering money at the wrong time",