

## Priestley's 'An Inspector Calls' Revision

### **Key Words**

Capitalism/capitalist  
Socialism/socialist  
Responsibility (individual and collective)  
Industrial Revolution  
Welfare State  
Dramatic Irony  
Edwardian  
hypocrisy/hypocritical  
juxtaposition  
Reputation  
Morality  
Stereotype  
Victim  
Naivety  
Ignorance  
Power  
Class divide

### **Priestley's Message/Writer's Intentions**

- Inspector Goole seems to be a vehicle through which Priestley presents his own views and political message.
- Criticise the treatment of the working class
- Expose the treatment of women
- Condemn the corruption in capitalism
- Promote the political belief of socialism
- Pushes a message of social responsibility.
- Concerned about the consequences of social inequality – gap between the poor and the rich

### **Plot**

1. The Birlings are celebrating the engagement of Sheila and Gerald
2. The inspector interrogates the Birlings
3. Mr Birling fires Eva from her job in the mill
4. Sheila gets Eva sacked from Milwards
5. Gerald sets up Eva as his mistress
6. Eric rapes Eva/Daisy
7. Mrs Birling refuses to help Eva/Daisy with money.
8. Mr Birling gets a phone call from a real Inspector

### **Context:**

**Play was written in 1945 but set in 1912 to challenge remaining Edwardian views.**

In 1912, society was patriarchal. Men had more power and rights than women. Because of this, women were easily exploited. Working class women had to work, particularly in factories or domestic settings. Middle and upper class women were expected to marry.

This capitalist society remained in the Edwardian era and there was a clear divide between the wealthy and the poor.

Whilst this benefitted the rich, business owners increasing their wealth and power, it also allowed for the abuse of the poor with low wages, poor working conditions and long hours. In 1945, negative attitudes towards the working classes remained – this is what Priestley is criticising

**Socialism:** A political system where the community should share everything together – they are responsible for each other.

**Capitalism:** A small group of people control the wealth of the country and exploit those poorer or weaker.

### **Dramatic Terminology:**

- 'who-dunnit'/ murder mystery/ detective
- Dramatic irony/sarcasm
- Façade
- Stage directions/lighting
- Dialogue

Character	Characteristics
Inspector	Assertive, imposing, authoritative, omniscient, relentless, calculating, ambiguous, mysterious
Mr Birling	Pompous, over confident, stubborn, social climber, arrogant, Edwardian Patriarchal views (Titanic is unsinkable. There will never be war.)
Mrs Birling	Supercilious, upper-class, prejudiced, unsympathetic, cold
Sheila	Naïve, compassionate, perceptive, curious, becomes wise, conscientious
Gerald	Aristocratic, self-centred, selfish, conceited, privileged and spoilt
Eric	Irresponsible, reckless, frustrated, repentant, low self-esteem/confidence
Eva/Daisy	Warm hearted, moralistic, represents the victim of Edwardian double standards.

#### Key Quotations:

- The lighting should be pink and intimate until the Inspector arrives and then it should be brighter and harder (1)**
  - Metaphor for the Birlings hiding their flaws behind a façade of wealth**
  - The Inspector illuminates their faults and exploitation of power over those weaker and poorer**
- You're just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted (4)
- Working together for lower costs and higher prices (4)**
  - Birling exploits his workers to gain wealth and status**
  - He exploits Sheila by marrying her off to Gerald**
  - Capitalist power and wealth only gained by abusing others**
- Is it the one you wanted me to have? (5)
- Unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable (7)
- Capital versus Labour agitations and all these silly little war scares...there'll be peace and prosperity (7)
- A man has to look after himself – and his family too (9)
- As if we were all mixed up like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense (10)**
  - Simile shows Birling's criticism of socialism – he doesn't want to work together for the good of everyone, he wants all the wealth for himself (selfish)**
- Sharp ring of a front door bell (10)
- Impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness (11)
- Burnt her inside out...great agony (11)
- I can't accept any responsibility...it's a free country (14)
- It's better to ask for the earth than to take it (15)
- These girls aren't cheap labour – they're people (19)
- You used the power you had to punish the girl (24)
- And probably between us we killed her (35)
- You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner (40)
- Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges (41)
- Elaborate fine feelings and scruples were simply absurd in a girl in her position (46)

20. He should be made an example of ...dealt with very severely (48)

21. I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty (52)

22. I've got to cover this up as soon as I can (54)

**23. We are members of one body.**

- **Biblical allusion to the idea we are metaphorically like one physical body – if one part suffers, we all suffer – this is a warning to the wealthy classes who look down upon the working-class poor**
- **Inspector is blaming the wealthy for ignoring their social responsibility to act responsibly to all members of society**

24. Each of you helped to kill her (55)

**25. There are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths...all intertwined with our lives (56)**

- **Hyperbole – suggests the many suffering and exploited people who are being harmed by selfish, Capitalist behaviours**
- **Common working-class name shows the wealthy encounter them daily yet ignore the consequences of their selfish, exploitative actions**
- **Socialist view that our actions impact everyone**

**26. They will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish (56)**

- **Metaphor of the horror that will be unleashed on society if the Edwardian Capitalist values are allowed to continue**
- **Reference to WW1 and WW2 that the 1945 audience have just lived through. DRAMATIC IRONY – Priestley is suggesting it is a result of the 1912 Edwardian Capitalist values of greed, selfishness and exploitation of the poor and lower classes.**

27. You're pretending everything's just as it was before (71)

28. They stare guilty and dumbfounded, the curtain falls (72)

### Example Question:

How does Priestley explore power in 'An Inspector Calls'?

Write about:

- The ideas about power in the play
- How Priestley presents these ideas in the way he writes

### Example essay style:

Priestley presents Mr Birling as a dislikeable archetype of an Edwardian Capitalist who wants to maintain his wealth and status by exploiting his daughter in marriage to, "...look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together – for lower costs and higher prices." This suggests his desire to climb in social status at the expense of everyone but himself reflects Priestley's view on Capitalism. Priestley is criticising Birling's capitalist attitude where he gains more wealth and status by exploiting his working-class employees. Furthermore, he is also exploiting Sheila, by marrying her to Gerald, using his patriarchal power to secure his wealth and climb the social ladder as Gerald is an aristocrat. Priestley could be warning the audience not to trust those who have power because of the patriarchy.

**CF** – Clear focus on the key word of the question before the quotation

**E** – evidence (quotation)

**WM** – writer's methods (language)

**WI** – writer's intentions

**KW** – key words

## Exam Questions

1. How does Priestley use the character of the Inspector to suggest ways that society could be improved?
2. How far does Priestley present Mrs Birling as an unlikeable character?
3. How far does Priestley present Eric as a character who changed his attitudes towards himself and others during the play?
4. How does Priestley explore the importance of social class in An Inspector Calls?
5. How does Priestley present selfishness and its effects in An Inspector Calls?
6. How does Priestley present Sheila as a character who learns important lessons about herself and society?
7. How are men presented as irresponsible in An Inspector Calls?
8. How is Mr Birling presented as a character who only cares about himself and his family?
9. How does Priestley use Gerald to explore ideas about responsibility?
10. How far does Priestley present society as unfair in An Inspector Calls?
11. How are women presented?
12. How are older and younger characters presented?