



# English Literature: An Inspector Calls

## JB Priestley



### Characters

- Mr Birling:** Nouveau riche / 50s / businessman / capitalist / pompous
- Mrs Birling:** Husband's social superior / middle 50s / prejudiced
- Sheila Birling:** Early 20s / about to be engaged / open to change
- Eric Birling:** Early 20s / varsity schooling / half shy and half assertive
- Gerald Croft:** Sheila's partner / upperclass / mid 30s
- Inspector Goole:** 50s / Priestley's mouthpiece / socialist
- Edna:** The Birling's maid / voiceless / used for exits and entrances
- Eva Smith / Daisy Renton:** Unseen in play / protagonist / represents social injustice and the vulnerable working class / exploited and

### Theatrical stagecraft

Dramatic irony	Where the audience know more than the characters
Stage directions	Instructions for actors (gestures/movements etc)
Setting	Adopts Aristotle's three unities – setting is constant
Tension	Follows narrative arc / Builds to climax in Act 2
Proxemics	How characters interact - can reveal clues
Cliff-hanger	Audience left with unanswered questions at end
3 Unities	Time, place and action: real life/time span

### Themes

- Social class:** Society was divided / wealthy capitalists looked out for themselves / working class people were 'underdogs' and exploited / some people started moving into higher social classes and were labelled 'new money' (nouveau riche) / poorer people relied on charitable donations to get by as the Government didn't offer support
- Young Vs Old:** There was a changing attitude in the Edwardian period / the older and wealthier generations seemed 'stuck in their ways' and didn't want change / the younger generation were beginning to affect change and accept a more socialist society
- Collective responsibility:** The Inspector is used to voice Priestley's own viewpoint that we are all 'members of one body' / blinkered and selfish mindsets had to change / people from all classes fought 'shoulder to shoulder' in the wars and class division was 'forgotten' / Inspector Goole comments on a 'chain of events' and that our actions affect others down the line and therefore we need to be collectively responsible for our actions – it's not 'everyman for himself' anymore

### Key Vocabulary

- Capitalism:** Wealthy owners compete for profit / not interested in others / industry and land etc owned by individuals and companies
- Socialism:** Where people look out for others / more equality / industry and land etc owned by the Government not individuals
- Nouveau Riche:** 'New money' – people who have earned money and moved into a different/higher social class
- Morality Play:** Where the characters move from ignorance to understanding (form)



### Social and historical context

- Written in 1945:
- First performed in Russia 1945 / England 1946
- 1945 – end of WW2 – 6 years of conflict ended
- 1945 Labour Government / start of Welfare State
- GB becoming more socialist / aware of each other / social equality was becoming possible
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- Set in 1912:
- Britain divided by class
- Two years before outbreak of WW1
- Only men who owned property could vote
- No Government support – charities were needed
- Titanic set sail and sank after hitting an iceberg
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- Women:
- Regardless of social class, women were treated as second-class citizens and were not allowed to vote
- In 1903 the fight for women's suffrage began
- Some women resorted to prostitution even though this had been made illegal in 1885 – respectable men dared not be caught with a prostitute



### Plot and Key Quotations

Act 1: The Birling family are celebrating the engagement of Sheila and Gerald. Inspector Goole arrives and announces the suicide of Eva Smith. Birling sacked Eva and Sheila had her fired from Milwards. Gerald recognises the name Daisy Renton	The lighting should be pink and intimate / 'war's impossible' / 'a man has to look after himself' / 'community and all that nonsense' / 'so I'm really responsible?' / 'Chain of events' / 'Except all last summer when you never came near me' / 'You're squiffy'
Act 2: Gerald kept Daisy as his mistress. Sheila returns the engagement ring. Attention shifts to Mrs Birling who finally admits denying a pregnant Daisy/Eva charity. She wants the father blamed. Eric arrives on the scene.	'He means I'm getting hysterical' / Do you know my husband was Lord Mayor?' / 'He's only a boy' / 'I'm rather more upset – by this business than I probably appear to be' / 'I consider I did my duty' / 'It's his fault'
Act 3: Eric admits his relationship with Daisy/Eva and that he stole money which she refused. The Inspector delivers his key warning speech of 'fire, blood and anguish'. Gerald returns and declares the Inspector a fake which Mr Birling confirms by making a phone call. They also find out no girl has committed suicide and the older generation and Gerald feel relieved at the hoax. Sheila and Eric are still feeling guilty. The phone then rings and another inspector is on his way – a girl has just died in the infirmary.	'I was in that state when a chap turns easily nasty' / 'I threatened to make a row' / 'Then you killed her' / 'There's millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths' / '...learn that lesson in fire, blood and anguish' / 'We've been had' / 'It frightens me the way you talk' / 'the famous younger generation...they can't even take a joke' / And a police inspector is on his way here'



# English Literature: An Inspector Calls

## JB Priestley - Questions



### Characters

- Q1: How old are the Birling parents?
- Q2: How old are the children?
- Q3: Who is the Birling's maid? What is her purpose in the play?
- Q4: Who is in their 30s?
- Q5: What is the Inspector's surname? What does it remind you of?
- Q6: Why do we need to know the ages of the characters?
- Q7: Who does Eva Smith represent?

### Themes

- Q1: Who says 'we are all members of one body'?
- Q2: What were people labelled if they had 'new money'?
- Q3: How was society divided during the Edwardian Period?
- Q4: Why does Priestley have older and younger-aged characters?
- Q5: What does collective responsibility mean?
- Q6: What does the Inspector mean when he says 'chain of events'?
- Q7: Why did the poorer people need charitable donations?

### Social and historical context

Written in 1945:  
 Question: List 3 things that happened in 1945

Set in 1912:  
 Question: What was life like in 1912?

Women:  
 Task: Describe the life of a woman in 1912.

### Theatrical stagecraft

Dramatic irony	Where the audience know more than the characters
Stage directions	
Setting	
	Follows narrative arc / Builds to climax in Act 2
	How characters interact - can reveal clues
Cliff-hanger	Audience left with unanswered questions at end
3 Unities	

### Key Vocabulary

- Q1:** How would you explain the difference between capitalism and socialism?
- Q2:** What's the other name for 'New money' – people who have earned money and moved into a different/higher social class?
- Q3:** Which form of play sees characters move from ignorance to understanding ?

### Plot and Key Quotations

Act 1: <b>Questions:</b> 1: What are the family celebrating? 2: What is the lighting like and why? 3: Why does an Inspector arrive? 4: Which 2 members of the family are interrogated and what was their involvement with Eva?	The lighting should be pink and intimate / 'war's impossible' / 'a man has to look after himself' / 'community and all that nonsense' / 'so I'm really responsible?' / 'Chain of events' / 'Except all last summer when you never came near me' / 'You're squiffy'
Act 2: <b>Questions:</b> 1: What did Eva change her name to? 2: Who is interrogated after Sheila? 3: What does Sheila give back to Gerald and why? 4: Whose turn is to be asked questions next? 5: What did this last character do to Eva	'He means I'm getting hysterical' / Do you know my husband was Lord Mayor?' / 'He's only a boy' / 'I'm rather more upset – by this business than I probably appear to be' / 'I consider I did my duty' / 'It's his fault'
Act 3: <b>Questions:</b> 1: Who got Eva pregnant? 2: What was stolen from Mr Birling and why? 3: What message does the Inspector leave the family with? 4: What does Gerald reveal to the family? 5: How do the family react to Gerald's news and why? 6: What happens at the close of the play?	'I was in that state when a chap turns easily nasty' / 'I threatened to make a row' / 'Then you killed her' / 'There's millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths' / '...learn that lesson in fire, blood and anguish' / 'We've been had' / 'It frightens me the way you talk' / 'the famous younger generation...they can't even take a joke' / And a police inspector is on his way here'