

## A. Key Background Information - Context

**Written:** 1945 - End of WW2 and the start of the Welfare State and ideals of social equality

**First Performed:** Russia 1945 / England 1946

**Genre:** A morality 3 Act play—a classic Greek tragedy

**Set:** April 1912 (one evening) - Just before WW1 and the sinking of the Titanic



**Structure:** Aristotle's The Three Unities:

1. Unity of action [one main rapid plot]
2. Unity of time [short period of time]
3. Unity of place [a single location]



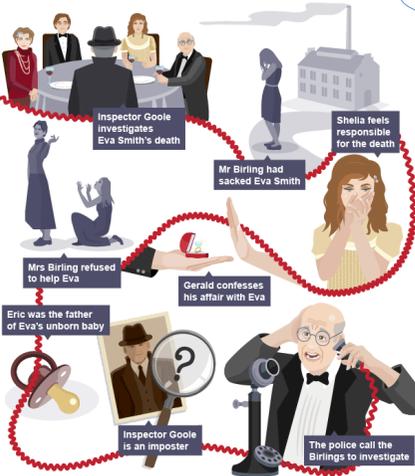
'We're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity.'

'she was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position'

'but these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people'

'well, I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty'

'we can keep it from him...'  
'I did keep a girl last summer...'



'but each of you helped to kill her. Remember that.'  
'We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other.'

**Mr Birling:** A businessman and capitalist who is against social equality. A self-made man.

**Adjectives:** arrogant, pompous, overconfident, selfish, prejudiced, stubborn, social climber



**Mrs Birling:** Her husband's social superior; she believes in personal responsibility.

**Adjectives:** "cold", upper class, supercilious, prejudiced, remorseless, socially superior



**Sheila Birling:** A young girl who comes to change her views and pities Eva, feeling regret for her actions.

**Adjectives:** naïve, curious, compassionate, perceptive, astute, sensitive, wiser



**Eric Birling:** A young man who drinks too much, gets Eva pregnant; regrets his actions.

**Adjectives:** irresponsible, reckless, compulsive, frustrated, repentant



**Gerald Croft:** A businessman who is engaged to Sheila and politically close to Birling.

**Adjectives:** aristocratic, evasive, pragmatic, partly repentant, unchanged, unfaithful



**The Inspector:** Priestley's mouthpiece; advocates social justice.

**Adjectives:** "massiveness", righteous, powerful, unconventional, systematic, unflappable, mysterious, imposing



**Eva Smith:** Unseen in play; comes to stand for victims of social injustice, symbolic

**Adjectives:** "warm-hearted", vulnerable, moralistic, principled, representative, emblematic



## B. Key Events - a Timeline

### Act 1

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.

### Act 2

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.

### Act 3

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...



## C. Key Characters - who's who...

**Edna:** servant of the Birlings, voiceless, working-class, a contrast to Eva  
**Adjectives:** domesticated, functionary, invisible, quiet, respectful, disposable

'a girl'  
'One Eva Smith has gone— but there are millions and millions of Eva Smiths'

D. Key Concepts and Context - Social and Capitalism

Capitalism	Socialism
<b>Definition:</b> an economic, political and social system in which property, business and industry are privately owned, directed towards making the greatest possible profits for successful organisations and people.	<b>Definition:</b> an economic, political and social system that is based on the belief that all people are equal and should share equally in a country's money.
	
What this actually means...	
Believes we should be <b>individualistic</b> (look after yourself first).	Believes we should be <b>socially conscious</b> (a society that looks after each other).
<b>Private ownership</b> of property and natural resources.	<b>Public ownership</b> of property via the state (government).
<b>Wealthy individuals</b> control resources and accumulate profit.	<b>State controls</b> resources and provides support to everyone.
<b>Inequality</b> in distribution of wealth.	People have a more <b>equal</b> split of money.
Sold national industries, deregulated economies and weakened unions.	Introduced NHS, social housing and welfare state.

E. Key Themes - J.B Priestley



Priestley was a socialist...

- ⇒ **Social Responsibility:** Priestley asks his audience to examine their individual and **collective responsibility** to society. He wants a welfare state.
- ⇒ **Class:** Priestley exposes how the upper and lower social classes are segregated: Eva Smith is the embodiment of young, working class women who were **oppressed** by middle/upper classes.
- ⇒ **Working Class:** The play demonstrates that when workers do not have full employment rights they cannot fight back.
- ⇒ **Capitalism:** Priestley criticises the **selfishness** of capitalism society and wants a fairer, socialist future after the horrors of two world wars.
- ⇒ **Hypocrisy:** Priestley highlights the hypocrisy of **middle-class** Edwardian society; appearance and reputation matter more than reality and morality.
- ⇒ **Age:** Priestley shows the **older generation** (Mr and Mrs Birling) to be set in their ways, while the **younger generation** (Sheila and Eric) are open to change.
- ⇒ **Misogyny:** Attitudes to women are **patriarchal**.



F. Dramatic Devices & Stagecraft Terminology [Tier 3 Vocabulary]

<b>Dramatic Irony</b>	The audience knows what the characters don't.	<b>Protagonist</b>	The main character.
<b>Stage Directions</b>	Entrances and exits, timings, character descriptions	<b>Antagonist</b>	The character who opposes the protagonist.
<b>Setting</b>	The Dining Room - where the play is set. Lighting.	<b>Circular Structure</b>	A narrative that ends more or less where it began.
<b>Tension</b>	Anticipation. Priestley controls how information is drip-fed.	<b>Cliff-Hanger</b>	The ending allows the audience to make their own minds up.
<b>A 'Well Made Play'</b>	Eugene Scribe [1791-1861] defined the features of a 'well-made play': <b>exposition</b> [an introduction to characters, themes and setting]; entrances and exits [perfectly timed to create tension]; the ' <b>obligatory scene</b> ' [a secret is revealed] the ' <b>climatic curtain</b> ' [ends on a tense, dramatic moment]; mistaken identity; one <b>central plot</b> ; and a logical and plausible <b>denouement</b> [ending of the play]. <b>How is An Inspector Calls a 'well-made play'?</b>		
<b>Greek Tragedy</b>	<b>Anagnorisis</b> [recognise own errors]; a <b>catastrophe</b> [the ending when the protagonist accepts ruin]; <b>catharsis</b> [outrush of emotions & pity the broken characters]		

