

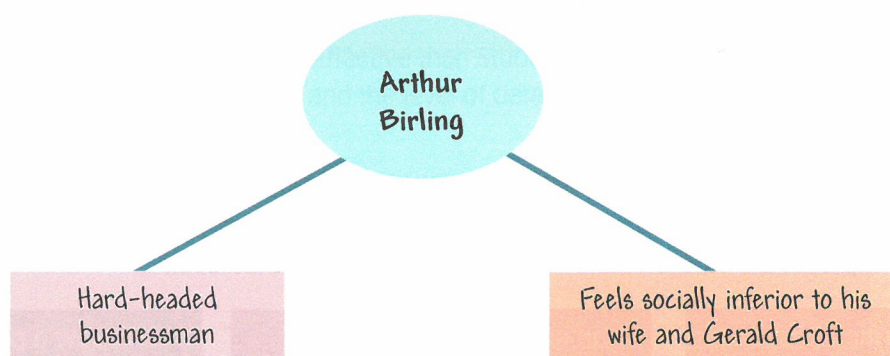
Characters

Playwrights cannot include the kind of descriptive passages found in novels, so their characters have to convey the author's ideas through what they say, how they behave and how they react to other characters and situations. Character can seem to be one of the easiest aspects of a text because we can understand, identify and sympathize with or dislike characters. However, the craft of characterization is a complex one and it is important to see the characters as vehicles created by the author or playwright to fulfil specific functions.

Arthur Birling

Activity 1

- a) Complete the spider diagram below to show what you know about Arthur Birling. Include quotations and your own words or phrases. Two examples have been given.



- b) Explain why Birling feels inferior to his wife and to Gerald Croft. Use the word 'self-made' in your response.

Activity 2

- a) Birling likes to show off about his position and power. Explain what each of the quotations from Act One in the following table suggests about him.

Quotation	What this suggests
"... your engagement to Sheila means a tremendous lot to me."	
"... it's exactly the same port your father gets..."	
"... I gather there's a very good chance of a knighthood..."	

"I'm still on the Bench."	
"... our Chief Constable... We play golf together..."	

- b) What is Birling most afraid of and why? Look back at the context chapter and weave some context into your answer if you can.

- c) What is Birling's reaction to Gerald's affair with Eva Smith? Does this surprise you? Give reasons for your answer.

- d) Does Birling appear to regret the way he treated Eva Smith in Act One? Support your answer with evidence from the play.

- e) In Act Three, Birling tells the Inspector '**[unhappily]: Look, Inspector – I'd give thousands – yes, thousands –'**. What is the **ambiguity** Priestley creates at this point? Do you believe that Birling is sorry and remorseful or is there another way of interpreting this?

ambiguity when something can be interpreted in two different ways

- f) How does Birling react once he discovers the Inspector was a 'hoax'?

- g) Circle the word below that you think best describes Birling's attitude towards the Inspector throughout the play.

disrespectful

impatient

strident

confrontational

belligerent

contemptuous

Upgrade

In the exam you can gain higher marks by showing that you understand how an author or playwright creates and shapes characters in order to achieve certain effects on the audience or reader. This is known as the author's craft.



Activity 3

In the play, Birling is presented as a man with strong beliefs and opinions.

a) What kinds of details are used in his speeches about his beliefs and opinions?

b) How do these help to make the character convincing, particularly in the context of the play?

c) What effect could his opinions have on an audience's view of him today and when the play was first performed in 1945?

d) Priestley uses the following ideas to present Birling negatively. Decide which you think makes us dislike him the most and justify your choice:

- his relationship with his family
- his treatment of his workforce
- his aspirations
- his reactions to ideas about shared responsibility.

- e) Use the ideas from the tasks on pages 32–34 to respond to the following questions. Write your responses on a separate piece of paper.
- How does Priestley ensure that the audience dislikes Arthur Birling?
 - Why does Priestley want us to dislike Birling? What does Birling represent?
 - What does our dislike of Birling suggest about Priestley himself?

Sybil Birling

Activity 4

- a) Within the context of when the play is set, why would it have been important that Mrs Birling is 'socially superior' to her husband? Would it have mattered less if her husband had been her 'social superior'?

- b) How does Mrs Birling speak to and about her son and daughter? Find examples of things she says and explain what this suggests about her as a mother.

- c) How do Sheila and Eric seem to feel about Mrs Birling in the different acts of the play?

Character	Act One	Act Two	Act Three
Sheila			
Eric			



Activity 5

- a) Comment on Mrs Birling's reactions to the following and find evidence from the text to support your comments.

	Mrs Birling's reaction	Quotation	What this suggests about her character
Gerald's affair with Eva			
Her own part in Eva's demise			
Eric's affair with Eva			
Eric's stealing			
Knowledge of her grandchild			
The 'hoax'			

- b) Look at the extracts below from speeches Mrs Birling makes about Eva in Act Two and carry out the following tasks:

- Underline words and phrases that are about truth and lies.
- Circle words and phrases that suggest Mrs Birling is highly judgemental.
- Highlight words and phrases that suggest that Mrs Birling feels no remorse.
- Put a star next to words or phrases that suggest Mrs Birling considers herself superior to others.

i.

"The girl had begun by telling us a pack of lies."

ii.

"... it made me finally lose all patience with her. She was giving herself ridiculous airs. She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position."

iii.

"That's the story she finally told, after I'd refused to believe her original story – that she was a married woman who'd been deserted by her husband. I didn't see any reason to believe that one story should be any truer than the other. Therefore, you're quite wrong to suppose I shall regret what I did."

iv.

"... it sounded ridiculous to me. So I was perfectly justified in advising my committee not to allow her claim for assistance."

- c) What is Mrs Birling's attitude to Eva Smith and how does it reflect her attitude to people she considers to be of a lower class? Use the quotations below from Act Two to help you develop your answer.

"Girls of that class"

"a girl in her position"

"As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!"



Activity 6

- a) By the time the phone rings at the end of the play, what has Mrs Birling lost? Has this resulted in any change in her?

- b) How would you describe Mrs Birling's reactions in the course of the play? Choose one word or phrase and explain why this description suits her. Write your response on a separate piece of paper.

- c) Look at the statements below. Place them in order from 1 to 3, with 1 showing which statement you most agree with and 3 which one you least agree with.

Priestley created Mrs Birling to show the audience that we shouldn't look down on people because of their class.

Priestley used Mrs Birling's relationship with Eva to show that we should look after vulnerable people who do not have adequate resources.

Priestley wanted Mrs Birling to show that wealth and class are no indicator of decency and worthwhile values.

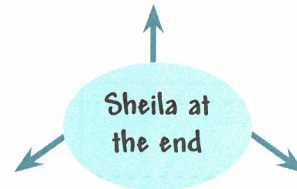
Justify your choices with reference to the play.

Sheila Birling



Activity 7

- a) Complete the two spider diagrams below to describe Sheila Birling's feelings, attitudes and circumstances at the start and the close of the play.



- b) From the beginning of the play, Sheila tends to be more honest than the other characters. Find two examples of her honesty from Act One.

- c) What does Sheila's behaviour immediately after the Inspector has shown her the photograph of Eva suggest about her character at this point in the play?

- d) At the beginning of Act Two Gerald says, "**You've been through it – and now you want to see somebody else put through it.**" Do you think there is an element of truth in this accusation? Suggest two different interpretations for Sheila's decision to stay while Gerald is questioned.

- e) Why is Sheila's act of handing back her engagement ring a brave one? Refer to context in your response.



Activity 8

foil a character who contrasts with another character in order to highlight particular qualities of the other character

- a) In what ways is Sheila a **foil** to Eva Smith? Consider Sheila's situation in life and how this enables her to behave. Write your own response on a separate piece of paper.
- b) Sheila comes to understand the Inspector better than the others as he moves through his interrogations of the characters. What do the following quotations from throughout the play suggest about her character? Use them to create a flow chart on a separate piece of paper that shows how her understanding of what the Inspector is trying to teach them gradually emerges.

[She goes closer to him (the Inspector), wondering.] "I don't understand about you."

"... I hate to think how much he knows that we don't know yet. You'll see."

"... I felt rotten about it at the time and now I feel a lot worse."

"... I remember what he said... and what he made me feel."

"No, he's giving us rope – so that we'll hang ourselves."

"I suppose we're all nice people now."

"Oh – how horrible! Was it an accident?"

"You began to learn something. And now you've stopped. You're ready to go on in the same old way."

"... it doesn't much matter who it was who made us confess."

- c) Rank the following in order of how far they make us like Sheila, with 1 being the strongest and 5 being the weakest.

Relationship with her family

Relationship with Gerald

Sympathy for Eva

Understanding of the Inspector

Reactions to ideas about shared responsibility

Give a reason for your first choice.

- d) Use the ideas from the tasks on these pages to answer the following questions. Write your responses on a separate piece of paper.

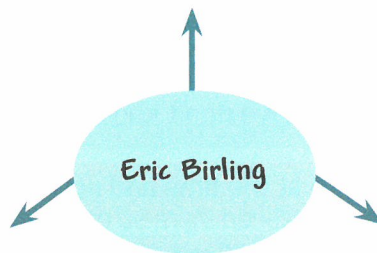
- How do we feel about Sheila at the beginning of the play?
- How does Priestley ensure that the audience likes Sheila by the end of the play?
- Why do you think Priestley wants us to like Sheila? What does she represent?

Eric Birling



Activity 9

- a) Complete the spider diagram below with information about Eric, his relationship with his family and his part in Eva's life. Include quotations from the play in the diagram.



- b) Complete the table below to show how Eric is treated by other members of his family. Find more than one example for each character.

Character	Treatment of Eric	Quotation
Mr Birling		"... you hysterical young fool..." (Act Three)
	Dismisses whatever he says	
Mrs Birling		
		"Silly boy!" (Act Two)
Sheila	Draws attention to his drinking habits	

- c) How do Eric's problems with alcohol make the audience feel about him?

d) What do they show about his life and his lifestyle?

e) Find two quotations from Act One that show that Eric thinks his father should treat his workers better.

f) What kinds of comments does Eric make that show he has learnt his lesson in Act Three?

g) How does the audience feel about Eric's treatment of Eva? Select one of the following statements and expand it into a paragraph that includes at least one quotation and one contextual reference.

He is an aggressive young man who assumed he could take advantage of a vulnerable lower-class woman.

He is a product of his background and does not realize the consequences his actions have on others.

He is weak-willed and unable to do the right thing because he is afraid of his parents and lacks the confidence to take control.

Gerald Croft



Activity 10

- a) How does Gerald behave in the opening episodes of Act One? In the table below, give some examples of things that he does or says and comment on their effect both on the Birlings and on the audience. One has been done for you as an example.

Actions or words	Effect on the Birlings	Effect on the audience
Compliments Birling "You seem to be a nice well-behaved family" (Act One)	Reassured Flattered	Polite He wants to ingratiate himself

- b) Can Gerald's words and actions be interpreted in different ways? Choose one example from your response and explain how this could be interpreted in two ways.

- c) How does what we learn about Gerald's involvement with Eva contrast with the way he is presented in Act One?

- d) When Sheila asks Gerald if he was in love with Eva, he says, **"It's hard to say. I didn't feel about her as she felt about me"** (Act Two). In what ways is this response typical of Gerald? Support your response with references to elsewhere in the play.

- e) Complete the table below by finding evidence from the play which suggests that Gerald regrets his treatment of Eva/Daisy and evidence that suggests he does not accept responsibility.

Gerald accepts responsibility	Gerald does not accept responsibility

- f) Sheila refers to Gerald, sarcastically, as the **"Fairy Prince"** (*Act Two*). What connotations does this comment have and how does it help the audience to explore Gerald's motivation?

- g) Gerald suggests that the Inspector did not show them the same photograph but that it was **"probably four or five different girls"** (*Act Three*). What is this designed to show the audience about him and people like him?

- h) Eric is not much younger than Gerald. Discuss why Gerald tends to side with Birling rather than with Eric. What does this tell us about all three characters?

- i) In what ways are Eric and Gerald very different characters? Look at the following traits and write 'G' if they describe Gerald and 'E' if they describe Eric.

Reliant on alcohol

Not trusted to take the reins at work

Attractive

Upper class

In charge at work

Self-controlled

Frustrated

On an equal footing with Birling

Immature

Dominated by his father

Confident

Inspector Goole



Activity 11

a) At what point in the play does the Inspector appear?

b) What is he wearing in contrast to the Birlings? What does this immediately suggest to the audience?

c) How does the Inspector explain his knowledge of Eva's life? Does this seem believable? Why/why not?

d) With reference to the text, explain how Priestley suggests that the Inspector is more than a police officer. You could refer to his actions, his words and the ways in which other characters react to him.

e) The Inspector says, "**We are members of one body**" (*Act Three*). Think about how a body works and then develop your own interpretation of what the Inspector is trying to say.

- f) Who is the Inspector? Look at the following statements made about the Inspector. Rank them in order to show which interpretation you most agree with, with 1 being the most and 7 being the least.

He is a ghost. (The name "Goole" is a **pun**: can you work out what it is?)

He is someone who knew Eva Smith well.

He is a religious messenger.

He is a time-traveller.

He is a political messenger.

He is a **mouthpiece** for Priestley's own views.

He is the conscience of us all.

Give reasons for your first choice.

- g) In what ways is the Inspector a mouthpiece for Priestley's own views? Look back to Priestley's life and beliefs (page 28) to help you. Write your answer on separate paper.

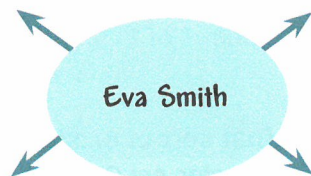
mouthpiece someone who speaks for another person or group

pun a play on words

Eva Smith

Activity 12

- a) Complete the spider diagram below with details about the life and character of Eva Smith. Include quotations from the text.



- b) Why does Priestley choose the names Eva and Smith? (Clue: 'Eva' could refer to Eve from the Bible. 'Smith' is a very common English surname.)

- c) Where is Eva's surname used in the play to emphasize the Inspector's message?

- d) How could the name Daisy be interpreted as symbolic?

- e) Identify three of Eva's principles in the play. Think about qualities like honesty and love in your response.

- f) Why do you think Priestley chose to present Eva Smith as highly principled? What is the effect of this?

- g) Considering the fact that the audience never sees Eva onstage, how would you describe Eva's role in the play? What is her function? Think about what she symbolizes and her part in the development of the plot. You might want to consider the following quotations:

- "... there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us" (*Inspector, Act Three*)
- "There are a lot of young women living that sort of existence in every city and big town in this country, Miss Birling" (*Inspector, Act One*).

Edna



Activity 13

- a) Edna is the Birlings' maid. How is she treated by the Birlings? What do you notice about the way they speak to her?

- b) What similarities are there between Edna and Eva? Use the context chapter to help you with ideas.



Progress check

Use the chart below to review the skills you have developed in this chapter. For each column, start at the bottom box and work your way up towards the highest level in the top box. Tick the box to show you have achieved that level.

I can sustain a critical response to *An Inspector Calls* and interpret the characterization convincingly

☐

I can use well-integrated textual references from *An Inspector Calls* to support my interpretation

☐

I can analyse the effects of Priestley's use of language, structure and form in *An Inspector Calls*, using subject terms judiciously

☐

I can develop a coherent response to *An Inspector Calls* and explain the characterization clearly

☐

I can use quotations and other textual references from *An Inspector Calls* to support my explanation

☐

I can explain how Priestley uses language, structure and form to create effects in *An Inspector Calls*, using relevant subject terms

☐

I can make some comments on the characterization in *An Inspector Calls*

☐

I can make references to some details from *An Inspector Calls*

☐

I can identify some of Priestley's methods in *An Inspector Calls* and use some subject terms

☐

Personal response

Textual references

Language, structure, form