

GCSE AQA English Literature: *An Inspector Calls*

— Paper 2 – Section A (Modern text) —



EXAM & TIMING

- Question type: whole-play essay (no extract)
- Marks: 34
- Paper 2 total time: 2 hours 15 minutes
- Suggested timing for *An Inspector Calls*: 45 minutes
- Suggested 25% extra-time timing: 56 minutes
- Suggested breakdown: 5 mins plan, 35 mins write, 5 mins check
- With 25% extra time: 6 mins plan, 44 mins write, 6 mins check

1 BIG IDEAS

- responsibility
- class inequality
- gender expectations
- capitalism vs socialism
- power and control
- appearance vs reality
- generational divide

2 KEY CHARACTERS

- Inspector Goole** – moral voice; exposes responsibility.
- Sheila Birling** – perceptive; changes the most.
- Arthur Birling** – capitalist, self-important, resistant to blame.
- Sybil Birling** – cold, proud, hypocritical.
- Eric Birling** – immature, guilty, capable of change.
- Gerald Croft** – privileged, charming, partly self-serving.
- Eva Smith / Daisy Renton** – absent but central victim of exploitation.

3 PLOT JOURNEY

- Celebration** – engagement dinner and Birling's speeches.
- The inspector arrives** – chain of events begins.
- Responsibility revealed** – each character's role is uncovered.
- Blame, guilt and conflict** – younger vs older generation.
- Final warning and phone call** – the lesson is not finished.

4 CONTEXT

- Set in 1912, first performed in 1945.
- Priestley's socialist message after two world wars.
- Class divisions in Edwardian Britain.
- Expectations of women and reputation.
- Dramatic irony: *Titanic*, war and Birling's confidence.
- Post-war audience and hope for change.

5 WRITER'S METHODS

- Dramatic irony** – The audience knows more than the characters.
- Stage directions** – Control mood, pace and highlight key moments.
- Cyclical structure** – The ending mirrors the beginning – the message continues.
- Symbolism of light and fire** – Light exposes truth; fire shows destruction and warning.
- Interrogation structure** – Goole questions each character like a police inquiry.
- Contrast between generations** – Young: open to change. Old: resistant and defensive.
- Characterisation** – Reveals attitudes and allows Priestley to message through them.

6 WHAT A STRONG ANSWER DOES

- ✓ Address the question directly from the start.
- ✓ Use references from across the whole play.
- ✓ Track how a character or idea develops.
- ✓ Analyse Priestley's methods and dramatic choices.
- ✓ Link context naturally to meaning.
- ✓ Explore Priestley's message, not just the plot.

7 MUST-KNOW MOMENTS

- | | | |
|---|---|--------------|
| Birling's speech | Arthur praises himself and his business. | Act 1 |
| Inspector's arrival | Goole arrives and asks about a girl's suicide. | Act 1 |
| Sheila returns the ring | Sheila shows early empathy and change. | Act 1 |
| Gerald's affair revealed | Gerald admits his relationship with Daisy. | Act 2 |
| Mrs Birling and the charity case | Her hypocrisy and lack of compassion. | Act 2 |
| Inspector's final speech | A call for collective responsibility and social change. | Act 3 |
| The final phone call | The inspector may not be real – the message remains. | Act 3 |



AQA LITERATURE SUCCESS REMINDERS: know the text well • answer the question asked • analyse meaning, not just techniques

