Year 11 GCSE Drama
Inspector Calls LEARN SHEET

Social Context

- First performed in UK in 1946 – just after WW2 and during the early 20th Century there was no government support for the poor.
- J.B. Priestley wanted to address the lack of help for the poor.
- He suggests that if people were more considerate for each other then it would improve the overall quality of life.
- He wanted the audience to be responsible for their own behaviour and the welfare of others.
- This is shown in the play through the treatment of Eva Smith and whether the characters do or don’t accept responsibility for their behaviour and are interested in the Inspector’s lessons.

Cultural Context (Age)

- Throughout the play we see the differences in beliefs between the generations.
- The younger characters = hope for the future and they learn from the Inspector’s lessons.
- Priestley showed his hope that the younger generation could learn and change through his portrayal of the younger characters.
- Mr Birling refuses to learn and Mrs Birling cannot see the obvious in front of her.
- Eric and Sheila are more willing to accept their mistakes.

Cultural Context (Class)

- The story centralises around a middle/upper class family who are involved in the death of a working class girl.
- Before WW2, Britain was divided by class.
- On one side there were wealthy land and factory owners and then there were the poor workers.
- However, war brought both sides together.
- Within the play, J.B. Priestley wanted to show the inequality still existed in post war society and suggests that the Upper class still looked down upon the working class.
- This is reflected through the treatment of Eva Smith by all those involved.

Cultural Context (Gender)

- The play was written in 1945 after WW2 and although it is set in 1912, we can see Priestley’s changed views towards women.
- During WW2, women worked and took on “manly jobs”. Therefore, men had to acknowledge that women were just as capable as men.
- Women were able to work and had more freedom.
- However, not all men accepted this change in attitude.
- Priestley shows this through Eva Smith’s independence and Mr Birling’s sexist attitude.
- Mr Birling and Gerald believe that Sheila should be sheltered from hearing about the investigation.
- Mrs Birling refused to help Eva Smith because of her background.
- Eva Smith is portrayed as outspoken and independent before her death – reflecting the change in society when it was written.
Historical Context

Set in 1912

Written in 1945

1912 to 1945: This was the period of the Russian Revolution, two appalling world wars, the Holocaust and the Atom Bomb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An Inspector Calls is set in 1912</th>
<th>An Inspector Calls was written in 1945.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The First World War would start in two years.</td>
<td>The Second World War ended in Europe on 8 May 1945.</td>
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<td>Birling’s optimistic view that there would not be a war is completely wrong.</td>
<td>People were recovering from nearly six years of warfare, danger and uncertainty.</td>
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<td>There were strong distinctions between the upper and lower classes.</td>
<td>Class distinctions had been greatly reduced as a result of two world wars.</td>
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<td>Women were subservient to men. All a well off women could do was get married; a poor woman was seen as cheap labour.</td>
<td>As a result of the wars, women had earned a more valued place in society.</td>
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<td>The ruling classes saw no need to change the status quo.</td>
<td>There was a great desire for social change. Immediately after The Second World War, Clement Attlee's Labour Party won a landslide victory over Winston Churchill and the Conservatives.</td>
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- Priestley deliberately set his play in 1912 because the date represented an era when all was very different from the time he was writing.
- In 1912, rigid class and gender boundaries seemed to ensure that nothing would change. Yet by 1945, most of those class and gender divisions had been breached.
- Priestley wanted to make the most of these changes. Through this play, he encourages people to seize the opportunity the end of the war had given them to build a better, more caring society.