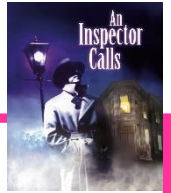


An Inspector Calls



Playwright / contextual information:

- J.B. Priestley was born in Bradford in 1894
- *An Inspector Calls* was written in 1945 but it was set in 1912
- At this time industries were doing well and the factory owners were becoming rich. But their workers lived and worked in bad conditions.

Key words:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| ✓ Stage directions | ✓ Emphasis |
| ✓ Monologue | ✓ Rhetorical questions |
| ✓ Dramatic irony | ✓ Setting |
| ✓ Foreshadowing | ✓ Stereotype |
| ✓ Capitalism | ✓ Actions / consequences |
| ✓ Socialism | ✓ Guilt |
| ✓ Cliff hanger | ✓ responsibility |
| ✓ Dialogue | |



Characters:

Inspector Goole – he comes to investigate the suicide of Eva Smith/Daisy Renton. He can be seen as Priestley's mouthpiece and that Priestley is speaking through the character of the Inspector.

Mr (Arthur) Birling – A successful business man who has been involved in local politics. He is also a factory owner. He is the father of Sheila and Eric.

Mrs (Sybil) Birling – she is an important member of a women's charity organisation in Brumley. She is not very friendly and is judgemental. She is the mother of Sheila and Eric.

Sheila Birling – Daughter of Mr and Mrs Birling. She is engaged to Gerald Croft.

Eric Birling – He is the son of Mr and Mrs Birling. He works for his father in the family business.

Gerald Croft – the son of a wealthy business man and he is engaged to Sheila Birling.

Eva Smith / Daisy Renton – Eva is sacked by Mr Birling for asking for higher wages; she is sacked from Milwards when Sheila complains; she becomes a mistress to Gerald; she is pregnant then to Eric which makes her ask for help from the women's charity which Mrs Birling is a part of. However, she is refused this help and she commits suicide by drinking disinfectant.

Edna – the maid of the Birling household



Themes:

Responsibility – The characters all have different views. Mrs and Mrs Birling do not believe that they are responsible for Eva's death, whereas, Sheila and Eric accept responsibility.

Capitalism – Mr Birling is a capitalist and he does not believe that he should help people. His philosophy is *always look after your own*.

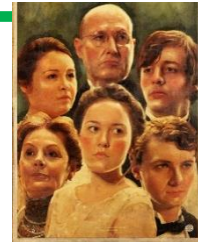
Younger generation vs older generation – the younger generation are much happy to learn and change than their parents.

Social class – in 1912 there was a very rigid class system and everybody knew their place Mr and Mrs Birling show no understanding of what life was like for the working class.

Lies and secrecy – the characters all try and cover their actions with lies which the Inspector then reveals to everyone.

Key plot points

- The Birling family are celebrating Sheila's engagement to Gerald Croft
- Mr Birling explains his views on how we should all look out for ourselves and how there will be no war.
- Inspector Goole arrives saying a girl – Eva Smith – has committed suicide
- The Inspector shows Mr Birling a photograph and Mr Birling tells him that she had sacked the girl for leading the strike for higher wages
- Sheila is shown the photograph and recognises her as the girl she has sacked from Milwards because Sheila was jealous and had lost her temper
- When the Inspector tells them that she then changed her name to Daisy Renton Gerald begins acting suspiciously.
- After much questioning it is revealed that Gerald did indeed know the woman and that she had been his mistress for 6 months
- Sheila is hurt and angry but she does respect that he has told her
- Mrs Birling tries to act like she is innocent, but Sheila tells her to be honest with the Inspector
- When Eric is out of the room, Mrs Birling admits that the girl had come to her charity for help because she was pregnant and that they had refused to help her
- Eric then confesses that he had got the girl pregnant and that he had stolen money from his father's business to support her
- When he learns of his mother's involvement Eric blames his mother for the girl's death.
- The Inspector makes a dramatic speech about the consequences of not thinking of others
- The Inspector leaves and Mr Birling and Gerald believe that the man was not a real Police Inspector
- Sheila and Eric feel guilty about what they have done and get angry at their parents
- The phone rings and Mr Birling is told that a girl has died on the way to the infirmary and that an Inspector is on the way over to make enquiries



Key quotations:

- 'it has good solid furniture of the period'
- 'we may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together – for lower costs and higher prices'
- 'we're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity'
- 'a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own...'
- 'because what happened to her there may have determined what happened to her afterwards'
- 'It's my duty to keep labour costs down'
- 'it's the only time I've ever done anything like that and I'll never, never do it again to anybody'
- 'she was young and pretty and a warm-hearted and intensely grateful'
- 'that was one of the things that prejudiced me against her case'
- 'I did nothing I am ashamed of or that won't bear investigation'
- 'I blame the young man who was the father of the child she was going to have'
- 'you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble'
- 'each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it'
- 'we are members of one body'
- 'they will be taught it in fire, blood and anguish.'
- 'the point is you don't seem to have learnt anything'
- 'you're beginning to pretend now nothing's really happened at all'

