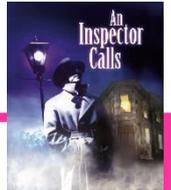


## An Inspector Calls



### Playwright / contextual information:

- J.B. Priestley was born in Bradford in 1894
- he left school at 16 and worked for a wool merchant before joining the army during WW1
- *An Inspector Calls* was written in 1945 but it was set in 1912
- at this time the coal, iron, steel, pottery and textile industries were booming
- factory owners were prospering whereas, the lives of their workers deteriorated as the owners attempted to maximise their profits.
- The play is set before the sinking of the Titanic ( there was much celebration about the Titanic and how it represented a new era for Britain) and before WW1

### 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 to serve a number of purposes, mainly, that he is Priestley's mouthpiece and 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 intensely 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 unfairly complains about her; 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 attitudes towards responsibility. Mrs and Mrs Birling do not believe that they are responsible for Eva's death, whereas, Sheila and Eric accept responsibility and recognise the parts that they played in the life of Eva/Daisy.

**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 more liberal minded than their parents who are single minded and do not feel they should be concerned by the fate of others.

**Social class** – in 1912 there was a very rigid class system and everybody knew their place. Birling is a wealthy factory owner is only interested in maximising his profits and protecting his business. Mrs Birling is very judgemental and refuses to try and understand the problems faced by the lower classes.

**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 outlines his arrogant viewpoints about the advances in Science, new inventions and the relationship between bosses and workers
- 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 overcome with jealousy 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 assert her authority 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 social irresponsibility
- The Inspector leaves and Mr Birling and Gerald believe that the man was not a real Police Inspector whilst Sheila and Eric feel guilty about what they have done
- 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'

