

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

SECTION ONE – Background

1946 vs. 1912	The Britain of 1946 was vastly different to the Britain of 1912. Two World Wars shaped that difference. Priestley blamed the class divide between upper and working classes for killing off a generation of young men.
Social Class	In 1912 British society was marked by a huge degree of inequality between the richest and poorest. The top 1% owned 70% of the total wealth, and the top 10% owned around 90% of the total wealth. Before the Second World War, there was a deep class divide in Britain. After the war, different classes mixed more. The higher classes were very concerned with their reputation (how people viewed them).
The Welfare State	In 1942 the Beveridge Report proposed the creation of a Welfare State, a government-funded system to help tackle the UK's problems. In 1945 the Labour government began the Welfare State by creating the NHS and Social Housing and setting up support in Social Security, Education, and Employment.
Factory Work	In 1912, Britain was the largest exporter of manufactured goods, and relied on factory workers to produce these goods. In 1912 most children left school at 13. Many well-off middle class people owned businesses that exploited members of the working class, paying them low wages.
Gender	A wealthy girl like Sheila born in 1890 had little chance of avoiding the role that was considered her destiny – to marry young, stay home and raise a family. The Suffragette movement, led by Emmeline Pankhurst, used militant means to argue for votes for women. Eva Smith is the embodiment of young, working class women who were oppressed by the middle and upper classes. The gender gap in society meant the treatment of men and women was very different.

SECTION TWO – Plot

Act 1	The Birling family are celebrating Sheila and Gerald's engagement. Mr Birling talks about his capitalist ideas. An Inspector arrives and reveals the suicide of Eva Smith. He questions Mr Birling (who sacked Eva Smith from his factory) and Sheila Birling (who got her fired from her next job, at a department store.)
Act 2	The Inspector questions Gerald Croft (who had an affair with Eva, who had changed her name to Daisy Renton.) Eric, becomes distressed and leaves. The Inspector questions Mrs Birling (who refused to give Eva help when she came to Mrs Birling's charity). It becomes clear that Eva was pregnant. Eric comes back.
Act 3	The Inspector questions Eric (who got Daisy pregnant and then stole money for her). The Inspector gives a final speech about how 'we are responsible for each other'. The family discover that the Inspector might not be real. The police then call to say another young girl has committed suicide and another Inspector is on his way.

SECTION THREE – Big ideas

Responsibility	Belief that everyone has a duty to look after each other in society.
Socialism	A political or social belief that wealth should be spread equally among the community to benefit the whole of society. Socialists expected privileged people to use their advantages to help the whole community.
Capitalism	A political or social belief that businesses should be run to benefit their owners by making them profits.
Microcosm	A community or situation that represents the features of something larger, like a complete society.
Morality	Knowing the difference between right and wrong

SECTION FOUR – Characters

Mr Arthur Birling	A wealthy businessman
Mrs Sybil Birling	His wife and social superior
Sheila Birling	Their young daughter
Eric Birling	Their son; a drunk
Mr Gerald Croft	Sheila's fiancé, son of Lady Croft
Inspector Goole	A newly appointed inspector
Eva Smith or Daisy Renton	Eva/Daisy symbolises the working class.

SECTION FIVE – Vocabulary

Authoritative	Naturally commanding and in control
Compassionate	Understanding other people's emotions
Deceitful	Lying and hiding things from people
Hubristic	Excessively proud or self-confident
Hypocritical	Saying people should do one thing, and doing the opposite yourself
Ignorant	When you are not very well educated or informed about the world
Impressionable	Easily influenced, easily persuaded
Naïve	Not knowing much yet about the world, like a child
Omniscient	Knowing everything.
Open-minded	Willing to think about new ideas
Patriarchal	An organisation, society or system controlled by men
Prejudiced	Disliking a group of people for no reason
Privileged	Born into a life with special rights and advantages
(Un)remorseful	(Not) sorry for what you've done
Vulnerable	In a position exposed to being harmed, physically or emotionally

SECTION SIX - Structure

Writer's message	The play is didactic : it aims to teach the audience a lesson . It teaches that everyone in society is responsible for everyone else, and that socialism will create a fairer society. The story of Eva Smith shows what can happen if they don't. Priestley did this to highlight the inequalities in Edwardian Britain (1912) and to try to show the way towards a new, more equal Britain in the aftermath of the war (1945).
Genre	This is a morality play disguised as a detective thriller, a whodunit . The morality play is a very old theatrical form, going back to the medieval period, which instructed audiences about good and evil. Where a traditional whodunit involves the narrowing down of suspects from several to one, <i>An Inspector Calls</i> inverts this process: one by one, nearly all the characters in the play are found to be guilty . In this way, Priestley makes his larger point that society is guilty of neglecting and abusing its most vulnerable members. A just society, he implies through the Inspector, is one that respects and exercises social responsibility .
The ending	Priestley uses a false ending to show that little has changed during the play. Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald have not changed their attitudes. Until they do, girls like Eva Smith will continue to lead hopeless lives. The ending implies that the audience should follow Sheila and Eric in changing their attitudes towards social responsibility .

SECTION SEVEN – Dramatic Terms

Stage and Audience	<i>An Inspector Calls</i> is a play , so use the words 'stage' and 'audience' in your answer to show you know this!
Stage directions	These are important instructions for the actors on the stage, like 'not quite at ease' for Eric or 'a rather cold woman' for Mrs Birling. Do discuss these to show that you recognise their importance. The opening stage directions tell us a lot about the Birlings and their selfish ways.
Dramatic devices	Priestley uses these to interest the audience and shape meaning. These include: Props – objects on the stage that tell us something about the characters e.g. the Birlings' 'solid' furniture, the engagement ring. Setting – the single setting shows how inward-looking and selfish the Birlings are. The Door Bell – this allows Priestley to imply strongly that Birling needs to be stopped! Exits and entrances – the Inspector's entrance and sudden final exit are key points in the play.

SECTION EIGHT – Key Quotations (Acts in brackets)

Arthur Birling	"unsinkable", "the Germans don't want war" (1)
	"a man has [...] to look after himself and his own" (1)
	"community and all that nonsense" (1)
	"famous younger generation who know it all" (3)
Sybil Birling	"A rather cold woman" "her husband's social superior" (1)
	"I did nothing I'm ashamed of" (2)
	Gerald's affair is "disgusting"; Sheila is a "hysterical child" (2)
	"As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!" (2)
Sheila Birling	"A pretty girl [...] very pleased with life" (1)
	"But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people!" (1)
	"You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner" (2)
	"Between us we drove that girl to commit suicide" (3)
Gerald Croft	"I don't come into this suicide business" (1)
	"I'm rather more – upset – by this business than I probably appear to be" (2)
	Inspector says he "made her happy for a time" (3)
	"Everything's alright now, Sheila. What about this ring?" (3)
Eric Birling	"Not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive" (1)
	"you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble" (3)
	I'm ashamed of you as well – yes both of you" (to his parents) (3)
	"the girl's dead and we all helped to kill her" (3)
The Inspector	Says the younger generation are "more impressionable" (2)
	"Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges." (2)
	"We don't live alone. We are members of one body" (3)
	"If men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it, in fire, and blood, and anguish" (3)