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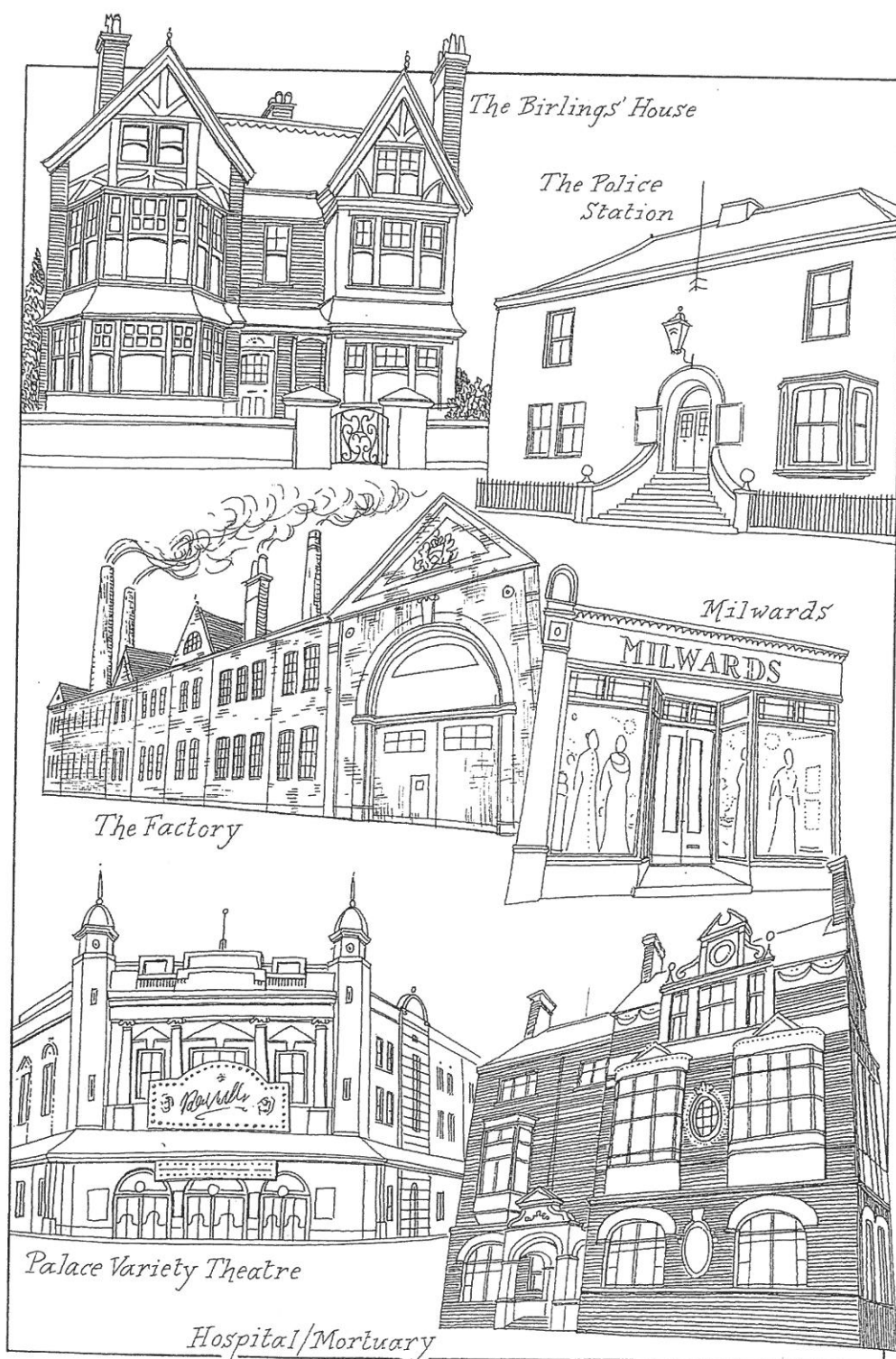
# ***An Inspector Calls***



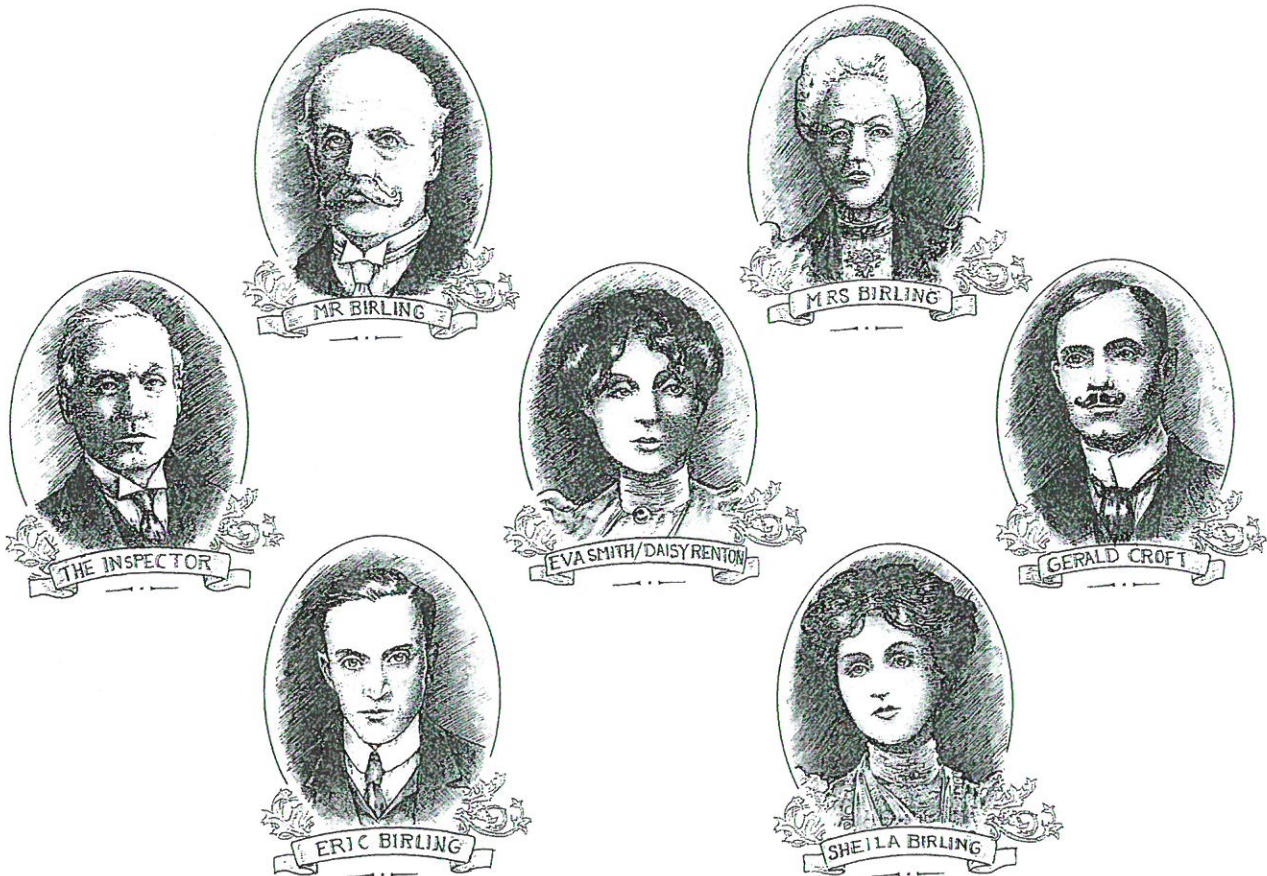
## Introducing *An Inspector Calls*

### SETTING

*An Inspector Calls* is set in the fictional industrial city of Brumley. The action takes place on one evening just before the First World War, in the home of a prosperous factory owner, and shows us the difference in life style between those who owned the factories, and who had money and power, and those who depended on them for work.



## CHARACTERS: WHO'S WHO



## J. B. PRIESTLEY: AUTHOR AND CONTEXT

1906 The Labour Party is founded after the success of the Labour Representation Committee in the General Election

1914–18 First World War. Aged 20, J. B. Priestley joins 10th Duke of Wellington's Regiment, and serves on the front line in France. He is wounded and gassed

1919 J. B. Priestley is awarded a place at Trinity Hall, Cambridge University, to study literature, history and political science

1922 J. B. Priestley begins work in London as a journalist writing for publications such as *The Times Literary Supplement* and *The New Statesman*. He publishes his first collection of essays under the title *Brief Diversions*

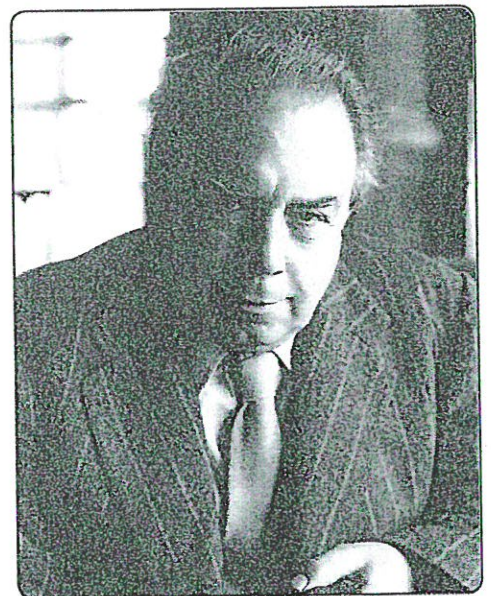
1926 The General Strike hits British industry

1929 The American economy is hit by a slump and the Wall Street Crash

1934 J. B. Priestley uses his travels through the poorer parts of Britain to write *English Journey*

1939–45 Second World War. J. B. Priestley makes regular wartime broadcasts on BBC Radio; his radio talks are published as *Britain Speaks*

1945 J. B. Priestley writes *An Inspector Calls*; Churchill's wartime coalition government resigns; a Labour government is formed under Clement Attlee after a landslide victory in the General Election; atomic bombs are dropped on Japan



# PART TWO: PLOT AND ACTION

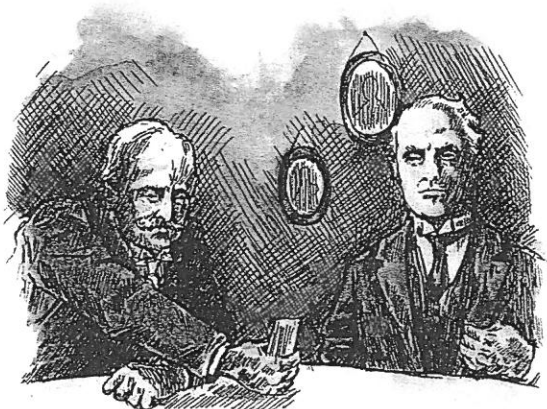
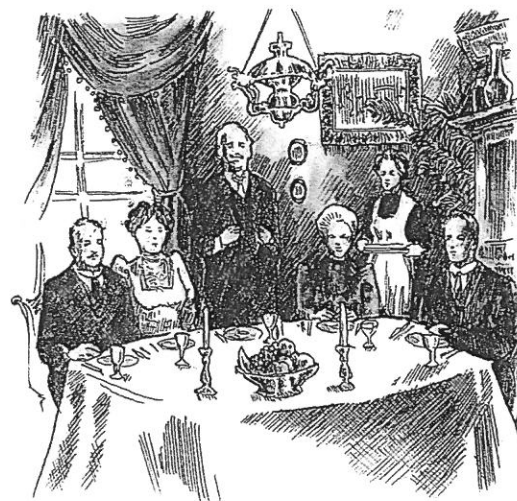
## Plot summary: What happens in *An Inspector Calls*?



- Go through the summary lists below and **highlight** what you think is the **key moment** in each Act.
- Then find each moment in the **text** and **reread** it. Write down **two reasons** why you think each moment is so **important**.

### ACT ONE

- The Birling family and Gerald Croft are celebrating Sheila's engagement to Gerald.
- Mr Birling makes pompous speeches outlining his views on the advances in science, new inventions and the relationship between bosses and workers, and saying they should ignore the 'cranks' (p. 10) who claim everybody has a responsibility to care for everybody else.
- The evening is interrupted by the arrival of a police inspector named Goole making enquiries about the suicide of a young woman, Eva Smith.



- Shown a photograph of the girl, Mr Birling admits he employed her in his factory but sacked her for being one of the leaders of a strike for higher wages.
- Sheila and Eric both feel their father has acted harshly, while Gerald supports Mr Birling's claim that he acted reasonably.
- Sheila is shown the photograph and she realises that, driven by jealousy and ill temper, she later had the girl sacked from her job as a shop assistant.
- When Gerald hears the girl changed her name to Daisy Renton, his reaction shows he too has known the girl.
- The Inspector suggests that many people share responsibility for the misery which prompted Eva Smith/Daisy Renton to end her life.
- Left alone with Gerald, Sheila warns him not to try to hide anything from the Inspector.

## ACT TWO

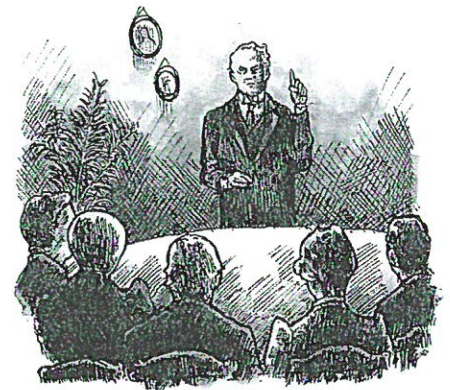
- Gerald admits he had met Daisy Renton in the spring of the previous year and that she was his mistress for six months.
- Sheila is hurt and angry at Gerald's involvement with the girl, yet she feels a certain respect for the openness of his admission.
- Mrs Birling tries to bully the Inspector and to control events.
- Sheila realises that the Inspector's enquiries are well founded, and that her mother might also have had some dealings with the girl.



- While Eric is out of the room, Mrs Birling is forced to admit the girl asked for the help of a charity that she worked for and was refused.
- It is revealed that the girl was pregnant, and Mrs Birling lays the blame for the girl's death on the father of the unborn child.
- There is a suspicion that Eric might have been the father of that unborn child.

## ACT THREE

- Eric confesses that he got the girl pregnant and that he stole money from his father's firm to support her.
- Learning that the girl had appealed to his mother for help and been turned down, Eric blames his mother for the girl's death.
- The Inspector makes a dramatic speech about the consequences of the sort of social irresponsibility that Mr Birling was preaching at the end of the dinner.
- The Inspector, having shown that each had a part in ruining the girl's life, leaves.



- Between them Gerald and Mr Birling gradually prove that the man was not a real police inspector.
- A telephone call to the Chief Constable establishes there is no Inspector Goole on the police force.
- A telephone call to the Infirmary reveals that there has been no recent suicide.
- Eric and Sheila continue to feel guilty about what they have done, but the others now shrug off any guilt.
- Mr Birling answers the telephone: a young woman has just died on her way to the Infirmary and an inspector is on his way to make enquiries.

## Progress and revision check



1 Why has the Inspector called on the Birling family? (Write your answers below)

.....

2 Why is Mr Birling so afraid of a scandal?

.....

3 What happens when Sheila is shown the photograph of the girl?

.....

4 Where had both Gerald and Eric met the girl?

.....

5 How did Eric obtain the money which he gave Daisy?

.....



On a piece of paper write down the answers to these questions:

1 Compare Mr Birling's speech to Eric and Gerald (Act One, pp. 9–10) with the Inspector's final speech (Act Three, p. 56).

Start: *Mr Birling shows he has strong views about ...*

2 Why might we think Gerald less guilty of harming the girl than the others?

Start: *Unlike the others, Gerald sets out to help the girl ... or When Gerald first sees the girl ...*

## GRADE BOOSTER



Answer this longer question about the plot of the play:

Q: In what ways does each of the Birling family and Gerald form part of 'a chain of events'? Think about ...

- The contact each has with the girl.
- The way the Inspector questions the characters.
- The timeline of the events brought out by the questioning.

**For a C grade:** Convey your ideas clearly and appropriately (you could use words from the question to guide your answer) and refer to details from the text.

**For an A grade:** Make sure you comment on the varied ways the plot is structured, and if possible come up with your own original or alternative ideas. For example, explore the extent to which the play is modelled on conventional detective thrillers.

# PART THREE: CHARACTER

## The Inspector

### WHO IS THE INSPECTOR?

He introduces himself as Inspector Goole, a police officer who has come to investigate the background to a young woman's suicide.



### WHAT DOES THE INSPECTOR DO IN THE PLAY?

- The Inspector interrupts the Birling family gathering.
  - He establishes they each did something cruel or unkind to the dead girl.
  - He gradually takes control of the situation and, while being polite, refuses to acknowledge that any of the others is superior to himself.
  - He leaves them after making an impassioned speech about social justice.
- Handwritten note: look out for each other*

**6 EXAMINER'S TIP**

Look at the stage directions. They give additional information to the actors, and in them you may find physical descriptions and suggestions about how a character is behaving and/or feeling.

### HOW IS THE INSPECTOR DESCRIBED AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Quotation	Means?
A man of 'massiveness, solidity and purposefulness' (p. 11)	The Inspector is an imposing figure who will dominate the play and will achieve his aims.
'One person and one line of enquiry at a time. Otherwise there's a muddle.' (p. 12)	He wants to do things his way, and he likes to do things in an orderly way. This allows J. B. Priestley to build the play as a 'chain of events'.
'It's my duty to ask questions.' (p. 15)	He takes his responsibilities seriously, and shows the others that they haven't done so.
'He never seemed like an ordinary police inspector - ' (p. 59)	The word 'ordinary' could mean 'usual', or it could mean that he was somehow 'extraordinary', more than human.

### EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT THE INSPECTOR



Look closely at key words. The word 'inspector' suggests someone who looks closely at things, and this is his role in the play. His name also sounds like ghoul, someone with a morbid interest in death, and it could be said that the Inspector's existence is a result of the girl's death. He remains solid and intact as the others break down, and nothing distracts him from his purpose. He acts as a catalyst, creating the possibility for the others to face up to what they have done. At times he seems in control of what they say – as Sheila says, 'Somehow he makes you' (p. 37). Think about how the way he uses the information makes him appear both an outsider and an all-knowing creature, mysterious and powerful.

**★ GRADE BOOSTER**

Think about other ways in which the Inspector appears to be different from our expectations of a police inspector.



## Mr Birling

### WHO IS MR BIRLING?

Mr Birling is a successful businessman, who has been active in local politics, has been Lord Mayor of Brumley and is the father of Eric and Sheila.



### WHAT DOES MR BIRLING DO?

- Mr Birling hosts a dinner to celebrate Sheila's engagement to Gerald Croft.
- He declares that a man's responsibility is only to himself and his family.
- Two years ago he fired Eva Smith from his factory.
- He tries to intimidate the Inspector, but also tries to protect himself and his family.
- He becomes increasingly concerned about any possible scandal.
- He is the one who takes the final telephone call.

### HOW IS MR BIRLING DESCRIBED AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Quotation	Means?
'heavy-looking, rather portentous man' (p. 1)	Mr Birling's size helps to give him a threatening appearance.
'a hard-headed practical man of business' (p. 6)	He thinks of himself as a man who does well in business, and who doesn't let sentiment get in the way of whatever needs to be done to succeed.
'Yes, my dear, I know – I'm talking too much.' (p. 7)	He likes to air his views and is aware that he tends to monopolise the conversation, suggesting he has a high opinion of his own importance.
'I'm a public man –' (p. 41)	He expects respect as he has been a member of the town council, Lord Mayor and a magistrate.

### EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT MR BIRLING



When you are writing about Mr Birling, remember that he sees himself as an important man in Brumley and he is prepared to use his reputation and powerful friends to intimidate the Inspector. Notice how he makes his views clear in the early speeches in Act One, and these do not change. His cry that he would give the girl thousands of pounds if he could is because he is afraid of what the girl's death will do to him, his family and to his chances of getting a knighthood, not because he feels remorse over sacking her. Mr Birling represents what socialists, like J. B. Priestley, felt was wrong with society. He is a man with money, power and social position, but he has no sense of social justice.

#### ★ GRADE BOOSTER

Give four or five words of your own which describe Mr Birling's character, behaviour or attitude.

#### ? DID YOU KNOW?

In the early nineteenth century it was illegal in Britain for people to join a trade union. The penalty for doing so was to be transported to prison colonies in Australia.

## Mrs Birling

## WHO IS MRS BIRLING?

Mrs Birling is a prominent member of the Brumley Women's Charity Organization.



## WHAT DOES MRS BIRLING DO?

- ▶ Mrs Birling praises Gerald for his timing of the presentation of the ring.
- ▶ She treats the Inspector as an inferior.
- ▶ She is disgusted when she learns that Daisy Renton was Gerald's mistress.
- ▶ She persuaded the Charity not to help the pregnant girl.
- ▶ She blames the girl's death on the father of the child – who turns out to be her son.
- ▶ She claims she was the only one not to 'give in' to the Inspector.

## HOW IS MRS BIRLING DESCRIBED AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Quotation	Means?
'a rather cold woman' and 'her husband's social superior' (p. 1)	Mrs Birling is not a friendly person and rarely shows any affection. She looks down on most people and expects the Inspector to treat her with respect.
'Please don't contradict me like that.' (p. 30)	She does not like, and doesn't expect, people to disagree with her. She is used to being listened to and having her opinions accepted as right.
'It's disgusting to me.' (p. 38)	Even though Gerald comes from a good family and meets with her approval as a future son-in-law, she cannot accept Gerald's affair.
'the most prominent member of the committee' (pp. 43–4)	She is the most powerful and respected member of the group which runs the Charity, and is able to influence the decisions it makes.

## EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT MRS BIRLING



Show that, despite her charity work, Mrs Birling lacks understanding of how other people live, shown in her comments about 'a girl of that sort' (p. 47) and her unwillingness to believe the girl's reasons for refusing to take stolen money or to marry the young man responsible for her pregnancy. Her lack of understanding extends to her family as she has been unaware of Eric's heavy drinking. She remains untouched by the Inspector's questions, although she is shocked to learn of her son's involvement. Having condemned Gerald's 'disgusting affair' (p. 38), she forgets it once the threat of scandal has been removed.

## ★ GRADE BOOSTER

Look back at pages 1–7 of the play and pick out what Mrs Birling says and does to show how fussy she is about good manners and correct behaviour.

## ? DID YOU KNOW?

Helping in a charity was considered almost compulsory for wealthy women during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, but charities would help only people they thought of as the 'deserving poor', that is people who led honest lives and tried to help themselves.

## Sheila Birling

### WHO IS SHEILA BIRLING?

Sheila is the daughter of Mr and Mrs Birling and is engaged to Gerald Croft.



### WHAT DOES SHEILA DO?

- Sheila shows genuine emotion when she hears that a young woman has died.
- She was responsible for making the girl lose her job in the dress shop.
- She realises the Inspector is not someone who can be lied to.
- After hearing about his affair, she breaks off her engagement to Gerald.
- She reveals that Eric drinks too much.
- She understands that the family's experience that night is meant to make them improve the way they treat others.

### HOW IS SHEILA DESCRIBED AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Quotation	Means?
'Oh – how horrible! Was it an accident?' (p. 17)	Sheila feels shock at the death of a young woman. She is naive to suggest that someone could drink a fatal amount of disinfectant 'by accident', but it shows she can't imagine someone not having a lot to live for.
'I wouldn't miss it for worlds' (p. 34)	Although bitter about Gerald's relationship with Daisy Renton, her curiosity needs to be satisfied and she is strong enough to hear the full story.
'I had her turned out of a job.' (p. 56)	She is prepared to accept responsibility for what she has done.
'it's you two who are being childish – trying not to face the facts'. (p. 59)	Sheila clearly believes that it doesn't matter whether the Inspector is a real police officer or not. Her parents are relieved that they might prevent a scandal, but she is concerned that they all harmed someone.

### EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT SHEILA



Note that Sheila changes more than any other character. At first she is playful and self-centred, enjoying the attention her engagement brings. When she hears of the girl's death she shows a sensitive side to her nature: she responds to the girl as a person, not as cheap labour, and criticises her father. When she realises her own jealousy and bad temper led to the girl losing her job, she is genuinely sorry. She grows stronger as the play goes on, and has the strength of character to respect Gerald's honesty, even though she feels they should end the engagement. She understands the Inspector's message, that there is a need for justice in society. These things all help to make her a more sympathetic character.

#### ★ GRADE BOOSTER

Find examples of when Sheila is lively and excited; caring; frightened; gentle and sympathetic.

#### ? DID YOU KNOW?

The tradition of giving an engagement ring dates back to medieval Italy; the ring symbolises the promise of a never-ending future together.

## Eric Birling

## WHO IS ERIC BIRLING?

Eric is Sheila's brother. He is employed in his father's business, drinks more than is good for him and is the father of Daisy Renton's unborn child.



## WHAT DOES ERIC DO?

- Eric drinks too much at the family dinner.
- He met the girl in the bar of the Palace Theatre and made her pregnant.
- He stole money from his father's firm to give to the girl.
- He accuses his mother of killing her own unborn grandchild.
- He accepts his guilt, whether the Inspector is a real police officer or not.

Quotation	Means?
'Just keep quiet, Eric, and don't get excited' (p. 13)	Mr Birling recognises that Eric has had too much to drink and might easily say something he shouldn't.
'That's something this public-school-and-Varsity life you've had doesn't seem to teach you.' (p. 16)	Eric has been to an expensive school and then university, but Mr Birling feels he knows more of life than his son.
'Besides, you're not the type – you don't get drunk –' (p. 50)	We know that Eric does get drunk, and that the opposite of what his mother says is true.
'Your trouble is – you've been spoilt'. (p. 54)	Mr Birling thinks that by being the boss's son Eric has had too easy a life.

## EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT ERIC

Think about Eric as a bit of a misfit. He is *'not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive'* (p. 2). He is weak-willed and looks for an easy way out of troubles. He sees his father as *'not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble'* (p. 54). Notice how he doesn't share his father's *'hard-headed'* (p. 6) attitude to business and to his employer. Notice also how the unpleasant side of his character is brought out when he drinks. He insists on going home with the girl, but cannot remember what happened that first time. He makes the girl pregnant and steals money from his father's firm. When the girl suspects he has stolen the money she refuses to take any more, and also refuses to marry him. Like Sheila, Eric believes that their experiences at the hands of the Inspector should make them improve their behaviour.

## ★ GRADE BOOSTER

Notice how J. B. Priestley manipulates his characters, having them going out of the room and coming back at moments which heighten the dramatic tension.

## ? DID YOU KNOW?

We believe today that anyone with good exam results can go to university, but a hundred years ago relatively few young people had the chance to do this.

**★ GRADE BOOSTER**

Gerald has much in common with Mr Birling. Look through the play and find instances when the two of them seem to think in the same way.

**KEY CONNECTION**

In *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens gives the miser Scrooge the opportunity both to look back on his past life and forward to the future so that he is able to change his ways and so avoid the consequences of his meanness.

**Gerald Croft**

**WHO IS GERALD CROFT?**

Gerald is the son of a wealthy industrialist and business rival of Mr Birling, and he has just become engaged to Sheila Birling.



**WHAT DOES GERALD DO?**

- Gerald gives Sheila an engagement ring during the dinner party.
- He agrees with Mr Birling about the way a business should be run.
- He rescued Daisy Renton from the drunken Alderman Meggarty.
- He kept Daisy as his mistress for six months, then broke off their relationship.
- He finds out that a police sergeant has never heard of an Inspector Goole.
- He telephones the Infirmary and learns that no girl died that day.

**HOW IS GERALD DESCRIBED AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

Quotation	Means?
<i>'easy, well-bred young man-about-town'</i> (p. 2)	Gerald gets on easily with people, is self-confident and assured, and looks as if he knows a lot about life.
<i>'That was clever of you Gerald.'</i> (p. 5)	He has a sense of what to do and when to do it, and he clearly has the approval of Mrs Birling.
<i>'You're just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted.'</i> (p. 4)	Mr Birling sees Gerald as being like himself – a determined man of business; he sees the engagement as bringing the two family businesses together.
<i>'I'm rather more – upset – by this business than I probably appear to be –'</i> (p. 39)	Gerald has been hiding his feelings, like an English gentleman is expected to do. Deep down he is greatly saddened by the girl's death, and has a strong feeling of responsibility for what has happened.

**EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT GERALD**



Gerald is not a member of the family, but his engagement to Sheila, business interests and knowledge of the girl link him closely to them. He is a complex character. The others have acted out of greed, anger, jealousy, spite, lust or pride, but you could argue that Gerald was motivated by sympathy and then genuine attraction. His sensitive nature is shown in the way he produces the engagement ring, by his reaction to the death of the girl and by his gently asking Sheila if he can come back after she has returned the ring. Note that his admission of his relationship with Daisy impresses Sheila who admits 'I rather respect you more than I've ever done before' (p. 40). At the same time, he agrees that Mr Birling was right to sack Eva Smith, and worldly-wise enough to enquire about the Inspector and then to phone the Infirmary and lie about his interest in a possible suicide.

# Eva Smith/Daisy Renton

## WHO IS EVA SMITH/DAISY RENTON?

These are two names by which the girl who suffered at the hands of the Birling family and Gerald was known.



## WHAT HAPPENS TO HER?

- Mr Birling sacked her from his factory for leading a strike for better pay.
- She was sacked from a dress shop after Sheila unjustly complained about her.
- She became Gerald Croft's mistress.
- She was made pregnant by Eric Birling.
- She applied to a charity for help, but Mrs Birling refused that help.
- She committed suicide by swallowing disinfectant.

## HOW IS SHE DESCRIBED AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Quotation	Means?
'a lively good-looking girl – country bred' and a 'good worker too' (p. 14)	Mr Birling had a good opinion of her. Being bred in the country made her naive, less worldly-wise than a city girl. As a good worker she was a potential 'leading operator'.
'She'd had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go.' (p. 15)	She had spoken up for the other girls who were on strike and was showing leadership qualities against Mr Birling, and he didn't like that.
'She was very pretty and looked as if she could take care of herself.' (p. 24)	But Sheila judged the girl by her appearance, and she did not think about the difficulties the girl might face in getting another job.
'Now she had to try something else.' (p. 25)	The words sound innocent, but the 'something else' was meeting men in a place used by prostitutes.

**★ GRADE BOOSTER**

Think about the characters' deeper significance as well as what they do. To what extent do you think Eva Smith/Daisy Renton is an 'every-woman' figure?

**6 EXAMINER'S TIP**

Remember that characters are revealed through what others say about them as well as what they themselves say and do.

## EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT THE GIRL 6

The girl remains a mystery: she never appears on stage, we do not know her real name, but the play revolves around her. We do know she was pretty enough for Mr Birling to remember her, for Sheila to be jealous of her and to attract the attention of Gerald and Eric. What we learn about her contrasts sharply with what we see of the Birling family. We should also recognise that she worked hard, supported her fellow workers and was kind. Although she was reduced to earning her living by picking up men in the Palace Theatre bar, her honesty prevented her from considering marriage to Eric and protected him from his folly in stealing money. You could say that she stands for all the people we meet in our everyday lives, and J. B. Priestley uses her to make us think about our responsibility towards others.

Progress and revision check



- 1 Select two ways in which the Inspector and Mr Birling are opposites of each other. (Write your answers below)  
.....
- 2 Find two places where Mrs Birling's coldness of character can be clearly seen?  
.....
- 3 What do Sheila's immediate reactions to learning of the girl's death tell us about her?  
.....
- 4 What is there about Eric's first meeting with the girl that shows the worst side of his character?  
.....
- 5 What do Gerald's actions in the final section of the play tell us about him?  
.....



On a piece of paper write down the answers to these questions:

- Why might we think Mrs Birling is a hypocrite?  
Start: *Mrs Birling's behaviour can be seen to be hypocritical on several occasions ...*
- What do we see in Sheila's character which might make us take a critical view of her?  
Start with: *Sheila has been very fortunate in her life ... or Our first impressions of Sheila are not particularly poor ones ...*

GRADE BOOSTER



Answer this longer question about characters in the play:

Q: How does J. B. Priestley create a feeling of sympathy for Eva Smith/Daisy Renton even though the audience never meet her? Think about ...

- The way different characters describe her.
- How each character treats her.
- The way the Inspector makes references to her.

**For a C grade:** Convey your ideas clearly and appropriately (you could use words from the question to guide your answer) and refer to details in the text.

**For an A grade:** Make sure you deal with each of the suggested bullets in depth and detail. Emphasise the ways the audience's picture of her is gradually built up and changes during the play, and offer your own interpretation of how she is seen by the end.

# PART FOUR: KEY CONTEXTS AND THEMES

## Key contexts

### THE AUTHOR: J. B. PRIESTLEY

J. B. Priestley was born in Bradford, Yorkshire, in 1894. He left school at 16, worked for a firm of wool merchants then joined the army at the start of the First World War, serving in France where he was wounded and gassed. After the war he was awarded a place at Cambridge University. He took a degree in Literature, History and Politics, after which he became a journalist writing for publications such as *The Times Literary Supplement* and *The New Statesman*. His first play, *Dangerous Corner*, was written in 1932, and together with *I Have Been Here Before* and *Time and the Conways* make up his 'Time' plays which took inspiration from his fascination with theories about time, premonitions and the idea that some people could see into the future and so be able to recognise and change actions which might have terrible consequences. *An Inspector Calls*, written in 1945, has some elements of this idea. As a socialist, he was disappointed in the economic chaos, political unrest and social deprivation that followed the First World War and ruined the dream of a country fit 'for our heroes to live in'. This play may be seen as his plea, and his hope, for a fairer and more equal society once the Second World War was over. In all J. B. Priestley wrote over sixty books and more than forty plays.

### SOCIAL POSITION

Social position, your place in society, was far more important in 1912 than it is today. Following the dramatic expansion of industry throughout the nineteenth century, many men in industries such as coal, iron and steel, pottery and textiles made considerable fortunes. Industrialists may have come from humble origins but their wealth allowed them to rise up the social ladder. Marriages between these newly rich families and aristocratic, but often impoverished, land-owning families helped to secure new social positions. Many of the industrialists were granted titles and this too helped to improve their social standing. It was important to maintain at least an outward appearance of respectability.

Arthur Birling has made his money through building up a successful manufacturing business. Mrs Birling's attitudes, her desire for strictly correct behaviour – even down to criticising her husband when he compliments the cook in front of a guest – and her general manner all suggest that she comes from a 'better' family background than Mr Birling. He has enhanced his status by getting on to the town council, becoming Lord Mayor and accepting the duties of a magistrate (an unpaid judge for minor offences). He is expecting his service to the community to be rewarded with a knighthood, which will raise him further up the social ladder. Gerald Croft's father is already a knight and the Crofts' firm is a larger one than Mr Birling's. A knighthood will make Sheila a more acceptable daughter-in-law for Lady Croft. Mr Birling's importance in the town and the influential friends he has made allow him and Mrs Birling to feel superior to the Inspector who they see as being only a public servant. His questioning brings out secrets that will cause a scandal and seriously damage the Birlings' social position.

#### KEY CONNECTION

As well as being a prolific writer, J. B. Priestley made radio broadcasts during the Second World War, founded his own production company and was the director of the Mask Theatre in London.



### WORKERS AND BOSSES

At the time the play is set, the Labour Party, founded by James Keir Hardie in 1893, was only just beginning to make an impact on the political life of the country. The rights of workers, like Eva Smith, were not taken too seriously by many employers, but at the same time many working people had benefited from the generosity of industrialists who genuinely cared for the welfare of their workers. Workers, however, generally didn't have much job security, and being fired from a job meant you had no references to show you as being of good character, making it harder for you to find another job. There was no unemployment pay or benefits system to help you if you were out of work.

Mr Birling's firm employed 'several hundred young women' (p. 12) so his recognition of a girl he had sacked two years earlier suggests she stood out from the crowd. The women had no trade union to organise their strike, to negotiate their claim for higher wages or to give them financial support during the strike. Mr Birling saw his duty as being 'to keep labour costs down' and so saw nothing wrong in sacking the 'four or five ring-leaders' (p. 15). Gerald thinks Mr Birling is right to do that, but Eric and Sheila do not. Perhaps because of the qualities which led the foreman in Mr Birling's factory to think that Eva was worthy of promotion, and because of her pleasant manner and appearance, the girl was able to find a good job in the dress shop. Once Sheila had her sacked from that job she found it difficult to find other work, and we see how easy it would be for her to have to lead the sort of life which led her into the clutches of Alderman Meggarty, Gerald and Eric.

### SETTING AND PLACE

The play is set in the fictional industrial town of Brumley. It is typical of the many towns where the factory owners, who provided much-needed employment, were able to run things pretty much as they liked. It is clearly a large town, having a Lord Mayor and its own police force and Chief Constable. The action of the play takes place in the Birlings' dining room, which is described in the *stage directions* as 'substantial and heavily comfortable, but not cosy' (p. 1), reflecting the family's outward comfort and inner tensions. J. B. Priestley wants the stage set to be realistic to convince the audience they are watching something real and normal – then he is able to create a greater effect when that normality is shattered.

#### EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT SETTING AND PLACE



In the fictional town of Brumley we see opportunities for employment in factories, and the town has shops which cater to the rich. Notice that employment of any kind, however, is dependent on the whims of the factory bosses and the shops' rich customers. We see another aspect of the town in the Brumley Women's Charity Organization, which suggests there are women who are poor and in need of help. The girl's treatment shows that the poor cannot depend on getting that help. You can discuss the contrast between the power of the rich and way of life of the poor inhabitants of the town, illustrated by the comfortable home, elegant clothes and fine food we see in the Birling household, and the shabby living conditions and hunger endured by Eva Smith/Daisy Renton.

#### ★ GRADE BOOSTER

Create a single revision sheet for each of the key contexts and themes. You could set it out in the form of a diagram with essential quotations, key points and some of your own thoughts.

## Key themes

## AN EQUITABLE SOCIETY

In this play, J. B. Priestley presents us with a sincerely felt and powerfully expressed social message. We are shown the comfortable home and rich way of life of the Birling family. By contrast we have the accounts of the desperate attempts of workers to increase their poor wages and the drab and sordid life that the girl is forced to live as a result of the actions of such people as the Birlings.

The Inspector champions the cause of the poor, and tries to get the others to accept that all people share a common humanity and so are part of an interdependent community. This message seems to get through to Eric and Sheila, but their father dismisses the idea of a community, in which responsibility and guilt are shared, as the foolish mutterings of socialist cranks.

As the play progresses, the Inspector's point is put across more and more forcefully, and he becomes a spokesperson for the disadvantaged and a voice for the conscience which the Birlings and Gerald seem to lack. The Inspector points out what would happen if injustice and inequality were allowed to continue unchecked. His **oratorical** style might seem exaggerated and overpowering if J. B. Priestley had not gradually built up the mysterious and prophetic aspects of the Inspector's **character**.

## KEY CONNECTION

Vincent Brome's biography *J. B. Priestley* (1988) is excellent for learning more about J. B. Priestley's life, especially his 'Time' plays.



## EXAMINER'S TIP

Answer the question that has been set – not the one you wished had been set!



- Look at what the Inspector and Sheila say about the girl's situation and about 'cheap labour' (p. 19).
- Reread Sheila's account of the confrontation in the dress shop (pp. 23–4).
- Look again at Gerald's story of meeting the girl. Reread pages 35–7 and notice how different the girl's world is from Gerald's.

## EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT AN EQUITABLE SOCIETY



It is clear that even today there are many things which we might see as being unfair. When looking at this play, however, it is important that we realise that the world Priestley was writing about wasn't just 'unfair'. It was a world in which most people had few rights, and they depended upon the goodwill of their employers far more than people do today. J. B. Priestley wants us to see that Eva Smith is completely at the mercy of the Birling family, and as she comes into contact with each of them her situation gets worse and worse. Notice how he takes Eva Smith on a downward journey; point out that when things seem to be going well for her something else will happen to spoil things for her.

### ★ GRADE BOOSTER

A feature of A-grade writing on literature is the ability to see more than one possibility of interpretation and to support a preference for one of them.

### 🔒 EXAMINER'S TIP

Short, or even single-word, quotations can be very effective if embedded into your own writing.

## RESPONSIBILITY

Most of the characters have a narrow view of what it means to be responsible, but the Inspector provides us with a much broader one. Mr Birling feels his responsibility is to make a success of his business. This means making as much profit as possible, even if he is harsh in his dealings with those who work for him. As a family man he has a responsibility to provide for the material needs of his family, yet it is clear that Eric does not see him as the kind of father to whom he could turn when in trouble.

Mrs Birling accepts her responsibility as chair of the Women's Charity Organization, but sees only a responsibility to help those that she feels are deserving of help. She allows her personal feelings to prejudice her decisions. Sheila belatedly recognises that as a powerful customer she has an obligation not to let her personal feelings and ill-temper lead to misery for people who have no power, while Eric has little sense of responsibility at all. He drinks far more than is good for him and he forced the girl into a relationship which had disastrous consequences. He attempted to help her by stealing from his father.

Gerald showed some sense of responsibility when he rescued the girl from the unwelcome attentions of another man, fed her and found her somewhere to live. Yet he gave in to his own desire for personal pleasure and eventually abandoned the girl without knowing, or very much caring, what happened to her.



Go back and look up these examples of occasions when you can see some of the characters' attitudes towards responsibility:

- Mr Birling's speech on page 10 and Eric's echoing of that speech on page 58.
- Mrs Birling's views, towards the end of Act Two, on who is to blame for the girl's death.
- What we learn of Eric's behaviour towards the girl in Act Three.

## LOVE

The play presents a variety of thoughts about love, the nature of love and different people's interpretation of love. Sheila and Gerald appear to be in love, and their engagement seems to bring them happiness as they contemplate their future together. After each of them has confessed to their shameful behaviour towards Eva Smith/Daisy Renton, Sheila realises that they do not really know each other well and that trust is an essential ingredient in a loving relationship. We are left wondering if their love will survive these events.

Mr Birling's remark about the engagement of his daughter bringing the two family firms into a closer working relationship gives us an indication of his attitude towards love and marriage. He sees marriage as a convenient way of progressing up the social and economic ladder. This makes us wonder whether love played any real part in his marriage to the socially superior Sybil Birling and whether her coldness to others, including her own children, does not have its roots in a loveless marriage.

Both Gerald and Eric have been involved with the girl, yet each of them denies that they loved her – their relationships were prompted by physical attraction. The girl took up with Eric out of necessity, but she does, however, seem to have felt a genuine love for Gerald. Gerald's ending of the affair may be seen as being callous in view of her love for him.

The Inspector preaches a form of love, a sort of true 'charity' which is a deep care for our fellow human beings. This is quite alien to Mrs Birling who is prepared to devote time to 'charity' while having no real care for others.



- Look at the way Gerald and Sheila talk at the time when he hands her the engagement ring (p. 5).
- Notice how Sheila, after hearing Gerald's story, realises that they don't really know each other (p. 40). Think about whether this suggests their love was true love or not.
- When Gerald is asked whether he loved Daisy Renton, he says 'It's hard to say. I didn't feel about her as she felt about me' (p. 38). Eric is more straightforward, saying 'I wasn't in love with her or anything – but I liked her – she was pretty and a good sport' (p. 52). What do we learn of the two men's attitudes?

## TIME

J. B. Priestley wrote the play for an audience just coming out of the horrors of the Second World War, yet he set his play in 1912, two years before the start of the First World War: this brings us to a consideration of J. B. Priestley's use of time as an element of his plays. At the end of the play we are left with a sense that the events are going to start all over again. We wonder whether things will be different and how the characters will behave.

One 'time' theory suggests that when we die we re-enter our life and live it all over again, and only by doing things better can we escape that cycle and begin a new life in which we do not repeat our mistakes. Another theory states that you could be given the gift of seeing forward in time as well as looking back. This would mean that, just as you can look back and see what actions led to your present situation, you could look forward and see the consequences of your actions. So, if you wished, you could change those actions and avoid the consequences.

*An Inspector Calls* contains elements of these time theories. The Inspector, arriving before the suicide is a reality, offers each character a chance to see the consequences, to change the future, to break the circle. Eric and Sheila seem prepared to face up to their past actions and to improve themselves, but the others do not.

The reflections on the past, and the possibilities of the future, highlight the importance of caring for others, of taking responsibility for our actions and of considering the consequences of them.

### ★ GRADE BOOSTER

A good answer will show that you can interpret and analyse points in the text, so avoid vague general statements.

### 🔒 EXAMINER'S TIP

It is always a good idea to collect a range of words to describe a character.

### KEY CONNECTION

J. B. Priestley based his 'Time' plays on the ideas which P. D. Ouspensky expressed in his book *A New Model of the Universe* (1931) and on the theories of J. W. Dunne. Try finding out more about these writers.

## PART FOUR: KEY CONTEXTS AND THEMES

### EXAMINER'S TIP

When writing about a specific scene or extract always make connections with the play as a whole – this shows you have read the complete work.

### KEY CONNECTION

Television programmes such as *Doctor Who* and films such as *Back to the Future* use the idea of intervention by a superior being to bring about change in the lives of others. Films such as *Groundhog Day* use the notion of time being circular.



- Consider what Mr Birling's speeches about the good times ahead, the prospects of lasting peace, the advance of technology and the newly launched 'unsinkable' *Titanic* meant to the audiences that first saw this play in 1946.
- Trace how the Inspector links each member of the family and Gerald to a specific time in the girl's life, and how the times fit so carefully together.
- Think of ways to explain the final telephone call.

### EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT TIME

Think about the Inspector's knowledge of events, apparently before they happen, his steady revelation of the **characters'** pasts and their links to the dead girl over a two-year period. These things give him a mystical, unworldly quality.

Notice how the Inspector's departure leaves the characters free to decide their future, while at the end we are left to wonder how they will cope with reliving the close scrutiny of their dealings with others when the cycle of questions begins all over again.

It is worth commenting that by setting the play in 1912 and presenting it to a later audience, J. B. Priestley has covered an era which includes both world wars. The failure of the older characters to learn anything reflects the failure of generations to learn from the mistakes of the recent past. There is **dramatic irony** in that characters talk of hopes for peace and prosperity, but we know these will not happen. By 1945, J. B. Priestley was hoping that the second time around the world might learn from past mistakes and we might see such hopes realised if we, the audience, can accept the challenge to be caring and socially aware.

## Progress and revision check



- 1 How did Priestley earn his living after leaving Cambridge University?  
(Write your answers below)

.....

- 2 How has Arthur Birling made his money?

.....

- 3 Who was responsible for founding the Labour Party in 1893?

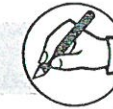
.....

- 4 Which famous ship sank on 14 April 1912?

.....

- 5 In which town is the play set?

.....



On a piece of paper write down the answers to these questions:

- 1 How might Mr Birling be seen as typical of men who in 1912 had confidence in the future?

Start: *Mr Birling shows his confidence in the future during Act One when he says ...*

- 2 What evidence can you find to suggest that Brumley is a large and prosperous town?

Start: *We know that Brumley is a large and prosperous town because ...*

## GRADE BOOSTER



Answer this longer practice question about the setting of the play:

Q: What is the effect of setting the whole play within Mr Birling's house? Think about ...

- How the house and its contents are described and what this tells us.
- How it contrasts or links to other settings in the play.

**For a C grade:** Explain clearly what effect the setting has, supporting your main points with relevant quotations and examples.

**For an A grade:** Explore each of the suggested points in depth and detail, and make a personal response to the **symbolic** importance of the house and other settings mentioned.

# PART SIX: GRADE BOOSTER

## Understanding the question

Questions in exams or controlled conditions often need 'decoding'. Decoding the question helps to ensure that your answer will be relevant and refers to what you have been asked.



### UNDERSTAND EXAM LANGUAGE

Get used to exam and essay style language by looking at specimen questions and the words they use. For example:

Exam speak!	Means?	Example
'convey ideas'	'get a point across to the audience': usually you will have to say how this is done	Sheila's statement that the girls 'aren't cheap labour – they're people' (Act One, p. 19) conveys the idea that workers deserve to be treated with humanity.
'methods, techniques, ways'	the 'things' the playwright does: making characters enter or leave at crucial moments, ending a scene on a cliff-hanger, or having a character say something which has more than one meaning	The playwright might create tension in the words of characters before someone's entrance – as Priestley does with Mrs Birling's condemnation of the unborn child's father just before Eric enters at the end of Act Two.
'purpose'	the reason 'why' a writer does something	Priestley introduces the 'rough sort of diary' (Act Two, p. 39) to provide the Inspector with knowledge not available to the others. This makes him more powerful than the person he is questioning.



### 'BREAK DOWN' THE QUESTION

Pick out the **key words** or phrases. For example:

**Question:** How does Priestley use the **changes in Sheila's character** to **convey** a belief that a **just society** in the future depends upon the behaviour of the **younger generation**?

- The focus is on **Priestley's views** about **society**, so you will need to talk about what those views are, what Priestley felt was wrong with society and what he hoped for in the future.
- You are asked to respond by looking at how **Sheila's character changes**.

What does this tell you?

- **Focus** on the changes to Sheila's character – when and how these happen and what Priestley wants us to think about these changes.



### KNOW YOUR LITERARY LANGUAGE!

When studying texts you will come across words such as **dialogue**, **dramatic irony** and **imagery**. Some of these words could come up in the question you are asked. Make sure you know what they mean before you use them!

## Planning your answer

It is vital that you **plan** your response to the controlled assessment task or exam question carefully, and that you follow your plan, to gain the higher grades.



### DO THE RESEARCH!

When revising for the exam, or planning your response to the controlled assessment task, collect **evidence** (for example, quotations) that will support what you have to say. For example, if preparing to answer a question on how J. B. Priestley has explored the theme of social justice you might list ideas as follows:

Key point	Evidence/quotation	Act, Scene etc.
Mr Birling has a selfish view of society	'a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own'	Act One, p. 10



### PLAN FOR PARAGRAPHS

Use paragraphs to plan your answer. For example:

- ① The first paragraph should **introduce** the **argument** you wish to make.
- ② The paragraphs that follow will **develop** this argument. Include **details, examples** and other **points of view**. Each paragraph is likely to treat one point at a time.
- ③ **Sum up** your argument in the last paragraph.

For example, for the following task:

**Question:** How does J. B. Priestley present the character of Sheila? Comment on the language devices and techniques used.

Simple plan:

- Paragraph 1: *Introduction*
- Paragraph 2: *First point*, e.g. Initially, J. B. Priestley presents Sheila as lively, excited, pleased with life. Her language is conversational, she uses slang, she jokes.
- Paragraph 3: *Second point*, e.g. On hearing of the girl's death she shows herself sensitive to the girl's situation. J. B. Priestley shows her feelings of guilt through her frank confession of how she treated the girl in the shop.
- Paragraph 4: *Third point*, e.g. Sheila's bitterness at Gerald's behaviour shows how she has been hurt, but her generous nature is shown by her fair-minded assessment of Gerald. Her ability to think of others is also shown by her attempts to protect Eric from her mother's condemnation of the 'young man'.
- Paragraph 5: *Fourth point*, e.g. J. B. Priestley demonstrates how the Inspector's visit has had a great effect on Sheila. Her earnest pleas to the others are made in language which echoes that of the Inspector, indicating that she has taken his views on board.
- Paragraph 6: *Conclusion*



## How to use quotations

One of the secrets of success in writing essays is to use quotations effectively. There are five basic principles:

- ① Put quotation marks, e.g. ' ', around the quotation.
- ② Write the quotation exactly as it appears in the original.
- ③ Do not use a quotation that repeats what you have just written.
- ④ Use the quotation so that it fits into your sentence, or if it is longer, indent it as a separate paragraph.
- ⑤ Only quote what is most useful.



### USE QUOTATIONS TO DEVELOP YOUR ARGUMENT

Quotations should be used to develop the line of thought in your essays. Your comment should not duplicate what is in your quotation. For example:

#### GRADE D/E

(simply repeats the idea)

Gerald Croft is embarrassed to admit that he met Daisy Renton in the spring in the stalls bar of the Palace music hall: 'I met her first, sometime in March last year, in the stalls bar at the Palace' (Act Two, p. 34).

#### GRADE C

(makes a point and supports it with a relevant quotation)

Gerald Croft is embarrassed, but admits that he first met Daisy Renton 'sometime in March last year, in the stalls bar of the Palace'.

However, the most sophisticated way of using the writer's words is to embed them into your sentence, and further develop the point:

#### GRADE A

(makes a point, embeds quote and develops the idea)

Gerald Croft is embarrassed to admit he met Daisy Renton 'sometime in March last year' when he had gone into 'the stalls bar of the Palace', a local theatre with a bad reputation.

When you use quotations in this way, you are demonstrating the ability to use text as evidence to support your ideas – not simply including words from the original to prove you have read it.

#### ★ GRADE BOOSTER

Where appropriate refer to the language technique used by the writer and the effect it creates. For example, if you say, 'this metaphor shows how ...', or 'the effect of this metaphor is to emphasise to the reader ...' this will get you much higher marks.

#### 🔒 EXAMINER'S TIP

Try using a quotation to begin your response. You can use it as a launch-pad for your ideas, or as an idea you are going to argue against.

## Sitting the examination

Examination papers are carefully designed to give you the opportunity to do your best. Follow these handy hints for exam success:



### BEFORE YOU START

- Make sure you **know the texts** you are writing about so that you are properly prepared and equipped.
- You need to be **comfortable** and **free from distractions**. Inform the invigilator if anything is off-putting, e.g. a shaky desk.
- **Read** and follow the instructions, or rubric, on the front of the examination paper. You should know by now what you need to do but **check** to reassure yourself.
- Before beginning your answer have a **skim** through the **whole paper** to make sure you don't miss anything **important**.
- Observe the **time allocation** – and follow it carefully. If the paper recommends 45 minutes for a question make sure this is how long you spend.



### WRITING YOUR RESPONSES

A typical 45 minute essay is probably between 550 and 800 words long.

Ideally, spend a minimum of 5 minutes planning your answer before you begin.

Use the question to structure your response. Here is an example:

**Question:** Do you see the ending of the play as negative or positive? What methods does the writer use to lead you to this view?

- The introduction could briefly describe **the ending** of the play;
- the second part could explain what could be seen as **positive**;
- the third part could be an exploration of the **negative** aspects;
- the conclusion would **sum up your own viewpoint**.

For each part allocate paragraphs to cover the points you wish to make (see **Planning your answer**).

Keep your writing clear and easy to read, using paragraphs and link words to show the structure of your answer.

Spend a couple of minutes afterwards quickly checking for obvious errors.



### 'KEY WORDS' ARE THE KEY!

Keep on mentioning the **key words** from the question in your answer. This will keep you on track and remind the examiner that you are answering the question set.



### ★ GRADE BOOSTER

Don't be afraid to develop your own views. Try to show different interpretations of the play or of events within it, but make sure you can always support your theories with evidence.

## Sitting the controlled assessment

It may be the case that you are responding to *An Inspector Calls* in a controlled assessment situation. Follow these useful tips for success:



### WHAT YOU ARE REQUIRED TO DO

Make sure you are clear about:

- The **specific text** and **task** you are preparing (is it just *An Inspector Calls*, or more than one text?)
- How **long** you have during the assessment period (i.e. 3–4 hours?)
- How **much** you are expected or allowed to write (i.e. 2,000 words?)
- **What** you are **allowed to take** into the Controlled Assessment, and what you can use (or not, as the case may be!). You may be able to take in brief notes but not draft answers, so check with your teacher.



### HOW YOU CAN PREPARE

Once you know your task, topic and text/s you can:

- Make **notes** and **prepare the points, evidence, quotations**, etc. you are likely to use.
- Practise or draft **model answers**.
- Use these **York Notes** to hone your **skills**, e.g. use of quotations, how to plan an answer and focus on what makes a **top grade**.



### DURING THE CONTROLLED ASSESSMENT

Remember:

- **Stick** to the topic and task you have been given.
- The allocated **time** is for **writing**, so make the most of it. It is double the time you might have in an exam, so you will be writing almost **twice as much** (or more).
- **If** you are **allowed** access to a **dictionary** or **thesaurus** make use of them; if not, don't go near them!
- At the end of the controlled assessment follow your **teacher's instructions**. For example, make sure you have written your **name** clearly on all the pages you hand in.



#### ★ GRADE BOOSTER

Produce a list of at least three key moments, three key quotations and three opinions of your own on each character.

## Improve your grade

It is useful to know the type of responses examiners are looking for when they award different grades. The following broad guidance should help you to improve your grade when responding to the task you are set!



### GRADE C

What you need to show	What this means
Sustained response to task and text	You write enough! You don't run out of ideas after two paragraphs.
Effective use of details to support your explanations	You generally support what you say with evidence, e.g. Sheila opposes her father's views when she defends the workers as people, not 'cheap labour' (Act One, p. 19).
Explanation of the writer's use of language, structure, form, etc., and the effect on readers	You must write about the playwright's use of these things. So, you might comment on the Inspector's careful, measured use of language compared to the excitable way that Eric speaks, or you might point out the way Priestley manages to make each set of questions neatly link with what has gone before and what is to follow.
Appropriate comment on characters, plot, themes, ideas and settings	What you say is relevant. If the task asks you to comment on how the Inspector builds his 'chain of events' (Act One, p. 14), you don't need to describe his appearance but you should concentrate on the way he links all the incidents in the girl's life.

### GRADE A

What you need to show in addition to the above	What this means
Insightful, exploratory response to the text	You look beyond the obvious. You might question the idea of of the Inspector being more than an ordinary police officer, perhaps exploring his almost superhuman knowledge.
Close analysis and use of detail	If you are looking at the writer's use of language, you comment on each word in a sentence, drawing out its distinctive effect on the reader, e.g. the use of the word 'offence' as used by Mrs Birling and the Inspector in Act Two, p. 31.
Convincing and imaginative interpretation	Your viewpoint is likely to convince the examiner. You show you have engaged with the text, and come up with your own ideas.

**Annotated sample answers**



This section provides you with extracts from two **model answers**, one at **C grade** and one at **A grade**, to give you an idea of what is required to achieve different levels.

**Question:** How does Priestley present contrasting views of Birling between the scene when the Inspector arrives, and later in the play?

**CANDIDATE 1**

<p>Sound opening point</p>	<p>Priestley shows in the opening scene that Mr Birling is not worried by the Inspector's visit because Birling offers him a drink. He thinks the Inspector has come for a warrant, something a magistrate like Mr Birling could provide. We see from what Birling says about himself that he is self-important. He makes sure the Inspector knows that he was an alderman, a 'Lord Mayor two years ago'. He is putting himself above the policeman who he thinks is there to ask a favour of him. He is surprised to learn the Inspector has come to ask questions about a girl's suicide, and even when he knows that he sacked her from his factory two years before, he isn't able to see that her death has anything to do with him. This suggests he only sees his workers as there to make him money. He is prepared to drop hints about playing golf with the Chief Constable, and to warn the Inspector, and this shows he will use his important friends to protect himself and give him an unfair advantage. Adjectives such as 'impatiently' and 'restlessly' about how he speaks show that he is used to getting his own way.</p>	<p>Evidence? Add scene and further quotation.</p>
<p>Quite thoughtful comment, but not supported or developed</p>	<p>Later on, he shows he is angry when Eric sides with the girls who went on strike and shows that he doesn't think Eric has learnt much from his 'public-school-and-Varsity' education. Sheila also takes the girls' side and Birling is not so hard with her and tries to protect her from the worst details about the girl's death, so Priestley shows he has a gentler side to him. We didn't see this so much at the start when he was showing off.</p>	<p>Contrasting views of Inspector but this is an essay on Birling</p>
<p>Relevant quotation here</p>	<p>Priestley also reveals more about Birling through what the Inspector says. He has his own way of working, and questions each character in turn. As he does this each is seen to have some responsibility for doing harm to the girl, even Birling. This evidence makes us see that Birling's idea that 'a man has to mind his own business and only look after himself and his own' is not right if 'his own' means just his family. The Inspector shows that it should mean those he has responsibility for, and that includes the people he employs. The Inspector is making a case for the sort of protection which workers today can expect to have. Priestley uses the Inspector to put forward his own views, and the Inspector's final speech sums up, like a sermon, all that was wrong with what Birling was doing.</p>	<p>Evidence of personal response</p>
<p>Suggests the relevance of the play to modern audiences</p>		

**Overall comment:** Candidate shows fair understanding of the text and makes some perceptive comments. Quotations are mostly appropriate but the effect not always commented on. The response tends to retell the story a little but a clear impression of Birling's character is developed, although there is too much on the Inspector. Perhaps greater attention to supporting evidence would have helped and more on the language used.

**GRADE C**

## CANDIDATE 2

(This is the first part of a student's response, dealing with the first scene.)

Strong and  
engaging  
opening

The opening extract shows Mr Birling in an increasingly bad light. In keeping with the mood of celebration at the dinner, Priestley shows that Birling's initial greeting of the Inspector is warm enough as he is 'still on the Bench' and as a magistrate sometimes has to sign warrants for the police. His assumption about the warrant allows Birling to act like someone enjoying the power of being in a superior position, placing the Inspector in the role of someone seeking a favour, and this is exemplified by the adjectives to describe his way of speaking and behaving – i. e. 'impatiently', 'restlessly'. However, he is surprised to learn the true reason for the Inspector's visit, and the way Priestley changes the direction of the plot and the change of mood, reverses their positions placing the Inspector in control, something clearly resented by Mr Birling.

Effective focus  
on structure  
and mood

Both his actions and what he says further support the picture we have seen at the start. Having recognised Eva Smith's photograph, his explanation of how he sacked her not only backs up his earlier assertion that he is a 'hard-headed man of business' but also reveals how a man who prides himself on his status in the community can still be ruthless in pursuit of 'lower costs and higher profits' even if this unfairly penalises his workers. Priestley also conveys his cunning, shown by his realisation that the strike could not last since after the holidays 'they'd all be broke' and this adds to the impression of a heartless and ruthless man.

Well developed  
argument

Other characters also help build a picture of Birling in the opening section. Eric's defence of the workers brings about a vicious verbal attack from Birling which pours scorn on Eric's lack of business experience and reveals his bitter feeling towards the 'public-school-and-Varsity' education. Priestley suggests he resents the advantages enjoyed by his son's generation and this helps the audience understand why later Eric says that Mr Birling is 'not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble'.

At this point, Priestley has provided a picture of a self-important man who places his faith in technology and industry, who believes that he can enjoy the rewards granted by the community while declaring that community spirit is 'nonsense' and that a man has to 'mind his own business and look after himself and his own'. Yet Eric, at this start of the Inspector's 'chain of events', has already challenged his father's views, and later Sheila will do the same by recognising a shared humanity with the workers.

Good use of  
language  
technique to  
show character

Insightful  
comment on  
characterisation.

Strong sense of  
dramatic  
construction

**Overall comment:** This is an interesting study of Mr Birling which displays the ability to understand his motives and behaviour. Quotations from the text are used skilfully to develop and secure the argument, and demonstrate the candidate's ability to form personal and original responses. The close reference to language and its effects, and comment on what the author does to build the picture of Birling, show this to be a sophisticated response to the first part of the task.

**GRADE A**

## Further questions

### EXAM-STYLE QUESTIONS

1. Which of the characters is most affected by the events of the evening?

Write about:

- What the Inspector's visit reveals about the different characters
- How each is affected
- Why you feel any one character is affected more than others

2. How does the play show up the contrast between the philosophies of Mr Birling and Inspector Goole?

Write about:

- What Mr Birling thinks is important in life
- What the Inspector believes is important in life
- What message the playwright intends us to take away with us

3. What aspects of British society does the play criticise?

Write about:

- Things that J. B. Priestley, through the Inspector, sees as bad
- Things various characters think of as important
- Your views on which things you might agree with

4. Describe the way J. B. Priestley develops Sheila's character during the course of the play.

Write about:

- What Sheila is like at the beginning of the play
- What things affect her during the play
- What sort of character Sheila seems to be at the end of the play

5. Examine the evidence to decide whether Eva Smith and Daisy Renton are indeed one and the same person.

Write about:

- How each character knew Eva or Daisy
- What the Inspector told them about the girl
- How the Inspector got his evidence

### CONTROLLED ASSESSMENT-STYLE QUESTIONS

1. Explore the ways in which the witches in *Macbeth* may be seen as a similar dramatic device to Eva Smith/Daisy Renton in *An Inspector Calls*.
2. Explore how the historical setting of *An Inspector Calls* and that of any of Shakespeare's plays might affect a modern audience's response to and appreciation of the themes and ideas within the two plays.
3. Explore how the theme of social status is used to add dramatic effect in *An Inspector Calls* and in Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*.
4. Explore the importance of family ties in *Romeo and Juliet* and *An Inspector Calls*.
5. Explore the ways in which the ending of any Shakespeare play which you have read and the ending of *An Inspector Calls* are, or are not, dramatically satisfying.

