



KS4 English – An Inspector Calls

Key Knowledge

Key Terminology

Characters/Symbols	
1.	The character Mr Birling is capitalist, dogmatic and foolish
2.	The character Mrs Birling is prejudice, conformist and remorseless
3.	The character Sheila Birling is childish, transformative and a product of her environment
4.	The character Eric Birling is reticent, reckless and an outsider
5.	The character Gerald Croft is aristocratic, opportunistic and disingenuous
6.	The character Eva Smith is emblematic, exploited and voiceless
7.	The character Inspector Goole is systematic, authoritative and moralistic
8.	The character Edna is acquiescent, functionary and invisible

Themes	
Social Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Birlings are comfortably middle class but strive for more.The working classes are shown as having little autonomy in the system. They were silenced by unfair restrictions and laws that meant they were dependent on the few upper class businessmen who ruled for their own profit. They have little opportunity to work for something better. Eva/Daisy represents this class.The Inspector is outside of the class system and seeks to attack it by showing its faults.The play is set in 1912 so Priestley can remind the 1946 audience what pre-war society was like and warn them to not revert back to the capitalist, selfish society that once ruled.
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The older Birlings still treat Sheila and Eric as children, even though they are grown up.Sheila and Eric begin to find their parents old-fashioned and rigid throughout the play.Sheila and Eric would have been more relatable to the 1945 audience thus their transformation from capitalists to socialists is a way for Priestley to appeal to the upper class members of the audience who could afford a ticket to the theatre when rationing was still enforced. Eric would have resembled the few young men who survived the war and Sheila a modern feminist with the right to vote. Priestley encourages the audience to parallel themselves with the younger generation.
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Women are presented as the weaker sex, as they were through history but Priestley has the Inspector empower Sheila and she becomes the wisest member of the family by the denouement of the play, reflecting the empowerment of women as a result of the franchise and the role they played during WW2.Even upper class women had limited choices and were under the control of men.The vulnerability of women evokes sympathy, which supports Priestley's belief in gender equality and community as 'one body.'
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The play is concerned with both personal responsibility and social responsibility.In 1942, Priestley helped to set up a new political party, the Common Wealth Party, which later transformed into the Labour party. He was increasingly concerned about the consequences of social inequality and called for greater democracy and public ownership of land so people were more driven to support each other.Priestley seems to be warning the characters of the consequences of caring solely for oneself.

Context
Edwardian Period: The play is set in 1912 during the Edwardian period. This is the time between the end of the Victorian era and the start of the First World War in 1914. In this time period class divisions were still very clear with there being virtually no welfare state or benefits in place for the poorer sections of society.
The Post-War Period: The play was performed in 1945 (in the Soviet Union and in the UK in 1946). This was a time of significant social, economic and political upheaval after two World Wars that completely altered the make-up of British society.
WW1 (1914-1918): WW1 was a watershed moment in European history. Priestley fought in the war and cited the war as the cause for his prejudice against the ruling class.
Women: Women in 1912, regardless of social class, were seen as second-class citizens – a fact underlined by their lack of a right to vote. It was the deplorable state of working-class women's lives that prompted Emmeline Pankhurst to found the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903. The suffrages fought to bring equality for women.
The Titanic: The ship is mentioned in the opening moments of the play as a feat of modern engineering.

Key Vocabulary	
Avaricious	Having or shown an extreme greed for wealth or material gain
Bourgeoisie	The middle class
Capitalism	An economic and political system in trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, not the state
Conscience	A sense of right and wrong
Didactic	Something intended to teach
Microcosm	A smaller version of a bigger thing
Omniscient	All knowing
Patriarchy	A male dominated hierarchy
Proletariat	The working class
Socialism	A political philosophy that and theory that believes the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community
Theatrical Stagecraft: Dramatic Devices	
Cliff-hanger	A suspenseful ending
Dramatic Irony	When the audience knows something that the characters do not
Entrances and exits	When characters enter or exit a scene
Foreshadowing	An indication of a future event
Stage directions	An instruction written into the script of a play indicating stage actions and movements/behaviour of performers
The fourth wall	An imagined wall that separates the story from the real world
Form	
Morality play	An allegorical drama having personified abstract ideas as the main characters (such as Greed or Death) and presenting a lesson about good conduct and character to the audience. They were popular in the 15th and early 16th centuries.
Well-made play	A type of very structured play that was immensely popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The action often builds to a climax.