



An Inspector Calls Knowledge Organiser

English Literature, Paper 2

Structure

- The **'well-made play'**: tight plot; action based on previous events; suspense through series of complications; a climax where truths/secrets are uncovered.
- The **'whodunit'**: murder/mystery to be solved; an expert detective investigating and/or interrogating; clues; a climax where the murderer is revealed and accepts guilt.
- 'Greek tragedy' (GT)**: 3 act format; follows **'unities'** - of time (action unfolds in real-time), of place (one place for all action), of action (one plot)
- Act** - The major divisions in the play. AIC is in 3 acts.

Plot

Act 1 - Exposition: The Birlings, their lifestyle and attitudes introduced. We see that pride/self-satisfaction is Mr Birling's **fatal flaw**. The Inspector interrupts Gerald & Sheila's engagement party to investigate the death of Eva Smith. Mr B & Sheila interrogated; Sheila accepts responsibility following encounter in the dept. store & urges others to do the same. Ends on a **cliffhanger**, as the audience anticipates the interrogation of Gerald.

Act 2 - Development: Gerald is interrogated & confesses to affair with 'Daisy Renton'; Gerald departs; Mrs Birling is interrogated.

Act 3 - Eric interrogated; confesses to forcing himself on her & stealing from the company to support her; confirms Eva's story that she refused marriage & financial support. Inspector delivers his **prophetic** message about the future, then departs. Characters react to his departure, showing how the young change while the elder Birlings remain concerned with the **'public scandal'** that will ensue. Gerald returns: no new inspector in Brumley, confirmed by Birling who contacts the chief constable; G calls the infirmary, no death - the older Bs & G talk of hoax. Mr B is triumphant, S & E won't be consoled. The phone rings **'A girl has just died [...] inspector is on his way here...'**

Characters

Mr Birling - a self-made, successful businessman and social climber, Birling married well and is aiming for a knighthood. He is a proud man, which Priestley highlights as his **fatal flaw (hubris)**.

Mrs Birling - Priestley states in the stage directions that she is **'her husband's social superior'**. She infantilises her children: of Eric **'he's only a boy'** (Act 2); is notably concerned with social etiquette **'Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things'** (Act 1) and is chiefly concerned with ensuring that her family do not 'lose face'.

Sheila Birling - Sheila is the first character to admit responsibility and show remorse. Because of this, she quickly becomes a **sympathetic character** despite her obvious poor behaviour towards Eva in the past. Priestley uses her as a **foil** to

Eric Birling - Eric is the other character to admit responsibility, but is not a sympathetic character initially. He **'drink[s] far too much'** (Act 2); steals from the business and forces himself upon Eva. He is also a **frustrated character**: his parents treat him like a child; Mr B is obviously doesn't see him as a worthy heir.

Inspector Goole - Priestley's mouthpiece; advocates social justice; serves as the Birlings' conscience	'massiveness, solidity and purposefulness'	Socialism
	'but each of you helped to kill her. Remember that.'	Social responsibility
	'millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths'	Class
	'fire and blood and anguish'	War
Mr Birling - Businessman; capitalist; against social equality; a self-made man (new-money)	'We're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity'	Capitalism/dramatic irony
	'Cranks'	Socialism
	'hard headed business man'	Capitalism
	'unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable'	Dramatic irony
Mrs Birling - Husband's social superior; believes in personal responsibility	'girls of that class'	Class
	'simply absurd in a girl in that position'	
Sheila - Young girl; feels regret	'but these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people'	Socialism
	'I'll never, never do it again'	Generational differences
Eric - Young man, drinks; regrets actions.	'It's what happened to the girl and all that happened to her that matters'	Social responsibility
	'in that state when a chap easily turns nasty'	Gender
Gerald Croft - politically closest to Birling	'Sorry- I- well, I've suddenly realized- taken it in properly- that she's dead'	Social responsibility
	'Everything's all right now Sheila'	Failed redemption/ Capitalism
Eva Smith - stands for victims of social injustice (Daisy Renton)	'lively looking girl'	Gender
	'wretched girl's suicide'	Class
	'She was young and pretty and warm-hearted and intensely grateful'	Gender
Edna - Symbolises working class	'Please, sir, an Inspector's called'	Class/socialism

Key Vocab	Pathos	Juxtaposition	Allegory	Capitalism	Working class
Dramatic irony	Foreshadows	Foreboding	Antithesis	Socialism	Morality
Cyclical structure	Tragedy	Hubris	Redemption	Climax	Hierarchy
Patriarchal	Exploitation	Corruption	Manipulation	Pity	Elitist

Gerald Croft - **'very much the easy well-bred young man-about-town'** (Act 1, stage directions). Engaged to Sheila, but older (around 30) and, in contrast to Eric, proven in business. Gerald becomes less sympathetic as the play progresses: like the older Birlings, his character will not learn from his mistakes.

Inspector Goole - disrupts the engagement party to question the Birling family about their parts in the lead up to the death of a young woman. It becomes clear that he already knows much of the private affairs of the Birlings and Gerald Croft. He is **no ordinary policeman**: he interviews them together; delivers his own verdict and social message.

Edna - plays a **minor role** however, she answers the door to the inspector and announces him which establishes him as a 'living' character, rather than a ghost, as some readings suggest. She also **represents the ordinary people**, whose lives are bound to everyone else's.

Eva Smith - never seen in the play, so not a character as such. She is the **everywoman** figure. She is a deliberate moral contrast to Sheila: a country orphan; a good worker; principled and gracious. They are both young women who, by virtue of class and circumstance, have led very different lives.

Context

- J. B. Priestley - A writer with a **social conscience**. AIC is one of his 'time' plays (see themes). A popular figure and keen supporter of social reform. Declined a knighthood and peerage, but accepted the Order of Merit
- The play was written in 1945**. It was aimed at a post-war audience, asking them to imagine life in the Edwardian era and recognise the follies of pre-war attitudes. The horrors and loss of two world wars reignited the drive for greater equality. With the end of each war came change: WW1 changes to voting rights, WW2 welfare reforms.
- The play is set in 1912, amidst a time of significant political change**. **Liberal reforms between 1906 and 1914** meant attitudes had begun to change, but the upper-middle and upper classes were resistant. Reforms included: minimum wage (some industries), National Insurance, Pensions, Labour Exchanges. Ironically, it is possible that a character like Birling would have benefitted from the political changes (to voting) that were fought for during the 1800s, yet resisted those of the early 1900s.
- Social Class - Birling is one of a so-called **nouveau riche**, furthered by his marriage to Mrs Birling, his **'social superior'**. They are still looked down upon, however, by Lady Croft who is **'from and old country family - landed people and so-forth'** (Act One). This tells us that her family are part of the old **Aristocracy**, or ruling class of Great Britain. Birling is keen to impress his social status, even though they are of a lower status than the Crofts, hence several references his status as **alderman**.

Themes

- Time - The relationship between the past, present and future
- Secrets and Lies
- Appearance and reality
- Responsibility - **'You'll be able to divide the responsibility between you when I've gone'** (Act 3)
- Rich and poor
- Employers and employees
- Blame and shame
- Guilt and innocence
- Control
- Young and old

Dialect

Mr Birling - straightforward structure and vocab' to reflect his humble start. Self-important: personal pronouns 'I', 'me', 'we'.
Mrs Birling - speaks with a dismissive tone, reflecting her sense of superiority and propriety.
Sheila and Eric - examples of slang & colloquialism to reflect younger generation, Sheila says 'squiffy', 'ass', 'chump' (Act 1)
Gerald - occasional slang, but measured dialogue: experienced
Inspector - emphatic (triadic), no hesitation, deliberate.
Realistic language - little use of figurative language mainly cliché when present: sense of realism.