

Characters		
Inspector Goole	Priestley’s mouthpiece; advocates social justice; serves as the Birlings’ conscience	Socialist, moralistic, righteous, powerful, intimidating, unconventional, mysterious, imposing, sardonic, omnipotent
Mr. Arthur Birling	Businessman; capitalist; against social equality; a self-made man (new-money)	Capitalist, arrogant, foolish, Panglossian, emasculate, prejudice, ignorant, selfish, stubborn, vainglorious
Mrs. Sybil Birling	Husband’s social superior; believes in personal responsibility	Arrogant, cold-hearted, insincere, prejudice, naïve, conformist, bitter, controlling, remorseless
Sheila Birling	Young girl; comes to change views and pities Eva; feels regret	Transformative, remorseful, socialist, pseudo-inspector, sensitive, astute, strong-minded, empowered
Eric Birling	Young man, drinks too much; forces himself on Eva Smith; regrets actions	Rebellious, reckless, immature, insubordinate, compulsive, desperate, disgraced, dualistic, irresponsible
Gerald Croft	Businessman; engaged to Sheila; politically closest to Birling	Aristocratic, evasive, secretive, dishonest, disingenuous, oleaginous, chivalric, privileged, pragmatic
Eva Smith	Unseen in play; comes to stand for victims of social injustice (changes her name to Daisy Renton)	Suffragist, victim, emblematic, allegorical, vulnerable, desperate, socialist, moralistic, principled

Theatrical Stagecraft: Dramatic Devices

Dramatic irony	Birling’s speeches, Mrs. Birling’s witless implication of Eric
Stage directions	Instructions for the actors; often revealing – such as the lighting change when the Inspector arrives: “Pink and intimate then brighter and harder”
Setting	Constant throughout but subtle changes e.g. lighting; characters on/off stage
Tension	Builds up throughout the play ; interrogation of characters, personal relationships, secrecy
Cliff-hanger	Eric’s reappearance in Act 3; the ending allows the audience to make up their minds
Foreshadowing	Symbolism (The Titanic), Mr. Birling’s “knighthood”, war
Time-lapse	Set in 1912, written in 1945; audience in a privileged position.
The 4 th Wall	The Inspector’s final speech addressed directly to audience.

Social, Historical and Literary Allusions

“the Titanic”	The Titanic sailed from Southampton and sank in the early hours of 15th April 1912. Priestley clearly wants his audience to see his drama play out against a background of real historical events and he has also chosen a moment in time when Birling’s comments appear particularly ironic.
“Nobody wants war”	In reality, economic rivalry between the British Empire and the new German Empire was one of the many causes of the First World War.
“Russia”	The irony here suggests that Russia will have progressed further than other European countries by the 1940s.
“Bernard Shaws and H. G. Wellses”	Both the noted Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and the father of science-fiction H. G. Wells (1866-1946) were well-known and outspoken socialists.

‘An Inspector Calls’ by J.B. Priestley: A Knowledge Organiser

Plot	
Act 1	Set in April 1912, Brumley, Midlands, UK. The Birling family and Gerald Croft are celebrating Sheila Birling's engagement to Gerald with a dinner. Mr Birling lectures his son, Eric Birling, and Gerald about the importance of every man looking out for himself if he wants to get on in life. Edna (the maid) announces that an inspector has arrived. Inspector Goole says that he is investigating the death of a young woman who committed suicide, Eva Smith. Mr Birling is shown a photograph of Eva, after initially denying recognising the woman in the photo, he remembers firing her in 1910 for organising a strike over workers pay. Sheila recalls also having Eva sacked about her manner when served by her in an upmarket department store. The Inspector reveals that Eva Smith changed her name to Daisy Renton. Gerald reveals to Sheila he had an affair with Daisy Renton.
Act 2	Gerald explains to The Inspector that he had an affair with Eva, but hasn't seen her since he ended their relationship back in Autumn 1911. Sheila gives her engagement ring back to Gerald. The Inspector turns his attention to Mrs Sybil Birling, she confesses that she also had contact with Eva, but Eva gave herself a different name to Mrs Birling. Eva approached a charity chaired by Mrs Birling to ask for help. Eva was desperate and pregnant but help was refused by Mrs Birling because she was offended by the girl calling herself 'Mrs Birling'. She tells Eva that the baby's father should be made entirely responsible. She also tells Inspector Goole that the father should be held entirely responsible and should be made an example of.
Act 3	Eric is revealed as the father. He stole money from Mr Birling's office to provide money to Eva. The Inspector delivers his final speech. After he leaves, the family begin to suspect that he was not a genuine police inspector. A phone call to the Chief Constable confirms this. Next, they phone the infirmary to be informed that no suicide case has been brought in. Mr Birling, Mrs Birling and Gerald congratulate themselves that it was all a hoax and they continue can continue as before. This attitude upsets Sheila and Eric. The phone rings. Mr Birling announces to the family that a girl has just died on her way to the infirmary, a police inspector is coming to question them

Key concepts and context: *Think about...*

1912	Set just before WWI and the sinking of the Titanic. A moment of rising international tensions and industrial expansion. End of Victorian era saw the demise of the rigid class system. Labour Party, founded in 1900, gaining momentum. The Russian Revolution began in 1917.
1945	People were recovering from six years of warfare, danger and uncertainty. Class distinctions greatly reduced as a result of two world wars. Women had a more valued place in society. Desire for social change. Following WW2, Labour Party won a landslide victory over Winston Churchill and the Conservatives.
Wealth, Power and Influence	The Birlings and the Crofts are representative of the wealthy upper-class. They all misuse their social influence to benefit themselves. Their actions adversely affect the vulnerable people in society.
Blame and Responsibility	Who is to blame for Eva’s death? Each of the Birlings contribute to a chain of events leading to the destruction of Eva Smith. What responsibilities do the characters have to each other? To society?
Public v Private	How do the public lives, the facades, of the Birlings juxtapose their private personas? What are their motivations for this? What are the repercussions, and for who?
Morality and Legality	What are the moral and legal laws of the society depicted in the play? How do they interweave? What actions do the characters undertake that are wrong, morally or legally?
Class Politics	How do the ideologies of capitalism and socialism collide in the play? Which characters are representative of which political allegiance? Is there a correlation between a character’s political beliefs and their behaviours?
Prejudice	What are the prejudices held by the Birlings? What are their inherent views regarding class and status? How do they act on these prejudices, and what are the consequences?
Young v Old	What differences are evident between the younger and older generation? They react and behave differently throughout the play – why? What are their attitudes towards each other? What do they learn? Which characters change, and how?

ACT		Order of the Inspector's Questioning	Key Notes	Character Quotes	
Act 1	Sheila and Gerald's engagement is celebrated.		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Priestley asks his audience to examine their individual and collective responsibility to society. He wants a welfare state.The hypocrisy of middle-class Edwardian society is uncovered: appearance & reputation matter more than reality & moralityPriestley criticises the selfishness of capitalism and wants a fairer, socialist future after the horrors of two world wars..Priestley shows the older generation to be set in their ways, while the young are open to change.Eva Smith is the embodiment of young, working- class women who were oppressed by the middle/upper classes.The play demonstrates that when workers do not have full employment rights they cannot fight back	Birling's Confidence	'We're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity'
Act 1	Birling says there will be no war; references Titanic		TIER 2 VOCAB	Birling on society	'The way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else'
Act 1	Inspector arrives; a young girl has committed suicide.			Shelia's recognition	'but these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people''
Act 3	Telephone rings; an inspector is coming.			Mrs Birling defends herself	'she was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position'
Thematic Quotes					
Social responsibility		"We are responsible for each other" Inspector "Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities" Inspector "It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that mattered." Eric			
Capitalism		"These silly capital vs labour agitations." Birling "A man has to make his own way" Birling			
Class		"A girl of that class" Mrs Birling "Well, we've several hundred young women there, y'know, and they keep changing." Birling			
Age		"the famous younger generation" Birling "What's the matter with that child?" Birling "Just keep quiet, Eric" Birling			
Gender & attitudes to women		"I hate those hard-eyed dough-faced women" - Gerald "And you think young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?" Inspector "She had far too much to say, far too much" Birling			

AN INSPECTOR CALLS Quotes - J.B. PRIESTLEY

class system	a way of dividing people into categories based upon their social, economic, or educational status.	Working class:	This class of people were employed but often in poorly paid jobs.
capitalism	a political, economic and social system which enables individuals to own and control areas of production - focuses upon making profit.	Middle class:	This class lived fairly comfortably and would usually have a job which offered some responsibility.
socialism	a political, economic and social system which states that all people are equal and should share equally in a country's wealth.	Upper class:	This class of people were extremely wealthy and were often referred to as the bourgeoisie because of their materialistic wealth.
Dehumanize	To remove someone's human qualities or attributes.	Lower class:	This class consisted of people that were perhaps homeless or unemployed.
Raisonneur	A character in a novel or play who voices the central theme	impressionable	Someone who can be easily influenced by others.
prophetic	Predicting what will happen in the future	Omnipotent	To have great, or even unlimited, power
microcosm	Miniature characteristic of something much larger	etiquette	A set of polite rules in society
fractious	Irritable of argumentative	Assertive	Acting with confidence and force
Social responsibility	A duty to act for the best interests of everyone in society.	obstinate	Refusing to change an opinion or actions, despite someone's attempts to persuade you to do so.
facade	An appearance which hides an ugly truth	deceitful,	The act of lying by misleading others.
supremacy	The state of being superior to all others: power, authority, status	insincere	Pretending to believe or feel something that you do not really feel.
morality	A set of personal or societal standards which distinguish the difference between good and bad. The distinction between right and wrong.	hypocrisy	To claim that one has moral beliefs and good virtues which the individual does not really possess
Dramatic irony	A writer's device: the reader or audience are aware of something that the character does not know.	prejudiced	an individual has a preconceived opinion or judgement about something or someone
prosperity	Something is thriving, growing in wealth	ignorant	A lack of awareness or knowledge about an event or person
imposing	Creating a sense of authority – in size, appearance or attitude	repudiate	To claim that a belief or action is false
caricature	An artistic representation of someone which exaggerates some of their characteristics	deterioration	The state of something becoming worse over time.
diatribe	A forceful, verbal attack against something or someone	reckless	Being unaware of the consequences of your actions
Hostility	Treating someone as the opposition with a feeling of unfriendliness	reformed	The act of changing and/or improving your behaviour
assertive	Showing confidence or boldness	omniscient	To be all knowing
discord	A state of disagreement or lacking harmony	generation	The word used to describe people born within a specific time frame.
identity	Who or what something is and the characteristics or traits which determine this.	attitude	A view or opinion held about something, typically over a longer period of time
optimism	A sense of hopefulness that the future will be better.	redemption	The action of being saved in some way from evil or error.
Conservatism	dedication to preserving tradition.	perpetuate	Maintain, continue
ideology	A system of ideas and beliefs that guides an individual or group.	Didacticism	A form of literature intended to directly instruct the audience and to teach them a lesson

