

# *An Inspector Calls*



## *Revision Guide*

# AN INSPECTOR CALLS

## TIMELINE

YEAR AND MONTH	WHAT HAPPENS	PERSON INVOLVED
September 1910	Eva sacked by Birling & Co.	MR BIRLING
December 1910	Eva employed by Milwards.	
Late January 1911	Eva sacked by Milwards.	SHEILA BIRLING
March 1911	Eva [calling herself Daisy Renton] becomes Gerald's mistress.	GERALD CROFT
Early September 1911	Gerald breaks off the affair.	GERALD CROFT
Eva leaves Brumley for two months.		
November 1911	Eric meets Eva.	ERIC BIRLING
December 1911/January 1912	Eva finds she is pregnant.	ERIC BIRLING
Late March 1912	Mrs. Birling turns down Eva's application for help.	MRS BIRLING
Early April 1912	Eva's suicide/the Inspector calls	ALL

## SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although *An Inspector Calls* is set in 1912 it was written in 1944/45 and produced in London for the first time in 1946; it is as much about post-war Britain as it is about the Edwardian period. Audiences at the end of the war would have appreciated the irony of Birling's predictions for the future. Setting the play before the First World War enabled Priestley to make the most of class division and social hierarchy. There are many references to social position: Birling's compared to his wife's, the Birlings compared to Gerald's family, the workers at Birling's factory and the destitute women who go to the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation for help. Birling constantly name drops, talking of Alderman Meggarty and the Chief Constable as well as his own time as Lord Mayor. He tries to impress Gerald with talk of the possibility of his being knighted. Social position is clearly important to him and Priestley uses Birling to represent the capitalist viewpoint. Birling is concerned about money and what other people think; the possibility of scandal horrifies him.

You may also notice the different attitudes to women in the play. Sheila is seen as someone who needs protecting from the harsh realities of life; both Gerald and Birling try to get her out of the room when Gerald is being questioned. They have a different attitude to women of the town, and to Eva Smith. Mrs Birling adds to this by implying that Eva Smith had ideas above her station. Although both Gerald and Eric see that Eva was different from the usual women in the Palace bar, they are still both prepared to use her in a way which would be unthinkable in a girl of their own social standing.

# **SUMMARY**

## **ACT 1**

The Birling family is celebrating the engagement of Sheila to Gerald Croft, the son of Lord and Lady Croft, who comes from 'an old country family – landed people'. Arthur Birling is in a good mood and makes a number of speeches giving his views about the state of the world, technology and industrial relations. One of his main themes is about everyone being responsible for themselves; he doesn't believe that anyone has a responsibility to others apart from his family.

When Inspector Goole is announced, Birling and Gerald make a joke about Eric who shows his guilty conscience by reacting strongly to this.

The inspector informs Birling about the death of a young woman who has committed suicide by drinking disinfectant. It emerges that Birling had sacked the girl, Eva Smith, two years earlier after she had been one of the ring-leaders in a strike and demanding higher wages.

Sheila Birling is also connected to the girl, having had her sacked from her new job at Milwards. She is horrified by what she did and is genuinely remorseful.

The inspector seems to know details of the family's involvement before they speak and when he tells them that the girl changed her name to Daisy Renton, Gerald's reaction tells us that he, too, knew the girl. When they are temporarily left alone, Sheila warns Gerald not to try to hide anything from the inspector.

By the end of the first act, the audience is expecting the inspector to reveal further connections with members of the Birling family.

## **ACT 2**

Although Gerald tries to get Sheila to leave the room, she insists on staying; Gerald admits to having had an affair with Eva Smith, the girl he knew as Daisy Renton, the previous summer. Sheila is hurt and disappointed in Gerald who had told her he was busy at the works at that time. After Gerald broke off the affair, Eva/Daisy had left Brumley for a few months. After Sheila has returned her engagement ring to him, Gerald goes out, seemingly genuinely affected by the news of the girl's death.

Despite Sheila's warnings Mrs Birling tries to intimidate the inspector, believing that she could have no possible connection to the girl. When the inspector reminds her of the pregnant girl she turned away from the charity organisation she chaired, Mrs Birling concedes but felt herself to be justified because the girl had lied to her about her name [calling herself Mrs Birling]. She also disbelieved the girl's claim that she had refused the offer of help from the father of her baby because she believed that he had stolen the money. Mrs Birling digs herself deeper into a hole by insisting that the father of the baby should be made to pay.

Eric has been out during this exchange but re-enters right at the end of the scene to expectant faces; we are expecting Eric to be the father of the baby.

## **ACT 3**

Eric immediately realises that they all know and tells them of how he met Eva and of her subsequent pregnancy. Questioned closely by the inspector, he also reveals that he had tried

to support the girl by giving her money but he had stolen it from his father's business. The Birlings seem more horrified by this than his responsibility for the girl's condition.

Having done his job, the inspector makes a speech about social responsibility and leaves the Birlings to examine their behaviour.

When Gerald re-enters he has news that there is no Inspector Goole employed by the local police. Birling and Gerald now set about disproving the inspector's case although Sheila and Eric feel that that is not the point. When Gerald confirms that no girl has died of drinking disinfectant by telephoning the infirmary, The Birlings and Gerald are delighted and their mood of jollity and good-humour of the beginning of Act 1 returns.

Sheila and Eric do not feel the same way, continuing to feel guilt for what they have done and are appalled at the behaviour of Gerald and their parents. When Birling suggests that Sheila take back her engagement ring from Gerald, Sheila remarks that it is too soon.

Just at the point where Birling is teasing them for their lack of a sense of humour, the telephone rings and Birling is obviously stunned by what he hears: a girl has died in the infirmary and a police inspector is on his way to ask them some questions.

## CHARACTERS

### MR BIRLING

Birling is a **snob** and a **social climber**, very aware of his position in society, especially as his wife is higher up the social scale than him, as are the Crofts, Gerald's parents. He tries to impress and **intimidate** the inspector by mentioning having been mayor, emphasising his connections to the Crofts and his friendship with the Chief Constable. Birling is **pompous** and makes **speeches** revealing a **selfish and arrogant attitude** towards others. His proclamations about the Titanic, the state of the nation and the impossibility of war are all designed to make him look **foolish** in the eyes of the audience who would have the benefit of hindsight. Birling believes that each person is responsible only for himself and his family and denies any collective or social responsibility. More **worried about scandal** and his reputation than other people's feelings, Birling shows a **callous and unsympathetic** attitude towards Eva Smith. He is very **impressed** by Gerald and is **indulgent** towards his affair with Eva Smith even though it is his own daughter who has been betrayed.

### MRS BIRLING

An even bigger **snob** than her husband, Mrs Birling is described in the opening stage directions as a 'cold woman, and her husband's social superior'. She is **narrow-minded** and **judgmental** about the 'lower classes' without really understanding how other people live. She has **no insight** and is genuinely unaware that her son is a heavy drinker. Her life is governed by her notion of **correctness** and whilst her daughter is behaving in an appropriate way, she seems to get on with her but when Sheila expresses opinions she doesn't approve of she reprimands her. Her **arrogant** and **patronising** attitude towards the inspector means that she falls a victim to his questioning despite Sheila's warnings. Although she chairs the committee of a charitable organisation, Sybil Birling is **not a charitable person**; she is **smug** and **self-satisfied** and only serves on the committee out of a sense of duty rather than a genuine desire to help those less fortunate than herself. Because she only hears what she wants to, she is **easily offended**. It is because Eva Smith had the impertinence to use the Birling name that Mrs Birling refused to

help her. She is delighted when it seems that the inspector is a fraud because she feels that she was the only one who didn't give in to him. She does not change her attitude, has **no sense of empathy** and shows **no remorse** for her role in Eva Smith's death.

## **SHEILA**

At the beginning of the play, Sheila is presented as rather pleased with herself but also rather shallow. She makes **inconsequential remarks** and speaks in a **rather childish** way: she calls her mother 'mummy' and uses words like 'squiffy' and 'jolly well'. However, she is the only one to immediately accept responsibility for her role in Eva Smith's death and she is, therefore, probably the **most sympathetic character** in the play. She is **genuinely remorseful** for her actions and is very affected by details of the girl's terrible death. She shows **perception** in her attitude towards the inspector, realising that he already knows much of what he is asking them and showing **intuition** about what his questioning is leading to. She is the first to realise that Eric is the father of Eva's baby and tries to stop her mother from making it worse for Eric. This intuition is also evident in the fact that before information about Gerald's affair came out, she was **suspicious** about his behaviour when she speaks to him 'half serious, half playfully' about it. Although she acted out of spite and jealousy in getting Eva sacked, she has more of a **conscience** than any of the other characters and we believe her when she says that she will never do anything like it again. She has more **empathy** for Eva, recognising her as a person not just as a worker. She is therefore very different from her father and mother and nearer to the inspector in terms of her **social conscience**. Of all the characters, Sheila is **most changed** by the inspector's visit. She is more **honest** and **outspoken** than at the beginning of the play, often shocking her mother with her remarks. Sheila **represents hope** that people can change.

## **ERIC**

Eric is rather **awkward** and **ill at ease** with himself and others. He is described as 'half shy, half assertive' **immature** and **weak**. He is presented as a **drunk** who does not stand up for himself against his father. Neither of his parents know him well or understand him and he seems to be lacking their regard and affection. Birling makes it clear that Gerald is the type of son he would have chosen for himself. His liaison with Eva Smith was possibly as a result of his parents' lack of understanding but he did not treat her well at the time and the revelations that he is a **thief** compound our view of him as a weak and spoilt young man. He is, however, **genuinely sorry** about Eva and **horrified** by the revelations that his mother had turned her away. The audience feels a certain sympathy for him, particularly because he does **redeem himself** towards the end of the play when he seems to have learnt his lesson.

## **GERALD CROFT**

Gerald is the upper class fiancé of Sheila Birling; unlike Eric, he is at **ease with himself** and others and has the **self-confidence** of a young man of his class and upbringing. He is more like Mr Birling in his views and outlook on life than he is Sheila or Eric to whom he is nearer in age. He agrees with the way Mr Birling handles the sacking of Eva Smith and when questioned by the inspector, like Mr and Mrs Birling, his **first impulse is to deny** everything. However, unlike them, he **shows remorse** for his actions when he realises what has happened to the girl. He tries to **protect** Sheila from the revelations about his affair with Eva and once he has

begun his confession, he admits what he did. However, he is the one who **acts on his suspicions** about the inspector and begins the chain of events which result in the revelation that the inspector is a fraud or impostor. Once he realises this, like the Birlings, he reverts to a light-hearted attitude which shows that he has **not learned anything from the events of the evening**.

## INSPECTOR GOOLE

The inspector is described as creating '**an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness**'. As each of the characters part in the death of Eva Smith is revealed, he remains **constant** and unmoving. Although he is described variously as speaking '**calmly**' and '**steadily**', he also speaks '**sternly**' and '**grimly**'. There are several references to his **taking control** and **intervening**. The inspector could be said to be a **mouth-piece** for Priestley's own opinions and as a contrast with the views of Birling; he has also been called merely a **dramatic device** to move the plot along. Certainly it is the inspector who makes things happen and takes control of how and when the revelations occur. He decides the order in which each character is questioned. The fact that he is quite **ordinary in appearance** underlines the fact that he is not ordinary in the way he asks questions and his attitude towards the other characters. He is **direct** and **takes charge** on a number of occasions. Both Birling and Mrs Birling remark on his rudeness. He is very **single-minded** and seems very **certain** of himself and his facts. He also seems to be **omniscient** [all-knowing] and Sheila is the one who recognises this most. He is a **catalyst** who seems able to get characters to reveal their involvement with Eva Smith because he seems to **already know** what they are going to say. Some critics have argued that he is like a **confessor figure** with the characters revealing their sins to him just as they might to a priest. He does not make things easy for them and he does pass judgment on them aloud, unlike a real police inspector although unlike a priest, he neither forgives them nor punishes them. Goole seems to be working to a very **tight time-scale** and makes a number of remarks about being **in a hurry**.

There are various possibilities for who or what Inspector Goole represents:

- Priestley
- God
- The voice of conscience
- A dramatic device
- A 'ghoul' or evil spirit
- A forewarning of what the characters will face on Judgment Day

The power of Inspector Goole's character lies in not knowing exactly who he is or what he represents. Priestley gives us no clues and deliberately leaves it open at the end because he does not want to impose just one interpretation of the inspector.

When he is uncovered at the end as not being a real inspector, it makes a huge difference to Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald because not only have they avoided a scandal but they are also very aware of status, whereas for Sheila and Eric it makes no difference: 'he inspected us all right'.

# THEMES

The themes of the play are closely connected and at times indistinguishable from one another.

## SOCIAL MESSAGE

Priestley uses the play to put across a social message that reflected his own views of society:

- The comparison between the Birlings and the contrast with the workers in Birling's factory striking for a few pennies a week more
- The fact that someone like Mrs Birling can have a say in whether the Eva Smith's of the world get help or not
- Mr Birling as representative of capitalism and the Inspector championing the poor
- The inspector counters Birling's selfish attitude by talking about the need to be 'responsible for each other'

## RESPONSIBILITY

Priestley shows the attitudes of the different characters towards responsibility:

- Mr Birling does not have a sense of responsibility to his workers, just to making a profit and towards his family
- Mrs Birling has a sense of responsibility to do good deeds by being on the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation but feels no sense of responsibility for what happened to Eva Smith after she turned her away
- Gerald seems to show a responsible attitude when he rescued the girl from the attentions of Alderman Meggarty but then used her for his own purposes, discarding her once she was of no further use to him
- Eric shows little responsibility for his own actions, forcing himself upon Eva when he was in a drunken state and even when he tried to help her, he did it by stealing from his own father
- Sheila does show a sense of responsibility somewhat belatedly, realising that her actions in Milwards had a devastating consequence for one young woman's life

## MORALITY

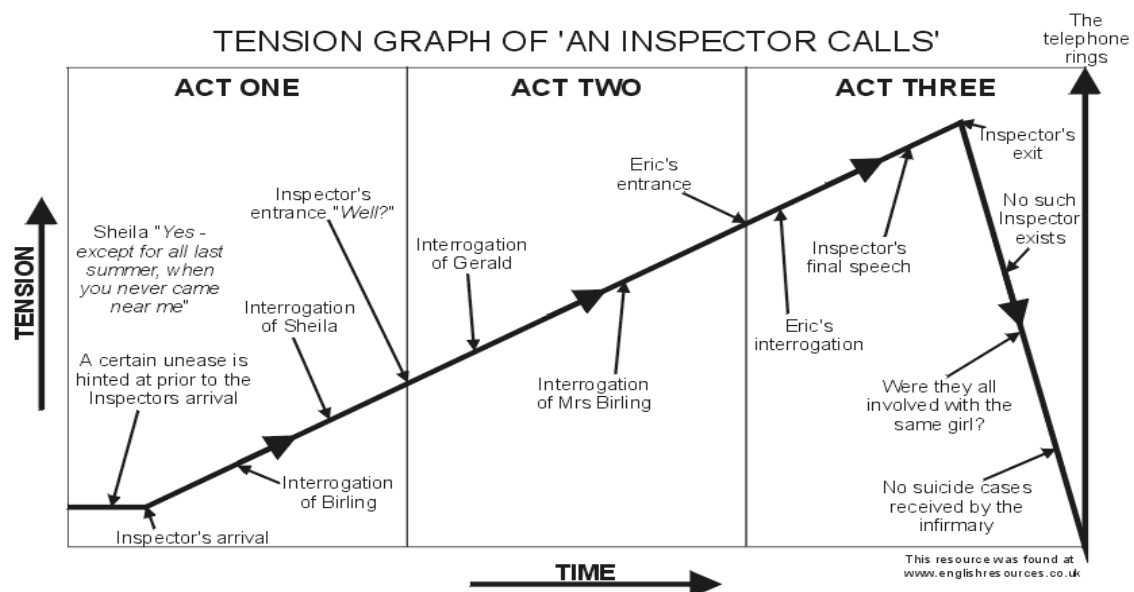
Apart from Eric stealing money from his father, **no crime** has been committed in the play, yet the characters are examined as if it has. What is being put on trial to some extent is the **morality** of their different actions or inactions. Although they may not have acted illegally, could each of the characters be said to have acted immorally in their dealings with Eva Smith, using their relative power over her to have her sacked [twice]; to seduce her and then discard her when she was no longer wanted; to force her into having sex against her will and leaving her pregnant; and refusing her money and turning her away when she was destitute.

## POLITICAL VIEWPOINT

The play could be seen as a microcosm of society with different attitudes being shown through the different characters. Through the character of Birling, we are shown the antithesis of everything that Priestley believes in; in the Inspector we get a glimpse of what Priestley would advocate instead. Unlike Birling, Priestley believes that everyone has responsibility towards others. In Inspector Calls, Priestley shows his fear that the country would not stand up to scrutiny, that as a society we might be like Birling although he shows some hope, in the characters of Sheila and Eric, that things might change.

## TENSION IN 'AN INSPECTOR CALLS'

- there is a very **compact structure** to the play, nothing is allowed to distract the audience from the central theme. There is **no sub-plot**
- the play takes place in just **one location**; the action is **continuous** and takes place over **one evening**
- Act One begins by introducing the characters and establishing the idea of a happy and united family looking forward to the future with a degree of confidence. In retrospect, there are a number of **hints that all is not as it seems** but these are not particularly obvious until later in the play. There is nothing to warn us of the shock of the Inspector's visit
- events soon gather speed and it is not long before we are being informed of **Birling and Sheila's involvement** with Eva Smith
- tensions increase, firstly as **Gerald's affair** is unveiled (and the scandal it would cause) and Sheila begins to realise that they are all implicated in some way 'he is giving us rope - so that we'll hang ourselves'. As reader/audience we realise that all the characters are going to have secrets to reveal under the clever questioning of the inspector; the **anticipation** of the audience raises the level of tension
- Mrs Birling's attempts to shift the blame for the girl's suicide lead her to **blame the father** of the unborn child. Despite Sheila's attempts to prevent her from digging herself deeper into a hole, **Mrs Birling ploughs on relentlessly** adding to the dramatic tension as the audience waits to see what will happen
- the tension is heightened at this point by the **dramatic entrance of Eric**.
- with the departure of the Inspector it would appear that what follows will be something of an **anti-climax** as the Inspector's identity is put into doubt by a series of observations made by the Birling family and Gerald. Even the existence of Eva is called into question.
- however, the tension remains to some extent as the two generations show a split in their attitudes, confirming **the differences highlighted by the Inspector's questioning** - the moral divide is very great indeed
- the **final denouement**, the phone call announcing that a police inspector is on his way to ask some questions about a girl who has just died in the infirmary, is as **shocking** as it is **surprising** and ensures that the audience will leave the auditorium in a state of real shock





# DRAMATIC DEVICES IN 'AN INSPECTOR CALLS'

- **stage directions** are used at the beginning of the play to **give information about the set**; it tells us that the Birlings are well off and middle class [it is 'a fairly solid suburban house' with 'good solid furniture' which is 'substantial and heavily comfortable' rather than cosy]
- stage directions are used at the beginning of the play to **give information about characters**; Priestley tells us not only about their appearance but also about their character [Birling is 'heavy-looking' and 'rather portentous' (it means self-important or pompous); Mrs Birling is 'rather cold', Sheila is a 'pretty girl...very pleased with life and rather excited'; Gerald is an 'attractive chap' whilst Eric is 'not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive'; when the inspector enters, we are told that he 'has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking']
- stage directions are widely used to give information about the feelings or actions of the characters which would help the actors playing the characters ['bitterly', 'distressed', 'after a pause, with a touch of impatience', 'massively taking charge']
- **lighting** is used to create effect – at the beginning the lighting is described as 'pink and intimate'; after the inspector enters there is a reference to his moving 'nearer a light – perhaps a standard lamp'. This suggests that the inspector is shining a harsh light on the Birlings and Gerald Croft
- sparing use of **sound effects** help to enhance the drama – the doorbell in the first act and the ringing of the telephone in the final moments of the play are both highly significant
- Priestley frequently makes use of the **dash** – to show a character's emotional state; the dash represents the fact that the character is speaking in a disjointed rather than a flowing and articulate way [see Sheila's speech on page 29 and Eric's on p.55]
- not all the characters are on stage all the time; **exits and entrances** are cleverly used to create **dramatic tension** [see separate notes about this] with some characters being unaware of what has happened whilst they were out of the room [examples include; the entrance of the inspector shortly after Birling has made his pompous speeches; Mrs Birling's not knowing that the inspector is implicating everyone with his clever questioning techniques and Eric's re-appearance at the end of Act 2 just at the moment when the audience and the characters on stage realise that Eric is the father of Eva Smith's baby]
- **dramatic irony** – this is particularly evident in Birling's speeches at the beginning of the play when he makes pronouncements about war, the state of the nation in 30 years' time and, more immediately, the unsinkable nature of the Titanic; compare this apparent foolishness with the inspector's talk of 'blood and anguish'. An audience seeing this immediately after the second world war with knowledge of the first war would think of Birling as a fool and the inspector as a prophet
- the **major dramatic device** used by Priestley is that of the Inspector himself. He is used to good effect to **move the plot along, controlling the pace of events and deciding in which order the characters are questioned**. He is also used to **voice Priestley's socialist views and opinions**
- **contrast** between characters is another effective dramatic device - the **juxtaposition** of Birling and the inspector provides an effective contrast of beliefs; the attitudes of Sheila and her father to the fate of Eva Smith also provides effective contrast
- **symbolism** is a further dramatic device used by Priestley: Birling **represents capitalism** whilst the inspector as a mouthpiece for Priestley himself **represents socialism**. Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald Croft represent the old order of things whilst Sheila and Eric are **symbolic of hope** for the future
- **cliff-hangers** – Priestley uses this device several times to make the audience wait in anticipation for what they know will happen: The end of Act 1 and beginning of Act 2 begin with the inspector saying 'Well?' to Gerald; the beginning of Act 3 is 'exactly as at the end of Act 2'

# EXAM QUESTIONS ON AN INSPECTOR CALLS

IN THE EXAM, you will be asked to write **TWO** answers on **An Inspector Calls**:

- **one compulsory question** based on an extract from the text [**10 marks**]  
This is known as a **CONTEXT** question. You are advised to spend about **20 minutes** on this answer.
- **one longer question** from a **choice of two** [**20 marks**]  
You are advised to spend about **40 minutes** on this answer.

## HOW TO ANSWER A CONTEXT QUESTION [No choice/10 marks/20 minutes]

1. Look carefully at what you are being asked to comment on – is it character, theme, dramatic devices?
2. Read the extract carefully and try to locate the passage – whereabouts in the play does it come? Before what? After what? This will give you a context for answering the question.  
**BUT**
3. Focus on the extract – only refer to elsewhere in the play if it is relevant e.g. shows a change of character.
4. As you read, write down about 3 or 4 points that you want to make to answer the question; underline a few quotes to support your points.
5. Don't do an introduction/conclusion – there isn't time.
6. Get straight into answering the question by making a **major point** in your first sentence.
7. Write about **3/4 short paragraphs** covering the points you have highlighted as being relevant.
8. Use only very **short quotes**.

**Q. Read the extract on the opposite page. Look closely at how Sheila speaks and behaves. What does it reveal about her character?**

### Sample answer

From the very beginning of this extract Sheila shows **more assertive behaviour** than earlier in the play. Although Gerald tries to protect Sheila from the revelations which are to follow, Sheila does not want protecting and shows her **determination** to stay.

major point

shows understanding of the context

There is evidence of a stronger character than there was in Act 1; she is far **less subservient** towards Gerald, showing her disappointment in his judgment of her by speaking 'bitterly' and interrupting him when he tries to explain himself.

knowledge of text

Priestley shows that Sheila is a **more sympathetic character** than either of her parents through selective use of stage directions. She is 'distressed' when reminded of the way Eva Smith died and reacts 'eagerly' when the inspector suggests that she does not want to feel entirely to blame. However, the fact that she does **acknowledge her responsibility**, and feels **remorseful** about it, makes the audience feel more warmly towards her:

'...I know I'm to blame – and I'm desperately sorry...'

Priestley effectively **conveys Sheila's emotions** through the use of dashes which suggest that she is speaking in a disjointed way and that she is **under some strain**.

During the play, Sheila is shown to be **perceptive** and to have some **sympathy** with the inspector and **intuition** about what he is doing. The first hint of this is shown at the beginning of this extract she says: '...but you haven't finished asking questions - have you?' and then later, when he seems to echo her own thoughts, she 'stares at him wonderingly and dubiously'.

Although this may seem a short answer, it is enough for the 20 minutes you have for a context question.

**SHEILA** No, but you haven't finished asking questions – have you?  
**INSPECTOR** No.  
**SHEILA** *(to GERALD)* You see? *(To INSPECTOR.)* Then I'm staying.  
**GERALD** Why should you? It's bound to be unpleasant and disturbing.  
**INSPECTOR** And you think young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?  
**GERALD** If possible – yes.  
**INSPECTOR** Well, we know one young woman who wasn't, don't we?  
**GERALD** I suppose I asked for that.  
**SHEILA** Be careful you don't ask for any more, Gerald.  
**GERALD** I only meant to say to you – Why stay when you'll hate it?  
**SHEILA** It can't be any worse for me than it has been. And it might be better.  
**GERALD** *(bitterly)* I see.  
**SHEILA** What do you see?  
**GERALD** You've been through it – and now you want to see somebody else put through it.  
**SHEILA** *(bitterly)* So that's what you think I'm really like. I'm glad I realized it in time, Gerald.  
**GERALD** No, no, I didn't mean –  
**SHEILA** *(cutting in)* Yes, you did. And if you'd really loved me, you couldn't have said that. You listened to that nice story about me. I got that girl sacked from Milwards. And now you've made up your mind I must obviously be a selfish, vindictive creature.  
**GERALD** I neither said that nor even suggested it.  
**SHEILA** Then why say I want to see somebody else put through it? That's not what I meant at all.  
**GERALD** All right then, I'm sorry.  
**SHEILA** Yes, but you don't believe me. And this is just the wrong time not to believe me.  
**INSPECTOR** *(massively taking charge)* Allow me, Miss Birling. *(To GERALD.)* I can tell you why Miss Birling wants to stay on and why she says it might be better for her if she did. A girl died tonight. A pretty, lively sort of girl, who never did anybody any harm. But she died in misery and agony – hating life –  
**SHEILA** *(distressed)* Don't please – I know, I know – and I can't stop thinking about it –  
**INSPECTOR** *(ignoring this)* Now Miss Birling has just been made to understand what she did to this girl. She feels responsible. And if she leaves us now, and doesn't hear any more, then she'll feel she's entirely to blame, she'll be alone with her responsibility, the rest of tonight, all tomorrow, all the next night –  
**SHEILA** *(eagerly)* Yes, that's it. And I know I'm to blame – and I'm desperately sorry – but I can't believe – I won't believe – it's simply my fault that in the end she – she committed suicide. That would be too horrible –  
**INSPECTOR** *(sternly to them both)* You see, we have to share something. If there's nothing else, we'll have to share our guilt.  
**SHEILA** *(staring at him)* Yes. That's true. You know. *(She goes close to him, wonderingly.)* I don't understand about you.  
**INSPECTOR** *(calmly)* There's no reason why you should.

# LONGER QUESTIONS

The second question you will answer on An Inspector Calls is a longer question – sometimes an essay style question. You need to choose **ONE** question from a choice of **TWO**. Aim to spend 40 minutes on this question: 5-10 minutes thinking and planning and about **30 minutes** writing. Don't do a long introduction or conclusion.

## 1. CHARACTER QUESTIONS

a) This might be about an individual character:

*How is Sheila Birling presented?*

*Which character do you have least sympathy for?*

OR

b) It might ask you to compare two characters:

*Choose two characters in Inspector Calls with different attitudes. How does Priestley present these two characters?*

OR

c) You might also be asked about the relationships between two characters:

*How is the relationship between Gerald and Sheila presented at different points in the play?*

## 2. EMPATHY QUESTIONS

In this type of question, you are asked to put yourself in a character's shoes and write as if you were them. You need to think about their attitudes, their attitudes to others and their reactions to what has happened. Try to use appropriate language and get the tone right for how they speak.

*Imagine you are Eric. At the end of the play, you look back over events. Write down your thoughts and feelings.*

## 3. DRAMA BASED QUESTIONS

These tend to be about the advice you would give to an actor playing a character.

*What advice would you give the actor playing **Arthur Birling**?*

You may be given some prompts but even if you are not, remember to think about **different times in the play**. You might take four different points when giving advice about Birling. For example: the beginning when he is making his speeches, after the Inspector has entered, then when he realises that the inspector does not exist and finally after the telephone call at the end.

## 4. WHOLE TEXT THEMES/ISSUES

*Which character is most to blame for the death of Eva Smith?*

*How is the theme of responsibility presented in the play?*

## 5. WRITER'S CRAFT

This could be about the structure of the play or about the dramatic devices used by Priestley.

*What do you think of the ending of the play?*

*How does Priestley create and maintain tension in 'An Inspector Calls'?*

*What do you think of the way Priestley uses dramatic devices in 'An Inspector Calls'?*

# INSPECTOR CALLS - PAST PAPER QUESTIONS

Here are some of the questions that have been asked over the last few years. This should help you to understand the TYPE of questions asked rather than being useful for practice. You may be able to guess what questions may come up by looking at what has been asked over the last four years. You will notice that the questions for FOUNDATION and HIGHER tier vary slightly. In the context question the passage is always the same but the questions in the FOUNDATION tier tend to be about one or more of the characters. In the HIGHER tier, the question will focus more on the MOOD or ATMOSPHERE created in the extract. In the longer questions, the FOUNDATION tier will often have prompts. Use these to help you structure your answer.

**2005**

**FOUNDATION**

Answer both parts of (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

**CONTEXT**

a) Read the extract on pp 33-35 Act 2 Beginning of questioning of Gerald 'Inspector: At the end of January last year...'

- (i) What are your thoughts and feelings about Sheila?
- (ii) What are your thoughts and feelings about Gerald? **[10]**

**LONGER**

b) Which character changes most as a result of the Inspector's visit, in your opinion?

Think about:

- your chosen character's dealings with the Inspector
- your chosen character's relationships with other characters in the play
- the way your chosen character speaks and behaves at different points in the play
- why you think your chosen character changes most **[20]**

OR

c) Give advice to the actor playing Mr. Birling about how he should speak and behave in the following parts in the play:

- at the beginning, before the Inspector arrives
- at the end, after Gerald brings news that there is no Inspector Goole on the police force **[20]**

**HIGHER**

Answer (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

**CONTEXT**

Act 2 Beginning of questioning of Gerald pp 33-35 'Inspector: At the end of January last year...'

a) With close reference to the extract, show how JB Priestley creates mood and atmosphere for an audience here. **[10]**

**LONGER**

EITHER:

b) Which character changes most as a result of the Inspector's visit, in your opinion? Show how this change is presented to an audience. **[20]**

OR

c) Give advice to the actor playing Mr. Birling on how he should present the character to an audience. **[20]**

**2006**

**FOUNDATION**

Answer both parts of (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

**CONTEXT**

a) Read the extract on pp.54-56 Act 3 just before the Inspector leaves. 'Inspector: (cutting in) And my trouble is, I don't have much time...'

How does the Inspector speak and behave in this extract? Give reasons for what you say. **[10]**

**LONGER**

**EITHER:**

b) Imagine you are Sheila. At the end of the play you think back over what has happened. Write down your thoughts and feelings.

*You may wish to think about:*

- *your relationship with your family*
- *your relationship with Gerald Croft*
- *your feelings about what the Inspector revealed about your involvement with the dead girl*
- *your feelings about what the Inspector revealed about your family's involvement with the dead girl*

[20]

**OR**

c) For which character in the play do you have the least sympathy? Give reasons for what you say.

[20]

**HIGHER**

**Answer (a) and either part (b) or part (c).**

**CONTEXT**

a) pp.54-56 Act 3 just before the Inspector leaves. 'Inspector: (cutting in) And my trouble is, I don't have much time...'

Look closely at how the Inspector speaks and behaves here. How does the way he speaks and behaves create mood and atmosphere for an audience?

**LONGER**

**EITHER:**

b) Imagine you are Sheila. At the end of the play you think back over what has happened. Write down your thoughts and feelings. Remember how Sheila would speak when you write your answer.

**OR**

c) Show how Priestley creates and maintains tension throughout the play.

**2007**

**FOUNDATION**

**Answer both parts of (a) and either part (b) or part (c).**

(a) Read the extract from the beginning of Act 2 which begins 'SHEILA No, but you haven't finished asking questions – have you?.' pp.27-29. Then answer the following questions:

(i) What do you think of the way Sheila speaks and behaves here? Give reasons for what you say. [5]

(ii) How do you think an audience would respond to this part of the play? Give reasons for what you say. [5]

**EITHER**

(b) Give advice to the actor playing Mrs. Birling on how she should present the character to an audience.

Think about:

- the way she speaks and behaves with Mr Birling;
- the way she speaks and behaves with Sheila, Eric and Gerald;
- the way she speaks and behaves with the Inspector;
- her response to the news about Eva Smith;
- anything else you think important.

[20]

**OR**

(c) Write about the character of Inspector Goole and his importance to the play.

Think about:

- his arrival;
- the way he speaks and behaves with different characters;
- the impact he has on the Birlings and Gerald Croft;
- anything else you think important.

[20]

## HIGHER

Answer (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

(a) Read the extract from the beginning of Act 2 which begins 'SHEILA No, but you haven't finished asking questions – have you?.' pp.27-29. Then answer the following questions:

Look closely at how Sheila speaks and behaves here. What does it reveal about her character?

[10]

## EITHER

(b) Give advice to the actor playing Mrs. Birling on how she should present the character to an audience.

[20]

## OR

(c) How is the character of Inspector Goole important to the play as a whole?

[20]

## 2008

## FOUNDATION

Answer both parts of (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

## CONTEXT

pp.70 – end Just after Birling has learned that there is no Inspector Goole and that no girl has died that day in the Infirmary.

'BIRLING (triumphantly) There you are. Proof positive..'

a)

i) What do you think of the way Mr. Birling speaks and behaves here? Give reasons for what you say.

ii) What do you think of the way Sheila speaks and behaves here? Give reasons for what you say.

[10]

## LONGER

### EITHER:

b) Imagine you are Gerald. At the end of the play you think back over its events. Write down your thoughts and feelings.

*You may wish to think about:*

- *what happened during the evening of the Inspector's visit*
- *your relationship with Sheila*
- *your relationship with Eva Smith/Daisy Renton*
- *the effect the evening's events had on you*

[20]

## OR

c) Which character do you think is most to blame for Eva Smith's death? Give reasons for what you say.

[20]

## HIGHER

Answer (a) and either part (b) or part (c).

## CONTEXT

pp.70 – end Just after Birling has learned that there is no Inspector Goole and that no girl has died that day in the Infirmary.

'BIRLING (triumphantly) There you are. Proof positive..'

a) How does this extract create mood and atmosphere for an audience?

[10]

## LONGER

### EITHER:

b) Imagine you are Gerald. At the end of the play you think back over its events. Write down your thoughts and feelings. Remember how Gerald would speak when you write your answer.

[20]

## OR

c) Inspector Goole says: 'We are all responsible for each other'. How does J. B. Priestley present this theme in 'An Inspector Calls'?

[20]

# REVISION TASKS

1. Re-read the text; **there is no substitute** for this. You will notice far more details on a second or third reading.
2. Annotate and highlight your text, either as you go or at the end of each act.

e.g.

**pompous**  
**looks foolish**  
**dramatic irony**

Birling: Just let me finish, Eric. You've a lot to learn yet. And I' talking as a hard-headed, practical man of business. And I say there isn't a chance of war.

3. Highlight or make a particular note of:
  - how each act starts and ends
  - when the interrogation of each character begins
  - at least two or three key quotes for each character [more if possible]
  - use of stage directions to give information about the set
  - use of stage directions to give information about a character
  - use of stage directions to give information to an actor about how to play the role
  - two or three examples of use of dashes for particular effect
4. Organise all the handouts and notes you have been given. Read through and pick out any points you think are particularly useful and use them for the next 2 tasks
5. **Make revision cards** -use ordinary postcards or index cards [you can get packs of 100 coloured ones from Staples]. On these cards put summarised details of characters, themes etc. Use these to test yourself on the characters. Suggestions include:
  - each of the 6 main characters – words to describe them, relationship with others, select a **few short key quotes**
  - Eva Smith/Daisy Renton – what do we know about her?
  - dramatic devices
  - political/social message
  - tension
6. **Practise exam style questions.** Look back at the sample answers in this revision guide and highlight the key points that have been made. Now do it the other way round. Choose one of the titles from the examples given earlier and spend about 5-10 minutes planning your answer. Finally try writing it as an exam style response in about 30 minutes. Repeat this if you have time, or just write the plans.

**TIP: Don't choose a question which has been used recently in the past papers. You might like to consider the following:**

- **Imagine you are: Mrs Birling/Mr Birling/Eric – write your thoughts and feelings at the end of the play.**
- **What advice would you give to the actor playing the part of: Sheila/Mrs Birling/Eric/Gerald/The Inspector at different times in the play?**
- **What message is Priestley trying to get across in 'An Inspector Calls'?**
- **Which character do you have most sympathy for in the play? [tip: don't choose Eva Smith!]**
- **Choose two characters and compare how they are presented.**
- **What role does the Inspector play?**



Use this sheet to gather one or more examples of each of these dramatic devices used by Priestley

**STAGE DIRECTIONS**

**THE INSPECTOR**

**PUNCTUATION**

**DRAMATIC TENSION**

**CONTRAST**

**EXITS & ENTRANCES**

**SOUND EFFECTS**



**DRAMATIC IRONY**

**USE OF LIGHTING**

**CLIFFHANGERS**

**SYMBOLISM**