



## KS4 An Inspector Calls Knowledge for Home Learning and Recall Tasks

### Themes:

Remorse, Responsibility, Class, Capitalism, Socialism, the Generation Gap, Prejudice, Family, Responsibility, Injustice, Hypocrisy

### Plot:

#### Act 1

The Birling family celebrate their daughter Sheila's engagement. Inspector Goole arrives to investigate the death of a young woman named Eva Smith who has taken her own life. Mr Birling fired Eva Smith from his factory because she wanted higher wages. Sheila Birling used her influence to have Eva Smith sacked from Milward's. The Inspector informs the family Eva Smith changed her name to Daisy Renton. Sheila notices immediately that her fiancé, Gerald Croft, reacts to the name.

#### Act 2

Gerald admits he had an affair with Eva/Daisy. He offered her a place to stay and gave her money. Sheila breaks off her engagement to Gerald. Mrs Birling eventually admits she used her influence to make sure Eva was refused help from a charity. Mrs Birling blames the father of Eva's unborn child and wants to see him made an example of.

#### Act 3

Eric Birling is the father of Eva's child. He gave her money stolen from his father's business and offered to marry her, but she refused both. The Inspector's final speech warns people to care for everyone or they will be taught their lesson in a painful way. In a final plot twist the family question whether the Inspector was real. The younger and older generation react differently when reflecting on their actions. Sheila and Eric change and show regret, their parents do not, and events repeat themselves.

### Characters:

**Mr Arthur Birling:** The head of a middle-class family and a prosperous business owner. He is selfish, boastful and self-important. He puts profit above people. He aspires to a knighthood. He is unchanged by the events of the evening and believes he has been hoaxed.

**Mrs. Sybil Birling:** She is a cold, unsympathetic woman who lacks compassion. She supports her husband, believes her actions are completely justified and refuses to help Eva Smith. She is prejudiced towards "women of that class". She is unchanged at the end of the play.

**Inspector Goole:** The Inspector highlights the importance of social responsibility and community. His role helps structure the play "one line of enquiry at a time". He explores how each character contributed to Eva Smith's death. He warns the characters and the audience of the consequences of their actions.

**Sheila Birling:** She is initially "very pleased with life and rather excited". She is shocked by the way Eva has been treated. She becomes more independent as the play progresses. She breaks off her engagement to Gerald. She is incredibly sorry for her behaviour.

**Gerald Croft:** The upper-class son of Lord and Lady Croft. He claims he was kept away from Sheila due to business while he was having an affair with Daisy/Eva. He sides with Mr. and Mrs. Birling at the end of the play in claiming the Inspector was a hoax.

**Eric Birling:** He is young, drinks heavily and works for the family business. He threatens to "make a row" when he goes home with Eva. He steals money to support pregnant Eva and offers to marry her. He is ashamed of himself and his parents' actions at the end of the play.

**Eva Smith/ Daisy Renton:** Eva Smith represents ordinary working-class women. She has no one to turn to when unemployed and pregnant. She highlights the need for the Welfare State established after WW2.



## Context:

(not assessed for An Inspector Calls but useful to know)

- Priestley served in the army during WW1 1914-1918 and wrote 'An Inspector Calls' in the winter of 1944-1945 as the "world was suffering" at the end of WW2.
- The play is set in 1912 and exposes the "rottenness behind the façade" of the families like the Birlings. The play is a social criticism of "middle-class prosperity and apparent respectability".
- Priestley exposes the irony of 1912 attitudes. The dramatic irony of Mr. Birling's claims: "there isn't a chance of war" and that the Titanic is "absolutely unsinkable" reflect his ignorance and pre-war complacency. Birling's speech at the beginning of the play also dismisses the idea of community "as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive". The idea that "a man has to make his own way" is interrupted by the Inspector's arrival to counter this message.
- The Inspector's final warning would resonate with the audience who had lived through two world wars. Priestley highlights the way Europe moved towards the 'fire and blood and anguish' of the 1914-1918 War because society did not appreciate that "We are members of one body" responsible for each other.
- The concept of "Time" inspired this and other works by Priestley. 'An Inspector Calls' allows the characters to examine the consequences of their actions. They are given an opportunity to change and act differently to break this cycle. The final climax of the play shows that lessons have not been learned just as they were not from WW1 and repeated in WW2.

## Writer's Messages:

- Priestley criticises society's division upon class lines through his representation of the Inspector who spearheads a message of responsible, empathetic, socialist change, whereby the young will build a new world which leaves behind the exploitative, cruel, capitalist system which Priestley so clearly despises.
- Priestley criticises the selfishness of the rich by pointing out how their lack of social responsibility is exploiting the poor.
- Priestley's anger at the exploitation of the poor results in his criticism of the selfish, capitalist rich who do not appreciate the damage they are causing to the most vulnerable members of society.
- The final point to emphasise is that it doesn't matter who the original 'Inspector' was – he's there as a vehicle to help convey the plot and to represent the writer's socialist ideas. It's about the ideas he represents.

## Structure and Form:

- Written in three Acts. Each act ends with a cliffhanger.
- The play is cyclical in nature, with the last Act directly linking to the events of the first.
- By the end of the play Sheila and Eric have learned important lessons and are ashamed of their previous behaviour. Mr. and Mrs. Birling believe their actions were right and justified.

## Quotations:

### Bees

'As if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense.'

### Earth

'It's better to ask for the earth than to take it.'

### Cheap

'These girls aren't cheap labour - they're people.'

### Rotten

'I felt rotten about it at the time, and now I feel a lot worse.'

### Impressionable

'... we often do on the young ones. They're more impressionable.'

### Class

'Girls of that class.'

### Felt

'I didn't feel about her as she felt about me.'

### Impertinently

'She'd impertinently made use of our name.'

### Ashamed

'I did nothing I'm ashamed of.'

### Frightens

'It frightens me the way you talk.'

### Millions

'There are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us.'

### Members

'We are all members of one body.'

### Anguish

'... if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.'

### Pretend

'You're beginning to pretend as if nothing's really happened at all.'

### Chap

'... you're not the kind of father a chap can go to when he's in trouble.'