Key Information from the Specification

Component 2: Post-1914 Prose/Drama, 19th Century Prose and Unseen Poetry

Written examination: 2 hours and 30 minutes

60% of qualification

This component assesses learners on either prose or drama from 1914 onwards, a 19th century prose text and unseen poetry. In Section A and Section B, learners will need to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of aspects of plot, characterisation, events and key themes; they will need to evaluate and analyse how language, structure and form are used by the writer to create meanings and effects. In Section B, learners will also need to show their understanding of the varied contexts of their chosen text. Section C consolidates many of the skills learners have developed as it requires learners to demonstrate these skills in a comparison of two unseen poems.

Section A (20%) Post 1914 Prose/Drama (40 marks)

An Inspector Calls – JB Priestley

This assessment will test, through a source based response, knowledge and understanding of the post-1914 prose/drama text. Learners will be expected to comment on the writer's use of language, structure and form and show an understanding of key themes, characters and ideas within the text. This assessment will also test learner's spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Section A assesses AO1, AO2 and AO4.

AO1
Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:
• maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
• use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2
Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO4
Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Learners are not permitted to take copies of the set texts into the examination.

Plot 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 – the 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.

His speech is interrupted by the sound of a door bell. Inspector Goole is announced and enters the dining room where the family are gathered. He informs them of 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 the details of the family’s involvement before they speak and when he tells them that girl changed her name to Daisy Renton, Gerald’s reaction tells them 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 who 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, appearing genuinely affected by the news of the girl’s death.

Despite Sheila’s repeated 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 justifies her actions, claiming that the girl deserved it as she had lied to her about her name - calling herself Mrs. Birling. She also claims that she refused the girl’s story about the father of the baby offering to help her with stolen money. She retains her stern, judgemental position and insists that the father of the baby is the only guilty party and should be held responsible for the girl’s death.

During this exchange, Eric (the son of Arthur and Sybil Birling) who has, until now, been out, enters the house and the audience realise that he is, in fact, the father of the baby.

Act 3

Eric immediately realises that they are all aware of his connection with Eva Smith, and he narrates his story. He verifies that he did, indeed, offer to help Eva Smith and the baby by stealing money from his father’s business.

Following this, the inspector makes his final monologue about the need for social responsibility. This dialogue is in complete contrast to that of Arthur Birling’s at the start and the two characters are, thus, placed in direct opposition to each other.

During this time, Gerald has been out and he now re-enters with the news that there is no Inspector by the name of Goole on the force and that he is, in fact, an imposter. At this news, Arthur and Sybil are relieved and talk about how all of this can be forgotten. However, a change has come over Sheila and Birling who try to convince their parents that regardless of whether or not Inspector Goole is a real inspector, they cannot deny what they have all done, and therefore, need to amend their ways.

The play ends with a phone call from the police station which informs them that an inspector is on his way to question them about the death of a young girl.
Character Information

Arthur Birling

- He is described at the start as a "heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties but rather provincial in his speech."
- He has worked his way up in the world and is proud of his achievements. He boasts about having been Mayor and tries (and fails) to impress the Inspector with his local standing and his influential friends.
- However, he is aware of people who are his social superiors, which is why he shows off about the port to Gerald, "it's exactly the same port your father gets." He is proud that he is likely to be knighted, as that would move him even higher in social circles.
- He claims the party "is one of the happiest nights of my life." This is not only because Sheila will be happy, but because a merger with Crofts Limited will be good for his business.
- He is optimistic for the future and confident that there will not be a war. As the audience knows there will be a war, we begin to doubt Mr Birling's judgement. (If he is wrong about the war, what else will he be wrong about?)
- He is extremely selfish:
  - He wants to protect himself and his family. He believes that socialist ideas that stress the importance of the community are "nonsense" and that "a man has to make his own way."
  - He wants to protect Birling and Co.
  - He cannot see that he did anything wrong when he fired Eva Smith - he was just looking after his business interests.
  - He wants to protect his reputation. As the Inspector's investigations continue, his selfishness gets the better of him:
    - He is worried about how the press will view the story in Act II, and accuses Sheila of disloyalty at the start of Act III.
    - He wants to hide the fact that Eric stole money: "I've got to cover this up as soon as I can."
- At the end of the play, he knows he has lost the chance of his knighthood, his reputation in Brumley and the chance of Birling and Co. merging with their rivals. Yet he hasn't learnt the lesson of the play: he is unable to admit his responsibility for his part in Eva's death.

Mrs Sybil Birling

- She is described at the start as "about fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior."
- She is a snob, very aware of the differences between social classes. She is irritated when Mr Birling makes the social gaffe of praising the cook in front of Gerald and later is very dismissive of Eva, saying "Girls of that class."
- She has the least respect for the Inspector of all the characters. She tries - unsuccessfully - to intimidate him and force him to leave, then lies to him when she claims that she does not recognise the photograph that he shows her.
- She sees Sheila and Eric still as "children" and speaks patronisingly to them.
- She tries to deny things that she doesn't want to believe: Eric's drinking, Gerald's affair with Eva, and the fact that a working class girl would refuse money even if it was stolen, claiming "She was giving herself ridiculous airs."
- She admits she was "prejudiced" against the girl who applied to her committee for help and saw it as her "duty" to refuse to help her. Her narrow sense of morality dictates that the father of a child should be responsible for its welfare, regardless of circumstances.
- At the end of the play, she has had to come to terms that her son is a heavy drinker who got a girl pregnant and stole money to support her, her daughter will not marry a good social 'catch' and that her own reputation within the town will be sullied. Yet, like her husband, she refuses to believe that she did anything wrong and doesn't accept responsibility for her part in Eva's death.
Sheila Birling

- She is described at the start as "a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited."
- Even though she seems very playful at the opening, we know that she has had suspicions about Gerald when she mentions "last summer, when you never came near me." Does this suggest that she is not as naive and shallow as she first appears?
- Although she has probably never in her life before considered the conditions of the workers, she shows her compassion immediately she hears of her father's treatment of Eva Smith: "But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people." Already, she is starting to change.
- She is horrified by her own part in Eva's story. She feels full of guilt for her jealous actions and blames herself as "really responsible."
- She is very perceptive: she realises that Gerald knew Daisy Renton from his reaction, the moment the Inspector mentioned her name. At the end of Act II, she is the first to realise Eric's part in the story. Significantly, she is the first to wonder who the Inspector really is, saying to him, 'wonderingly', "I don't understand about you." She warns the others "he's giving us the rope - so that we'll hang ourselves" (Act II) and, near the end, is the first to consider whether the Inspector may not be real. She is curious. She genuinely wants to know about Gerald's part in the story. It's interesting that she is not angry with him when she hears about the affair: she says that she respects his honesty. She is becoming more mature.
- She is angry with her parents in Act 3 for trying to "pretend that nothing much has happened." Sheila says "It frightens me the way you talk:" she cannot understand how they cannot have learnt from the evening in the same way that she has. She is seeing her parents in a new, unfavourable light.
- At the end of the play, Sheila is much wiser. She can now judge her parents and Gerald from a new perspective, but the greatest change has been in herself: her social conscience has been awakened and she is aware of her responsibilities. The Sheila who had a girl dismissed from her job for a trivial reason has vanished forever.

Eric Birling

- He is described at the start as "in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive."
- Eric seems embarrassed and awkward right from the start. The first mention of him in the script is "Eric suddenly guffaws," and then he is unable to explain his laughter, as if he is nervous about something. (It is not until the final act that we realise this must be because of his having stolen some money.) There is another awkward moment when Gerald, Birling and Eric are chatting about women's love of clothes before the Inspector arrives. Do you feel that there is tension in Eric's relationship with his father?
- It soon becomes clear to us (although it takes his parents longer) that he is a hardened drinker. Gerald admits, "I have gathered that he does drink pretty hard."
- When he hears how his father sacked Eva Smith, he supports the worker's cause, like Sheila. "Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?"
- He feels guilt and frustration with himself over his relationship with the girl. He cries, "Oh - my God! - how stupid it all is!" as he tells his story. He is horrified that his thoughtless actions had such consequences.
- He had some innate sense of responsibility, though, because although he got a woman pregnant, he was concerned enough to give her money. He was obviously less worried about stealing (or 'borrowing' from his father's office) than he was about the girl's future. So, was Eric, initially, the most socially aware member of the Birling family?
- He is appalled by his parents' inability to admit their own responsibility. He tells them forcefully, "I'm ashamed of you." When Birling tries to threaten him in Act III, Eric is aggressive in return: "I don't give a damn now." Do you think Eric has ever stood up to his father in this way before?
- At the end of the play, like Sheila, he is fully aware of his social responsibility. He is not interested in his parents' efforts to cover everything up: as far as he is concerned, the important thing is that a girl is dead. "We did her in all right."
Gerald Croft

- He is described as "an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred man-about-town."
- He is an aristocrat - the son of Lord and Lady Croft. We realise that they are not over-impressed by Gerald's engagement to Sheila because they declined the invitation to the dinner.
- He is not as willing as Sheila to admit his part in the girl's death to the Inspector and initially pretends that he never knew her. Is he a bit like Mr Birling, wanting to protect his own interests?
- He did have some genuine feeling for Daisy Renton, however: he is very moved when he hears of her death. He tells Inspector Goole that he arranged for her to live in his friend's flat "because I was sorry for her;" she became his mistress because "She was young and pretty and warm-hearted and intensely grateful."
- Despite this, in Act 3 he tries to come up with as much evidence as possible to prove that the Inspector is a fake - because that would get him off the hook. It is Gerald who confirms that the local force has no officer by the name of Goole, he who realises it may not have been the same girl and he who finds out from the infirmary that there has not been a suicide case in months. He seems to throw his energies into "protecting" himself rather than "changing" himself (unlike Sheila).
- At the end of the play, he has not changed. He has not gained a new sense of social responsibility, which is why Sheila (who has) is unsure whether to take back the engagement ring.

Inspector Goole

- He is described on his entrance as creating "an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit. He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking."
- He works very systematically; he likes to deal with "one person and one line of enquiry at a time." His method is to confront a suspect with a piece of information and then make them talk - or, as Sheila puts it, "he's giving us the rope - so that we'll hang ourselves."
- He is a figure of authority. He deals with each member of the family very firmly and several times we see him "massively taking charge as disputes erupt between them." He is not impressed when he hears about Mr Birling's influential friends and he cuts through Mrs Birling's obstructiveness.
- He seems to know and understand an extraordinary amount:
  - He knows the history of Eva Smith and the Birlings' involvement in it, even though she died only hours ago. Sheila tells Gerald, "Of course he knows."
  - He knows things are going to happen - He says "I'm waiting...To do my duty" just before Eric's return, as if he expected Eric to reappear at exactly that moment
  - He is obviously in a great hurry towards the end of the play: he stresses "I haven't much time." Does he know that the real inspector is shortly going to arrive?
  - His final speech is like a sermon or a politician's. He leaves the family with the message "We are responsible for each other" and warns them of the "fire and blood and anguish" that will result if they do not pay attention to what he has taught them.
- All this mystery suggests that the Inspector is not a 'real' person. So, what is he?
  - Is he a ghost? Goole reminds us of 'ghoul'.
  - Is he the voice of Priestley?
  - Is he the voice of God?
  - Is he the voice of all our consciences?
  - Do you have any other suggestions?
• Of course, we never see Eva Smith on stage in the play: we only have the evidence that the Inspector and the Birling's give us.
• The Inspector, Sheila Gerald and Eric all say that she was "pretty." Gerald describes her as "very pretty - soft brown hair and big dark eyes."
• Her parents were dead.
• She came from outside Brumley: Mr Birling speaks of her being "countrybred."
• She was working class.
• The Inspector says that she had kept a sort of diary, which helped him piece together the last two years of her life:
• However, in Act 3 we begin to wonder whether Eva ever really existed. - Gerald says, "We've no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl." - Birling adds, "There wasn't the slightest proof that this Daisy Renton really was Eva Smith." Yet the final phone call, announcing that a police inspector is shortly to arrive at the Birling's house to investigate the suicide of a young girl, makes us realise that maybe Eva Smith did exist after all. What do you think?
• Think about Eva's name. Eva is similar to Eve, the first woman created by God in the Bible. Smith is the most common English surname. So, Eva Smith could represent every woman of her class.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Quotation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Birling</td>
<td>&quot;You'll hear some people say war is inevitable … fiddlesticks!&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;Community and all that nonsense.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;You've had enough of that port, Eric.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody, it would be very awkward, wouldn't it?&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I speak as a hard-headed business man.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Look Inspector, I'd give thousands…&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Look at the way he talked to me…&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;By Jingo! A fake!&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;That was the police. A girl has just died – on her way to the infirmary.&quot;</td>
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<td>Mrs Birling</td>
<td>&quot;About fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband’s social superior&quot;</td>
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“Girls of that class”

“Go and look for the father of the child. It’s his responsibility.”

“As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!”

“But I accept no blame at all”

Gerald  “An attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred young man-about-town”

“You couldn’t have done anything else” (sacking Eva Smith)

“After all, y’know, we’re respectable citizens and not criminals”

“But how do you know it’s the same girl? ... We’ve no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl”

“She was very pretty – soft brown hair and big dark eyes.”

“Nearly any man would have done” (adored being ‘fairy prince’)

“Everything’s all right now Sheila. What about this ring?”

Eric  “In his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive”

“Why shouldn’t they try for higher wages? We try for the highest possible prices”

“I’d have let her stay”
"I wasn’t in love with her or anything— but I liked her— she was pretty and a good sport—"

"You’re not the kind of father a chap could go to when he’s in trouble."

"He was our police inspector all right"

"(shouting) And I say the girl’s dead and we all helped to kill her— and that’s what matters—"

Sheila: "I’ll never let it out of my sight for an instant."

"We really must stop these silly pretences."

"Yes, go on, Mummy"

"But these girls aren’t cheap labour— they’re people."

"And if I could help her now, I would—"

"No, he’s giving us the rope— so that we’ll hang ourselves"

"You mustn’t try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl. If you do the Inspector will just break it down."

"(bitterly) I suppose we’re all nice people now."
| Inspector Goole | "Need not be a big man but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness."

| | ‘A chain of events’ (may have driven her to suicide)

| | “It’s better to ask for the Earth than to take it”

| | ‘A girl died tonight. A pretty, lively sort of girl, who never did anybody any harm.’

| (the young ones) | “Are the most impressionable”

| | “Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges”

| | “You’ve had children. You must have known what she was feeling. And you slammed the door in her face”

| | “Each of you helped to kill her.”

| | “We are responsible for each other.”

| | “We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other.”

| Eva Smith | “…and died, after several hours of agony…”

| | She was a very pretty girl…that didn’t make it any better.”

| | ‘As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!’


“Just used her for the end of a stupid drunken evening, as if she was an animal, a thing, not a person.”

**Edna**  
The Maid

“Edna the parlor-maid is just clearing the table”

“Yes Ma’am”

“Edna’ll answer it”

“Please, sir, an inspector’s called”

“All right, Edna. Show him in here. Give us some more light.”

“Edna’ll go. I asked her to wait up to make us some tea”

### Key Themes and Quotes

#### Responsibility

Everyone in society is linked...

The words responsible and responsibility are used by most characters in the play at some point. Each member of the family has a different attitude to responsibility. Make sure that you know how each of them felt about their responsibility in the case of Eva Smith.

The Inspector wanted each member of the family to share the responsibility of Eva’s death: he tells them, "Each of you helped to kill her." However, his final speech is aimed not only at the characters on stage, but at the audience too: “One Eva Smith has gone - but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, and what we think and say and do.”

The Inspector is talking about a collective responsibility, everyone is society is linked, in the same way that the characters are linked to Eva Smith. Everyone is a part of "one body", the Inspector sees society as more important than individual interests. The views he is propounding are like those of Priestley who was a socialist. Remember at the time the ethos was based on the individualism ethos of laissez faire (leave alone), Priestley wanted the characters to consider a social conscience and to embrace a collective responsibility. He adds a clear warning about what could happen if, like some members of the family, we ignore our responsibility:

“And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, when they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.”

What would Priestley have wanted his audience to think of when the Inspector warns the Birlings of the "fire and blood and anguish"? Probably he is thinking partly about the world war they had just lived through - the result of governments’ blindly pursuing 'national interest' at all costs. No
doubt he was thinking too about the Russian revolution in which poor workers and peasants took over the state and exacted a bloody revenge against the aristocrats who had treated them so badly.

The generations

The main characters can be loosely divided into the older and younger generations. Mr and Mrs Birling are obviously the older generation whilst Eric and Sheila are of the younger. Gerald is only a few years older than Sheila, but identifies more with the older generations and the traditional ways of the upper classes. The inspector is older – perhaps of a similar age to the older Birlings – yet he is the character who brings the more radical ideas to the play.

There is a definite generational clash between the older Birlings and their children – especially between Mr Birling and Eric. Eric wants to be taken seriously and given more responsibilities in the business, but Mr Birling refuses to listen to him and treats him like a child rather than an adult. Sheila tries to reason with her mother, but Mrs Birling is so intent upon evading the inspector’s enquiry, she misses the obvious signs that the inspector knows more than she’s willing to admit. When Mrs Birling ignores her daughter, it cements the idea that she still sees Sheila as a child not a woman who is getting married.

Older Generations

The old are set in their ways. They are confident that they are right and the young are wrong. They will do anything to protect themselves and their reputation – Mr. Birling’s first thought is to cover up a scandal. They have never been forced to examine their actions and they cannot do this now ‘you can’t teach an old dog new tricks’. Mr. and Mrs. Birling have much to fear from a visit from the real Inspector – they will lose the thing they value most.

Younger Generations

More open to new ideas. Their views change throughout the play and they express sympathy for the striking workers. They accept responsibility for their actions and their effects. Eric and Sheila examine their role in Eva’s death. They have less to fear from the real Inspector as they have already admitted their wrong doing and it is suggested they will change.

Gender

When the play was written in 1945, women had more opportunities than they did in 1912 when the play was set, but fewer rights than they have today. Although the inspector discusses that there are “millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths”, it is significant that Priestley chose to make a woman the focus of the play. By doing so, he highlights how women were exploited more than men were at the time. Mrs Birling takes on the traditional role in the family. She will criticise her husband but she knows her place and accepts that it is a woman’s role to support her husband’s career. Mrs Birling’s only involvement in the work place is her charity work – she has no career of her own. Sheila is told by her mother that she will have to accept that men’s jobs are important and will take their time away from their wives.

Key Quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Importance of Social Class</th>
<th>Mr Birling apologises to Gerald for being of a ‘lower class’ than his mother.</th>
<th>“What I meant to say was – that Sheila’s a lucky girl.”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Birling shows his desire for upward social movement.</td>
<td>“You’re just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mr Birling boasts of his achievements and dreams of greater social acceptance.</td>
<td>“might find (his) way into the next Honour’s list.”</td>
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<td>Mr Birling thinks Lady Croft expected Gerald to have ‘done better’ for himself ‘socially’.</td>
<td>“As I told you, they sent me a nice cable – couldn’t be nicer.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mrs Birling tells her husband off</th>
<th>“(reproachfully) Arthur – you’re not supposed to say such things.”</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Mr Birling informs Gerald and Eric that women think differently to men</td>
<td>“clothes mean something quite different to a woman.”</td>
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<td>Young men have more freedom than young women.</td>
<td>“… you don’t… know what some of these boys get up to nowadays.”</td>
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Sheila would hate for Gerald to turn into an alcoholic middle aged man – man and drink are closely linked. "I’d hate you to… (be) like one of those purple-faced old men."

Truth and lies

Gerald’s reasons or excuses for not seeing Sheila all summer

"I was awfully busy at the works all that time."

When Mrs Birling supresses the truth regarding Sheila and Gerald’s impending marriage – this implies that Sheila and Gerald’s marriage is more than just a ‘love’ match.

"Arthur, I don’t think you ought to talk business on an occasion like this."

When Mr Birling discusses how businesses are becoming prosperous, he is really meaning the employers rather than the workers

"We’re in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity."

Eric covers himself when in discussion with his father and Gerald about women.

Gerald: That’s true.
Eric: (eagerly) Yes, I remember – (but he checks himself.)
... Gerald: (amused) Sounds a bit fishy to me.

Complacency and misplaced confidence in the future

Mr Birling’s narrow ideas regarding how businesses will become more successful

"there’ll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere”

Mr Birling is confident that the Birlings’ have nothing to hide that would cause a social scandal – his biggest fear.

"so long as we behave ourselves, don’t get into the police court or start a scandal."

At the time The Titanic was believed to be the best cruise liner at the time and was impenetrable.

"unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable."

The idea of any sort of war was frowned upon – there were those in the upper classes that believed there wouldn’t be a war of any sort.

"The Germans don’t want war. Nobody wants war…”

Time and prediction

Structure – Dramatic Devices

Setting and Lighting

The Setting and Lighting are very important. Priestley describes the scene in detail at the opening of Act 1, so that the audience has the immediate impression of a "heavily comfortable house." The setting is constant (all action happens in the same place). Priestley says that the lighting should be "pink and intimate" before the Inspector arrives - a rose-tinted glow - when it becomes "brighter and harder." The lighting reflects the mood of the play.

The dining room of a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a prosperous manufacturer. It has good solid furniture of the period. At the moment they have all had a good dinner, are celebrating a special occasion, and are pleased with themselves.

There are subtle hints that not is all as it seems. For example, early on we wonder whether the happy atmosphere is slightly forced. Sheila wonders where Gerald was last summer, Eric is nervous about something, Lord and Lady Croft did not attend the engagement dinner. This arouses interest in the audience - we want to find out what is going on!
Dramatic Irony and Tone

There is dramatic irony. For instance, the audience knows how wrong Mr Birling is when he makes confident predictions about there not being a war and is excited about the sailing of The Titanic: famously, the ship sank on her maiden voyage. This puts the audience at an advantage over the characters and makes us more involved.

There is a lot of tension as each member of the family is found to have played a part in Eva's death. New pieces of information contribute to the story being constructed. The audience is interested in how each character reacts to the revelations.

The Inspector

The Inspector himself adds drama:

He controls the pace and tension by dealing with one line of enquiry at a time. Slowly the story of Eva's life is unravelled, like in a 'whodunnit'.

He is in command at the end of Act I and the start of Act 2, and the end of Act 2 and the start of Act 3. He is a brooding, inescapable presence, very much in control.

He is very mysterious and seems to know what is going to happen before it does.

Tension and Timing

There are numerous changes in tone. For instance, Mr Birling's confidence is soon replaced - first by self-justification as he tries to explain his part in Eva's death, and then by anxiety.

Timing of entrances and exits is crucial. For example, the Inspector arrives immediately after Birling has told Gerald about his impending knighthood and about how "a man has to look after himself and his own."

The Ending

Mr and Mrs Birling call the local police, only to realise that there is no Inspector Goole.

The ending leaves the audience on a cliff-hanger. In Act 3 the Birlings believed themselves to be off the hook when it is discovered that the Inspector wasn't real and that no girl had died in the infirmary. This releases some of the tension - but the final telephone call, announcing that a real inspector is on his way to ask questions about the suicide of a young girl, suddenly restores the tension very dramatically. It is an unexpected final twist.

Sample Questions/Responses

- How does Priestley present the younger generation of men in the play?

Response

Eric is the son of the Birlings and he drinks heavily and at first seems to take no responsibility for his actions. This is seen in the fact that he stole money for Eva (who was pregnant with his baby) and didn't seem to think that this was a problem. When accused by his mother of theft, he replies that he intended to pay it back. The reader must decide whether or not to believe this based on his character. Priestley shows that Eric feels entitled to take what he wants to.
When the inspector arrives he tries to stay away and avoid any questions. He doesn't want to be involved with family business and he mocks what is going on around him. When he realises his part to play in what happened to Eva, he needs a drink to steady himself. Priestley shows that he is either an alcoholic or extremely nervous. Perhaps both. Eric might drink because he doesn't have to work hard as he will inherit. Maybe he gets bored. At the end of the play, he remains horrified, like Sheila, at what he and his family have done. This contrasts with his parents and with Gerald. Priestley shows that Eric has the ability to heed a warning and to see the world in new and better ways.

Gerald is Sheila’s fiancé. His family are wealthier than the Birlings and everything revolves around money. At the start of the play the family are celebrating his engagement to Sheila and feeling “pleased with themselves.” Priestley foreshadows Gerald’s part in the events surrounding Eva when we are told that he was absent all summer. It turns out that he cheated on Sheila with Eva/Daisy. He refers to some of the women he saw as “hard-eyed, dough faced women.” This reinforces how superficial he is; he is only interested in appearances and his reputation so he felt good when he helped out the pretty poor girl; he felt like a hero. Priestley does suggest, however, that Gerald genuinely cared about her as he is upset that she has died. Initially, Gerald lies and tries to avoid the truth, not wanting Sheila to hear. He has to pull himself together when he hears the word “Daisy Renton”. As well as being upset, he also knows that he has been caught out – he was unfaithful to Sheila.

It is Gerald who works out that Inspector Goole is not who he claims to be. This, and the fact that Sheila forgives him, means his problem goes away. He even wants to put the engagement ring back on Sheila's finger. In doing this, he is different to Eric and Sheila and more like Birling who is exasperated with his children for not understanding or seeing the difference between this coming out in private and “a downright public scandal.”

Priestley didn’t want people to be like Mr and Mrs Birling just minding their own business. The writer satirizes them to make this point. He wanted people to learn or suffer the consequences – to work together for a better society. He wanted the rich to take responsibility for others as well as themselves. With the younger men, we see a contrast: Eric does learn and, in this, Priestley suggest that there is hope for the younger generation to change society if they take heed of what is so apparent around them, if they open their eyes to society as a whole. Gerald remains smug and stuck up and doesn’t see that it matters unless it affects him; his position is still secure and so he is only bothered about himself. Priestley shows his audience the real picture in this: some will listen to his message on social responsibility and some will keep ignoring it, appearing foolish and ignorant.

**How does Priestley build the drama and tension in this extract?**

**From page 47: ‘MRS B: I’m sorry she should have come to such a horrible end. But I accept no blame for this at all’ to the end of Act Two.**

**Response**

In this extract, JB Priestley builds drama and tension through the use of dramatic irony. Mrs Birling does not realise until the very end of the scene that her own son is responsible for Eva Smith’s pregnancy. However, Sheila and the audience begin to realise this before her. So, when she says things like 'I blame the young man of the child she was going to have', we realise that she is unknowingly incriminating herself and her son. This makes it tense and exciting, because we want to see what will happen when she eventually does realise that the person she is being so harsh on is her own son.

In this extract, JB Priestley builds drama and tension through having Sheila realise the truth of the situation long before her mother. Sheila is constantly interrupting trying to explain to her mother that by blaming the father of the child she is only blaming her own son. For example, she says 'Mother – stop – stop!' and 'But don’t you see -’ As well as her words, the stage directions show that she is getting increasingly ‘agitated’ and ‘hysterical’ in attempting to warn her mother about what is happening. This is very tense and dramatic because Mr and Mrs Birling misinterpret her words and just assume she is overexcited. They assume she is being silly, when in fact she is the closest of all of the Croft family to true insight at this point.
In this extract, the effect on the audience is that we are eagerly, nervously, awaiting the moment of recognition when Mrs Birling will see that her own son is the person she has criticized so thoroughly. Mrs Birling has been so arrogant and smug before this that there may even be an element of excited anticipation, as we long for her to get her comeuppance and realise the hypocrisy of her callous and unsympathetic views on life. We desperately want to see how she will react when the Inspector reveals that the ‘chief culprit’ is her son. Her eventual understanding of the truth comes slowly and dramatically – first she is still ‘triumphant’, then she is ‘frightened’ as the truth begins to dawn, and then finally she retreats to ‘agitated’ denial as Eric appears at the door and his guilt emerges. The scene ends at this dramatic, climactic moment, which has overturned the certainties and smugness of Mrs Birling.

How does Priestley explore responsibility in An Inspector Calls?

**Response**

Priestley explores ideas about responsibility through the way the Birlings behave towards Eva Smith. Arthur Birling explains the family’s philosophy when he says ‘a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own’ which suggests that he feels that he only has responsibility for his own family and himself.

This is reinforced by the way the Birlings treat Eva Smith. First of all Arthur fires her from his factory to make an example of her because she asks for higher wages and dares to take responsibility for others by speaking up on their behalf. Arthur’s prime motive is to keep wages down so that he could make more profits. Priestley reinforces this through Arthur’s constant repetition of ‘hard headed man of business’, to remind the audience that he is representative of capitalism and the damage it causes. Priestley is showing the audience that a blind belief that generating profits and prosperity for the good of everyone is fundamentally wrong as it causes innocent people to suffer tragic consequences.

Although all the Birlings are responsible for Eva’s mistreatment and death in some way, they react differently when they find this out from the Inspector. Mr and Mrs Birling do not change and are only concerned about their reputation the possible ‘scandal’ or Arthur’s ‘knighthood’. However, Sheila and Eric do recognise that they have behaved badly by the end of the play and therefore Priestley is suggesting that it is the younger generation that have the responsibility for adopting more socialist principles. Through their attitudes Priestley suggests that socialism is the modern way and that it is young people who will change society for the better.

How does Priestley create mood and atmosphere in this extract?

**Response**

The sense of tension builds up very strongly in this extract. There is a sense of dramatic irony because Mrs Birling is the last to realise the implications of what she is saying. Priestley uses the Inspector’s questioning to back Mrs Birling into a corner. He shows his impatience with her and his anxiety to get on by speaking to her ‘sternly’. His questioning leads Mrs Birling into condemning her own son. Mrs Birling needs very little encouragement to blame the young man and the Inspector seems to be prompting rather than questioning. Her arrogance and lack of foresight add to the increasing tension. When the Inspector tells her he is waiting to do his duty, she replies ‘triumphantly’ which serves to emphasise her lack of insight.

Mrs Birling’s arrogant pronouncements about what should happen to the young man are punctuated by Sheila’s warnings. She ignores Sheila’s repeated warnings, calling her ‘hysterical’, which adds to the mounting tension. Sheila’s ‘sudden alarm’ gives way to ‘quiet crying’ and when her mother will still not listen, she becomes ‘distressed’. It is the knowledge of some characters, and the audience, that something is about to happen combined with Mrs Birling’s own blissful ignorance of this that heightens the tension and builds up a sense of drama and expectation.
It is only at the end that Mrs Birling seems to realise what she has done, captured by Priestley’s reference to the way she ‘exchanges a frightened glance with her husband’. This fear also adds to the sense of something terrible about to happen.

The Inspector’s seeming omniscience is also captured effectively in this scene when it is emphasised that he is ‘waiting’ to do his duty and the way ‘he looked at his watch’ which suggest that there is a time pressure because the Inspector knows what is about to happen. Before ‘we hear the door’ the ‘Inspector holds up a hand’ suggesting that he knew about Eric’s return before he heard the door. He has been waiting for something and as Eric enters ‘pale and distressed’ we, and finally Mr and Mrs Birling, realise that this is what he has been waiting for. The tension is at its height therefore, as the curtain goes down. Priestley makes his audience wait in anticipation of what will happen next.

**Useful Weblinks**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature/dramainspectorcalls/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature/dramainspectorcalls/)