

An Inspector Calls: Knowledge Organiser

Plot - set over the course of one night; one story, one place, one time; uses flashbacks

Act One:

- The Birling family celebrate Sheila and Gerald's engagement
- The Inspector arrives
- Mr Birling reveals he fired Eva Smith for going on strike from the factory
- Sheila reveals she got Eva fired from her job at Milward's out of jealousy
- The Inspector reveals Eva changed her name to Daisy Renton
- Sheila questions Gerald alone

Act Two

- Gerald explains how he tried to help Daisy and had an affair with her
- Mrs Birling pretends not to know who the girl is from the photograph
- Mrs Birling is forced to reveal the girl went to her for help because she was pregnant, calling herself Mrs Birling. Mrs Birling uses her influence to have the girl's claim rejected
- Mrs Birling thinks the father should be dealt with severely; Sheila understands that it is Eric

Act Three

- Eric enters and tells his story about Eva Smith
- Eric discovers his mother didn't help her and accuses her of causing her death
- The Inspector leaves
- Gerald returns and suggests that maybe it was a hoax
- Mr Birling is convinced everything is fine and phones the police station and then the infirmary – no Inspector Goole and no suicide
- The police call and say there has been a suicide

Characters

The Inspector – arrives in Act One; has a picture of Eva Smith; questions the Birlings and Gerald; is not a real Inspector; voice of Priestley

Mr Birling – upper middle class man of the house; factory owner; successful capitalist - has worked his way up

Mrs Birling – upper class; volunteers for a charity

Sheila – daughter; early 20s; most influenced by the Inspector - changes the most

Eric – son; early 20s; likes to drink – irresponsible; steals money from his father's business; sides with Sheila by the end of the play

Gerald – about 30; engaged to Sheila; upper class; more likely to side with Mr and Mrs Birling; doesn't accept responsibility

Eva Smith – lower class working woman; only ever presented through the voice of the other characters: commits suicide by drinking disinfectant

Themes

Responsibility – individual and collective responsibility within society; Priestley believed social responsibility – work together not against each other

Gender – start of the play presents stereotypical view that women are the weaker sex; power struggle between genders

Class/power/wealth/status – early 20th century class divide. Priestley wanted to bridge the gap between upper and lower classes; upper classes owned most of the land and had most of the money. Priestley wanted a fairer socialist world rather than a selfish capitalist one; he wanted to expose the immorality of the elite

Generations – older generation are set in their ways; progressive younger generation are able to change

Context

1912 – play set the night the Titanic sinks; just before WW1; just before strikes

1945 – play written; after WW2; start of welfare state; social equality more of a perceived need

Socialism – social responsibility, we should all look after one another and work together for the better

Capitalism – Businesses should continue to make money in spite of human cost, we are all responsible only for ourselves

Class – upper and lower social classes segregated

Age – old vs young; new and old ideas set against each other

Attitudes to women – patriarchal society leading to misogyny

Audience reactions

Post-war audience (contemporary) would have found Birling's foolish predictions to be ridiculous; Priestley intended to expose upper class ignorance and arrogance.

First shown in Russia in 1945; Communist audience might have been sympathetic to Priestley's message.

Shown in USA in 1947; wealthier capitalist audience might have been less sympathetic.

Stagecraft/Key Devices

Lighting - *"The lighting should be pink and intimate until the inspector arrives, and then it should be brighter and harder."* P.161 The lighting changes to highlight the Inspector's impact on the family and to mirror his interrogative manner

Dramatic irony – the audience knows that Mr Birling's many predictions are wrong. Used to highlight ignorance and foolishness of the upper classes in Priestley's eyes

Foreshadowing – hints early in the play that things will go wrong later for the family **'so long as we behave ourselves, don't...start a scandal'** p.167 Mr Birling

Euphemism – using more mild words or phrase to replace blunt ones

(Edwardian customs) 'a girl of that sort', **'women of the town'** p.182 Gerald

Imagery – 'as if we're all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense' p.168 Mr Birling; **'fire and blood and anguish'** p.207 The Inspector

The Inspector	To Mrs Birling: 'I think you did something terribly wrong' p.198; to the family: 'but each of you helped to kill her. Remember that' p.206; 'if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish' p.207	'an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness' p.169; 'cutting through massively' p.170
Mr Birling	'lower costs and higher prices' p.164; to Eric: 'You've a lot to learn yet' p.166; 'I speak as a hard-headed business man' p.166; 'a man has to mind his own business and look after his own' p.168; 'by the way some of these cranks talk and write, you'd think we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense.' P. 168; 'I've got to cover this up as soon as I can' p.205; 'Excitedly...a fake!' p.212	'portentous' p. 161; rather impatiently' p.170
Mrs Birling	'I think Sheila and I had better go into the drawing room and leave you men' p.165; 'You seem to have made a great impression on this child, Inspector.' p.185; to Gerald: 'I don't think we want any further details of this disgusting affair' p.192; about Eva Smith's plea for help: 'I used my influence to have it refused' p.197; 'I've done nothing wrong' p.198;	'a rather cold woman' p. 161
Sheila	'I'm sorry Daddy' p.165; 'Oh I wish you hadn't told me' p.175; 'But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people' p.177; 'I know I'm to blame' p.184; 'it's you two who are being childish – trying not to face the facts' p.209; 'You began to learn something. And now you've stopped.' P.220	'very pleased with life and rather excited' p.161; 'cutting in' p.184, 186
Eric	'Yes, I know – but still –' p.166; 'Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?' p.174; 'I insisted – it seems' p.203; 'you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble' p.205; 'you killed her' p.206; 'The money's not the important thing' p.214; 'I agree with Sheila...it frightens me' p. 220	'not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive' p.161; 'Eric suddenly guffaws' p.163;
Gerald	'easy, well-bred man-about-town' p.161; 'I was awfully busy at the works' p.163; 'You couldn't have done anything else' p.173; 'I don't come into this suicide business' p.182; 'Everything's alright now, Sheila [Holds up the ring]' p.220	easy, well-bred man-about-town' p.161;
Eva Smith	'lonely, half starved, she was feeling desperate' p.177 The Inspector 'She'd had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go' p.173 Mr Birling 'she was very pretty and looked as if she could take care of herself' p.181; 'I was sorry for her' p.191; 'I didn't feel about her as she felt about me' p. 192 Gerald 'I didn't like her manner' p.197 Mrs Birling 'she was pretty and a good sport' p. 204 Eric	