

An Inspector Calls Character Notes

<u>Key quotations</u>	<u>Key language & structural features</u>	<u>Priestley's Ideas</u>
<p>MR BIRLING</p> <p>"I'm talking as a hard-headed practical man of business"</p> <p>'you'll hear some people say war is Inevitable ... fiddlesticks!'</p> <p>'The Titanic – she sails next week...and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable.'</p> <p>"I gather there's a very good chance of a knighthood"</p> <p>"A man has to make his own way – has to look after himself – and his family too, of course"</p> <p>"(rather impatiently) Horrid business. But I don't understand why you should come here."</p> <p>"you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense."</p> <p>"I was an alderman for years – and Lord Mayor two years ago – and I'm still on the Bench – so I know the Brumley police offers pretty well"</p> <p>"there's every excuse for what your mother and I did"</p> <p>"Probably a Socialist or some sort of crank"</p> <p>"Now look at the pair of them- the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke--"</p>	<p><u>long monologues</u></p> <p><u>dramatic irony</u></p> <p>His language is also very dismissive when he says 'Fiddlesticks!' and 'silly' - he belittles other's ideas.</p> <p><u>Exclamatory sentence</u> – he's passionate and convinced about what he's saying.</p> <p><u>Titanic symbolizes</u> his own family – believes they are untouchable until the Inspector arrives giving them a rude awakening.</p> <p>His language changes when the Inspector arrives as he speaks in <u>short, sharp fragments</u> and uses lots of <u>dashes</u>.</p> <p>His language becomes more <u>colloquial</u> 'y'know' which conveys how his authority is breaking down.</p> <p>He often uses 'I' which conveys his selfish attitude, however, as the play continues he switches to the <u>inclusive pronoun 'we'</u> to diminish the scale of the problem (Eva's death) and shift blame.</p> <p>He uses <u>understatement</u> 'it would be very awkward wouldn't it?'</p> <p>He uses <u>euphemisms</u> when referring to taboo subjects</p>	<p>Priestley uses Birling as a symbol of the callous and heartlessness of capitalism. Through his character he is criticizing the complacency of capitalist prosperity.</p> <p>He is representative of the older generation who were unwilling to change.</p> <p>However, he is presented as a <u>realistic character</u> by Priestley through his use of <u>colloquial language</u> appropriate for the time. Furthermore, he is described as 'panic stricken' this indicates that his defiance and bravado have finally been shattered and so Priestley lets the audience see someone who is so blindly wrong and never as really in control of events as he would like himself and others to think. Therefore the audience is invited to feel sympathy.</p>
<p>MRS BIRLING</p> <p>"About fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior"</p> <p>"girls of that class"</p> <p>'you know, my husband was Lord Mayor only two years ago and that he's still a magistrate'</p> <p>'I'm very sorry. But I think she only had herself to blame'</p>	<p>The <u>stage descriptions</u> of her actions change as the pretence is revealed e.g. 'grandly' / 'haughtily' / 'triumphantly' become 'rather cowed' / 'distressed' 'staggered' / 'alarmed'.</p> <p>Mrs Birling's language is quite <u>abrupt and dismissive</u>: 'that class' / 'that sort' / 'the type'. She believes she is morally and socially superior to them – she is a snob.</p> <p>Later in the play Mrs Birling's language is <u>broken up into</u></p>	<p>Priestley uses Mrs Birling to epitomize all that is wrong with society. She <u>represents the social snobbery and hypocrisy</u> of the upper classes and shows no remorse in her cruel treatment of Eva Smith.</p> <p>Priestley presents her as an <u>absurd</u></p>

<p>"I've done nothing wrong – and you know it."</p> <p>"Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility."</p> <p>"She was giving herself ridiculous airs...claiming elaborate fine feelings...that were simply absurd in a girl in her position."</p> <p>"As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!"</p> <p>"I'm sorry she should have come to such a horrible end. But I accept no blame at all"</p> <p>"he ought to be dealt with very severely-...make sure that he's compelled to confess in public his responsibility"</p> <p>'he certainly didn't make me confess – I had done no more than my duty'</p>	<p>fragments that don't connect: 'No-Eric-please'. The fragmented speech echoes the collapsing of self-confidence and complacency of these very comfortable, middle class, wealthy characters. This is more shocking because of the contrast with how they were at the start of the play. The dashes could also represent the break down in their relationship.</p> <p>Mrs Birling uses imperatives as she commands the Inspector and other characters which conveys her superiority, confidence and self-assurance.</p> <p>Puts on a pretence of respectability by her use of euphemisms: e.g. 'a girl of that Class' who has found herself in a 'particular condition'</p> <p>Use of imagery: Sheila warns her mother not to try and build up a kind of 'wall' – the wall being a symbol of a barrier/pretence</p>	<p>character that ironically passes her own social guilt onto her own son – condemning him. As a result, Priestley deals with Mrs Birling with special severity, having her fall into a trap of her own making: she is confronted with the knowledge that Eric is a hard drinker and the father of the dead woman's child. She has helped to kill her own grandchild. It is only when she realises this does she begin to show any signs of weakening.</p> <p>Priestley shows us that we should not trust the wealthy members of society to tell the truth.</p>
<p>SHEILA BIRLING</p> <p>"A pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited"</p> <p>"Yes, go on, Mummy"</p> <p>"(rather distressed) I can't help thinking about this girl- destroying herself so horribly- and I've been so happy tonight. Oh I wish you hadn't told me."</p> <p>"But these girls aren't cheap labour- they're <i>people</i>."</p> <p>"She was a very pretty girl...that didn't make it any better."</p> <p>"I went to the manager and told him this girl had been very impertinent – and – and -"</p> <p>"And if I could help her now, I would-"</p> <p>"I'll never, never do it again to anybody...I feel now I can never go there again"</p> <p>"Why- you fool- he knows. Of course he knows. And I hate to think how much he knows that we don't know yet. You'll see. You'll see."</p>	<p>Sheila uses imagery when she talks of her mother's attempts to 'build up a kind of wall'; implying the metaphorical distance Mrs Birling creates between the classes. When Sheila warns the others that the Inspector is 'giving us rope so that we hang ourselves', she once again uses a metaphor to create a visual image of the way the Inspector skilfully manipulates characters into confessing their sins.</p> <p>Sheila's language also reflects her increasing maturity as she begins the play saying "mummy" using a lot of personal pronouns to highlight her selfish, childlike attitude at the start of the play. As the play progresses she refers to Mrs Birling as "mother" which reflects this change and perhaps she doesn't feel as intimate with her mother and has lost respect for her because of the way she is behaving.</p> <p>Sheila's language becomes more passionate and she uses sarcasm ("So nothing's happened, so there's nothing to be sorry for, nothing to learn.") Sheila also uses irony when she is appalled by her parents' attitudes to carry on as before: "I suppose we're all nice people now". Sheila uses irony to show that she completely disagrees with her parents and that she understands the moral consequences of her actions. The use of irony highlights the tensions that existed between the younger</p>	<p>Priestley uses the character of Sheila to represent his own views of social responsibility.</p> <p>She offers hope for the future and Priestley uses Sheila as an example of people's changing attitudes towards those less fortunate than themselves. She is sympathetic towards Eva and other girls in her position, recognising that they were "not just cheap labour but people". She accepts that her actions impacted on Eva's life and that she cannot disconnect her actions from the effects these have on others. She recognises and understands the Inspector's message that we are all collectively responsible for all that happens in the world.</p> <p>At times she acts as almost an assistant to the Inspector, in that</p>

<p>“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. And it’ll be all the worse when he does”</p> <p>“No, he’s giving us the rope- so that we’ll hang ourselves”</p> <p><i>Bitterly</i> “I suppose we’re all nice people now”</p> <p>“He inspected us all right.”</p> <p>“It frightens me the way you talk”</p>	<p>and older generations.</p> <p>Sheila and Eric are less restrained and their use of slang expressions such as ‘squiffy’ which shock their parents and highlight the tensions between the generations.</p> <p>Sheila uses dramatic language “We killed her”</p> <p>Stage directions– she “shivers”, “tensely” - shows her fear</p> <p>Shows she becomes a bit like the Inspector – asking questions, contradicting her mother.</p> <p>Sheila significantly refuses to take back Gerald’s ring and interestingly she uses phrases reminiscent of the Inspector in her reply, “not yet” and “It’s too soon” which emphasizes the importance of timing – the telephone rings just after.</p>	<p>she supports his criticism of the other characters, becoming his mouthpiece when he has left the stage. Sheila’s character becomes quite didactic and this can make her a character with whom the audience do not sympathise with as her change has happened far too quickly and so she is in some ways quite unrealistic.</p>
<p>ERIC BIRLING</p> <p>“In his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive”</p> <p>“Why shouldn’t they try for higher wages? We try for the highest possible prices”</p> <p>“it isn’t as if you can go and work somewhere else.”</p> <p>“He could have kept her on instead of throwing her out. I call it tough luck.”</p> <p>“I’d have let her stay”</p> <p>“Well I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty- and I threatened to make a row”</p> <p>“And that’s when it happened. And I don’t even remember- that’s the hellish thing.”</p> <p>“I wasn’t in love with her or anything- but I liked her- she was pretty and a good sport-”</p> <p>“she didn’t want me to marry her. Said I didn’t love her- and all that. In a way, she treated me- as if I were a kid. Though I was nearly as old as she was.”</p>	<p>Eric acts as dramatic irritant to his father challenging his ideology – contradicting him / interrupting / asking questions.</p> <p>Eric uses a euphemism to describe his sexual assault on Eva Smith: ‘that’s when it happened.’</p> <p>Eric’s language is fragmented as he becomes emotional / hysterical. The dashed could also represent the break down in his relationship with his mother.</p> <p>As his attack on his mother continues, his language becomes more violent as he repeats ‘killed’ three times. The effect on the reader is highly shocking as this language completely contrasts with the polite, euphemistic language of earlier in the play. Priestley effectively uses the semantic field of heaven and hell when Eric describes what he did to Eva Smith: ‘that’s the hellish thing. Oh - my God!’</p> <p>When the Inspector leaves Eric emulates the Inspector using the Inspector’s harsh, commanding language. Priestley does this so the Inspector’s presence is felt on stage and a reminder to the audience to look at their own conscience. (“the girl’s dead”)</p> <p>Eric’s character develops - stage directions, e.g. ‘uneasily’ / ‘unease’; ‘suddenly guffaws’ – by the end ‘shouting’</p>	<p>Eric has the most active social conscience – at the start of play he says: “he could have kept her instead of throwing her out”. This demonstrates that there is potential/hope for the future. At the end of the play Eric shows remorse and his acceptance is evidence of his moral fibre.</p> <p>Through Eric’s treatment of Eva “I wasn’t in love with her or anything” an abhorrent picture of the upper-class emerges. They are shown to be callous and cold. However, Eric illustrates the capacity to change – despite your past errors and your family’s beliefs you can change. His transformation is more realistic – as at first he blames his mother for her death and then finally comes round to accepting responsibility.</p> <p>On the other hand, he is presented</p>

<p>“You’re not the kind of father a chap could go to when he’s in trouble- that’s why.”</p> <p>“Then- you killed her. She came to you to protect me- and you turned her away-yes, and you killed her-and the child she’d have had too- my child- your own grandchild- you killed them both- damn you, damn you-”</p> <p>“He was <u>our</u> police inspector all right”</p> <p>“(shouting) And I say the girl’s dead and we all helped to kill her- and that’s what matters-”</p>		<p>as quite a weak character and is the most emotional and demonstrative of all. This leads the audience to question whether he can change his ways for good or is he too weak and dependent on his parents?</p> <p>When Eric gives Eva stolen money, Priestley could be commenting that wealth does not replace goodness and integrity – there needed to be a more even distribution of wealth so people like Eric become socially aware.</p>
<p><u>GERALD CROFT</u></p> <p>“An attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred young man-about-town”</p> <p>“Well, it came just at the right moment. That was clever of you, Gerald.”</p> <p>“You couldn’t have done anything else” (sacking Eva Smith)</p> <p>“After all, y’know, we’re respectable citizens and not criminals”</p> <p>(about Sheila): “She’s obviously had about as much as she can stand”</p> <p>“Why should you [stay]? It’s bound to be unpleasant and disturbing”</p> <p>“It’s a favourite haunt of women of the town”</p> <p>‘[Daisy] gave me a glance that was nothing less than a cry for help”</p> <p>“I insisted on Daisy moving into these rooms and I made her take some money to keep her going there...I want you to understand that I didn’t install her there so I could make love to her...I was sorry for her...I didn’t ask for anything in return”</p> <p>“She was young and pretty and warm-hearted- and intensely grateful. I became at once the most important person in her life- you</p>	<p>Gerald is inevitably careful and correct about what he says.</p> <p>Mrs Birling’s admiration of Gerald’s cleverness is echoed at the end of the play. There are many <u>parallels</u> like this in the play’s construction, which link in with Priestley’s ideas on timing.</p> <p>Gerald <u>echoes</u> Mr Birling’s concern to protect Sheila from anything ‘unpleasant’ – patronizing – view of women</p> <p><u>Euphemism</u> is also used in the play when characters refer to taboo subjects, so when Mr Birling talks of Eva becoming a prostitute he talks of her going ‘on the street’ and Gerald refers to ‘women of the town’.</p> <p>Gerald and Sheila use <u>irony</u> in their interchange when he says “You’re going to be a great help” and “I’m glad I amuse you”. The irony highlights for us the tension between the two of them.</p> <p>Gerald uses <u>imagery of a rescue mission</u> when describing his role in Daisy Renton’s death. He does this to lessen his guilt and try and justify his behaviour.</p> <p>Gerald’s offering Sheila the engagement ring <u>echoes</u> the same event from the start of the play.</p>	<p>Priestley uses the character of Gerald Croft to throw light both on the Birling parents who are too set in their social ways to be changed by the Inspector’s visit, and on the Birling children who are certainly very responsive to the Inspector’s message, but possibly in a slightly naïve and hysterical way. Gerald acts as <u>a bridge</u> between the two generations.</p> <p>Gerald provides a strong contrast to Eric, Mr Birling’s natural son and Priestley uses Gerald to show the tensions between Eric and his father.</p> <p>Priestley shows that it was common for the upper class to behave so badly towards the lower-class by having Gerald present. If the Inspector only questioned the Birling family, Priestley wouldn’t be able to convey to the audience how widespread the problem was. Nor</p>

<p>understand?"</p> <p>"She told me she'd been happier than she'd ever been before"</p> <p>"Nearly any man would have done" (adored being 'fairy prince')</p> <p>"That man wasn't a police officer...I'm almost certain"</p> <p>"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"</p> <p>"Everything's all right now Sheila. What about this ring?"</p>		<p>would he be able to get them to inspect their own consciences.</p>
<p><u>INSPECTOR GOOLE</u></p> <p>"Need not be a big man but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness."</p> <p>"He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period. He speaks carefully, weightily and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking"</p> <p>"Two hours ago a young woman died in the Infirmary. She'd been taken there this afternoon because she'd swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course"</p> <p>"A chain of events" (may have driven her to suicide)</p> <p>"it's better to ask for the Earth than to take it"</p> <p>"Goole. G. double O-L-E"</p> <p>"it would do us all a bit of good if sometimes we tried to put ourselves in the place of these young women counting their pennies in their dingy little back bedroom"</p> <p>(To Gerald) "And you think young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?"</p> <p>"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-"</p> <p>"If there's nothing else we have to share our guilt"</p>	<p>The Inspector assumes control, which is a disturbing shift for Birling and he immediately tries to regain it. The Inspector interrupts Birling 'cutting through, massively'. The Inspector's <u>interruptions</u> and his indifference to the nicer points of polite behaviour make him stand apart from the others.</p> <p>Whenever Priestley describes the Inspector, he uses the <u>semantic field of size</u>: showing the importance of this man, and his power.</p> <p>He speaks in a controlled way, often building on comments made by other characters. He <u>repeats</u> words they have used and <u>manipulates</u> them for his own end. Examples include his repetition and manipulation of the word 'impression' and his manipulation of the word 'position', the meaning of which he changes from a metaphorical to a more literal one, in order to shock Mrs Birling.</p> <p>The Inspector also <u>turns each character's words and actions back upon him or her</u>, e.g. he draws attention to Gerald's hypocrisy regarding women: "And you think young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?" This theme of reversal runs through the structure of the play.</p> <p><u>Chain imagery</u> – Goole emphasizes how we are all responsible for each other and Eva's death was the result of a chain of events etc.</p> <p>Throughout the play, Priestley makes use of <u>dramatic pauses</u> to</p>	<p>The omniscient Inspector is used by Priestley to further convey his views on collective / social responsibility. The Inspector is used very effectively to highlight the corruption and the selfish attitudes of the twentieth century society.</p> <p>The Inspector's name leads us to question whether he actually exists. The word 'Goole' suggests his mysterious quality, being a pun on the word 'ghoul'. Is he merely a ghost, someone whose very existence has come about as a result of Eva Smith's death?</p> <p>Through the Inspector's final dramatic speech, Priestley skillfully warns the audience of the potential social disasters of failing to support or help those in need in society.</p> <p>Inspector Goole serves several functions in the play. He acts as the storyteller, linking all the separate incidents together into one, coherent story. Priestley has him</p>

<p>(the young ones) “Are the most impressionable”</p> <p>“Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges”</p> <p>“You’ve had children. You must have known what she was feeling. And you slammed the door in her face”</p> <p>“And be quiet for a moment and listen to me. I don’t need to know any more. Neither do you. This girl killed herself- and died a horrible death. But each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it. <i>(He looks from one to the other of them carefully)</i>But then I don’t think you ever will. Remember what you did”</p> <p>“But remember this. 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. We don’t live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Good night.”</p>	<p>build tension. The Inspector uses them to make the other characters feel uncomfortable and to control the pace.</p> <p>When he begins to reveal who is responsible for the death of Eva Smith, his words are quite emphatic and he makes great use of two short sentences in the imperative ‘Remember that. Never forget.’</p> <p>He alludes to the Bible when he says ‘We are members of one body’ to emphasise the Inspector’s belief in human love and equality.</p> <p>The speech is composed of complex sentences, which are referential (utterances that provide information) and short sentences that are expressive (utterances that express the speaker’s feelings). Priestley makes great use of these short sentence structures in order to deliver his opinions as facts. This intended effect is to make both the characters and the audience inspect their own consciences. Furthermore, the use of short sentences symbolises the limit of society, which could still be developed by everyone accepting each other.</p> <p>To convey to the Birlings how widespread their actions are, the Inspector uses the extended metaphor of ‘millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths’ to represent the number of working-class men and women who were exploited on a daily basis by the greed of capitalism.</p> <p>The Inspector’s use of the inclusive pronoun ‘we’ contrast with the language of Mr and Mrs Birling who normally use ‘I’ as their primary concern is themselves. The use of ‘we’ further emphasises Priestley’s ideas of collective responsibility and how society should be formed.</p>	<p>supply dates for events, or fill in background about the girl. He also behaves rather like a priest, someone to whom characters confess their sins, helping them to see the extent of their involvement in the downfall of Eva Smith, and encouraging them to acknowledge their guilt and repent. While the Inspector himself does not hand out forgiveness or punishment, characters are made to recognise that they must find the courage to judge themselves, because only then will they have learnt anything and be able to change themselves.</p> <p>Certainly it seems that Priestley did not want to promote a single interpretation of who the Inspector ‘really’ is. The character’s dramatic power lies in this. To have revealed his identity as a hoaxer or as some kind of ‘spirit’ would have spoilt the unresolved tension that is so effective at the end of the play.</p>
<p><u>EVA SMITH</u></p> <p>“Two hours ago a young woman died in the Infirmary. She’d been taken there this afternoon because she’d swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course”</p> <p>“Now – about this girl, Eva Smith. I remember her quite well now. She was a lively good-looking girl – country-bred, I fancy – and she’d been working in one of our shops for over a year. A good worker too.”</p>	<p>Eva’s character is absent from the stage.</p> <p>Her character is first introduced by the Inspector – significant as the working class were supported by very few people in society – namely those concerned with socialism.</p> <p>Emotive language used to describe Eva’s death – creates sympathy for her.</p>	<p>In many ways she is a counterpoint to the Inspector. Like him, she remains a symbolic figure and one who carries the weight of the plot. Priestley uses Eva as a symbol of the common man or woman and reminds us of our need to take responsibility for our actions and their impact on others.</p>

<p>“...and died, after several hours of agony...”</p> <p>“She was a very pretty girl...that didn’t make it any better.”</p> <p>“She was young and pretty and warm-hearted- and intensely grateful. I became at once the most important person in her life- you understand?”</p> <p>“She was giving herself ridiculous airs...claiming elaborate fine feelings...that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.”</p> <p>“As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!”</p> <p>“I wasn’t in love with her or anything- but I liked her- she was pretty and a good sport-”</p> <p>“she didn’t want me to marry her. Said I didn’t love her- and all that. In a way, she treated me- as if I were a kid. Though I was nearly as old as she was.”</p> <p>“Just used her for the end of a stupid drunken evening, as if she was an animal, a thing, not a person.”</p> <p>“But remember this. 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.”</p>	<p>Imagery of insides – suggests that the abuse Eva experienced was not physical (exception of Eric) but more emotional – a reminder to the audience that the damage we do to people is not always seen at first.</p> <p>Eva is described in an idealized way – innocent victim, pretty a good worker. In some ways, Priestley presents her as a martyr. The lower she sinks in her fortunes, the more honourable and noble she appears. She refuses to treat others as they have treated her, even though she is in a position to create scandal for them all.</p> <p>When Eric gave Eva stolen money, she wouldn’t accept it showing that she has strong morals. This hagiographical deification of Eva creates a lack of respect for Eric and further highlights the corruption of the upper-class. By presenting Eva in a positive light Priestley presents his socialist ideas of equality and equal rights for all.</p> <p>Eva is described in terms of objectification. She is often referred to as ‘the girl’, which highlights her youth and innocence. The Inspector also says that Eric treated her like ‘an animal, a thing.’ Mrs Birling refers to her as ‘that sort’ etc.</p>	<p>Eva represents ordinary people who can be destroyed by indifference when society fails to grant them the right of basic human dignity.</p> <p>Her connection to the characters in the play is what prompts their confessions. She promotes the idea that we have collective social responsibility, therefore. Despite her lower social class and death, Eva could be said to have the upper hand in the play as she is the one who has shown the others who they really are.</p> <p>The fact that Eva is presented in a highly idealized way which makes her an unrealistic character – could someone who had suffered so much be so gracious and forgiving?</p> <p>The fact that Eva was pregnant suggests that the way we treat people can affect the next generation but also shows how hard it was to escape poverty.</p>
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<p>EDNA</p> <p>“Edna the parlour-maid is just clearing the table”</p> <p>“Yes Ma’am”</p> <p>“Edna’ll answer it”</p> <p>“Please, sir, an inspector’s called”</p> <p>“All right, Edna. Show him in here. Give us some more light.”</p> <p>“Edna’ll go. I asked her to wait up to make us some tea”</p>	<p>Interestingly, while Priestly explains how the set should be and introduces the characters, Edna is the last to be mentioned: ‘<i>At rise of curtain, the four Birlings and Gerald are seated at the table... Edna the parlourmaid, is just clearing the table</i>’. Hierarchy is a key concept within <i>An Inspector Calls</i>. It could be argued that it is what drives the main characters actions. Priestley immediately establishes that Edna is at the bottom of the hierarchy and not of any real importance in the eyes of the Birlings and Gerald. He does this by describing her as ‘the parlourmaid’, emphasising the fact that she is only seen as her profession; the audience is given no details about her appearance or personality because they don’t need to know.</p> <p>She provides a contrast to Eva - their names are similar on purpose - and is the dramatic device which means that the family do not have to leave the dining room to perform tasks. They come and go at the behest of the Inspector.</p> <p>Edna calls him sir. The repeated use of ‘Sir’ when talking to Birling is a reminder of how stark the class divide was at the beginning of the 20th century. He, however, calls her by her Christian name but not out of friendliness - it is a way of reinforcing that he is the boss and that she is disposable.</p> <p>Note that Birling is abrupt with her ‘Don’t know him.’ This is not a conversation and there are no niceties - Birling wants this exchange to be over quickly so he can get back to his pleasant evening so he speaks in fragments. He uses unmitigated imperatives with her: ‘<i>Show him in</i>’ and ‘<i>Give us...</i>’.</p> <p>When Edna announces the arrival of the Inspector it is as though she is heralding in an opportunity for change. It is the people like Edna who would benefit the most from the Birlings learning the Inspector’s lesson; her life could improve vastly. Therefore she is allowed a seldom moment away from her docile obedience and delivers the Inspector into the room readily, even stopping the Birlings from finishing their conversation.</p>	<p>Edna is another example of the invisible working class and she helps to create an impression of the Birling’s wealthy lifestyle.</p> <p>Edna illustrates the themes of inequality, power, responsibility and class.</p>
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