

# **AQA English Literature GCSE**

## **An Inspector Calls: Character Profiles**



## First Impressions

### Character in context

The Inspector is dressed in a **minimal** “*plain darkish suit*” and seems to be an ordinary police Inspector. However, the **supernatural** nature of the Inspector becomes apparent as the play progresses, as the **homophone** of Goole (“*ghoul*”) suggests.



Priestley leaves the Inspector’s physical appearance as vague and, to some extent, unimportant due to his message of **social responsibility** being more important than his appearance. He dictates in the **stage directions** that the Inspector “*need not be a big man, but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness*”.

- The Inspector takes on the role of an **omniscient** (all-knowing), moral force for good.
- Priestley presents his character as a spiritual **avenging angel**.
- **Socialist** values and ideology are channelled through the Inspector.
- Priestley utilises the Inspector as a **vehicle to catalyse** change in perceptions of responsibility. He encourages the younger generation to break away from the older, more traditional and **individualistic generation**.

### Moral force - resistant to corruption

The Inspector is opposed to, and exempt from, the **immorality** and corruption of society. Despite the Inspector’s physical appearance as a police Inspector, he is more akin to that of a **moral policeman**.

Priestley immediately portrays the Inspector’s as a moral force as he refuses a drink of port: “*no, thank you [...] I’m on duty*”. Alcohol bears connotations of **immoral behaviour** and therefore the Inspector’s refusal is **symbolic** of his refusing to act immorally. The offering of an **alcoholic drink** to an on duty policeman by Mr Birling is a soft attempt at corrupting the Inspector, who is conversely responsible and takes the role seriously.

Priestley utilises a **cyclical structure**, as the play also ends with the Inspector rejecting Mr Birling’s attempt of **bribery**. Mr Birling makes it clear he would “*give thousands*”, which the Inspector responds with “*you’re offering the money at the wrong time*”. This cyclical structure is used to demonstrate the consistency of the Inspector’s morals, while simultaneously presenting Mr Birling as immoral throughout. The audience realises this and draws upon their **political differences** as the cause - **capitalism** causes **immorality** and **socialism** causes morality.



## Socialist views

Priestley demonstrates the Inspector's conviction that everyone is equally important within society. The Inspector's views are noticeably **too progressive** for the **pre-suffrage** 1912 society and are more aligned with those of the **contemporary** audience.

- Priestley encourages the audience to realise that a person's class is irrelevant to their **degree of responsibility** as "**public men ... have responsibility as well as privilege**".

The Inspector sees Eva as an individual and refuses to refer to her as a "**girl**" in the same **superficial** fashion as the Birlings do. Instead, he persists in referring to her by her name, Eva Smith.

- ◆ The Birlings perceive Eva as insignificant – just a "**girl**", due to her **lower social status** as a working-class citizen.
- ◆ To the Inspector, Eva is an individual, who has significance. This is evidenced by the Inspector's acknowledgement of Eva's "**promising little life**".

The Inspector's morality is due to his awareness of **social responsibility** and the impact of an individuals' actions upon all of society. Fundamentally, because he rejects **capitalism**, he rejects immorality as Priestley presents the two as **synonymous**.

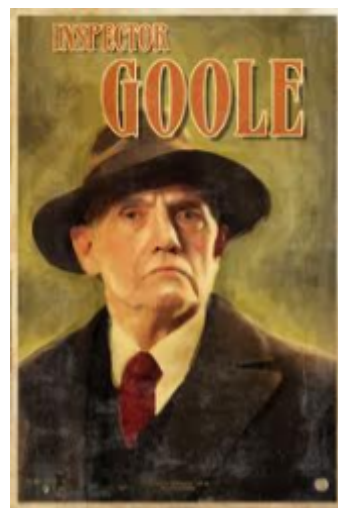
## Omniscience

The **supernatural** element to the character of the Inspector is evident through his apparent **omniscience**. The Inspector's purpose is not to convict the Birlings of any crime. His purpose is much deeper and more significant; he attempts to force the Birlings to recognise the **immorality** of their actions and change their attitudes towards **social responsibility**. Through Priestley portraying the Inspector as completely **moral**, the audience is provided with an **example** of how to act themselves for the improvement of society.

## Physical appearance

Priestley describes the Inspector in the **stage directions** in order to convey the message that a person's inner morality and integrity supplants their outward appearance. The Inspector "**need not be a large man**" but he "**gives the impression of massiveness**". His physical appearance does not convey the impact of his message and **prowess of his character**; it is the strength of his values and morals which are important.

The Inspector is presented as dressing **modestly** in a "**plain darkish suit**". Perhaps, Priestley is suggesting that the Inspector has no interest in attracting interest to himself; his purpose is to promote **socialist** values and denounce the **commercialism** and **superficiality** of **capitalism**. This modest appearance is in direct contrast with Mr Birling, who is "**heavy looking**" and "**portentous**" with a "**substantial**" house. Through the **juxtaposition** of these two characters, Priestley demonstrates the strength of the Inspector's values of **socialism** are stronger than Birlings' views of capitalism. This is why the Inspector doesn't need to reinforce his views with an impressive appearance.



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## Consequences of lacking responsibility

Priestley utilises the Inspector's final speech to warn the audience of the consequences in continuing in the same **capitalist** and **individualistic** fashion. He incorporates **Biblical** references within the Inspector's final speech which establish an atmosphere similar to that of Catholic mass. Through summarising each characters' sins, the Inspector symbolises the role of a **Pastor** and warns the characters of not following his moral message: **"if men will not learn that lesson"**. This message extends to the rest of the audience through the sweeping use of the **plural noun** **"men"**, who are instructed by the Inspector to **"learn that lesson"** of **capitalism** and the detrimental effects of commercialism.

## War

The structure of the play mirrors that of the two world wars. The initial arrival of the Inspector is portrayed as being due to society's capitalist flaws and therefore represents WWI. Then, the intermittent duration between WWI and WWII is highlighted as the characters' opportunity to change and accept greater social responsibility. However, the characters fail this and the phone call to the Birling residence, at the end of the play, is symbolic of WWII as this is the **"fire and blood and anguish"**, which the Inspector warned the characters about.

Priestley suggests that WWII occurred due to humanity not heeding the need for greater **social responsibility** for their actions, and that the world wars were a direct result of **"if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish."** Therefore, Priestley's underlying message is revealed; to stop society failing again, the audience needs to take action and reconstruct society to be more responsible than it was in 1912. The world wars were, as suggested by Priestley, caused by the greed and capitalist attitudes of society. However, the Birlings chose to dismiss the Inspector as **"socialist or some sort of crank"**. Therefore, Eva's 'second' death is caused by Birlings' refusal to admit responsibility after the Inspectors exit. This repeating of events (Eva's death) is a reflection of the repeated World Wars.

## Vehicle for Priestley's agenda

The **character** of the Inspector is used as a **mouthpiece** to present Priestley's own views regarding the need for **socialist** change. The Inspector is portrayed as a role model and is used to show how people should treat each other.

The **cyclical structure** of the play is contextually significant; the characters of the play failed to **assimilate** (understand) the Inspector's message.

Thus, unless the **contemporary** audience embraces the Inspector's lesson and takes on greater **social responsibility**, they too will face the consequences, which plagued the characters of 1912.

- The Inspector's departure is necessary to test the characters to see if they have learnt their lesson: this departure mirrors the interwar years between WWI and WWII; the ruling class also had the chance to change their **capitalist** and individualistic attitudes.



## Symbolism

### Omniscient, yet not omnipotent [all-knowing yet not all-powerful]

Priestley's message would be less effective on the audience if the Inspector forced the characters to change. Moreover, this would undermine the message of the play, as the audience needs to **accept greater responsibility** without an external force.

Priestley uses **shocking imagery** in an attempt to persuade the characters to change as he frequently refers to Eva's death as "**burnt her inside out**". Persuasion is the Inspector's greatest form of power, as he relies on **rhetorical devices**, such as **triplets**, to evoke empathy: Eva was "**friendless, penniless, desperate**" and needed "**advice, sympathy, friendliness**". The Inspector also attempts to appeal to the **maternal** side of Mrs Birling in an effort to persuade her: "**you've had children**". This tactic is flawed as Mrs Birling is, in fact, not a caring mother. This reveals the truth behind Priestley's opening **stage directions**, which describe Mrs Birling as "**rather cold**".

### Agent of God

Priestley incorporates many similarities between the Inspector and the perception of the **Judeo-Christian God**. Both the Inspector and God are **Omniscient**, this is revealed in a **plethora** (lots) of ways. The Inspector arrives immediately after Mr Birling dismisses **socialism**, saying a man should "**mind his own business and look after himself and his own**".

The nature of the enquiry being moral, rather than criminal, elevates the Inspector to that of an **agent of God**. The Inspector sets about forcing confessions of **vices** (sins) from the characters, similar to the role of a priest, who accepts confessions of sins in the Catholic Church. This link is strengthened through the allusion to the **Book of Genesis** as "**we are members of one body**", which is also used in **Holy Communion**. Therefore, through echoing the words of God, Priestley implies that the Inspector is speaking on **God's behalf**.

Alternatively, this **semantic field** (words with a shared association) of morality and religion could simply be Priestley drawing upon existing Christian concepts of responsibility to increase the audience's acceptance of Priestley's message. Both Christian mass and the Inspector's final speech ends with "**go forth in peace**". This is, perhaps, Priestley sending the message to the audience that by following the Inspector's socialist message, society can finally achieve **peace**.



## Relationships with other characters

### Antithesis to Mr Birling

Priestley presents Mr Birling as intolerable. This perception of Mr Birling extends to the ideology which he represents: **capitalism**. This allows Priestley to portray the Inspector as a favourable alternative, which also extends to **socialism** being a favourable alternative to **capitalism**. It is important to consider why Priestley contrasts the Inspector to Mr Birling as his **foil** (opposite).

#### Exam tip -

You will develop your AO2 for characterisation, if you are able to include a direct comparison between the characters of Mr Birling and the Inspector.

- The purpose of Mr Birling is to allow the Inspector to be presented in a favourable light.
- Mr Birling's reliability is destroyed by Priestley's use of **dramatic irony**. Therefore, his opinions and values bear no value or weight.
  - This is demonstrated through Mr Birling's confident claim that "**there's no chance of war**", which is perceived as contemptible by an audience, which has been affected by both WWI and WWII.
- Mr Birling is only concerned with his appearance and other character's perception of himself, as Priestley describes him in the **stage directions** as "**portentous**".
- Priestley portrays Mr Birling as only concerned with his own appearance, rather than morality.
  - This contrasts with the Inspector, who "**speaks weightily**" and "**need not be a big man**" as the strength of his position and ideology outweigh the need for an imposing physical appearance.
- Priestley places the Inspector and Mr Birling up against each other in order to establish the ideological debate between **capitalism and socialism**.
  - Priestley portrays Mr Birling as **dominating** speech throughout the opening scenes, until the arrival of the Inspector. Then upon the Inspector's arrival, the counterargument against capitalism is provided.
    - The Inspector interrupts the **capitalist narrative** of Mr Birling. This is, perhaps, an **extended metaphor** for **socialism** ending the precedence of **capitalism** in the global/historical narrative. Foreshadowing, a greater sense of **social responsibility** felt by all.

### Conversion of Sheila

The Inspector has the greatest impression on Sheila, out of all the characters, as she becomes **symbolic** of Priestley's intended audience response. She therefore becomes **symbolic** of the Inspector's ability to change the mindset of people.

- This conversion is symbolised by whether Sheila accepts or rejects Gerald. This is due to Gerald being **emblematic of capitalism** and the upper-class.
  - Sheila's attitude to Gerald becomes **symbolic** of whether the younger generation will accept the ways of the past. Therefore, it is significant that the inspector interrupts their engagement.





## Exposure of Gerald

The Inspector causes the **hypocrisy** of the upper-classes to be revealed; he exposes the upper-class for **shunning** responsibility.

- Gerald, despite knowing that Eva Smith is indeed the same girl that was wronged by all the characters, suggests that they were in fact different girls. Gerald validates Sheila's story as Eva "**said something about the shop too**" and also had to leave Mr Birling's employment "**after a strike**". Therefore, Gerald knows, beyond reasonable doubt, that Eva is indeed the same girl. However, he **fabricates** the claim that Eva is not the same girl to partially **excuse his responsibility** for her ultimate suicide. Priestley uses the character of the Inspector to condemn the upper-classes' lack of responsibility and determination to avoid it.

## Mrs Birling's vain attempts to halt inquiry

The Inspector's **accusing tone** causes Mrs Birling to condemn Sheila for expressing empathy towards Eva and the guilt that she feels for her role in her suicide.

- Mrs Birling silences Sheila as "**your behaving like a hysterical child**", right after she expresses how responsible she feels for Eva's death.
- Mrs Birling refers to the disorder *hysteria*, which was essentially constructed by the **patriarchy** to oppress women and prevent them from gaining positions of power.
  - She uses this against her own daughter in an attempt to **dismiss her** views, which are becoming aligned with the Inspector's **progressive view of socialism**.

## Supporting Eric

Priestley ensures that Eric is portrayed as redeemable and that the Inspector reveals his **capacity to change**.

Priestley does not directly condemn Eric for his actions, through the Inspector. Rather, Eric's excuse for his actions seems valid; he had been exposed to "**respectable**" men using prostitutes and thus it became normal for him. This coupled with Mr Birling being "**not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble**", allows Eric's actions to seem to be due to the **influence of the society** the Inspector is so heavily critical of.



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## Eva as a symbol

The Inspector uses Eva as a means to inflict guilt upon the characters and catalyse change within them. The Inspector's inquiry is centred around the suicide of Eva Smith; however, the Inspector's message is not limited to just Eva. The Inspector acknowledges the **widespread suffering** of the lower-classes at the hands of those **socially superior** to them. This is demonstrated by the Inspector's message that "**there are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths**". Inspector reveals in his final speech that Eva's significance extends beyond her as an individual. The characters can no longer help Eva, yet, they can aid the millions of other people whose suffering they are complicit in. Else, they shall "**learn that lesson**" in "**fire blood and anguish**".



## Structure

### Inspector's arrival

Priestley deliberately times the Inspector's arrival to coincide with, and interrupt, Mr Birling and his negative view of socialism. This allows Priestley to structurally represent the Inspector's opposition to Mr Birling's capitalist views. His arrival concludes a series of claims that the audience – through blunt and explicit use of **dramatic irony** – know to be incorrect due to hindsight:

- **"You'll hear some people say that war is inevitable. And to that I say – fiddlesticks!"** - The use of the **noun** "fiddlesticks", alongside Priestley's use of **dramatic irony** causes Mr Birling to seem overwhelmingly confident in his arrogance. This is due to Britain entering WWI soon after 1912.
- **"(the Titanic is) unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable"** - The certainty shown by Mr Birling's **repetition** of "unsinkable" demonstrates his poor judgement. This is due to the Titanic sinking.
- **"time of steadily increasing prosperity"** - The Great Depression followed 1912 and engulfed post-war Britain. Therefore, the audience in 1945 would identify Mr Birling as unreliable and thus dislike him.

Mr Birling's final statement before the Inspector's arrival: **"a man has to mind his own business and look after himself"** is proved to be as **equally unsubstantiated** and incorrect as his prior erroneous statements. The Inspector's interruption of the **monotonous**, slow paced and single character dominated scene also causes the audience to experience **subconscious relief** at the Inspector's arrival. Priestley may intend for this relief to become **associated with the Inspector's** presence. Therefore, the audience are manipulated into finding catharsis from the change in ideology from a **capitalist** to a **socialist** narrative. This enables Priestley's **manipulation** of the audience's response to the beliefs he supports.

### Switch in authority

The Inspector's arrival marks a shift in authority from Mr Birling to the Inspector, which can be interpreted as the shift from **capitalism** to **socialism**. Mr Birling has, hitherto (until now), dominated the dialogue of the play. His **dramatic monologue** form of speech excludes the views of others, which is demonstrated by his dismissal of Eric's protest **"What about war?"**, with **"the Germans don't want war"**. This reflects how capitalism has dominated society throughout the 19th Century and early 20th Century.



The British Museum

Upon arrival, the Inspector challenges the unquestioned authority and dominance not only of Mr Birling, but of the **capitalist** narrative that has so far controlled the narrative and society. Therefore, his interruption marks a change in attitude as past views have to contend with attempts of reform. Priestley constructs this conflict to mirror the way in which war has acted as a **catalyst** for post-war society. Therefore, this forces the audience to reconsider how society should be formed if previous systems led to suffering.





It is significant that it is not Eva's death that has called the Inspector to visit the Birlings, but the **capitalist** and individualistic views that instigate the Inspector's inquiry. He is not there to investigate the crime against Eva Smith. He is there to investigate the cause of **immorality in society**, which Eva is merely a single example of, caused by **capitalism**.

## Final impressions

### Need for change

Priestley, through the character of the Inspector, expresses the need for change, yet, he also describes how to change. The role of Inspector allows Priestley to portray *An Inspector Calls*, as a **didactic** (educational message) morality play, which is **disguised as a murder mystery**. This is a **reversal** of a murder mystery as the number of suspected characters actually expands, rather than being narrowed down by the Inspector.

The suspects are responsible for contributing to, both, Eva's suicide and the suffering of society.

- Priestley, through the Inspector, portrays Eva as **symbolic** of the reason behind the need for society to adopt **socialism**. In doing this, Priestley creates a compelling argument for the need for reform through the guilt of the characters in their role of Eva's suicide.
- Therefore, Priestley, through the Inspector, conveys the message that it is the whole of the upper class that is responsible for the suffering of the working-class. In doing this, it is clear to the audience that the disparity in the **class system** is responsible for this suffering of the lower classes. The Inspector refuses to allow Sheila to comprehensively accept blame for Eva's death and continues his policy of **"one line of enquiry at a time"**.
  - The Inspector must compromise his beliefs and partially excuse her behaviour to gain her as an ally and display the culpability of all members of the upper-classes.
  - He lays blame on the **"power you had"** rather than Sheila as an individual. Sheila is not fundamentally a bad person; the **influence of her class and environment** has caused her to behave in that immoral manner.

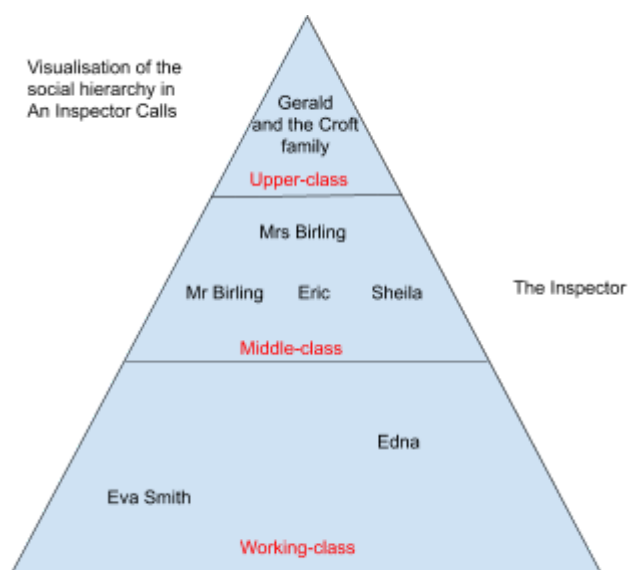


Figure 1



## Ambiguous portrayal

Priestley presents the Inspector in such a way that attitudes towards his genuine presence are **ambivalent** (doubtful). He potentially does this to raise questions about his authenticity.

- Academics often engage in a continuous debate regarding the Inspector's purpose and his true nature; was the Inspector real, or perhaps a form of collective conscience? There is also the view that the Inspector was, true to his **omniscient** nature and role of judgement, a representation of God.
- Whilst there is an argument, with evidence, for each interpretation given Priestley leaves **no definitive answer**. Perhaps, this reveals that it is not **who** the Inspector is, which matters. Rather, it is **what** the Inspector's message was, which is of utmost significance.
- This message is a desperate plea to ensure that post-war society is vastly different to pre-war society; men must "**learn that lesson**" of **social responsibility**. The lesson is realising the **capitalist flaws of society**; the response is **socialism**.

## Possible 'Topic Sentences'

- Priestley promotes his socialist agenda through the Inspector's speech and appearance, and portrays this ideology as favourable to the status quo of capitalism.
- Priestley explores the contrasting responses to social responsibility through contrasting the reactions between the older and younger-generations within the play.
- Furthermore, Priestley presents socialism favourably through the antithesis of the Inspector - Mr Birling - whose contemptible portrayal extends to the capitalist ideology that he represents.
- Priestley explores the ideal response of the audience to the Inspector's message of responsibility through his profound effect on Sheila.

### Exam tip -

A 'Topic Sentence' is the first sentence of your argument. This should convey the overall point you are making. It should reference Priestley explicitly and his ideas.

### Exam tip -

Topic sentences should always link back to the question at hand. Also, try to link these sentences together (e.g. discuss the initial, transitional and final portrayals of a character).



## Inspector Goole quote bank by theme

Theme	Quote	Analysis
Morality / responsibility	<b><i>“Speaks carefully, weightily”</i></b>	The use of the <b>adjective</b> “ <b>weightily</b> ” evidences the impact of the Inspector’s moral message. Also, speaking “ <b>carefully</b> ” directly contrasts Mr Birling, whose speech is diluted with <b>dashes</b> and hesitations.
	<b><i>“If you’re easy with me, I’m easy with you”</i></b>	Priestley’s use of <b>parallelism</b> (same grammatical features of a sentence repeated) in this phrase is, perhaps, symbolic for the Inspector’s message. This sense of equality and treating others how you wish to be treated is inherently <b>socialist</b> .
	<b><i>“Yes, but you can’t. It’s too late. She’s dead.”</i></b>	Here, Priestley uses <b>short sentences</b> and a <b>terse triplet</b> of expressions to convey an impactful message and express the need for radical change.
	<b><i>“Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges”</i></b>	The Inspector reminds Mr Birling that he cannot do as he pleases without considering the potential consequences his actions may have.
	<b><i>“Their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness all intertwined with our lives”</i></b>	Priestley continues to spread the message of <b>socialism</b> and the need for greater <b>social responsibility</b> as everybody’s lives are “ <b>intertwined</b> ”.
	<b><i>“We are members of one body”</i></b>	Priestley alludes to the <b>Book of Genesis</b> as “ <b>we are members of one body</b> ” is used in <b>Holy Communion</b> . Therefore, through echoing the words of God, Priestley implies that the Inspector is speaking on <b>God’s behalf</b> .
	<b><i>“Each of you helped to kill her, remember that. Never forget it.”</i></b>	Despite none of the characters directly ending Eva’s life, they have all had a part to play in her death and are therefore <b>responsible</b> for driving her to suicide.



	<b><i>“You used the power you had... to punish the girl.”</i></b>	The Inspector plainly states how Sheila abused her power, out of “ <b>jealousy</b> ” in order to punish Eva Smith for being more beautiful than her.
Omniscience	<b><i>“He knows”</i></b>	Sheila understands the Inspector’s <b>omniscience</b> and thus reveals all to the Inspector, while encouraging Gerald to do the same, as “ <b>he knows</b> ” anyway.
	<b><i>“I don’t need to know any more. Neither do you.”</i></b>	At this point, the Inspector has revealed the <b>culpability</b> of the characters in Eva’s death. As this is not a <i>real</i> Inspector, there is no need to know any more details, other than a sense of guilt and <b>responsibility</b> .
Physical appearance	<b><i>“Need not be a big man”</i></b>	The Inspector “ <b>need not be a big man</b> ” as the strength of his position and <b>ideology</b> outweigh the need for an imposing physical appearance.
	<b><i>“Impression of massiveness (solidity and purposefulness)”</i></b>	Priestley leaves the Inspector’s physical appearance as vague and, to some extent, unimportant due to his message of <b>social responsibility</b> being more important than his physical appearance.
	<b><i>“A plain darkish suit”</i></b>	Priestley presents the Inspector as wearing simple and minimal clothes in “ <b>a plain darkish suit</b> ”, as appearance is irrelevant to him. It is moral and <b>social responsibility</b> which is of greater importance.
Warning of not learning lesson	<b><i>“Burnt her inside out, of course”</i></b>	Priestley uses <b>shocking imagery</b> in an attempt to persuade the characters to change as he frequently refers to Eva’s death as “ <b>burnt her inside out</b> ”.
	<b><i>“If men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish”</i></b>	Therefore, the threat of “ <b>fire blood and anguish</b> ” could be the Inspector warning both the characters and the audience of the religious consequences for neglecting their duty of <b>social responsibility</b> . The religious connotation of “ <b>fire</b> ” is <b>hell</b> and therefore the punishment for not following the message of both <b>Christianity and socialism</b> to ‘love thy neighbour’.



## First Impressions

### Character in context

It's important to have a sense of the character Mr Birling as a whole, in order to have a greater understanding of the play. Arthur Birling is firmly entrenched within 1912 **ante-bellum** (means before the war) English social elite.



The play is set just before the outbreak of World War One and within the extravagant Birling household. Mr Birling's dominant position within a **static society** (poor stay poor and rich stay rich) is portrayed through:

- His **patriarchal** (male dominated society) role as owner of Birling and Co. which only employs young women at extortionately low wages.
- His marriage to Mrs Birling (Sybil), who accepts her own **domination** by Mr Birling. This is a reflection of Mr Birling's control over his household; she is often ordered to sit in the "drawing room", while men talk.
- His indifference to his daughter's (Sheila) concerns regarding Gerald's alleged affair as this could **compromise the economic relationship** between the Croft business and his own.

### Capitalism personified

Priestley exhibits Mr Birling as the living embodiment of the **capitalist ideology** (everything revolves around profit at all costs). His physical appearance is a reflection of capitalism; he wears formal clothes; he is **"heavy looking"** (symbolises greed) and frequently displays his **"portentous"** attitude (he tries really hard to impress people).

- Birling's clearly **pompous perspective** (self-absorbed) is evidenced through his immediate reclamation of the spotlight after Sheila and Gerald's engagement is announced. It is **"one of the happiest nights of my life"** and toasts to **"lower costs and higher prices"** rather than to his daughter's health.
  - Mr Birling values Sheila on her **capacity to further the family company** and thereby objectifies her as a bargaining chip; **"she'll make you (Gerald) happy"**, yet more significantly Mr Birling will have direct connections with an **"older and bigger"** business. Here it's clear that Mr Birling values the **prospect of increased profit** over his daughter's joy in engagement.
- His business is of greater importance than his own family – this **foreshadows** Mr Birling's indifference to Eva Smith's suicide, which is initiated through his refusal to grant her a pay rise.
  - Moreover, he attempts to **bribe** the Inspector **"(unhappily) Look, Inspector - I'd give thousands - yes, thousands -"**, to prevent losing wealth and social status through a criminal record. This epitomises the **individualistic** nature of **capitalism**.



## Insecure in his own social position

Despite Mr Birling's success in the world of business, his humble beginnings are evident from the stage directions as his tendency to be **"provincial in speech"** (he speaks with a noticeable accent) reveals his **lower-class origins**. This insecurity causes Mr Birling to constantly **remind people of his status in society**, through bringing up former roles as **"Lord Mayor"** and suggesting **"there's a very good chance of a knighthood"** to convince Gerald of his great social status. This **"provincial"** speech indicates a **lack of sophistication**.

This relative **uncouthness** (Mr Birling's mannerisms, etiquette and pronunciation are not aligned to the middle-class norms) is preyed upon by Mrs Birling, who is his natural **"social superior"**. Mrs Birling was, contrastingly, brought up within a **wealthy household** and thus her social etiquette has been **refined**; she is embarrassed by Mr Birling acknowledging his staff.

- Priestley introduces this insecurity immediately in the play; thus, this insecurity becomes **synonymous** (closely associated) with the **character** of Mr Birling. Insecurity in **middle-class social position** reveals the **far-reaching nature of the suffering** caused by large differences in wealth and clear **social divisions**; it's not simply the lower-classes who suffer, although their hardship is to a greater extent.

## Seeming superficiality of wealth

The Birling's wealth seems unnatural as Mr Birling is not from a traditionally wealthy background and instead made his own money. Therefore, it is important to consider how this affects Mr Birling, as he lacks the reputation of a well-known family name.

- Priestley's opening description of the Birling household through stage directions as **"substantial and heavily comfortable but not cosy or homelike"** immediately indicates the great wealth of the Birlings, yet the lack of feeling like home reinforces the **cosmetic** nature of their comfort in their own wealth; Mr Birling's **lower-class roots** means his higher-class lifestyle can never seem **"homelike"**.
- Birling compensates for his **"provincial"** speech and **unrefined etiquette**, through his **"substantial"** house as a clear indicator of his high social status. This desire to ensure his status as belonging to the **upper echelons of society** (higher status) is derived from his **initial social inferiority**, before he started his business.

## Nouveau riche (acquired wealth rather than inherited)

Mr Birling's character is **condemned** and looked down upon by higher-class men and those from respected families due to his lack of an **aristocratic** (noble) background. Social divisions existed even in the higher classes, and the audience can see how these affect Mr Birling, who is seen as a class imposter by many above him in the societal rankings.

Priestley uses the character of Mr Birling, not only as a method to **critique capitalism**, but to reveal the **cycle of oppression** caused by social divisions and **classism**. Mr Birling attains **validation** of his superiority in an almost **sadistic** manner (pleasure in inflicting pain), through denying pay rises and maintaining poor working conditions and hours - essentially exercising **complete control** over these lower-class

### Exam tip -

Using terminology, which you may be unfamiliar with can be scary at first but once you get the hang of it, this can greatly benefit AO2 for subject terminology.





women. The excessively self-centred nature of Mr Birling is, in essence, driven by his determination to uphold an **appearance of affluence** - ultimately and inevitably at the expense of his employees, causing the **firing of Eva Smith**. Priestley focuses on the insecurities of Mr Birling and the middle-class, as this is necessary to **establish a connection with the middle-class contemporary audience**, through exploiting the genuine insecurities they faced.

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## Final impression

### Dismissive of the Inspector's message

The suicide of Eva Smith is **partly blamed** on Mr Birling by the Inspector, to which Birling eagerly trivialises (plays-down) and **rejects all claims** that his actions began the **"chain of events"**, which led to Eva's suicide. It is important to consider why Mr Birling is so dismissive of the Inspector.

- Mr Birling has worked for his high social status and sees himself as proof that if the lower classes work hard enough they too can succeed like he did: **"a man has to make his own way - has to look after himself"**
- His desire to dismiss Eva's suicide is **catalysed** by the pressure of maintaining his **public image** and ensuring that he is not rejected from the society he worked so hard to enter.
- His determination to reject the Inspector's message of social responsibility is portrayed through his **dismissive response** to Eva's death, with his **"impatiently"** forced **"Yes, yes"**.

#### Exam tip -

When talking about the Inspector's message, this is a great opportunity to include some context about post-WW2 and calls for a welfare state.

### Resistant to change and reluctant to accept responsibility

The **older generation** within An Inspector Calls are especially **opposed to societal changes** which would lessen the divisions in classes. This is largely due to the current capitalist society benefitting the Birling family greatly in a financial sense. Birling's **"provincial"** speech bears connotations of **conservatism** and an unwillingness to change, which is reflected in his rejection of **socialism** (a concept of community and equality in society) as **"nonsense"**.

- Gerald's theory of the Inspector not being real is **"eagerly"** and **"triumphantly"** accepted by Mr Birling, despite his actions being real.
- Instant **catharsis** (relief from strong emotions) is felt by Mr Birling, when the prospect of a criminal record is no longer apparent, due to the Inspector not being real.
- Therefore,, it is clear Mr Birling did not care for Eva Smith's suicide, but simply for his own chances of attaining a knighthood by avoiding **"the police court or start(ing) a scandal"**
- For Mr Birling to accept **social responsibility**, he would have to **sacrifice the profiteering methods** of exploiting labourers and paying **subsistence wages** (just enough to live on). Thus, it is in his best interests to oppose the Inspector and attempt to **discredit his message** of social responsibility.
- Priestley's use of the **adverb "eagerly"** to describe both Mr Birling's denial of the Inspector's existence and also Sheila's agreement with Eric that **"this girl's still dead"** emphasises the **divide between the generations**.



- Priestly **contrasts the characters** of Eric and Sheila, against Mr and Mrs Birling. The younger generation acknowledge their **failing in their morality**. However, the older generation merely consider the potential detriment to their **social status through prosecution**, whilst disregarding any **moral duty**.

## Cyclical presentation

Mr Birling, and the older generation as a whole, **intend to live in the same fashion** as they did before the arrival of the Inspector. This continuous attitude of not caring about the impact of his actions is demonstrated by Priestley. The **cycle of immorality** is implied by the ending of the play, which finishes as it began: with Mr Birling offering Gerald a drink. The **lack of change in attitude** is reflected by the **lack of visual change** in the play. Here, Priestley conveys the underlying message that the **flaws of the current society** are caused by the **upper-classes' resistance to change**.

The cyclical structure of Mr Birling's outlook creates a **static character**, who cannot change. Priestley, through the character of Mr Birling, critiques how these societal flaws and **capitalism** allow the upper-classes to be supported and their **unfair privileges maintained**. In a way, Priestley **manipulates the audience** into siding with his personal preference of **socialism**, as they turn to this **alternative** in disgust of Priestley's presentation of Mr Birling as uncaring, self-absorbed and manipulative, all traits we come to **associate with capitalism**. Priestley ends the play, also, with **another phone call** - perhaps this time from a '**real**' **Inspector**. This cyclical device is used to **warn the audience** of not taking on board social responsibility themselves.

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## Relationships between other characters

### Marriage to Mrs Birling

Priestley immediately creates a **divide** between Mr and Mrs Birling through the aforementioned stage direction "**her husband's social superior**".

The theme of capitalism affects even the most intimate relationships, as Mr Birling married Mrs Birling **for her social status rather than love**. Their marriage was a **transaction** - Mr Birling's financial stability in exchange for Sybil's **reputable family**. The lack of love and **intimacy** in their relationship is demonstrated through Mrs Birling "**reproachfully**"

(disappointedly and shameful) responding to Mr Birling. Mrs Birling clearly feels unfulfilled by Mr Birling as she reminds Sheila that she'll just "**have to get used to, just as I did**" highlighting to the audience the **unhappiness** caused by this **capitalist system**, where status and wealth are **paramount** (most important).



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## Father-son relationship

Mr Birling's relationship with his son, Eric, lacks a sense of **familial connection**. Eric opposes the way that his father runs Birling & Co. and is against the way his father exploits the employees. He remains "**not quite at ease**" with his privileged life, formed at the expense of the lower-classes, yet he accepts it.



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The father-son divide is symbolic of the divide between the **older generation and the younger generation**. Eric's resentment of Mr Birling's workplace practices reveals that Eric will also oppose **capitalism** and is more aligned to the concept of **socialism**.

Priestley creates an instantaneous divide between father and son, as Mr Birling exclaims "**we try for the highest possible prices**", which Eric demonstrates his disgust by responding with the **rhetorical question** "**why shouldn't they try for higher wages?**". This divide is maintained throughout the play as Mr Birling deflects blame for firing Eva Smith as it's a "**free country**", which Eric challenges: "**it isn't (a free country) if they can't go and work somewhere else**".

Mr Birling attempts to lecture Eric and influence him with capitalist and **individualistic** notions; "**a man has to make his own way – has to look after himself**", however, this largely fails to resonate (be

taken on board) with Eric. Despite this divide, Eric shares some qualities with his father. Indeed, they both exploit Eva in some way.

## Mr Birling's foil (opposite character) - the Inspector.

Priestley deliberately creates the Inspector as the **antithesis** of Mr Birling in order to compare the ideologies that each character symbolises. Mr Birling represents capitalism, whilst the Inspector is symbolic of socialism.

### Exam tip -

You will develop your AO2 for characterisation, if you are able to include a direct comparison between the characters of Mr Birling and the Inspector.

The concept of **rugged individualism** and "**a man has to look after himself**" proposed by Mr Birling is contrasted by The Inspector's notion of **social responsibility** and that "**we are all one body**". This difference in ideas is reflected in their differing appearances.

- The Inspector plays on Mr Birling's appearance of a reputable family "**you seem like a nice well-behaved family**", while emphasising the **superficiality** of their appearance with the verb "**seem**".



### Appearance

The appearance of the Inspector as an “**impression of massiveness**” is significant as it presents **socialism** as the more powerful idea. This power and confidence that the Inspector has is due to him presenting a true portrayal of himself, rather than Mr Birling’s obsession with his own **perceived public image**. His contrasting lack for the need for **material objects** to validate his own social status is reflected through his minimal “**plain darkish suit**”.

### Speech

In speech, the Inspector “**speaks carefully, weight fully**” while arguing his case with evidence such as Eva Smith’s diary and photograph. This compelling argument is contrasted with Mr Birling who is portrayed as ignorant and arrogant; his speech is diluted with **dashes** and **hesitations**, while his arguments such as “**the Germans don’t want war**” and “**(the Titanic is) unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable**” are proven invalid by **dramatic irony** (the audience knows and understands that the Germans did want war and that the Titanic did sink, as they play was performed in 1945, whilst Mr Birling is unaware).

### Power struggle

The Inspector resists Mr Birling’s assertions of authority and attempts of intimidation. Mr Birling attempts to use his social status to **intimidate** the Inspector and retain some **authority** by referencing his irrelevant roles as “**I was an alderman for years – and lord mayor two years ago**”, however, this leaves the Inspector unaffected.

Birling’s constant attempts to **condescend** the Inspector with **rhetorical questions** such as “**Is it now?**” or “**eh Inspector?**” create a **façade** (deceptive outward appearance) of authority to **mask his own insecurity in his social status**. The Inspector’s indifference to Mr Birling’s attempts to intimidate him lead to Mr Birling asserting his authority over his children: “**you’ve had enough of that port, Eric**” and “**you keep quiet Eric**”. Here, Priestley demonstrates how Mr Birling’s **insecurity in his own authority** leads to **oppression**, which is also reflected onto the lower-classes in the workplace as Mr Birling resists his workers’ strike for a pay rise.

### **Uncertain relationship with Gerald Croft**

Gerald is naturally above Mr Birling in the all-important **social hierarchy**, as the Croft family are more reputable and wealthier than the Birling family. This causes a noticeable **tension** from Mr Birling, who increases his **ostentatious tendencies** (he tries to impress Gerald).

The higher status of Gerald is evidenced by Mr Birling’s **hesitant tone**: “**you ought to like this port, Gerald ... It’s exactly the same port your father gets**”. The uncertain **verb** “**ought**” to reveal Mr Birling’s **insecurity** and **wariness** of not giving Gerald orders, as he would to those below him on the social hierarchy.

- Mr Birling deliberately brought the same port as Gerald’s father in order to present himself as a **social equal** and to mask the insecurity he feels.
- Gerald’s mother, Mrs Croft, disapproves of the marriage therefore Mr Birling attempts to **compensate** for his lower social status by suggesting that there’s a “**very good chance of a knighthood**”.

**Exam tip -**  
Here, context can be added.  
The middle class of 1912 could not become upwardly socially mobile without connections to respected families (e.g. wedlock)



- This **self-promotion** of Mr Birling reveals the real motive behind marriage, as rather than praise Sheila as a great potential partner, he promotes himself in an attempt to unite the Croft and Birling families and thereby **increase his ranking on the social hierarchy**.
- The profound effect of the **class system** is revealed by Mr Birling's great respect to Gerald, despite Mr Birling being considerably older.
- Here, Priestley demonstrates that respect is merely gained through status.

## Symbolism of Mr Birling

Priestley deliberately portrays Mr Birling as a **static character**, who shows no remorse or accepts any responsibility.

- Mr Birling is **symbolic** of the selfish, capitalist higher middle-class. This is demonstrated through his relief upon Gerald's theory that the Inspector wasn't real and that "**the whole thing's different now**".
- Eva's torment no longer matters to Mr Birling as he is no longer at risk of legal prosecution or socially accountable for her suicide.
- Priestley demonstrates this uncaring attitude as Mr Birling "**jovially**" displays his happiness, as he no longer has to worry about **social responsibility** and he can continue to resist change.
- Through displaying Mr Birling and the older generation as unaffected and resistant to change, Priestley **targets the younger generation**, who are "**more impressionable**" (in the words of the Inspector) in a hope to **rebuild society** with a more **socialist mindset**.
- It is necessary for Mr Birling to remain a **static character**, as Priestley intends for him to be a **vehicle for capitalism** and the source of opposition to positive change to society.
- Therefore, Mr Birling **must be completely dislikeable** and through the audience's hatred of Mr Birling, Priestley is able to gain support and persuade the younger generation in his **critique of capitalism**; Mr Birling is a **construct of capitalism**.

## Audience's reaction

### Priestley's message

Priestley involves the audience heavily in his play and uses **dramatic irony** to form the audience's opinion of the characters, especially Mr Birling. It is important to consider the methods Priestley uses to convey his **underlying message of socialism**.

- The audience's dislike of Mr Birling causes them to dismiss his view of socialism "**as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense**".
- However, the contemporary middle-class audience likely related to Mr Birling's insecurities and therefore Priestley is able to cause the audience to **reflect on their own social responsibility** and the way in which they conduct themselves.
- Priestley targets the younger middle-class audience through this portrayal of Mr Birling, as they have the **combination of wealth and influence to drive change** and therefore not become like Mr Birling.





Hence, Priestley attempts to convince this powerful audience, who can afford theatre admission, that a **less divided society** would not only **benefit** the working-classes, but all people.



## Focused analysis AO2

### Use of dramatic irony

Priestley uses **dramatic irony** to portray Mr Birling as both foolish and unlikable. It is important to consider why Priestley creates this obvious irony, with reference to widely known events.

- Mr Birling's complete confidence in "***the Germans don't want war***" as he goes "***to that I say - fiddlesticks***", is received by the **contemporary audience** in 1945 as ignorant, as these people have most likely lost loved ones and have strong memories of both **WWI** and **WWII**. The use of the **dismissive exclamation** "***fiddlesticks***" furthers the audience's loathing of Mr Birling.
- Mr Birling makes the bold claim that England was undergoing a "***time of steadily increasing prosperity***", yet the audience is aware that the **great depression** followed the aftermath of WWI. This causes Mr Birling to become demonised and for the audience to **oppose his capitalist notions**, as the audience most likely suffered one of the greatest economic depressions in modern history.
- The audience is provided with a sense of **relief** at the arrival of the Inspector, who interrupts Mr Birling's repetitive ranting and domination of speech in the play. This allows Priestley to **establish an atmosphere of relief** associated with the appearance of the Inspector.
- Priestley encourages a favourable perception of the Inspector and this relief is extended to the ideologies which Mr Birling and the Inspector represent; the Inspector's **socialism** provides relief from Mr Birling's **capitalism**. The Inspector is perceived by the audience as a **force for good**, saving society from the **backwards views** of Mr Birling.





## Possible 'Topic Sentences'

- Priestley uses the character of Mr Birling as a construct for capitalism and demonstrates the individualistic nature of this ideology through Mr Birling's appearance and personality.
- However, Priestley explores the initial insecurity demonstrated by Mr Birling, in his own social position within the social hierarchy of 1912 British society.
- Priestley explores the static nature of Mr Birling, as this insecurity is maintained throughout the play - unaffected by the Inspector's anti-class-system message of socialism.
- Priestley explores the stark contrast between the younger and older-generation, regarding their attitudes to responsibility. Mr Birling's initial rejection of any responsibility remains constant throughout the play, as Priestley confines the character of Mr Birling to a static development.
- The character of Mr Birling is the antithesis to the Inspector. Priestley explores the ideologies that these characters represent - capitalism and socialism, respectively - and how these are also in direct opposition.

### Exam tip -

A 'Topic Sentence' is the first sentence of your argument. This should convey the overall point you are making. It should reference Priestley explicitly and his ideas.

### Exam tip -

Topic sentences should always link back to the question at hand. Also, try to link these sentences together (e.g. discuss the initial, transitional and final portrayals of a character).



## Mr Birling quote bank by theme

Theme	Quote	Analysis
Insecurity	<b><i>“Provincial in his speech”</i></b>	The <b>adjective</b> <b>“provincial”</b> is used to show the low-class origins of Mr Birling. He has to compensate for his lower-class accent with material possessions.
	<b><i>“You ought to like this port, Gerald It’s exactly the same port your father gets”</i></b>	The <b>verb</b> <b>“ought”</b> reveals Mr Birling’s insecurities regarding social status; he is hesitant to command Gerald (who is of a higher class) like he would command Eric.
	<b><i>“There’s a fair chance that I may find myself into the next honours list.”</i></b>	Mr Birling’s insecurity is revealed by his feeling of inadequacy due to his lower social status, compared to the Crofts. Therefore, he feels the need to compensate with boasts of a potential knighthood.
Capitalism vs socialism	<b><i>“We may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together – for lower costs and higher prices.”</i></b>	This reveals the true motive behind Sheila’s marriage, which is profit - rather than love.
	<b><i>“as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense.”</i></b>	The <b>simile</b> <b>“like bees in a hive”</b> is an attempt by Mr Birling to trivialise the concept of socialism.
	<b><i>“A man has to mind his own business and look after himself”</i></b>	Here, Mr Birling speaks in the <b>third person</b> in an attempt to create a philosophical element to his speech.
	<b><i>“It’s my duty to keep labour costs down.”</i></b>	Priestley uses the <b>noun</b> <b>“duty”</b> to emphasise Mr Birling’s dedication to capitalism and profit.
	<b><i>“If you don’t come down sharply on some of these</i></b>	The <b>hyperbole</b> (exaggeration for effect) of <b>“asking for the earth”</b> is an attempt by Mr Birling to explain his rejection of Eva Smith’s pay rise. However, the



	<i>people, they'd soon be asking for the earth."</i>	absurdity of people <b>"asking for the earth"</b> reflects the absurdity of Mr Birling's refusal to pay a decent wage.
	<i>"Probably a socialist or some sort of crank"</i>	The <b>noun</b> <b>"crank"</b> is an attempt by Mr Birling to condemn socialism, however, Priestley's use of <b>dramatic irony</b> causes the audience to oppose Mr Birling's views and therefore sympathise with socialists.
Older generation vs younger generation	<i>"Why you hysterical young fool – get back – or I'll – "</i>	Here Priestley uses <b>irony</b> to further create a dislikeable perception of Mr Birling, who insults and threatens violence towards his own child. Therefore, it is clear that it is in fact Mr Birling who is <b>"hysterical"</b> .
	<i>"now look at the pair of them – the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke"</i>	The use of the <b>noun</b> <b>"joke"</b> is significant as it is <b>ironic</b> . It occurs just before the phone rings and a 'real' inspector calls on the telephone. Also, trivialising Eva Smith's suffering as a <b>"joke"</b> emphasises the static character of Mr Birling.
Responsibility	<i>"As it happened more than eighteen months ago – nearly two years ago – obviously it has nothing to do with the wretched girl's suicide."</i>	The <b>adverb</b> <b>"obviously"</b> is used to emphasise Mr Birling's arrogance and disregard for his own social responsibility. Priestley does this to continue Mr Birling's unlikable image.
	<i>"I can't accept any responsibility."</i>	The use of the <b>adverb</b> <b>"any"</b> reveals Mr Birling's complete lack of morality, as he believes sacking Eva Smith had no impact on her life, which drove her to suicide.
	<i>"If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody... it would be very awkward wouldn't it?"</i>	Priestley's use of the <b>adjective</b> <b>"awkward"</b> , coupled with Mr Birling's self-absorbed character reveals that an increased sense of responsibility for everyone would really only be <b>"awkward"</b> for him. This awkwardness extends to the class and ideology that he represents: capitalist middle-class.
	<i>"I've got to cover</i>	Priestley uses this sense of urgency as Mr Birling's



	<i>this up as soon as I can."</i>	reaction to his involvement in Eva Smith's suicide shows how he is focused solely on the well-being of his own social status, rather than the death of Eva and how his actions contributed to it.
	<i>"There's every excuse for what both your mother and I did."</i>	Mr Birling separates himself and Mrs Birling, as the older generation, from Eric and Sheila in the younger generation. This diversion of blame onto his children reveals the selfish core of Mr Birling and inability to develop a sense of social responsibility.
	<i>"(jovially) But the whole thing's different now"</i>	Priestley uses the <b>stage direction</b> <i>"(jovially)"</i> to emphasise Mr Birling's indifference to the well-being of Eva Smith, as <i>"the whole thing's different now"</i> due to there being no social or legal consequences affecting Mr Birling.
	(the Inspector is speaking) <i>"Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges"</i>	Priestley uses the Inspector as a <b>vehicle</b> for socialism, as Mr Birling is reminded of his <i>"responsibilities"</i> and the need to address them.
Self-absorbed	<i>"It's one of the happiest nights of my life... your engagement to Shelia means a tremendous lot to me"</i>	The selfish nature of Mr Birling is revealed by the use of the <b>personal pronoun</b> <i>"me"</i> and <i>"my life"</i> . The emphasis on Mr Birling's own life is due to his own reputation and social status increasing after Sheila's marriage to Gerald. In reality, it matters not whether Sheila and Gerald are happily married.
	<i>"Perhaps I ought to warn you that that [the Chief Constable is] an old friend of mine. We play golf together."</i>	Mr Birling attempts to intimidate the Inspector through the <b>verb</b> <i>"warn"</i> . The belief that association with the Chief Constable puts Mr Birling above the law epitomises the need for greater social justice and responsibility.
	<i>"I don't like your tone nor the way you're handling this enquiry."</i>	Again, Birling attempts to sway the Inspector and force him to leave by mentioning the irrelevant fact that he doesn't <i>"like"</i> the Inspector's tone. This is due to the higher classes, generally, being let off by law enforcement due to association with officers in higher positions.



	<b><i>"I care. I was almost certain for a Knighthood in the next honours list."</i></b>	Priestley uses the <b>short sentence</b> <b>"I care"</b> to create a potential turning point, where Mr Birling finally accepts his moral and social responsibility. However, what follows is an <b>anti-climax</b> as Mr Birling's static nature as a character is reaffirmed. What Mr Birling only cares about is his social position, not the wellbeing of Eva Smith and other employees.
	<b><i>"There'll be a public scandal... and who here will suffer for that more than I will?"</i></b>	This <b>rhetorical question</b> is used by Priestley to demonstrate Mr Birling's self-pity rather than sympathy for Eva Smith. His social status is more valuable to him than his employee's lives.
	<b><i>"A heavy looking, rather portentous man"</i></b>	The use of the <b>adjective</b> <b>"portentous"</b> in the stage directions gives an immediate indication of Mr Birling's self-indulged temperament.
	<b><i>"Alderman for years / Lord Mayor two years ago"</i></b>	Priestley uses these high-ranking local roles to reveal Mr Birling's belief that social status transcends law and order.
Dramatic irony	<b><i>"You'll hear some people say that war is inevitable. And to that I say – fiddlesticks!"</i></b>	The use of the <b>noun</b> <b>"fiddlesticks"</b> , alongside Priestley's use of dramatic irony causes Mr Birling to seem overwhelmingly confident in his arrogance. This is due to Britain entering WWI soon after 1912.
	<b><i>"(the Titanic is) unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable"</i></b>	The certainty shown by Mr Birling's <b>repetition</b> of <b>"unsinkable"</b> demonstrates his poor judgement. This is due to the Titanic sinking.
	<b><i>"time of steadily increasing prosperity"</i></b>	The Great Depression followed 1912 and engulfed post-war Britain. Therefore, the audience in 1945 would identify Mr Birling as unreliable and thus dislike him.



## First Impressions

### Character in context

Mrs Birling (or Sybil Birling) is married to Mr Birling and is mother to Eric and Sheila. She has some **public influence** as she sits on the council for charity organisations and is married to Mr Birling, who was Lord Mayor, and is a business owner.



Priestley uses her as a **symbol** for the **hypocrisy** of the upper-classes and as a demonstration of the need for a **welfare state**. Priestley dictates in the stage directions that Mrs Birling is “**about fifty, a rather cold woman**” and thus reveals her **unsympathetic** and **individualistic** nature. She is her husband's “**social superior**” and therefore belongs to an upper class family.

- Mrs Birling represents the selfish nature of the upper classes, their privileges, and their prejudices.
- She perceives the working classes as inferior.

### Complicit in her own domination

Priestley portrays an accurate depiction of domestic life in the early 20th Century, as the inequality between men and women and is demonstrated through her reluctance to challenge her husband.

- At the time it was the **convention** (tradition of the time) for to go to the drawing room after dinner, allowing men to remain in the dining room to discuss politics and news. These were not considered suitable topics for women, so they were excluded from such affairs and confined to domestic chores.
- However, Mr Birling does not command her to leave; she knows her place. It is Mrs Birling, who is the one to initiate their exit as she announces it is time for Sheila and herself to “**leave you men**”.
  - Mrs Birling's commitment to maintaining the **patriarchal status quo** (existing state of affairs) leads her to become **complicit in her own oppression** and she inflicts this upon her own daughter.

### Marriage is a construct

Mrs Birling recognises that marriage is a means to secure financial security and social status.

- Loyalty and trust, the foundations of a loving relationship, are not seen by Mrs Birling as important.
  - This is demonstrated through Mrs Birling's indifference to Gerald's affair with “**Daisy Renton**” (Eva Smith's **pseudonym**) and potentially Mr Birling's affair. Instead, it is viewed as something to be expected of men.
- Priestley describes Mrs Birling as a “**cold woman**” in the stage directions, which would have been perceived as a bit of an **oxymoron** at the time.
  - **Contemporary women** were meant to conform to the expectations of their **gender** of being loving, **maternal** and sensitive. However, Mrs Birling is “**cold**”, implying that she shows little emotion, and is self-interested.





- Perhaps, this is Priestley conveying the message that Mrs Birling's **detached** attitude towards suffering is irrational and unnatural.
- Mrs Birling's cold nature is further demonstrated when she is **unsympathetic** to her child's distress after Sheila discovers how her actions helped contribute to Eva's suicide.
- The idea of marriage is clearly not centred around love for Mrs Birling; it is a **transaction**.
- Gerald covers up his affair by telling Sheila he's "**busy at the works**", which she doesn't question initially, submitting to her expected societal role, based on her gender.



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/>

### Upholding the patriarchy

Priestley portrays Mrs Birling as upholding the current patriarchal system of 1912. Her perception of men's sexual desires is a clear **patriarchal interpretation** as she believes they should be accepted and satisfied, without question, by **submissive** women.

Mrs Birling perceives Eva's suicide as Eva's own fault as those who are responsible were "**first, the girl herself**" and "**secondly the young man**". Mrs Birling takes the ignorant view that working class women **voluntarily choose prostitution** rather than being **forced** into it.

The Inspector's message of **collective responsibility** is rejected by Mrs Birling, and she denies her role in the chain of events leading to Eva's suicide: "**I won't believe it**". Rather than accept the need for **greater social responsibility**, Mrs Birling maintains the view that Eva chose to lead the life she led, and therefore the consequences are her own fault. Therefore, there is no need for society to change, as she believes that **class inequalities** did not cause Eva's death, and Mrs Birling's privileged upper class lifestyle can continue.

### Hysteria

Mrs Birling perceives displays of emotion to be a sign of weakness. This is evident when she attempts to silence and dismiss Sheila, telling her that "**you're behaving like a hysterical child**". Priestley includes references to the **hysteria** disorder, which has historically been used to control women and prevent them from acquiring positions of power.

- Sheila's **newfound socialist views** are opposed by Mrs Birling and therefore using **hysteria** to dismiss her as **delusional** is easier than attempting to argue against the views she holds.
- This is an example of an **ad hominem** attack, focusing on Sheila's personal traits, demonstrating that Mrs Birling does not have a satisfactory counter-argument.
- Gerald sides with Mrs Birling in attacking Sheila for becoming "**hysterical**".

### Resisting suffrage

Mrs Birling is used by Priestley as a **symbol** of the upper classes, many of whom resisted the suffrage movement in the early 20th Century.



- Mrs Birling perceives the suffrage movement as undermining **traditional gender roles** and the foundation of the family, which will ultimately (in her view) lead to **domestic chaos**.
- Priestley demonstrates Mrs Birling's **conservative** view that women should have moral and domestic roles and exclude themselves from the **political realm of men**.
- She is able to take this stance because she has no interest in **changing society** because she is privileged. **Suffrage** threatens her comfortable lifestyle, as Mrs Birling's privileges are at risk.

## Relationships with other characters

### Marriage of convenience

Priestley presents Mrs Birling as, to an extent, ashamed of her husband's lower-class origins and the way he carries himself. Mrs Birling is, as Priestley describes her in the **stage directions**, her husband's "**social superior**". Therefore, the **upper class social etiquette** and mannerisms of Mrs Birling are unnatural to Mr Birling. This is demonstrated by Priestley's use of the **adverb** "**reproachfully**" in the **stage directions** when she criticises Mr Birling: "**Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things**".

Their marriage was most likely arranged in a similar fashion to a **transaction**; Mr Birling's **financial support** in exchange for Mrs Birling's **reputable family and status**. Here, Priestley demonstrates the **individualism of capitalists**, as they don't marry for love, but in the interests of **social mobility** or financial gain.

#### Exam tip -

AQA places great value on your recognition of **why** Priestley uses a particular technique. You need to go further than simply identifying a technique: explain what effect it has.

Mrs Birling hints at Mr Birling having an affair, and accepting it, responding to Sheila's discomfort in the knowledge of Gerald's affair, as something she will "**have to get used to, just as I did**". This further evidences the expected lack of happiness and love in marriage. Priestley dictates in the **stage directions** that the Birling household doesn't feel "**cosy or homelike**" as the family is not one built on love but built for appearance and in a "**portentous**" (done to impress) fashion.

### Sheila resists her mother's manipulation

Priestley portrays Sheila as, at first, a victim of her mother's influence. However, after the Inspector's arrival, there is a **distinct shift** in their relationship; Sheila rejects her **mother's manipulation**.

Initially, Sheila is obviously influenced by her mother's **formal vocabulary**, evidenced by Sheila's use of the **adjective** "**impertinent**" when she describes Eva, **linguistically echoed** by her mother later. However, Sheila, towards the end of the play, rejects the use of this **adjective**, calling it "**such a silly word**". It is clear that from this point onwards, Mrs Birling has lost all influence and power over her daughter.



## Mrs Birling juxtaposes Sheila

Priestley uses two female characters that directly contrast each other, creating a clear distinction between the **older and younger generations** which highlights the differences in their beliefs and attitudes.

Sheila is the **exemplar response** (how Priestley wants the audience to respond) to the Inspector's message, whereas Mrs Birling is her direct **antithesis** (opposite character). This is evident as Sheila aligns herself with the views of the Inspector, while Mrs Birling rejects the Inspector's message.

- Mrs Birling denies all responsibility and inadvertently deflects the blame onto her son, Eric, as **"I'll tell you what I told her [Eva]. Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility."**
- Sheila accepts her role in Eva's suicide immediately, and is **remorseful**: **"I know I'm to blame – and I'm desperately sorry"**.

Here, Priestley presents Mrs Birling as **symbolic** of **conservatism** and **resistant to change**. Sheila **symbolises the progressive** younger generation, who will replace the outdated views of their parents. Mrs Birling represents the bygone era of the Victorian age, with strict etiquette and formal language, neither of which have a place in contemporary society.

## Opposition to the Inspector

Mrs Birling is in complete opposition to the Inspector and the message that he represents - the need for increased **social responsibility**. Priestley portrays Mrs Birling as significantly opposed to the Inspector.

- Priestley demonstrates Mrs Birling's **abhorrence** to the Inspector's accusing and forthright tone through the **rhetorical question** **"what business is it of yours?"** and the **exclamation** **"I beg your pardon"**.
  - The Inspector violates the established class system of 1912 Britain, in his treatment and accusation of Mrs Birling, who is of a much higher social class.
- Mrs Birling's outrage at being dictated to by an Inspector of a lower-class background is demonstrated by the **passive-aggressive response**, **"I realise that you have to conduct some sort of inquiry, but I must say that so far you seem to be conducting it in a rather peculiar and offensive manner."**

### Exam tip -

Ensure that you explicitly link Priestley's methods (oxymoron, rhetorical question) with the question's theme (e.g. responsibility).

## Contempt for Eva

Priestley portrays Mrs Birling as maintaining a **repugnance** (hatred) for Eva Smith and her working class background. Priestley presents Mrs Birling as having strong-held beliefs against people of **inferior social status**.

- Mrs Birling immediately signals her indifference to Eva's suffering as she tells Sheila she **"ought to go to bed - and forget about this absurd business"**. The **adjective** **"absurd"** reveals her dismissiveness; due to the death of Eva not directly affecting Mrs Birling, she sees no point in caring.



- The real reason behind Mrs Birling's dislike of Eva is revealed as she doesn't **"suppose for a moment that we can understand why the girl committed suicide. Girls of that class -"**.
  - The divide between the upper and lower classes is evidenced by Mrs Birling's use of the **determiner "that"**, which enables her to distance herself from the working class, which she views as 'other' (different from herself).
  - This is further evidenced by Mrs Birling's contempt for Eva, who clearly didn't appreciate Eva's **social etiquette** **"I didn't like her manner"**.
- Mrs Birling describes Eva's plea for aid to the charity council which she sits on as **"simply a piece of gross impertinence"**. Therefore, it is clear that Mrs Birling's **prejudice** against the lower classes **negatively affects** those people in her charity work.

#### Exam tip -

AQA does not take kindly to students who incorrectly identify words. For example, if you describe a word as a verb when it is a noun. If you are uncomfortable with identifying a particular word - do **NOT** guess.

### Indifference to Eric

Priestley shows Mrs Birling to be 'cold' and **uncaring**, even for her own children. She is more concerned with the way in which Eric and Sheila **behave** as upper class citizens, than with their own personal wellbeing.

Priestley portrays Mrs Birling as **indifferent** to Eric's **welfare**. To shift some of the responsibility away from her, Mrs Birling inadvertently blames her own son, dictating the punishments he should receive, **"He should be made an example of. If the girl's death is due to anybody, then it's due to him"**. Then, upon realising that Eric is indeed the father of Eva's soon-to-be child, she refuses to accept this as the truth: **"Eric, I can't believe it. There must be some mistake."**

- Mrs Birling refuses this fact as it **jeopardises** the **reputation** of the Birling family.
- Eric's outrage towards his mother, who is **unsympathetic** and fails to even apologise, is demonstrated by Priestley in his broken speech, **"Then - you killed her... and the child she'd have had too - my child - your own Grandchild - you killed them both - damn you, damn you."** and **"You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried."**

Mrs Birling expresses her disappointment in her son as **"Eric, I'm absolutely ashamed of you"**. Here, it is clear that Mrs Birling still hasn't accepted any **responsibility**. It is important to note that Mrs Birling only expresses this after the Inspector leaves as perhaps, she knew that he would object to her saying this.

- Eric responds to this with **"well, I don't blame you. But don't forget I'm ashamed of you as well - yes both of you"**. This shows that Eric has accepted responsibility as he doesn't blame his mother for being **"ashamed"**, but he doesn't allow his parents to escape the responsibility either, reminding them of their implication.
  - Mrs Birling remains **unsympathetic** towards Eric despite denying aid to her **granddaughter-to-be's mother**, which was one of the last things that contributed to Eva's suicide.



## Final Impressions

### Superficiality

Mrs Birling and her husband are **static characters**, as their beliefs remain unchanged at the end of the play. Priestley presents Mrs Birling as seeming to care very deeply about others' perception of her.

- She believes that "***I did my duty***" in denying Eva aid, due to a lack of evidence in her story. Priestley presents Mrs Birling's perception of "***duty***" as limited to a **capitalist social duty** of keeping the rich people rich and the poor people poor. In doing so, she **neglects her moral duty** to provide assistance to those who need it the most.



### Image conscious

Mrs Birling's public image is of utmost importance, and she is concerned about how the family is perceived by others.

- Eva's use of the "***Birling***" surname was a cause of **embarrassment** to Mrs Birling, as she felt disgusted by being associated with the lower class.
- Priestley presents Mrs Birling in contrast to her husband:
  - She is his "***social superior***" and fully aware of how a family should appear.
  - Mrs Birling admonishes her husband, telling him that he isn't "***supposed to say such things***" after complimenting their chef, in part because he is a member of their own staff, and also due to Mrs Birling wanting to maintain an image of ignoring the existence of working class people.
- Mrs Birling is accustomed to getting what she desires, whilst maintaining **power** and **control** over others.
  - This power is something she enjoys, as demonstrated by her denial of aid to Eva, whilst sitting on a charity's council.
  - The Inspector's overwhelming sense of **moral authority** is therefore met with great opposition from Mrs Birling.

### Class system only leads to hate

Despite Mrs Birling benefitting from the class system, she is still **discontented** and constantly **paranoid** about her reputation being tarnished.

- Priestley does this to expose the class system for being **toxic** and spreading **discontent** amongst all people.

#### Exam tip -

For visual learners, see Figure 1 at the bottom of the document for a diagram of the social hierarchy





The wealth of the Birlings doesn't bring them happiness, but **paranoia** and **insecurity**. This is evident in the **stage directions** as their home is "**heavily comfortable**", yet lacks the qualities of being "**cosy or homelike**".

- Mrs Birling's husband is never content with his **current status and wealth** because he believes he must constantly prove his wealth and success due to his "**provincial**" origins.
- Mrs Birling's **avarice** (greed for wealth) is demonstrated by her **financially motivated** marriage to Mr Birling.
- Similarly Mr Birling's **cupidity** (greed for money and possessions) is evident as he proclaims Sheila's marriage to Gerald "**one of the happiest nights of my life**".

Priestley shows the unhappiness of the upper class and the suffering of the working class to demonstrate that it is **imperative** to **rid society of this system**.

### Acceptance of responsibility

Priestley portrays Mrs Birling as rejecting any sense of **responsibility**. Mrs Birling is **static** in her character development; she remains **ideologically the same**. This demonstrates her confidence in her own **superiority** yet this also reveals her **stubbornness** and **reluctance** to change.

However, it is possible that Mrs Birling may **consciously** know that her actions were **immoral**, but convinces herself that she has no reason to be responsible for Eva's subsequent actions to end her own life.

Priestley uses Mrs Birling as **symbolic** of the upper classes' **resistance** to change.

The comfortable lifestyle of the Birling family is challenged by **socialist change** and **greater social responsibility**.

Therefore, **accepting responsibility** would mean sacrificing their lives of **privilege** - a sacrifice they are not willing to take.

#### Exam tip -

AQA states that quotes are not essential to making an argument in an essay. Descriptions of "**contrasts and parallels in characters**" are equally valid.

### Cold temperament

Mrs Birling is used by Priestley to symbolise extreme individualism. Priestley deliberately characterises Mrs Birling as a person who is **selfish** and **egocentric** (thinks only of herself).

Mrs Birling gives priority to herself over her own family. This becomes evident when she justifies denying Eva Smith financial aid: "**In spite of what's happened to the girl since, I consider I did my duty**".

- This duty was not a **moral duty**; it was merely to defend her own **social image** and seek revenge against the perceived "**impertinence**" of Eva.
- Priestley similarly portrays Mr Birling as valuing a duty to business over a duty to the needy in society; "**It's my duty to keep labour costs down**".
- This is contrasted by the Inspector who tells them "**it's my duty to ask questions**", investigating the **morality** of the characters in the play and making them consider what their "**duty**" should really be.





She evidently lacks the **capacity to empathise** with the suffering of the lower classes.

- This is demonstrated through her blaming of Eva for her own suicide as ***"I don't suppose for a moment that we can understand why the girl committed suicide"***.
- Furthermore, Mrs Birling provides no comfort to her daughter, Sheila, when she feels **insecure** about her marriage, telling her to ***"get used to that"*** feeling.

### Abuse of power

Priestley shows Mrs Birling as deliberately misusing her upper class power and privilege, presenting her as immoral. Priestley implies that the source of poverty is the greed and immorality of the upper classes.

- This is evident as Eva wouldn't accept Eric's **stolen money**, forcing her to be reliant on charity, yet Mrs Birling ironically stereotyped her as **greedy**.
- Mrs Birling refused to help Eva and thus Eva's **moral predicament** becomes apparent - when the legitimate sources of aid are prejudiced against them, the poor cannot afford to choose where their money comes from.

This irony in Mrs Birling stereotyping the lower classes as inherently greedy is evident:

- The **avarice** (greedy) desire of the upper classes is much stronger than the lower classes, who merely try to survive.
- Mr Birling's greed cost Eva her job as he refused to grant her and the other workers a relatively small pay rise.
- This initial **capitalist** greed sparked a **chain reaction** that ultimately ended in her suicide.

The **exploitation** of the lower classes is the reason why the poor are reliant on aid and charity. They can't help themselves as they have no **power or influence**.

### Contrast with Eva

In contrast to Mrs Birling, Eva is a symbol of morality within the play:

- She refused to take the stolen money and ***"didn't blame [Gerald] at all"***.
- She wouldn't marry Eric because she ***"said [Eric] didn't love her"*** and knew of the consequences Eric would face; he could possibly be disowned by his family.
- Mrs Birling is portrayed, throughout, as ***"cold"***. She has no ***"fine feelings"*** and is oblivious to her wrongdoings and flaws.

### Upholding divisions

Mrs Birling is **symbolic** of maintaining the **traditional class system**. Priestley presents Mrs Birling as failing to see those belonging to the lower classes as people deserving of respect.

- Mrs Birling is strongly in favour of the **class division**.
  - She is critical of Gerald's affair as a ***"wretched business"***, mainly because it was an **inter-class affair**, rather than the fact that it was a betrayal of Sheila.
- Mrs Birling emphasises that Eric ***"didn't belong to [Eva's] class"***, demonstrating her firm belief in the fixed nature of the class system.
  - Priestley's use of the **verb "belong"** demonstrates Mrs Birling's belief that once born into a class, there should be no **social mobility**; where you are born is God's will and this is where you should stay.



- This is slightly **hypocritical** of Mrs Birling as she married Mr Birling, whose “**provincial**” **lower-class** background is evidence of **upward social mobility**.
- She is dismissive of the **abusive nature** of Eric’s relationship with her, objecting most to the fact that Eva was of a lower class.

## Hypocrisy

Priestley provides strong evidence of Mrs Birling’s **prejudice** towards the poor through Mrs Birling’s role as a “**prominent member of the Brumley Women’s Charity Organisation**”.

Priestley Portrays Mrs Birling as **morally hypocritical**.

- She claims “**with dignity**” that “**we’ve done a great deal of useful work for deserving cases**”.
  - This emphasis on the **adjective** “**deserving**” reveals Mrs Birling’s joy in playing God in these young women’s lives - whether they receive aid and benefit or are refused and suffer.
  - Equally, Mrs Birling’s distinction that aid is only for “**deserving cases**” highlights how the aid is given out at the **discretion** of the upper classes.
- Mrs Birling acknowledges her own **prejudice** against Eva’s “**impertinence**” in claiming to be “**Mrs Birling**” as “**one of the things that prejudiced me against her**”.
  - Thus those living in poverty have no way to escape it as they cannot challenge their exploitation; Eva’s attempt to strike saw her fired; the institutes meant to help them are **prejudiced** against them.

### Exam tip -

AQA stresses that you must give the text priority with regards to context. Any context used must be **relevant** to the question.

## Ignorance

Priestley portrays Mrs Birling as **oblivious** to the lives, struggles, and **suffering** of others.

- She is uninterested in the reality of the **suffering** of the poor, instead accepting **convenient truths**, which benefit her perception of how society should function.
- Mrs Birling only accepts that which reinforces her pre-existing beliefs:
  - This is evident as, with regards to Eva’s plea to the charity council: “**it didn’t take long for me to get the truth – or some of the truth – out of her**”.
  - Mrs Birling only considers this the “**truth**” as it confirms her bias against the working class.
  - Eva’s honest recount of events, which didn’t fit with what Mrs Birling believes about **inter-class relationships**, was dismissed as “**silly nonsense**”.

## Symbolism

### Pride

Priestley portrays Mrs Birling as a manifestation of the **cardinal sin** of pride. Mrs Birling’s sense of **self-importance and superiority** drives her to abuse her privilege because she perceives the poor as inferior. She feels entitled to the respect of those **socially inferior** to her, which is demonstrated by her use of the **demeaning adjective** “**impertinent**” to describe Eva.

- She attempts to convey this demand of respect through her **formal language**:



Mrs Birling's **complex and elaborate use of language** masks the unsubstantiated nature of her arguments.

- Similarly Mr Birling compensates for the weakness of his arguments with **quantity** of speech, while Mrs Birling focuses on the **quality** of hers.
- Conversely, the Inspector is **terse** (concise) in speech and refrains from using complex language as his message is well substantiated by the death of Eva.

## Possible 'Topic Sentences'

- Through the character of Mrs Birling, Priestley explores the resistance of the upper class to the change that threatens their social position.
- Priestley explores how the suffering of the working class is perpetuated by the class system through Mrs Birling's denial of financial aid to Eva Smith as a result of class-based prejudices towards her.
- Priestly demonstrates the hypocrisy of the upper classes through the character of Mrs Birling.

### Exam tip -

A 'Topic Sentence' is the first sentence of your argument. This should convey the overall point you are making. It should reference Priestley explicitly and his ideas.

### Exam tip -

Topic sentences should always link back to the question at hand. Also, try to link these sentences together (e.g. discuss the initial, transitional and final portrayals of a character).



## Mrs Birling quote bank by theme

Theme	Quote	Analysis
Responsibility	<b><i>"A piece of gross impertinence"</i></b>	Mrs Birling's reference to Eva's honest tale of woe with the <b>adjective</b> " <b>impertinence</b> " reveals how she believes she is absolved of all responsibility as Eva's claim to be " <b>Mrs Birling</b> " was disrespectful.
	<b><i>"She had only herself to blame"</i></b>	Mrs Birling takes the view that " <b>suicide</b> " is a conscious choice and therefore Eva can only blame herself for taking her own life.
	<b><i>"I did nothing I'm ashamed of"</i></b>	Priestley demonstrates the true extent of Mrs Birling's " <b>cold</b> " nature as despite Eva's death, Mrs Birling does not regret her denial of aid to Eva.
	<b><i>"I did my duty"</i></b>	Priestley's use of the <b>noun</b> " <b>duty</b> " is used to expose Mrs Birling's perception of <b>duty</b> as limited to a <b>capitalist social duty</b> of keeping the rich people rich and the poor people poor. In doing so, she <b>neglects her moral duty</b> to provide assistance to those most in need.
	<b><i>"First I blame the girl herself. Secondly, I blame the young man"</i></b>	Priestley portrays Mrs Birling as unable to accept any responsibility as she deflects blame onto Eric inadvertently. Yet, her <b>hypocrisy</b> is further revealed when she realises, and states " <b>I didn't know</b> ", implying that she would not have placed the blame on her son for the same action.
	<b><i>"He'd be entirely responsible. [...] Compelled to confess in public his responsibility"</i></b>	Mrs Birling's <b>double standards</b> are laid bare by Priestley when she discovers who the father is; the public confession of Eric would <b>tarnish</b> the reputation of the Birling family name. Mrs Birling is not consistent with her morals when it is her reputation at stake.



Pride	<b><i>“Don’t contradict me like that”</i></b>	Priestley presents Mrs Birling as <b>symbolic</b> of <b>conservatism</b> and resistant to change. By contrast, Sheila is representative of the younger generation who embrace radical change and the need for <b>socialism</b> .
	<b><i>“A trifle impertinent”</i></b>	Mrs Birling attempts to convey a demand of respect through her <b>formal and complex vocabulary</b> , evidenced by her accusing the Inspector as being <b>“a trifle impertinent”</b>
	<b><i>“Prominent member of the Brumley Women’s Charity Organisation”</i></b>	Priestley implies that Mrs Birling’s role is not held out of care or compassion for the poor, but as a way to gain <b>influence and status</b> due to her self-professed “prominent” status.
	<b><i>“[With dignity] We’ve done a great deal of useful work helping deserving cases”</i></b>	This emphasis on the <b>adjective “deserving”</b> reveals Mrs Birling’s joy in playing God in these young women’s lives, deciding whether they receive aid and benefit or are refused and suffer, a reflection of the power of the upper classes.
	<b><i>“One of the things that prejudiced me against her case”</i></b>	Mrs Birling sees her treatment of Eva as valid, unashamedly declaring that Eva’s <b>“impertinence”</b> in claiming to be <b>“Mrs Birling”</b> as <b>“one of the things that prejudiced me against her”</b> . This demonstrates that those living in poverty have no way to escape it as they cannot challenge their exploitation; Eva’s attempt to strike saw her fired; the institutes meant to help them are <b>prejudiced</b> against them.
	<b><i>“The rude way he spoke ... it was quite extraordinary!”</i></b>	Priestley’s use of the <b>adjective “rude”</b> reveals Mrs Birling’s perception of the Inspector as disrespectful. In doing so, she attempts to undermine his authority, devalidating his argument, meaning that they don’t have to take responsibility for their actions.
	<b><i>“What business is it of yours?”</i></b>	Priestley’s use of this <b>rhetorical question</b> evidences the <b>arrogance</b> of Mrs Birling and her sense of <b>superiority</b> . This is clear as the Inspector’s job is to <b>“ask questions”</b> and therefore anything related to the death of Eva

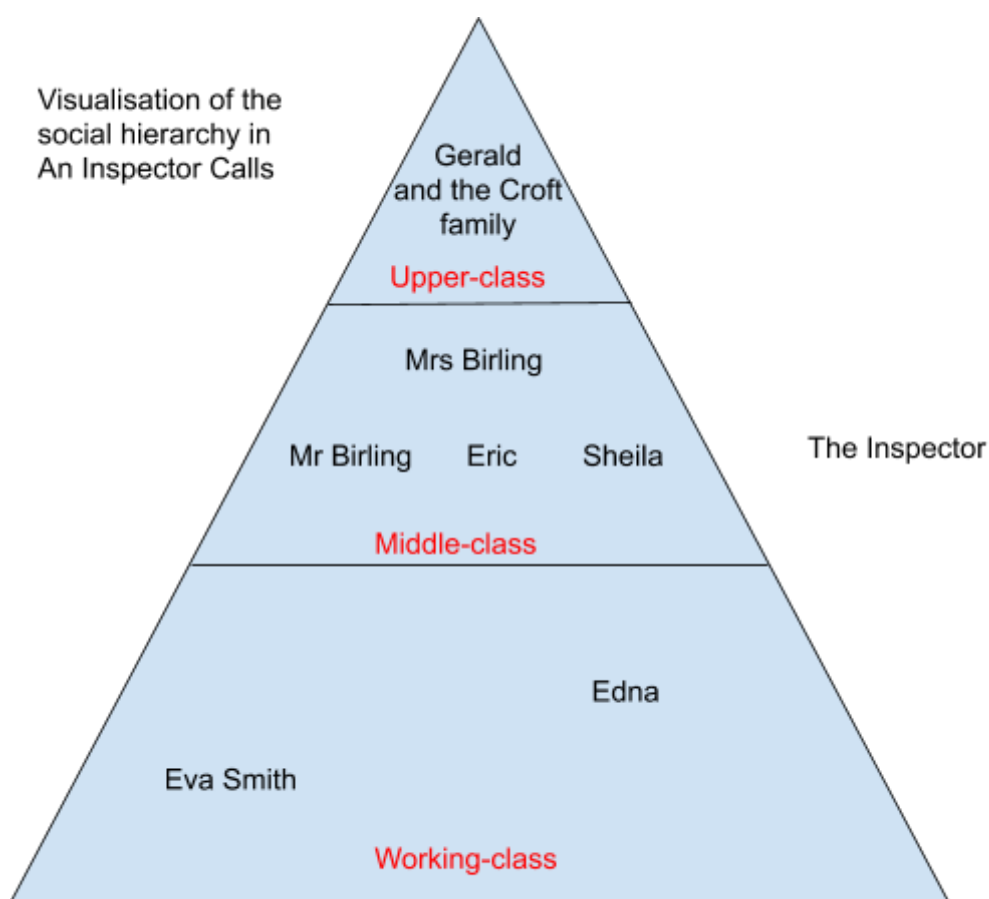


		Smith is the Inspector's " <b>business</b> ".
Class	<b>"Her husband's social superior"</b>	Mrs Birling is, as Priestley describes her in the <b>stage directions</b> , her husband's " <b>social superior</b> ". Therefore, her <b>upper class social etiquette</b> and mannerisms are not natural to Mr Birling and we see that this causes embarrassment to Mrs Birling; image, the way they are perceived by others, is everything.
	<b>"Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things"</b>	Mrs Birling admonishes Mr Birling when he compliments his own chef, accidentally betraying that he is not from the same class as his wife, who tells him that he isn't " <b>supposed to say such things</b> ". Mrs Birling desires to maintain an image of not associating with, and almost ignoring the existence of, lower-class people.
	<b>"Disgusting affair"</b>	She is critical of Gerald's " <b>disgusting affair</b> " as a result of its <b>inter-class nature</b> , rather than because of his disloyalty to Sheila.
	<b>"girls of that class"</b>	This makes it clear that her rejection of Eva's case was purely based on <b>prejudice</b> , shown by Mrs Birling's generalisation " <b>girls of that class</b> ". The determiner 'that' demonstrates contempt of the working class and is further evidence of how deep-rooted the class divide was in 20th century Britain.
Empathy	<b>"A rather cold woman"</b>	Priestley's use of the stage directions to describe Mrs Birling as a " <b>cold woman</b> " would have been perceived as an <b>oxymoron</b> at the time. <b>Contemporary societal norms</b> dictated that <b>women</b> were meant to be loving, <b>maternal</b> and emotional. Therefore, describing Mrs Birling as emotionally " <b>cold</b> " is perhaps an attempt by Priestley to convey that such a <b>detached</b> attitude towards suffering is unnatural.
	<b>"You'll have to get used to that, just as I had"</b>	Mrs Birling provides no comfort to her daughter, Sheila, when she feels <b>insecure</b>





		about Gerald's absence (and potential affair), instead upholding patriarchal norms by telling her to " <b>get used to that</b> " feeling. This is a demonstration of a societal double standard; contemporary women shunned if they did not abstain from sex outside marriage, while men were not condemned for doing so.
	<b>"Claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples"</b>	Mrs Birling perceives the working class as being <b>less human</b> , with less complex emotions, and feels that it is inappropriate for Eva to behave in a way that doesn't conform to her expectations of her class.



**Figure 1**



## First Impressions

### Character in context

Sheila is the daughter of Mr and Mrs Birling, and the sister of Eric Birling. Her status is that of firmly **middle-class**. She's engaged to Gerald Croft who is of a higher social status to her.

Priestley portrays Sheila in the **stage directions** as "**a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited**". This initial portrayal develops and she gains maturity as the play progresses, following her acknowledgement of the part she played in Eva Smith's suicide. Sheila is **receptive** to the Inspector's message and noticeably evolves as a character. Her **jealous instincts** are replaced by a sense of **maturity** by the end of the play.



Sheila is a part of the **younger generation**, alongside Eric. Each child shows resentment towards the lack of **social responsibility** their parents feel. She takes on board the Inspector's message and takes on the role of his **proxy** (represents the Inspector) upon his departure by continuing to reject her parent's views.

### Superficial engagement

The engagement between Sheila and Gerald is one formed on **materialism** and **capitalism**. Her obsession with material objects is demonstrated when Sheila needs the **physical token** of a ring to "**really feel engaged**". This ring is a **visual marker** of **ownership** and commitment from Gerald to their relationship.

- The notion of this ring **validating** their relationship is a **metaphor** for the nature of their marriage. It is founded on **strategic upward social mobility and business relations** between the Crofts and Birlings, rather than love.
  - Therefore, it is only natural that their engagement doesn't feel real until a **monetary investment**, the ring, has been made.
- Priestley presents this engagement to Gerald as **superficial** and **business orientated** to allow Sheila to develop in **maturity** and ultimately return the ring to Gerald by the end of the play.

### Jealous tendencies

Priestley portrays Sheila as **immature** and **insecure** of her own beauty. It is important to consider why Priestley does this at the start of the play and what affect her behaviour has on the audience's perception of her as a character. Sheila is presented as having a jealous mindset, initially, to allow Priestley to develop the character later on in the play as she adopts the Inspector's message of **social responsibility**.

The immediate reaction of Sheila to news of Eva's death was to question her beauty: "**Pretty?**". Here, it can be inferred that Sheila's grief was greater due to Eva being pretty. This demonstrates Sheila's **warped view** of the world, as the value of someone's life depends on their outward



beauty. This view of value being linked to beauty extends to **social classes**, as those who are rich are able to improve their appearance with more beautiful clothes and make-up. Therefore, the logical extension of Sheila's evaluation of people is that upper classes are of a greater value than the lower classes. Priestley does this to encourage the audience to form a **negative perception** of Sheila and view her as **shallow**.

However, Sheila's jealousy is **validated** by the revelation of Gerald's affair with Eva Smith. Mrs Birling's reaction to Gerald's affair reinforces Sheila's jealousy and that men having affairs is **commonplace**: *"you'll have to get used to that, just as I had"*. Priestley does this to evidence the sacrifices women are forced to make in order to maintain the stability that marriage offers. The threat of Eva Smith extends beyond Gerald's loyalty. If Gerald values Eva's beauty to Sheila's, this would **compromise** Sheila's livelihood as she would lose the provider in her life.

### Sheila as a victim

Priestley's presentation of Sheila could, however, be the **product** of her **environment** and the society which she has been exposed to. Sheila merely judges others by their beauty as a result of being judged on this sole value herself. Why does Priestley portray Sheila as a victim of her surroundings and are the contextual restrictions placed on women in early **20th century Britain** significant to her character?

- The women of 1912 had very little in the way of rights and **no political means** to argue for greater rights (women in Britain only gained the right to vote by 1918). This meant Sheila and other middle-class women of 1912 were expected to marry and fulfil the **domestic** role in the household.
- They were subject to a poor standard of education and were **dependent** on their male counterparts financially and for stability in their lives. This was due to women's jobs only paying a small fraction of men's jobs, while many employers refused to hire women.
- Sheila has become attached to her **"fairly substantial"** lifestyle and **"heavily comfortable"** house. However, Sheila cannot maintain this by herself; she requires a man to provide it for her. Therefore, middle-class and upper-class women are **forced** into marriage as the only means of sustaining the lives that they have become accustomed to. Marriage's purpose, therefore, must always have an element of **financial motivation** and not be solely for love.
- Priestley presents a true reflection of women in 1912, as women are valued on their **capacity to attract a man**. It is through men (in this case Gerald) that women (Sheila) can increase her position in the social hierarchy. This **victimhood** of women is demonstrated through Sheila's joy at receiving the ring and asking whether it was **"the one you (Gerald) wanted me to have?"**. It is at this point that Sheila **"really feels engaged"** as she is comforted by the **financial security** that Gerald provides, which is **symbolised** by the ring.

### Parental manipulation

Priestley portrays Sheila as the result of Mr and Mrs Birling's manipulation. Priestley allows the audience to feel **sympathy** towards Sheila and her dislikeable behaviour as Priestley makes it clear that her **immaturity** and **materialism** is a product of her parent's influence.

**Exam tip -**  
When analysing language techniques, ensure you refer to "Priestley" explicitly. This shows the examiner that you are considering his methods directly.



- Sheila's **materialistic** reaction to the ring is reflected by Mr Birling's **capitalist** and business focused speech to "**lower costs and higher prices**".
- Priestley intends for his play to be **educational** in its message and target the **younger generation**. Therefore, it is crucial that Sheila rejects the **traditional** and **outdated** mindset of the older generation, allowing a more **socialist** and **reformed society** to be created.

### Similarities between Sheila and Eva Smith

The similarities between Sheila and Eva are created by Priestley to demonstrate the impact **women's upbringing** have upon their lives. He creates these parallels between the women to compare the **privilege** experienced by Sheila within her higher-class lifestyle, with the squalor and struggle experienced by Eva.

#### Exam tip -

You will develop your AO2 for characterisation, if you are able to include a direct comparison between the characters of Sheila and Eva.

The similarities between the characters is made explicit by Priestley as Sheila is described by the **stage directions** as a "**pretty girl in her early twenties**", while Eva is described by the Inspector as "**twenty-four**" and "**very pretty**".

However, their perceptions of the **future** are presented as a stark contrast by Priestley and as a direct result of the **divisions in social class**. Sheila is "**very excited**" by her potential life of higher social status through marriage to Gerald whereas Eva's suffering was so great that she committed suicide; she couldn't bear to experience the future.

- The audience realises the differing factor between the characters is **class** and therefore it is this distinction that enables Sheila to live carefree.
- It is also class which sentences Eva to a life of constant suffering.

Priestley is able to convey his **promotion of socialism** through this **juxtaposition** of characters, within this **didactic** play (moral teaching).

Alternatively, it could be argued that Priestley creates these **similar characteristics** between Sheila and Eva as it enables the audience to feel more empathy with Sheila. Moreover, it makes it more believable that Sheila would change in her beliefs once she is made aware of how similar she is to Eva. Both these factors help to **further Priestley's own agenda of promoting socialism**.

- As Sheila is so similar to Eva she becomes the most responsive to Priestley's message as she can **empathise the most** (out of the Birlings) for Eva and the working classes.
- Sheila is also able to see the events through the desperate perspective of Eva, due to their similar experience. This is demonstrated through Sheila's disgust at her father's attitude: "**these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people**".
- Sheila is not exploited to the same extent as Eva is, yet, Sheila is nonetheless controlled by men and **surrenders her own autonomy**.



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## Inexcusable

Priestley portrays Sheila as **accepting of her role** in Eva's death, she refuses to make excuses for behaviour (as Mr and Mrs Birling did). The **personal reflection** that Sheila sees in Eva causes her to become unable to dismiss her role in the chain of events, which led to Eva's suicide. Her open stance to her own responsibility is a **distinct contrast** to the other characters in the play, who attempted to **avoid responsibility** or had to be forced by the Inspector to talk:

- Eric couldn't face the truth and impact of his actions and therefore **left the house**.
- Mrs Birling refused to accept responsibility as she deemed her case unworthy of aid and therefore used her "**influence to have it refused**".
- Mr Birling initially pretends to not know who the Inspector is referring to and then maintains a stance of not accepting responsibility.
- Gerald's tone towards the inspector is **misleading** and **reluctant** "**All right, I know her. Let's leave it at that**".

Through Sheila, Priestley is able to convey the message towards the audience to better society and reduce suffering. And, for this to be achieved, it is necessary to start seeing the world from the **perspective of the disadvantaged and persecuted lower-classes**, rather than distancing themselves from them. This genuine care is demonstrated by Sheila's **feminine compassion**, notably in response to Eva's death; "**how horrible!**".

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## Final Impressions

### Permanent change?

The question as to whether Sheila has completely changed for the better by the end of the play is left in an **ambiguous** fashion by Priestley. This uncertainty is revealed by the use of **reverse syntax** in the phrase "**it frightens me, the way you talk**". Priestley inverts this sentence to create **uncertainty** about what is scaring Sheila. This causes her fear to become **central** to the sentence and prompts the question whether Sheila's fear is in fact more complex; does Sheila merely fear the way that Mr and Mrs Birling talk? or does she share her parent's fear of how their lifestyle would be impacted by an increased sense of **social responsibility**?

#### Exam tip -

This consideration of the play's structure will develop your AO2 marks. The examiner will recognise your consideration of both the form of the play and its structure.

Likewise, Sheila's uncertainty is reflected in her **half-rejection** of Gerald and his ring: "**we'd have to start all over again**". Priestley uses **cyclical structure** in the presentation of Sheila at the beginning and end of the play; she must decide on her engagement to Gerald. Despite Gerald's affair, Sheila does not completely reject him. Perhaps this implies that Sheila returns to the ideological position she held at the start of the play. Also, Sheila's failure to reject Gerald's ring is symbolic of her acceptance of **nepotism** (those with power or influence of favouring relatives or friends), **classism** and **patriarchy** that Gerald represents.





## Symbolism of Sheila

### The ideal recipient of the Inspector's message

Sheila's **convictions** (personal, strongly held beliefs) become more open to the Inspector's own views as the play progresses. Priestley demonstrates Sheila's instantaneous recognition of the Inspector's message, as she responds to her father's **dehumanising and capitalist approach** to business with "**these girls aren't cheap labour, they're people**".

However, Sheila is also presented as **ignorant** of the suffering occurring outside of her **privileged bubble**; the Inspector **enlightens** Sheila. Sheila's empathy is evident through the use of the **plural noun "girls"**, as she can relate to the **patriarchal oppression** they face.

- The impact of the Inspector's message is **visually demonstrated** by Priestley through the **stage directions** as "**she goes closer to him wonderingly**". This physical movement towards the Inspector is a reflection of Sheila's mindset moving towards that of the Inspector's **socialist ideology**.
- Priestley suggests, through the Inspector, that Sheila's youthfulness is responsible for her **assimilation** (understanding) of the Inspector's message as "**we often do on the young ones. They're more impressionable.**"
- Sheila's change in mindset to become more **receptive** to the Inspector's message allows her to continue his message and act as his **proxy**, when the Inspector departs. She understands the greater significance of the Inspector as a **moral teaching**, rather than just the threat of prosecution as she realises his **omniscience**: "**(laughs rather hysterically) Why - you fool - he knows. Of course he knows.**"

Sheila is portrayed as the **ideal exemplar** to the audience, showing them how they should react to the Inspector's message. In this manner, Priestley encourages the audience to take on the role of the Inspector and propagate (spread) the need for greater **social responsibility**.

### Ideal representation of repenting and responding to vices (sins)

Priestley portrays Sheila as the perfect responder to her own **wrongdoings** as she accepts

responsibility for her actions **immediately**, without deflecting blame onto others. The openness Sheila shows in accepting responsibility is evident as "**it was my own fault**" and that she "**was in a furious temper**". Sheila, in contrast to the majority of other characters (save Eric), places no blame on Eva. She accepts that her own faults of **jealousy** caused her to envy Eva's beauty and mistreat her.



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This reaction directly contrasts Mrs Birling, who adopts the view that "**firstly I blame the girl herself**". Here, Priestley conveys that **maturity doesn't necessarily increase with age** - in fact the younger generation in Priestley's play are the most mature. Here, Sheila has clearly developed from the character she was at the start of the play, who echoed her mother's use of "**impertinent**" to describe Eva. Priestley, reminds the audience that for **positive socialist change** to





occur there needs to be **critical thought** and a move away from **inheriting toxic capitalist views**.

- ❖ Priestley was determined for 1945 to be a time of change and to not fall back into the **Victorian style divide in classes**. The implementation of the **Beveridge Report** ensured this and formed the foundation of the **Welfare State**.

### Alone in her responsibility

Priestley's combination of Sheila's characteristics as young, receptive, feminine and similar to Eva, causes her to realise the **immorality** of her actions (more than the other characters). Why does Priestley present Sheila as the **most socially responsible**?

- The rest of the Birlings and Gerald are more or less **content in their own immorality** and are **indifferent** to their impact on Eva Smith. Priestley does this to:
  - ◆ Encourage the audience to **oppose societal values** that are accepted, yet **objectively immoral** (such as profiteering and labour exploitation)
  - ◆ Promote the need for a shift from outright **capitalism** to a more **socialist** society, thus embracing new and modern views.
- Sheila contrasts the other characters in the play with her determination to accept responsibility:
  - ◆ Eric's **inability** to accept the impact of his own actions is reflected through the **stage directions** as "**the front door slams**" and he flees the Inspector's inquiry.
  - ◆ Eric's vagueness in his description of his relationship with Eva suggests the extent of his involvement in Eva's suicide is greater than he lets on. Priestley achieves this through **euphemistic language** as Eric describes trying to force entry into Eva's lodgings as "**a row**".
  - ◆ Gerald's initial denial of knowing Eva demonstrates his **valuing** of his own **social status** over the life of Eva Smith (he would rather preserve his status than aid a legal inquiry).
  - ◆ Mr Birling suggests his firing of Eva was **righteous** to "**keep labour prices down**", despite paying his employees a sustenance wage. Blame is further deflected onto Eva, as Mr Birling describes her as a typical "**trouble maker**".
  - ◆ Mrs Birling is the most **zealous** to avoid responsibility. She blames Eva as she implies that "**girls of that class**" are **inherently dishonest**. Her deflections of blame extend to Eric (inadvertently) as she believes that father is to blame and "**If the girl's death is due to anybody, then it's due to him**".

After accepting responsibility, Sheila shows **permanent change** as she promises "**I'll never, never do it to anyone again**". This change in behaviour is, arguably, **more important** than accepting responsibility.

### Sheila's receptiveness to the Inspector is dismissed

The **social responsibility** and remorse felt by Sheila is **objected** to by the other characters in the play. Gerald exercises his **social authority** over Sheila as he requests to the Inspector that she should be "**excused**" for becoming "**hysterical**". The use of this **adjective** is **inherently sexist** and bears connotations of the **mental disorder** 'hysteria'. This disorder can only be diagnosed to women (as it was caused by a 'wandering womb', which the prefix of "**hys**" meaning womb) and is characterised by **emotional excess**. This emotional excess Sheila exhibits is due to her passion



for the Inspector's message of the need to accept responsibility, change and the **immoral** treatment of Eva Smith. Sheila's **overwhelming** emotional response is necessary for change and **socialist reform**; it is this passion, which will prevent her from **regressing** back into her former mindset.

## Hysteria

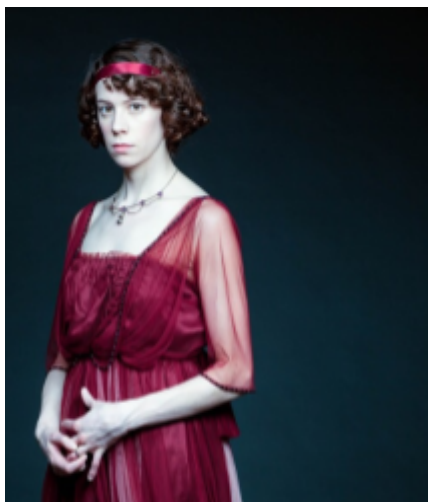
Historically, **hysteria** has been utilised as a means to control women.

- **Unfeminine traits** were **symptomatic** of hysteria, therefore, serving as a method to force women to adhere to predefined **gender roles** (e.g. staying at home and doing household chores, rather than becoming a strong political leader). This prevented women from attaining positions of power due to their tendency to exhibit excessive emotion.
- Priestley ensures that when Sheila challenges the **status quo** she is **condemned** and **dismissed** as **hysterical**:
  - The **stage directions** dictate that "**Sheila gives a short hysterical laugh**" in response to her mother's use of the "**silly word**" "**impertinent**". Sheila's laugh is **symbolic** of her rejection of Mrs Birling's treatment of Eva.
  - Mrs Birling objects to Sheila condemning Eric and "**severely**" informs her that she's "**behaving like a hysterical child**".
- The accusation of hysteria is used as an effective method to attack Sheila personally, rather than the socialist ideas that she attempts to argue. This form of **ad hominem** allows the Birlings and Gerald to continue their lives of privilege, without worrying about social responsibility.

## Reaction of the audience

The audience is encouraged by Priestley to **relate to Sheila** and therefore identify with her view of increased **social responsibility**. It is crucial to understand why Priestley attempts to align the audience's empathy with Sheila and her views.

- Priestley infuses Sheila's language with **rhetorical devices**, which resonate with the audience: "**You knew it then. You began to learn something. And now you've stopped.**" This **group of three** is memorable of the Inspector's direct and **terse** (short) accusations against the Birlings.
  - Sheila must be the focus of the audience and who they find the most likeable. Priestley does this as Sheila takes on the role of the Inspector (once he leaves). Therefore, it is Priestley's intention that **the audience emulate Sheila** and take on extra **social responsibility**. Without Priestley portraying Sheila as likeable, his message of **socialism** would be less effective as the audience would not take on board the Inspector's thrust to the same extent and reform themselves.



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## Relations with other characters

### Rejection of parents

The values that Mr and Mrs Birling imposed on Sheila are rejected, increasingly, as the play continues. The **rebellion** of Sheila against her parents' established views is critical to the **didactic** (moral teaching) nature of the play.

- Both parents are directly challenged by Sheila, as she **condemns** her father ***"these girls aren't cheap labour"***. Sheila views Mr Birling's employees as individuals and despises the exploitation of their labour, by her father. She also rejects her mother's use of ***"impertinent"*** as ***"such a silly word"***.
- This rejection of her parents is further demonstrated by her refusal to commands, such as refusing Mr Birling's **imperative** to go to bed.
- She loses respect for her parents, as her **informal** and **childish tone**: ***"look mummy isn't it a beauty"*** changes to a serious and critical one: ***"Mother, I think it was cruel and vile"***. This change from ***"mummy"*** to ***"mother"*** is acknowledged by Mrs Birling, who realises she can no longer **infantise** Sheila and therefore refers to her a ***"young woman"***.

### Alignment with inspector and awareness of supernaturalism

The Inspector is acknowledged to be, by Sheila, beyond the nature of a normal human. The Inspector's impression upon Sheila is echoed through her **repetition** of his final words ***"fire and blood and anguish"***. The Inspector's supernatural attributes are recognised by Sheila, who realises the **homophone** (same pronunciation but different meaning) of Inspector Goole's name: ***"ghoul"***. This, coupled with the Inspector's **omniscience** (knowledge of everything), creates an image of an **avenging angel** on a **moral crusade** for greater **social responsibility**.

### Engagement to Gerald

Marrying Gerald is **symbolic** of Sheila accepting the **corruption**, gender and class inequality of society. It is important to consider why Priestley uses Gerald as a construct in this manner.

Sheila's question to Gerald: ***"Is it the one you wanted me to have?"*** reveals the control Gerald has over Sheila, in the beginning of the play. By the end of the play Sheila ends their engagement and returns the ring; rejecting Gerald extends to the rejection of the ideas he represents - the **individualist school of thought**. Therefore, this rejection is Sheila putting **principle and morality** before her own **financial security**.

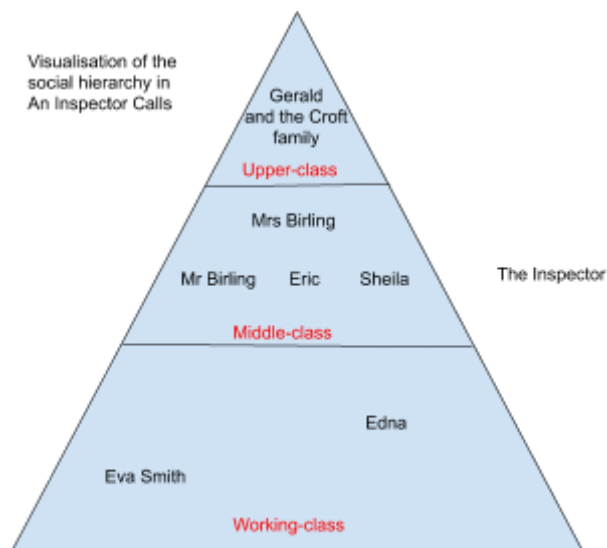


Figure 1



Sheila's initial relationship with Gerald excites her, Sheila is "**very pleased with life and rather excited**". The excitement of financial stability and power it will bring her allows her to be **blissfully ignorant** of life's **cruelties** and **inequalities**.

### Rejection

Sheila's rejection of Gerald occurs directly after the Inspector arrives and reveals the corruption and exploitation within society. Sheila acknowledges that she has changed "**you and I aren't the same people**", as not only has Sheila changed how she views Gerald, but also how she perceives the injustices in society as she can no longer ignore them. Gerald's second engagement proposal follows the revelation that the Inspector was fake. Sheila is still reluctant because she understands that the Inspectors' message had a greater meaning.

The **authenticity** of the Inspector is irrelevant as the **injustices** in society are very real. Sheila exclaims that "**lucky for us**" there may have been no suicide for their actions, yet, this doesn't change their **immoral nature**.

### **Possible 'Topic Sentences'**

- Priestley explores the superficial nature of Sheila's engagement with Gerald and the transactional purpose of their relationship to...
- Priestley explores the detrimental effect of the class-system through the similarities between Sheila and Eva Smith and the differing experiences of upper and lower-class backgrounds.
- Priestley explores the character of Sheila as the ideal recipient of the Inspector's message, as her role as the Inspector's proxy is Priestley's preferred response from the audience.



## Sheila quote bank by theme

Theme	Quote	Analysis
Responsibility	<b><i>"Oh - how horrible"</i></b>	Sheila is the only character who expresses genuine emotion towards the suicide of Eva Smith. Priestley demonstrates this through the use of a <b>dash</b> , indicating Sheila's authentic displeasure.
	<b><i>"I was in a furious temper" and "It was my own fault" and "I behaved badly too. I know I did".</i></b>	Sheila is instantly open toward accepting responsibility and is self-critical of her selfish actions
	<b><i>"I felt rotten about it at the time"</i></b>	Priestley's use of the <b>informal adjective "rotten"</b> demonstrates Sheila's lack of maturity in <b>vocabulary</b> . However, she also shows remorse for her actions, which she instantly knew was wrong. Arguably, this is Priestley conveying the message that maturity is proportional to the level of <b>social responsibility</b> you feel, rather than using <b>formal vocabulary</b> .
	<b><i>"If I could help her now, I would" and "I'll never, never do it again to anybody"</i></b>	Priestley evidences Sheila's commitment to changing her attitude towards <b>social responsibility</b> .
	<b><i>"I suppose we're all nice people now"</i></b>	Priestley uses this <b>rhetorical device</b> , coupled with a <b>sarcastic tone</b> to convey Sheila's disapproval of her parents and Gerald's lack of remorse. The lack of a potential criminal conviction doesn't <b>alleviate</b> their immoral actions.
Older generation vs younger generation	<b><i>"It's you two who are being childish - trying not to face the facts"</i></b>	Sheila recognises her parents' faults. Priestley uses <b>irony</b> to expose the lack of responsibility and immaturity of Mr and Mrs Birling, as Sheila (the child) labels her parents as " <b>childish</b> ".
Parental manipulation	<b><i>"Impertinent"</i></b>	The use of the <b>adjective "impertinent"</b> to describe Eva Smith is unusual for the childish character of Sheila and is realised by the audience as influenced by the <b>formal vocabulary</b> of Mrs Birling.
Maturity	<b><i>"pretty girl in her early twenties" and "very pleased with life and rather excited"</i></b>	Sheila is initially portrayed through the <b>stage directions</b> as living comfortably and blissfully ignorant of society's injustices. Priestley does this to develop Sheila as a character later in the play, into a more socially responsible person.



	<b><i>“You and I aren’t the same people”</i></b>	Sheila has gained maturity since her initial engagement with Gerald. Sheila’s perception of Gerald has changed and she can no longer ignore the injustices in society.
	<b><i>“You don’t seem to have learnt anything”</i></b>	Here, Sheila acknowledges the purpose of the Inspector’s inquiry - a <b>moral teaching</b> . Priestley does this to portray the older generation as stubborn and opposed to changing their stance on <b>responsibility</b> .
	<b><i>“No not yet. It’s too soon. I must think.”</i></b>	This pivotal moment is where Sheila must either accept or reject Gerald and the <b>capitalist individualism</b> he stands for. The use of this <b>imperative “must”</b> is a direct message from Priestley to the audience - to think for themselves.
Materialism	<b><i>“Now I really feel engaged”</i></b>	Sheila’s obsession with <b>material objects</b> is demonstrated when Sheila needs the <b>physical token</b> of a ring to <b>“really feel engaged”</b> . This ring is a <b>visual marker</b> of <b>ownership</b> and commitment from Gerald to their relationship.
	<b><i>“Is it the one you (Gerald) wanted me to have?”</i></b>	Priestley’s use of this question reveals the extent of <b>patriarchal control</b> Gerald has over Sheila. Beginning with the choice of ring and inevitably extending to controlling the <b>minutiae of quotidian life</b> (little details of everyday life).
Capitalism vs Socialism	<b><i>“Pretty?”</i></b>	Here, it can be inferred that Sheila’s grief was greater due to Eva being pretty. This demonstrates Sheila’s <b>warped view</b> of the world, as the value of someone’s life depends on their outward beauty.
	<b><i>“But these girls aren’t cheap labour - they’re people”</i></b>	Priestley demonstrates Sheila’s instantaneous recognition of the Inspector’s message, as she objects to her father’s <b>dehumanising and capitalist approach</b> to business.
	<b><i>“impertinent is such a silly word”</i></b>	Sheila, later on in the play, has developed in maturity and <b>rejects</b> her mother’s use of the formal adjective <b>“impertinent”</b> to criticise Eva as <b>“such a silly word”</b> .





## First Impressions

### Character in context

It's crucial to have an understanding of the character Eric Birling, to have a greater sense of the message of the play *An Inspector Calls*.

Eric is the son of Mr and Mrs Birling and Sheila is his sister. Eric is employed by his father Birling and Co. and is instantly portrayed as having a **drinking habit** by Priestley (perhaps attempting to drown his sorrows).

Drawn by  
Sarah  
Stubington



The **stage directions** dictate that Eric is in his “**early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive**” and demonstrates his **naivety**. Priestley uses Eric as **symbolic of redemption**; no matter the **atrocities** committed in the past, he has the capacity to **change and improve**.

- Priestley presents Eric in a **sympathetic light** through Eric's opposition to Mr Birling's **capitalist and individualistic** attitudes.
- The audience's feeling of sympathy for Eric is increased by the evident lack of a good role model as a father.
- Priestley portrays society's norms as the reason for the **immoral behaviour** of Eric (his rape of Eva) - he is simply following in the footsteps of other men.
- Eric is presented as **naive and ignorant** of the true extent of the suffering of the **lower-class**.
- **Remorse and regret** is clearly shown by Eric while he **accepts responsibility** for his actions, yet he rejects taking sole responsibility for her **suicide**.
- The character of Eric can be seen as a **source of optimism**; anyone can change for the better.

### Innately moral

Priestley portrays Eric Birling as able to make the distinction between right and wrong throughout the play. It is important to understand why Priestley presents Eric in this **favourable fashion**.

**Eric's emotional response** to the news of Eva's death shows that he has morals. Priestley demonstrates this through the **stage directions** “[**involuntarily**] **My God!**”.

- Priestley's use of the **adverb** “**involuntarily**” demonstrates the **moral nature** of Eric as he could not suppress his **emotional reaction**; it is involuntary.
- Eric would not choose to reveal his emotions within a patriarchal society which **condemns feminine traits** such as **excessive emotion** as the disorder “**hysteria**”.

#### Exam tip -

Ensure that any references to Priestley's methods are directly linked to the question at hand. Failing to link your analysis with the question will cause a drop in AO1.

Here, Priestley attempts to convey the message that emotion is human and thus necessary for society to improve. Furthermore, he wants the audience to react like Eric did and feel instinctively emotional.

Eric's reaction to her death is contrasted with Mr Birling's who Priestley describes in the **stage directions** as “**rather impatiently**” and dismissing her suicide with “**yes yes. Horrible business**”.



Here, Priestley makes the distinction between the older and younger generation and their differing attitudes to the lower classes.

### Socialist views

Priestley portrays Eric to have personal views which are inherently **socialist**. It is important to consider why Priestley exhibits Eric as possessing these views (despite his **atrocious** act of raping Eva).



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/profiles/5MqqrFYCZvS7s9HDJw2Fb0R/eric-birling>

- Eric condemns his father's **capitalist** view of his workers and challenges this through the question ***"why shouldn't they try for higher wages?"***.
  - It is clear that Eric is able to empathise with the **lower-classes** and can recognise the need for better workplace rights and the even more desperate need of ridding society of the practice of **exploiting labourers**.
- Priestley presents Eric, with the **capacity for empathy and emotion**, which therefore separates him (and Sheila) from the other characters, who are unable to experience such emotions.
  - This is done to demonstrate Eric as **morally superior** and as a character, which the audience should align themselves with.

### Aware of hypocrisy and corruption

The upper-class' internal **corruption** and **hypocrisy** is acknowledged by Eric, explicitly, throughout the play. It is important to understand why Priestley demonstrates Eric as not completely **naive**, but aware of levels of corruption in society.

- Eric initially sees Mr Birling's **hypocrisy** in the determination to achieve ***"lower costs and higher prices"***, yet, denying Eva and his employees a higher wage.
  - Eric exclaims his discontent with such **hypocrisy** as ***"why shouldn't they try for higher wages"*** as ***"we try for the highest possible prices"***.
- He realises that there is no **meritocracy** and that a ***"good worker"*** does not constitute better treatment, but that **capitalism** exists fundamentally to exploit workers and create profit.
- Eric recognises how his father is **hypocritical** in hiding his views from Inspector as he ***"[Laughs bitterly] I didn't notice you told him that it's every man for himself"***.
  - Eric lets out a ***"bitter"*** laugh because he realises Mr Birling's **hypocrisy**, yet, there is no humour to be found in the **moraleless capitalism**, which his father abides by.

### Reluctantly conforms to the class system

Priestley portrays Eric as too weak to be able to stand up to the way his father treats the lower classes. Eric knows and understands it's **immoral**, wrong and ridiculous but sits by and **conforms**. It is important to understand why Priestley presents Eric as continuing to abide by the social conventions of exploiting those in the lower-classes and failing to meaningfully oppose this system.

#### Exam tip -

For visual learners, see Figure 1 at the bottom of the document for a diagram of the social hierarchy



Priestley demonstrates Eric's discomfort towards his family's lifestyle and privilege, through the **stage directions** "**not quite at ease**". These **foreshadow** Eric's attitude throughout the entire play; he is not quite at ease with his father's behaviour, nor is he quite at ease with his own.

Eric is eager to be done with talk of their engagement as he realises the ridiculousness of the toasts for a marriage which is merely a **transaction**. Even though he disapproves, he is portrayed as powerless to do anything. This is evident as Eric interrupts his father's engagement speech and protests "**[not too rudely] Well don't do any (speechmaking). We'll drink to their health and have done with it.**"

- Although Eric interrupts through the **stage directions**, he does it "**[not too rudely]**" as he doesn't have the power to challenge his father directly yet is not quite at ease with the **capitalist** purpose of his sister's marriage.

### Anyone is capable of immorality

Initially Eric is portrayed as a positive character who has morals, he disapproves of Mr Birling's individualistic **business rhetoric** (speech). However, the revelation of Eric's rape of Eva demonstrates that sin is not beyond anyone. It is important to consider why Eric is exhibited in this way by Priestley.

- Eric acknowledges that Mr Birling's "**respectable friends**", such as "**alderman Meggerty**" are acting immorally, but Eric is too weak to stand up for his own beliefs. Therefore, he ends up going along and copying them.
- Arguably, alcohol is Eric's response and coping mechanism to the **hypocrisy** and **materialism** of his family.
  - There are also **lower-class connotations of alcoholism**.
- Through suggesting that it is Eric's perceived **lack of influence**, which **precludes** (prevents) him from making change, Priestley teaches that people need to stand up for reform regardless of who they are in society.
  - Therefore, everyone should unite in dissent, rather than disregard their morals (otherwise they may end up accepting what's wrong like Eric did).
  - Even Eva, who is the exemplar of morality, is forced to **immoral prostitution** out of desperation.

### Why is Eric like this?

The audience's sympathy for Eric is maintained by Priestley throughout the play in an attempt to keep him **redeemable**. We are shown potential reasons for Eric's behaviour which can allow the audience to sympathise with him. Priestley attempts to encourage a **positive perception** of Eric through a **deflection of blame** onto his parents and the society in which he lives.

#### Parenting

Eric's childhood has been within a "**not cosy and homelike**" environment. Instead he has been raised by a "**cold woman**" and a father who is "**not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble**". Priestley therefore encourages the audience to view Eric as the product of poor parenting. Through denying **Eric care or compassion** throughout his childhood, Eric's parents have **condemned** him to treating others with the same **callousness** (cruel disregard for others) by offering no support, they have **stunted his moral development**.



Priestley preceded the Inspector's arrival with a **series of lectures** delivered from Mr Birling to Eric and Gerald. Considering the **capitalist**, **individualistic** and **patriarchal content** of Mr Birling's speech, perhaps Priestley uses this to show the audience that Eric is being shaped by the values of his father. He has been taught to disrespect women and disregard the lower-classes therefore

### Normal male behaviour

Priestley provides a legitimate explanation for Eric's **immoral actions**. We are shown by Gerald that "**respectable**" men use prostitutes therefore Eric has learnt to associate prostitution with the normal behaviour of the upper-class. His behaviour is therefore **normalised**.

- **Contextually**, Eric's behaviour can also **be excused** (to a certain degree) as, within 1912 society, women were perceived as being inferior to men in all aspects of life. This meant their value was measured through the **utility of their bodies** and **sexual appeal**.



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### Unreliable narration

Eric is left to tell the story about what he did to Eva which means his narration is likely to be **unreliable**. His **biased** telling of the story (to make himself look less bad) enables the audience to take what they want from the story and ignore anything they don't want to believe.

- He says "**and that's when it happened**". The use of the **pronoun "it"** allows the audience members to fill in the gaps about what 'it' is that Eric did to Eva. Thus, Priestley manipulates the audience into perceiving Eric as **redeemable** as they **retain their own opinion** of whether he actually did rape Eva
  - This implies that it is Priestley's intention for Eric to be favoured by the audience and serve as a **medium for socialist ideas** and **converted capitalists**.
- Priestley uses the **euphemistic phrase** "**that state when a chap easily turns nasty**" as a substitute for Eric's admittance of being drunk.
  - Priestley's choice of colloquial language **normalises** Eric's lack of restraint which implies that it's the alcohol which caused him to act in that way, not his lack of morals. This prompts the question of whether he would have abused Eva if he was sober.

Throughout the play the audience is encouraged to consider whether Eric's actions are really **reflective of his true character**, or whether society has **conditioned** him to behave in this manner.



## Final impressions

### Genuine regret

Eric is portrayed by Priestley as **repentant and remorseful** for his **immoral** actions towards Eva. It is important to understand why Priestley presents Eric as **experiencing regret**.

- Eric immediately recalls his actions as “**yes I remember** - “. Priestley does this to demonstrate Eric’s authentic regret, as he still thinks about Eva and the impact of his actions.
- Priestley’s **linguistic** use of **euphemistic phrases and dramatic exit** shows that Eric feels guilty and doesn’t want to think about what he did, as he’s ashamed of his actions.
- Priestley uses the **third-person** when Eric is recalling the events of his relationship with Eva, such as “**when a chap**”. This allows Eric to **disassociate himself** from his cruel actions.

### Limited responsibility

Priestley portrays Eric as only **partially accepting responsibility** for the death of Eva Smith. It is important to understand why Priestley presents Eric as **failing to accept full responsibility** for his actions and feel **sufficiently guilty**.

Priestley reinforces Eric’s **evasion of responsibility** as he excuses his behaviour by comparing his **exploitation of Eva** to the use of prostitutes by Mr Birling’s “**respectable friends**”.

- Here, Eric implies that he is not **responsible** for how he acted, due to a lack of good role models to follow.

“**that state when a chap easily turns nasty**”. Here, Eric insinuates that **alcohol-fuelled** violence is a state familiar to all men and is therefore acceptable. Priestley’s use of the **colloquial noun** “**chap**” suggests Eric is **trivialising** the situation and doesn’t feel **guilty** to a great extent.

Eric’s attempts to **divert blame** away from himself – be it the influence of **immoral men** or his own **intoxication** – causes him to be perceived as similar to the older generation as he is **avoiding responsibility**.

- It is this avoidance of **responsibility**, which Priestley places the blame for society’s problems on.
- Priestley attempts to cure this with the character of the Inspector, which causes Eric to be consequently depicted as **unsympathetically**.





## Relationships with other characters

### Mr Birling

Priestley presents Eric as in **direct opposition** to Mr Birling ideologically. It is important to consider why Priestley portrays this **father-son relationship as opposing**.

Eric consistently challenges and opposes Mr Birling's opinions and capitalist attitudes.

- Eric raises the question of “**what about war**”, which is opposed by Mr Birling who is staunchly confident in “**the Germans don't want war**”.
- Mr Birling's proud claim of striving for “**lower costs and higher prices**” is rejected by Eric, who questions “**why shouldn't they try for higher prices**” and that she simply “**can't go and work somewhere else**”.
- Mr Birling's **maxim** (rule of conduct): “**If you don't come down sharply on some of these people, they'd soon be asking for the earth**”, is rejected by Eric as “**I think it was a damn shame (that Eva died)**” and that you “**can't blame her**”.

#### Exam tip -

You will develop your AO2 for characterisation, if you are able to include a direct comparison between the characters of Mr Birling and Eric.

Priestley places these characters in **juxtaposition** to mirror the conflict between **capitalism and socialism**. Eric's opinions are **socialist** by nature – he is standing up for worker's rights and exposing the **corruption and exploitation of capitalism**.

- Priestley's portrayal of Mr Birling as dislikeable is achieved through playing on Mr Birling's **ignorance surrounding world affairs** (e.g. the impending world war) through **dramatic irony**.
  - His lack of emotion towards Eva's death (dismissing it “**rather impatiently**”) also contributes to his abhorrent presentation.
  - By standing in opposition to his father, Eric is viewed favourably by the audience.

### Mrs Birling - the uncaring mother

Priestley portrays Eric as lacking a **caring** and maternal mother. Mrs Birling has greater concern for the way in which Eric and Sheila **present themselves** as upper-class citizens, rather than their own wellbeing. It is important to consider why Priestley portrays Mrs Birling as **indifferent** to Eric's **welfare**.

Mrs Birling, inadvertently, diverts blame onto Eric for Eva's suicide as “**He should be made an example of. If the girl's death is due to anybody, then it's due to him**”.

- However, upon realising that Eric is indeed Eva's partner she refuses to accept this as the truth: “**Eric, I can't believe it. There must be some mistake.**”
- Mrs Birling refuses this fact as it **jeopardises** the **reputation** of the Birling family, which she values over her son's loss of a child.
- Eric's outrage towards his mother, who is similarly **unsympathetic** and fails to even apologise, is demonstrated by Priestley: “**Then - you killed her... and the child she'd have had too – my child – your own Grandchild – you killed them both – damn you, damn you.**” and “**You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried.**”





Mrs Birling expresses her disappointment in her son as “***Eric I’m absolutely ashamed of you***”. Here, it is clear Mrs Birling still hasn’t accepted any **responsibility** and more importantly Mrs Birling shows no **remorse**.

- It is important to note that Mrs Birling only expresses this after the Inspector’s leave, as perhaps, she knew that he would object to her saying this.
- Eric responds to this with “***well, I don’t blame you. But don’t forget I’m ashamed of you as well - yes both of you***”. This shows that Eric has, conversely, accepted responsibility as “***I don’t blame you*** (Mrs Birling)” for being “***ashamed***”.
- Mrs Birling remains **unsympathetic** towards Eric despite denying aid to her **to-be-granddaughter’s mother** and effectively providing the final blow to Eva before committing suicide.

## Sheila

Both Eric and Sheila are portrayed as appreciating the importance of the Inspector’s message. In aligning the two characters, Priestley is clearly showing the difference between the younger generation and the older generation in their attitudes towards others.

- Both of the **younger-generation** characters are in opposition (or at least appear to be) to the **older-generation’s beliefs of capitalism and individualistic tendencies**.
- Through this, Priestley suggests that people must work together despite their differences for the shared aim of **bettering society**.
  - Even if their ideas are different, it is **imperative** to still work together in order to reach this goal.
- The Inspector acknowledges their age as making them “***more impressionable***”, to both the **ideologies** of their parents and the ideology of **socialism** that the Inspector **propagates** (spreading).



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## Does he change as much as Sheila?

Eric’s agreement with some **socialist ideas** is not to the same extent as Sheila’s comprehensive **conversion to socialist ideology**. It is important to consider if Eric’s favouring of the Inspector is merely due to Eric’s agreeable nature and why Priestley portrays **Eric’s socialist ideas** as being weak.

Priestley conveys this **ambivalence** (uncertainty) in Eric’s mindset through a heightened emotional state as he acts erratically in the **stage directions** changing quickly from “***[shouting]***” to “***[quietly]***”.



- Perhaps Eric has been **emotionally overwhelmed** by the Inspector and is, therefore, not speaking seriously when he supports the inspectors view. Instead, it is a **superficial**, impulsive level of agreement.
- Arguably, Eric finds **moral sanctuary** in agreeing with the Inspector as it is easier to do this than to argue with him.

The influence of a lot of alcohol must also be taken into account, as **Eric's speech is tainted with intoxication** his degree of seriousness is thrown into doubt. This altered state of consciousness may lead to Eric not accepting **socialism** once sober and calm.

Priestley leaves the play on a **dramatic cliff-hanger**, leaving the audience to predict the characters' response to the second death of a mysterious girl.

- Maybe Priestley does this to **force the audience** to consider how they, themselves, would respond to the death and question whether their response would be **moral**. This will then reflect onto their own life decisions and prompt questions on how they live their lives.
- Priestley encourages the audience to consider the consequences of different attitudes held by different characters in the play.
- Arguably, he intends for the audience to compare their own attitudes to that of the characters in the play - causing the audience to view the **physical manifestations** of their own set of beliefs.

## Eva

Priestley's portrayal of Eric's relationship with Eva goes against tradition, due to its **inter-class nature**. It is important to understand why Priestley deliberately chooses this affair to be **inter-class** and what **social impact** this has.

**Exam tip -**  
When writing about characters, ensure you refer to them as constructs used by Priestley. This will show a greater understanding to the examiner and develop AO2.

Eric's abuse of Eva and violence towards her is not explicitly revealed, as Eric uses **euphemisms** when referring to their relationship (and potential rape) such as "**that's when it happened**", "**I was in a state where a chap easily turns nasty**" and he "**threatened to make a row**". This deliberate use of **vague euphemistic language** hides the true extent of Eric's **immoral behaviour**.

Eric's **vague language implies** that it is likely to be rape as his **euphemisms** reveal his guilt and desire to avoid facing what he did. However, this doubt over what Eric actually did allows Eric to **remain redeemable**, in the eye of the audience. He can be used by Priestley as an example for the audience of accepting **greater social responsibility** and as evidence that they can change their ways to make up for their **past immorality**.

Their **sexual relationship** takes an unconventional turn as Eva's role evolves, essentially from partners to a more **maternal relationship** as "**In a way she treated me – as if I were a kid. Though I was nearly as old as she was.**" Eva realises Eric's **immaturity and ignorance** to the **societal conventions** of 1912 British society, which essentially forbids **inter-class relationships**. Therefore, she felt obliged to "**refuse (Eric's stolen) money**" as she did not belong to Eric's class and their relationship could not be public. This refusal of Eric's money contradicts the **lower-class**



**stereotype** of **immoral scavengers**, which Mrs Birling propagates as she exclaims “**as if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money**”.

### Eric's relationship with Eva

Eric's treatment of Eva is **symbolic** of the abuse the working-class are subjugated to by the upper-class.

The Inspector's “**line of enquiry**” finishes with Eric where his offence is shown to have pushed Eva over the edge, resulting in her suicide. Priestley makes Eric's offence against Eva the most severe and least forgivable. The other characters abused Eva **indirectly** and therefore seem **less responsible** for her suicide. This is exemplified through Mrs Birling and Sheila using their **intangible influence** to cause Eva to lose her job and be **refused charity**, respectively. Then she was abused emotionally through removing their companionship.

Eric combines these offences in an offence that is **both physical and emotional** as he abuses Eva using his social influence and physically overpowers her. He uses physical force to gain entry into Eva's house despite “**she didn't want me to go in**”. Then Eric continues to emotionally harm Eva as he proceeds to “**turn nasty**”.

It is the combination of these wrongdoings that causes his actions to be perceived by the audience as **excessively immoral**. However, it is also this **explicit immorality** that offers hope for the audience. If Eric can change his ways and redeem himself, then there is a possibility for everyone in the audience to do the same.

### Possible 'Topic Sentences'

- Priestley uses Eric to reveal the inequality in society between men and women and the way in which the upper classes abuse their power.
- Priestley portrays Eric sympathetically as he is the opposite of Mr Birling and challenges his father's claim of innocence.
- However, Eric does not initially show remorse, and this serves to reinforce Priestley's development of him as an unsympathetic character.
- On the other hand, Priestley could be using Eric's seemingly normal outward appearance to make a point about his actions being due to the influence of the society the Inspector is so heavily critical about.

#### Exam tip -

A 'Topic Sentence' is the first sentence of your argument. This should convey the overall point you are making. It should reference Priestley explicitly and his ideas.

#### Exam tip -

Topic sentences should always link back to the question at hand. Also, try to link these sentences together (e.g. discuss the initial, transitional and final portrayals of a character).



## Eric quote bank by theme

Theme	Quote	Analysis
Responsibility	<b><i>"you killed her – and the child...your own grandchild"</i></b>	<p>Priestley encourages the audience to <b>sympathise</b> with Eric. Despite the Inspector's attempts to enlighten the Birling family that they are all <b>jointly responsible</b>, Eric's accusation of blame upon his mother is <b>tantamount</b> (equivalent) to Mrs Birling's blame of the <b>"father"</b>.</p> <p>By merely placing all the blame upon his mother, with <b>"you killed her,"</b> Eric attempts to <b>absolve himself from any blame</b>.</p>
	<b><i>"You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried"</i></b>	<p>Eric continues to <b>undermine himself</b> as he berates his mother <b>"You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried"</b>. Priestley's use of <b>repetition</b> and <b>hyperbole</b> creates a <b>parody</b> of the <b>sweeping statements</b> we might expect a teenager to use in an argument with their parents.</p>
Gender inequality	<b><i>"[Suddenly guffaws] I don't know - really. Suddenly I felt I just had to laugh."</i></b>	<p>Priestley's use of the <b>stage directions</b> to portray Eric as he <b>"suddenly guffaws"</b> occurs directly after Gerald tells Sheila that he will <b>"be careful"</b> after she has told him that she is <b>suspicious</b> of Gerald's time away from her in the summer.</p> <p>Perhaps this sudden <b>"guffaw"</b> indicates that Eric knows that Gerald is routinely unfaithful. Eric would certainly see this <b>first hand</b> as they both attend the <b>Palace Bar</b> specifically with the intention of picking up women or prostitutes.</p>
	<b><i>"She wasn't the usual sort"</i></b> <b><i>"She didn't know what to do"</i></b>	<p>Priestley reveals Eric's previous experiences with prostitutes, as Eva <b>"wasn't the usual sort"</b>. The <b>adjective</b> <b>"usual"</b> implies that visiting prostitutes is the <b>norm</b> for Eric. Eric's</p>



		<p>observation that “<b>she didn’t know what to do</b>” implies both that he is attracted to Eva’s <b>innocence</b>, and also that he might realise that she is a woman he can exploit because of her <b>ignorance</b>.</p>
	<p><b>“I hate these fat old tarts”</b></p>	<p>Eric’s <b>proclamation</b> of “<b>I hate these fat old tarts</b>” reveals his disgust at his own <b>hypocrisy</b> in frequenting the palace bar, looking for sex. Priestley implies, through Eric, that - for all men - it is a <b>social norm</b> to pay for sex.</p> <p>The upper-class’ use of prostitution <b>symbolic</b> of their exploitation of the <b>female lower-class</b>, who are the prostitutes that are abused by high-class men.</p>
Guilt	<p><b>“I insisted – it seems”</b></p>	<p>On Eric’s visit to Eva’s lodgings: “<b>I insisted – it seems</b>”. Priestley’s use of the <b>verb “insisted”</b> implies that Eric may have <b>physically overwhelmed</b> Eva’s resistance. Priestley’s use of the <b>ambiguous verb phrase “it seems”</b> reveals Eric’s attempt to forget his immoral actions, and <b>distance himself</b> from his <b>guilt</b>.</p>
	<p><b>“in that state when a chap easily turns nasty”</b></p>	<p>Priestley demonstrates Eric’s <b>subconscious</b> attempts to distance himself from his actions by switching from <b>first person to third person</b> as he refers to himself as “<b>a chap</b>” rather than ‘I’. Eric’s <b>trivialisation</b> of such violence of a possible rape, through the <b>colloquial</b> use of “<b>a chap</b>” is an attempt by Eric to soften the harshness of his actions.</p>
	<p><b>“I threatened to make a row”</b></p>	<p>Eric’s <b>violent</b> language, “<b>I threatened</b>”, is softened through the <b>euphemistic</b> use of “<b>a row</b>”. Priestley demonstrates Eric’s attempts to convince himself that his actions were to a <b>lesser extent</b> of <b>immorality</b> than they actually were.</p>





Morality	<b><i>“(Involuntarily) My God!”</i></b>	<b>Eric’s emotional response</b> to the news of Eva’s death as Priestley demonstrates his innate rectitude (morality) through the <b>stage directions</b> . Priestley’s use of the <b>adverb “involuntarily”</b> demonstrates the <b>moral nature</b> of Eric as he could not suppress his <b>emotional reaction</b> ; it is involuntary. Eric would not choose to reveal his emotions, within a patriarchal society which <b>condemns feminine traits</b> , such as <b>excessive emotion</b> .
Capitalism vs Socialism // Class	<b><i>“[not too rudely] Well, don’t do any. We’ll drink to their health and have done with it.”</i></b>	Eric is eager to be done with talk of their engagement as he realises the <b>ridiculousness</b> of the toasts for a marriage which is merely a <b>transaction</b> . Eric disapproves, however, he is powerless to do anything. This is aptly demonstrated by Priestley through the <b>stage directions</b> as Eric interrupts <b><i>“[not too rudely]”</i></b> as he doesn’t have the power to challenge his father directly yet is not quite at ease with the <b>capitalist</b> purpose of his sister’s marriage.
	<b><i>“Why shouldn’t they try for higher wages?”</i></b>  <b><i>“you said yourself she was a good worker”</i></b>	Eric questions <b><i>“why shouldn’t they try for higher wages?”</i></b> as he believes that the <b>capitalist</b> system ought to be fair to both employers and employees. He puts forward a <b>moral form of capitalism</b> , pointing out to Birling, <b><i>“you said yourself she was a good worker”</i></b> , implying that she should be financially rewarded for this.

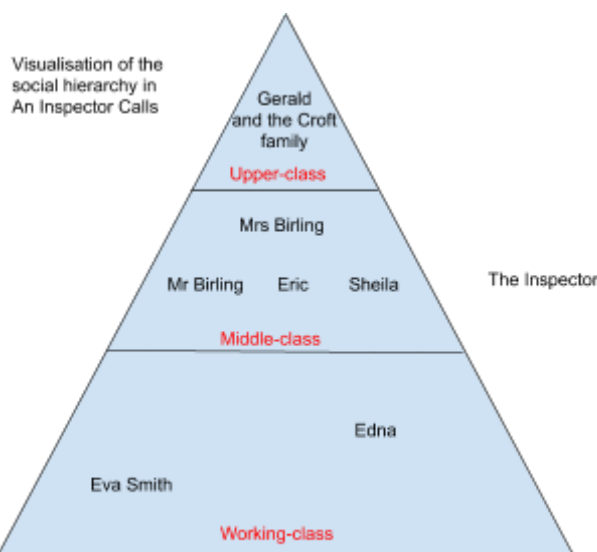


Figure 1





## First Impressions

### Character in context

We never find out Eva's true identity within the play. This ambiguity enables her to become a **universal symbol of oppression**. She represents the oppression that both women and the lower classes experienced in early 20th Century society.



The audience learns that all the characters have come into contact with Eva and, together, their actions result in her suicide. The Inspector claims that Eva worked for Mr Birling and was **fired for striking** in favour of fairer wages. Then she worked at a shop, Milwards, where Sheila was **instrumental in her dismissal**. Next, she had a relationship with Gerald, and then Eric, with whom she became **pregnant**. Finally, Eva turned to Mrs Birling's **charity committee** for aid, yet they rejected her, giving her pregnancy outside of wedlock as the reason. She subsequently **committed suicide** by drinking disinfectant two hours before the play begins.

- Eva symbolises the **suffering of the lower-classes**.
- She is the victim of a **patriarchal society** and the **class inequality** which is apparent throughout the social hierarchy of 1912 Britain.
- She **demonstrates** the need for a **welfare state**.

### Eva Smith

Priestley uses the name Eva as a reference to Eve, the first woman in the **Biblical** story of the **Garden of Eden**. She was tempted by Satan to eat fruit from the Forbidden Tree which resulted in Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden (this expulsion is often called the fall of man).

- Eve is from the Hebrew "**to live**" / "**source of living**" and therefore Eva's suicide is **paradoxical**, as the source of living has given up on existence.
- She is a **symbol of all those living** as Eve is the mother of humanity. Eva is the representation of all humanity, but especially women and those living in poverty.
- While Eve tempted men to corruption through offering Adam the apple in the Garden of Eden, Eva is the **opposite** of this; *she* is corrupted by the *men* in the play.
- She **never appears on stage**, but is the **central figure** around which all of the action spins.

### The surname Smith

- Priestley uses "**Smith**" as at the time it was the **most common** surname in Britain and therefore **symbolises** the everyday people of Britain. Eva's story of **poverty and suffering** is the universal story of the common people. This is demonstrated by the Inspector's message that "**there are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths**".
  - 'Smith' is a working class name, originating from 'blacksmith', and Priestley uses this to demonstrate that her class is a **fixed part of her identity and origins**, something that **she can't escape**.



- In using just two names to represent the entire working class, they lose identity as individuals. This suggests these are people that society has forgotten, or has simply ignored from the start.

## Daisy Renton

The Inspector suggests that Eva **changed her name** to Daisy Renton. However, desperately looking for a way to absolve himself of guilt, Gerald argues that Eva and Daisy are in fact two different girls and that the Inspector's story isn't true.

### Why does Priestley portray Eva under two different names?

Priestley uses this name change to demonstrate how Eva felt the need to change the direction of her life in order to survive in a society that is **hostile towards people like her**.

After trying, and failing (as a result of the Birlings), to earn enough money through 'honest work' she resorts to prostitution which goes against her own **moral principles**.

- The name "**Renton**" is derived from the **verb "rent"**, which was a **euphemism** for prostitution.
- She is forced to **rent herself** to survive, further lowering her standing in society - in a largely Christian world, prostitution (sex outside of marriage) was seen as sinful, and not viewed as a legitimate job.
- Although she is **stigmatised** for resorting to prostitution, the men who use her services are, in a **sexual double standard**, not treated in the same way.
- She is paid for her affection, company and body.

## Significance of her death

Eva's death is a necessary indicator of the consequences of the other characters' **immoral actions**. The worst-case scenario of suicide allows the characters and, more importantly, the audience to understand the **fatal** impact of careless **individualism and capitalist attitudes**.

Eva Smith found herself in such a desperate situation that she saw suicide as the only way to end her suffering.

### Exam tip -

Using terminology, which you may be unfamiliar with can be scary at first, but once you get the hang of it, this can score you marks for AO2 (subject terminology).

### Disinfectant

Priestley evidences that Eva killed herself with "**a lot of very strong disinfectant**" demonstrating the deliberate and meaningful attempt to commit suicide. Perhaps Priestley did this to reveal connotations of **cleansing and purification** that come with disinfectant. The sexual abuse and exploitation that Eva suffered at the hands of Eric and Gerald left her **unclean and violated**. Therefore, she needed to be **purified**.

Priestley uses of **shocking imagery** of drinking disinfectant, which "**burnt her inside out**" to describe her suicide. This associates Eva's death with **hell**. The use of the **violent verb "burnt"** shows the suffering and torture that this death would have caused. The association with hell is linked to the contemporary Christian belief that **suicide is a grave sin**; committing suicide violates



the commandment 'thou shalt not kill', which is punishable by an afterlife in hell. The fact that Eva still chose suicide demonstrates that her life was already a **living hell**, and could imagine nothing worse.

### Graphic death

Priestley deliberately uses **graphic language** to describe the gruesome death of Eva in order to awaken the **privileged** upper class audience to the suffering of the working classes.

Priestley uses the character of Eva to **inflict guilt** upon the Birling family to make them repent, change, and ultimately accept responsibility for their actions. He must **emphasise and dramatise** the suffering they caused for the characters to take any notice; the more brutal Eva's suicide, the greater the guilt they should feel.

After Sheila's confession, the Inspector reminds her that Eva "**died in misery and agony – hating life**". The **graphic adjectives** "**misery and agony**" encourage the audience to **empathise** with Eva, as they would **visualise** the pain and suffering she had endured at the hands of the Birlings. Priestley **intensifies** Sheila's guilt as her enjoyment of life is **at the expense of others**.

Eva's death is used by Priestley to highlight to the audience the injustice and inequality among the social classes.

## Audience reaction

### Why is her identity never revealed?

Priestley does not reveal the identity of Eva Smith as an individual. This allows him to use her as a **symbolic representation of the oppressed working class people (the masses)**.

- If she were given a face, she would become an individual instead of a representation of all who suffer as a result of **class inequality and capitalism**.
- By keeping her faceless, the audience is encouraged to give her the face of whoever they may have personally impacted through **individualistic** actions, allowing them to gain a new outlook on their own actions instead of just condemning the Birlings.

Perhaps Priestley wants the audience to reflect on whether Eva would have suffered to the same degree in their era.

- This is **contextually relevant** as the Labour government was on the brink of revolutionising British society when *An Inspector Calls* was first performed in 1945. The start of the **welfare state** was well under way (liberal reforms in the early 1900s, the [Beveridge Report](#) planning NHS in 1942).
- Therefore, Priestley could be sharing a hopeful message, as the audience should feel optimistic about the improvements society has made since 1912, encouraging them not to fall back to the old ways (like the Birlings do).

Priestley allows the story of Eva's life to be told by other people, encouraging each member of the Birling family to describe their involvement with her in turn. This reflects how her actual life was



**controlled and dictated** by other people, eventually driving her to take her own life. In doing this, Priestley **symbolises** that the narrative of working class lives are told and controlled by the **upper classes**, **demonstrating** the control that the **upper classes** have over the **working class**.

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## Relationship with other characters

### Parallels to Sheila

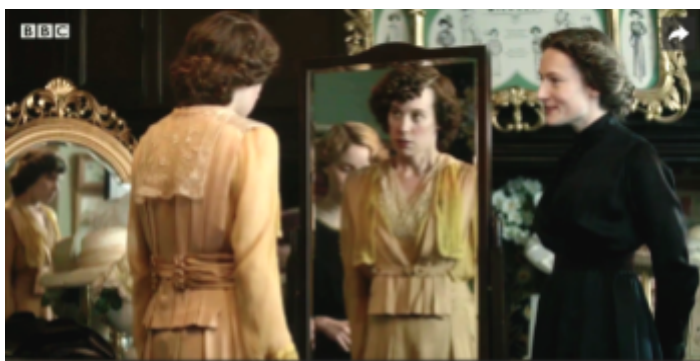
Priestley establishes **parallels** between Sheila and Eva to demonstrate that the progression of a woman's life depends entirely on the **family she is born into**. It is important to consider why Priestley portrays **Eva as similar to Sheila**.

- This allows Priestley to comment on the **inequality** within society, as Sheila's life is easy because she is upper-class whereas Eva's life has been full of **suffering** due to being lower-class. This is luck, something they were born into.
- Their **physical descriptions are similar** as Sheila is described as a **"pretty girl in her early twenties"**; while Eva is **"twenty-four"** and **"very pretty"**.
- Sheila's looming wedding and respected husband makes her **"very pleased with life and rather excited"** by the future, while Eva was so terrified of what tomorrow held that she killed herself, dying **"hating life"**.
- The contrast between the lives of the two young women is emphasised by making them similar in all ways **except class** – even down to the men they are connected to:
  - Sheila is engaged to Gerald, while Eva is exploited by him as a mistress.
  - Sheila is related to (and teases) Eric, while Eva is raped by him.

#### Exam tip -

You will develop your AO2 for characterisation, if you are able to include a direct comparison between the characters of Eva and Sheila.

Because class is what **differentiates them**, the audience is given the impression that **class**



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determines that Sheila will live an easy, carefree life, while Eva will be subject to constant suffering. This means that Priestley is able to use Sheila as evidence of the **divisive nature** of social class and how it creates **undeserved privilege and undeserved persecution**. Priestley uses this parallel between characters to further his agenda of condemning the **class system**.

### Exploited by the patriarchy

The way in which Eva is treated by the male characters within the play reflects the patriarchal society of the time. Her value to the male characters is merely a **hedonistic** (pleasure-seeking) way of fulfilling their **lustful desires**. They do not value her as an individual, but rather as how she can further their own business success or sexual desires.



Eva is female and working class, and therefore this makes her among one the most **inferior demographics** in society. She was **sexually exploited** and **abused** by Eric, who raped her. Eva's vulnerability and **economic disempowerment** (lack of money) was also **taken advantage of** by Gerald, who kept her as a mistress. Mr Birling mistreated Eva **commercially** through **exploiting her labour**, paying her very low wages.

- The male characters see her as a **tool**, an **object**. This is evident through their descriptions of Eva as "**cheap labour**" or a "**good sport**".
- Alderman Meggerty had "**wedged her into a corner with that obscene fat carcass of his**". Eva was trapped in that corner by Meggerty, just as the upper class **traps her and confines** her to the working class.

### Gerald's exploitation of Eva as his mistress

Priestley explores how Eva is kept by Gerald in a **possessive fashion** as his mistress. It is important to understand how Gerald's saving of Eva from the Palace Bar is in fact a **superficial rescue**; it a mere **substitution of abusers**.

Gerald's **lustful desires** are evidenced through his **predatory description** of Eva/Daisy, who is "**young and fresh and charming and altogether out of place down there**". The **adjective "fresh"** bears connotations of **desire and fertility**, as Gerald views her with sexual desire from the start. Describing her like food makes it clear that he sees her as an **object or possession**. Gerald's **misogynistic objectification** evidences his sinful lust.

Priestley also includes **connotations of purity** as she is "**out of place**", which is possibly a **euphemism** for her still being a virgin. This is reinforced by Eva only recently turning to prostitution. She appeals to him because she **seems innocent** and sinless, which allows Gerald to disguise his use of prostitution from himself, as Eva's **innocence** is refreshing for Gerald, who is used to the "**hard-eyed**" prostitutes of Palace Bar.

Exam tip -  
For visual learners, see Figure 1 at the bottom of the document for a diagram of the social hierarchy

### Benefits of her relationship with Gerald (alternative interpretation)

It could be argued that Eva actually benefited from her relationship with Gerald and that they had a **genuine connection**. The Inspector evidences Eva's **joy** in their relationship as "**she'd been happier than she'd ever been before**". Furthermore, Gerald showed Eva some affection and kindness, as he listened to her and helped her in a time of need.

Gerald differs in his treatment of Eva as "**he at least had some affection for her and made her happy for a time**". However, his help was **self-serving**. He is a self-professed "**wonderful fairy prince**" to Eva. Gerald admits to enjoying his time with Eva and being her **knight in shining armour**.

- Having a relationship with Eva appealed to Gerald at the time, and it was **convenient** to help her as he was able to use her to **satisfy himself sexually** whenever he pleased.
  - This allowed him to feel important – like a prince and a saviour.





Yet, once it was no longer convenient for Gerald, and he could no longer use the excuse of being “**busy at the works**” instead of meeting Sheila, he says that he “**broke it off**” with Eva. The use of the verb “**broke**” suggests a sudden, but casual, action which requires little thought.

Eva is grateful to Gerald for his help as he provided her with necessities for her survival; financial aid, shelter, and more importantly, a **degree of real human affection**. Such basic needs bring her happiness because their fulfilment is foreign to her. She is not used to being treated with any **compassion**, so a time when she is cared for constitutes the happiest of her life. Eva was “**intensely grateful**” for his help. Yet she didn’t expect to have any lasting kindness as she “**knew it couldn’t last**” due to their class differences. It was a novelty for her to feel treated like a human being.

Perhaps Gerald did love her and it wasn’t just exploitation. This is evidenced as Gerald leaves, almost immediately after the Inspector asks “**were you in love with her?**” and Sheila exclaims “**just what I was going to ask!**” His leaving could be to avoid the question, which he doesn’t answer, meaning that he may have **genuinely loved her**. It may also indicate that he is **overwhelmed by emotion**, having now learned of her death and of his role in it, demonstrating that he does care for her.

### Emotional reaction to death

Gerald is clearly moved by the news of Eva’s death, feeling **guilt and remorse**.

- Gerald’s **staggered and interrupted speech** reveals the true sadness that he feels at her death, as he stammers, “**I – well, I’ve suddenly realised – taken it in properly – that she’s dead**”.
  - Gerald, however, is clearly attempting to suppress this emotion, eventually “**pulling himself together**”, as Priestley describes in the **stage directions**.
- In British patriarchal society of 1912, it was not socially acceptable for men to show their emotions, as being sensitive was considered a **feminine trait** and was seen to **undermine their masculinity** and authority.
  - Despite this stigma, he is unable to entirely conceal his emotions, perhaps demonstrating that he had genuine feelings for her.
- It is clear that until this point Gerald hadn’t expressed much remorse over their former relationship.
  - Until it directly affects them, the upper classes ignore the consequences of their actions, allowing them to continue **living a life of luxury without guilt**.





## Final impressions

### Victim of capitalism

Eva is portrayed by Priestley as a victim of the **capitalist attitudes** held by the upper classes. It is important to understand why Priestley presents Eva as a **victim** throughout the play.

- Eva is a working class woman and suffers because of it.
- She was fired for asking for a living wage, which is a reasonable request. However, the strikers are not protected and are therefore exploited.
  - All that Eva did was ask for higher wages and the Inspector points out that **"it's better to ask for the earth than to take it"**.
  - Mr Birling's **stinginess** is forgotten when there is a **chance of criminal prosecution**, as Mr Birling claims that he would **"[unhappily] give thousands - yes, thousands ---"**.
  - The Inspector reminds Mr Birling that he is **"offering the money at the wrong time"**; Eva is dead, and he is only moved to help now that his involvement means that his own comfort is threatened, revealing his selfishness.
- All that workers can do is ask for better rights but even this is denied of them as they have no voice.
  - Priestley **reflects this** through the character of Eva, who also has **no voice and no presence in the play**.
  - She is **powerless** to change anything as her story is being told by the upper-class.
  - In a socialist world, this is not so much the case, demonstrated by the **Labour government**, who would go on to set up trade unions and protect the rights of workers (as the audience knows).



<http://www.frockflicks.com/an-inspector-calls-2015/>

Within the play, Eva is essentially **killed by capitalism**. Through her, Priestley demonstrates the **fatal consequences** of living by such an ideology in Britain.

### Victim of society's prejudice and individualism

Priestley portrays Eva as a victim of this **patriarchal society's classist prejudice** and lack of **social responsibility**. Priestley uses Eva as a **vehicle** for exposing the **harmful individualism of capitalism**.



### Mrs Birlings' treatment of Eva

The character of Eva is used by Priestley, to convey the notion that **poverty is an unnecessary evil** and a **symptom of capitalist corruption**. This is evidenced through Mrs Birling who is supposed to be a "**prominent member of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation**" and therefore a moral person. Moreover, she claims "**with dignity**" that they "**we've done a great deal of useful work for deserving cases**". However, Priestley's use of the **stage direction "with dignity"** suggests that Mrs Birling's role is not held out of care or compassion for the poor, but as a way to gain influence and status within society.

- ❖ Contextual note: 1912 was before women could vote, but wealthy women could hold positions on councils and committees.

Through Mrs Birling's claim that the charity is only for "**deserving cases**", Priestley highlights that financial aid given out is at the **discretion of the upper classes**. This is another example of how the upper class **exert control over** the lower classes. Mrs Birling is **prejudiced** against Eva's story due to her **class**, declaring that "**a girl of that sort would [not] ever refuse money**". This is something she even admits to when pointing out Eva's "**impertinence**" (calling herself Mrs Birling) as "**one of the things that prejudiced me against her**". This demonstrates Mrs Birling's hypocrisy, accusing Eva of the **greed** her own family embodies.

### **Victim of gender prejudice and patriarchal values**

Priestley conveys the concept that Eva is the most **oppressed demographic** in society; she is a lower-class woman. It is important to understand why Priestley presents Eva as a victim of a **patriarchal** society.



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#### Objectification

Eva is **objectified**. In 20th Century British society, a woman's value was based a lot in their appearance. This is evident as Eva is referred to as "**pretty**", "**very pretty**" "**a lively, good-looking girl**" by Gerald and Eric. Her **physical appearance**, rather than her personality, is what matters to them.

Gerald dehumanises Eva, referring to her as "**the girl**", erasing her individual identity. Therefore, it is clear that Gerald **doesn't recognise her as an individual**, as he doesn't dignify Eva/Daisy with a name, another example of **objectification**.

#### Transactional language

Priestley uses **transactional language** and the **semantic field of finance** when Gerald describes his relationship with Eva; "**install her**" "**this business**" "**anything in return**". Gerald's use of **business terminology** undermines his claims of caring for her and conflicts with the tone of his story. This **capitalist corruption** of human relationships is reflected through his marriage with Sheila, done for the financial and social benefit of both families.



In a patriarchal society, women have little in the way of value or rights. Their only value is through how they can be exploited to benefit men (be it sexually or as a worker). Therefore, a woman's purpose in society is merely as a transactional piece (owned by their father, then by their husband).

### Eric

Eric refers to Eva as "**pretty and a good sport**", which implies that he saw her as a means to **fulfilling his own desires as "good sport"** is a **euphemism** for willing to sleep with him. "**Good sport**" also has **hunting connotations**. Perhaps Priestley does this to demonstrate the **predatory nature** of their relationship as Eva takes on the **symbolism** of **prey**. This is reinforced by Gerald's description of Eva as "**young and fresh**".

#### Exam tip -

When analysing language techniques, ensure you refer to "Priestley" explicitly. This shows the examiner that you are considering his methods directly.

Eva's relationship with Eric was not consensual, as he confesses "**she didn't want me to go in**", yet she was powerless to prevent him. Priestley describes drunken Eric as "**in that state when a chap easily turns nasty**", implying that male violence is commonplace and accepted in society.

### **Hypocrisy of the upper classes**

Eva is used by Priestley as a **symbol** to highlight the **overt hypocrisy** of the upper classes in their treatment of the lower classes.

### Money

Mrs Birling claims that "**a girl of that sort would [not] ever refuse money**", as she assumes that due to her lower class origin, Eva is **inherently greedy**. Despite this, Eva is presented as a **moral force**, who never takes stolen money and won't marry Eric just for his wealth and social status.

- This is **in contrast to Eric**, who steals money (from his own father), despite coming from the upper classes. This makes Mrs Birling's assumption of Eva's greediness **ironic**.
- The Birlings arrange Sheila's marriage for financial gain; in the name of "**lower costs and higher prices**".

### Shirking responsibility

This hypocrisy is also demonstrated by Gerald's attempt to escape the group's guilt and responsibility by claiming Eva was many different girls, rather than the same girl. This is despite him **linguistically echoing** Sheila's description of Eva, describing her as "**very pretty**" and having "**big dark eyes**". Furthermore, he recalls her telling him she had a job that she had to "**leave after a strike**" and "**said something about the shop too**".

Therefore, it is obviously clear that the characters are **denying the Inspector's accusations for their own benefit**, in order to continue living as before, without taking responsibility.

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## Symbolism

### Expose the impact of individualism

Priestley uses the character of Eva to force the Birlings to realise that their actions have consequences for which they must take responsibility. Priestley uses Eva to criticise **individualism**.

- All the main characters have impacted Eva, driving her to suicide (except for the Inspector).
- She serves as the Inspector's evidence, an example for why taking responsibility is necessary, exposing the dangers of the **class system**.
  - ◆ This demonstrates that what he is teaching is for the **greater good of society**.
  - ◆ **Structurally**, Priestley shows this through the Inspector's repeated reference to Eva's death and suffering throughout.
- More importantly, the audience is reminded to **connect individualistic** actions to Eva's suffering, **encouraging the audience** to behave more collectively.

### Need for welfare

Priestley uses the character of Eva to exhibit the **failure of a capitalist society** in providing for the **working class majority**, rather than just the **elite few**.

- ❖ If the organisations, which are meant to support and protect the needy, are **prejudiced** against them, then there is no way out of **poverty**.
  - Mrs Birling had judged her and decided on how to treat her before even hearing her story.
- ❖ Mrs Birling openly admits to Eva's use of the name 'Mrs Birling' when appealing for help being "**one of the things that prejudiced me against her**", demonstrating that **prejudice** is not something rejected by society, rather that it is acceptable and commonplace.
  - Referring to Eva, simply as a "**girl**" is **condescending** and shows how Mrs Birling **perceives her as lesser and inferior** due to her class.
  - This is supported by her use of the **adjective "impertinent"**, which implies a lack of respect to someone who deserves reverence and therefore it is evident that she views herself as **superior** than Eva.

### Context

- ❖ After World War II, many citizens supported a welfare state as government interference in war gave them a taste of it.
- ❖ Priestley **campaigns for the Labour party**; the introduction of the welfare state and trade unions were some of their key policies.

### Antithesis (opposite) to her stereotype

Priestley uses the character of Eva to dismiss the **contemporary beliefs** concerning the causes of **poverty**. In his play, Priestley aims to counter the **negative stereotype** of the lower classes. It was commonly believed that **poverty was merely** the result of **poor morals and laziness**, and therefore the poor were not deserving of aid to escape their situation, which the upper classes perceived to be self-inflicted. This is clearly demonstrated when Mrs Birling blames "**first the girl herself**". Despite this, Eva is a stark contrast to the **lower-class stereotype**.



### Lazy

Mr Birling's describes Eva as "**a good worker**" and "**lively**", rather than the **lazy and avarice** (greedy) stereotype. Yet, even these **favourable characteristics** are not enough to prevent her falling into poverty as the poor are viewed as "**cheap labour**" and exploited to benefit the wealthy.

### Immoral

Priestley uses the character of Eva to **subvert** the idea that the lower classes lack morals. Throughout the play, Eva puts morals before money and even her own survival.

- She refuses to accept money from Eric ("**she wouldn't take any more**") once she finds out it was stolen.
- She refuses to marry Eric despite her pregnancy, as Eric reports that "**(she) said I didn't love her**").

Priestley suggests that she is forced to **immorality** because of the Birlings' actions. After being fired twice, she is forced to prostitute herself in order to survive.

### **Socialist propaganda**

'An Inspector Calls' can be seen as **socialist propaganda** and a criticism of the **capitalist society currently in place**. Priestley uses the play to suggest that under a **socialist government**, Eva wouldn't have suffered to the extent she did as she would have been able to have fulfilled "**a nice little promising life**".

- Her **positive characteristics** of "**lively**" and "**a good worker**" would have been duly rewarded under **socialism** and this would result in a **good standard of living**.
  - Priestley makes it explicit that her traits made her life "**promising**", but this promise cannot be fulfilled in a **capitalist society** as it is not equal and those at the bottom are exploited for the benefit of those at the top.

Therefore, Priestley suggests that the problems Eva faced would be solved by the Labour party's policies.

- Eva striking would have been protected by trade unions and therefore workers couldn't be fired, as they were easily let go by businesses under the **capitalist system** because Eva couldn't challenge them if dismissed unfairly.
- She wouldn't only rely on organisations run by the wealthy, but by the government.
  - Thus, she wouldn't be **forced into prostitution**, as she would be provided with money and support by the government indiscriminately if unemployed.
  - This is **contextually significant** as the National Insurance Act was one of the things Labour hoped to reform (they did so in 1946).
- In a **socialist society**, Eva wouldn't have been in poverty in the first place, due to the policy of **wealth redistribution**. Therefore, she acts as **the evidence for the need for socialism**.



## Possible 'Topic Sentences'

- Priestley explores the detrimental effect of the class system through portraying distinct parallels between Eva and Sheila.
- Priestley portrays Eva Smith as a victim of the prejudices and individualistic attitude of the capitalist society of early 20th Century Britain.
- Through the character of Eva, Priestley depicts the collective suffering of the lower classes at the hands of the upper classes, therefore arguing the need for socialist reform.

### Exam tip -

Topic sentences should always link back to the question at hand. Also, try to link these sentences together (e.g. discuss the initial, transitional and final portrayals of a character).

### Exam tip -

A 'Topic Sentence' is the first sentence of your argument. This should convey the overall point you are making. It should reference Priestley explicitly and his ideas.





## Eva quote bank by theme

Theme	Quote	Analysis
Class	<b><i>"There are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths"</i></b>	The name 'Smith' has its roots in the working class, originating from ' <i>blacksmith</i> ', and arguably Priestley does this to demonstrate that her class is a fundamental part of her identity and origins, something that <b>she can't escape</b> . Priestley uses the common name 'John Smith' to <b>symbolise</b> the universality of the suffering of the working classes, largely forgotten and neglected by the wealthy.
	<b><i>"died in misery and agony – hating life"</i></b>	After Sheila's confession, the Inspector reminds her that Eva <b>"died in misery and agony – hating life"</b> . The <b>graphic adjectives</b> " <b><i>misery and agony</i></b> " encourage the audience to <b>empathise</b> with Eva, <b>visualising</b> the pain and suffering she endured at the hands of the Birlings. Priestley <b>intensifies</b> Sheila's guilt as her enjoyment of life is at the expense of others.
Exploitation	<b><i>"Renton"</i></b>	Arguably, the name " <b><i>Renton</i></b> " is derived from the <b>verb "to rent"</b> , a <b>euphemism</b> for prostitution in the early 20th Century. Priestley uses this change in name to mark Eva being forced to change her approach to surviving in a <b>hostile society</b> . She can no longer survive by working hard and therefore she must go against her own <b>moral principles</b> to survive, engaging in prostitution.
	<b><i>"young and fresh and charming and altogether out of place down there"</i></b>	The <b>adjective "fresh"</b> bears connotations of <b>desire and fertility</b> , demonstrating that Gerald views her with sexual intent from the start, describing her like food, an example of <b>misogynistic objectification</b> . Priestley also includes connotations of purity as she is " <b><i>out of place</i></b> ", which is possibly a <b>euphemism</b> for her still being a virgin.
Capitalism vs Socialism	<b><i>"[unhappily] give thousands - yes, thousands ---"</i></b>	Eva is a working class woman and suffers because of it, beginning with being fired after asking for a living wage, which is a reasonable request. For the



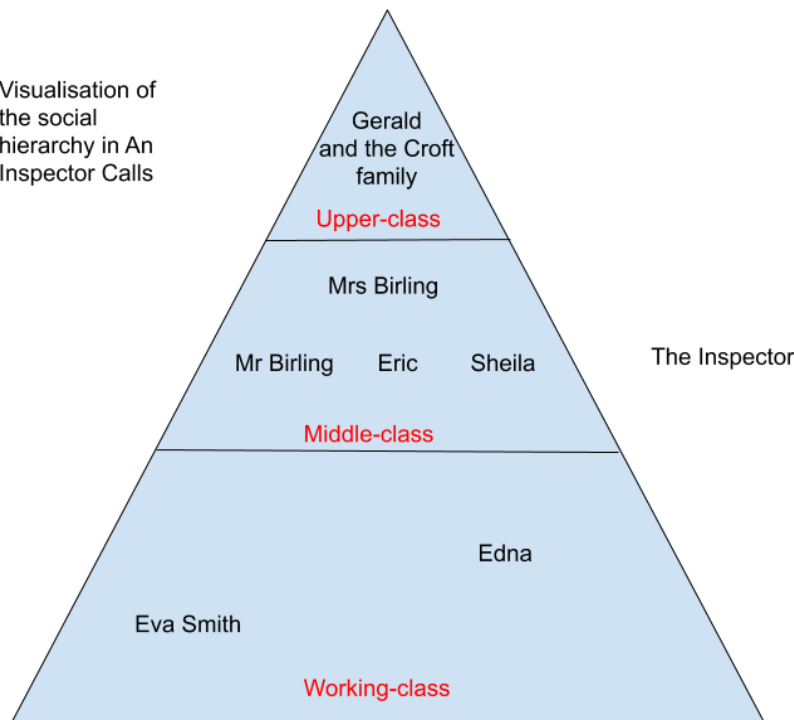
		benefit of those who profit from capitalism, the strikers are not protected and therefore are exploited. However, Mr Birling's <b>stinginess</b> is soon resolved when there is a <b>chance of criminal prosecution</b> .
	<b><i>"[With dignity] we've done a great deal of useful work for deserving cases"</i></b>	Priestley's use of the <b>stage direction "with dignity"</b> suggests that Mrs Birling's role is not held out of care or compassion for the poor, but as a way to gain influence and status. Mrs Birling claims that the financial aid is reserved only for <b>"deserving cases"</b> , a decision made at the discretion of the upper classes, reflecting how the lives of the working classes are controlled by the wealthy.
Hypocrisy	<b><i>"a girl of that sort would (not) ever refuse money" //</i></b> <b><i>"impertinence"</i></b> (in claiming to be Mrs Birling) // <b><i>"one of the things that prejudiced me against her"</i></b>	Mrs Birling is <b>prejudiced</b> against Eva's story due to her <b>class</b> , rather than against Eva as an individual. She even admits to this when pointing out Eva's <b>"impertinence"</b> (in claiming to be Mrs Birling) as <b>"one of the things that prejudiced me against her"</b> . The use of the <b>noun "impertinence"</b> is loaded with connotations of class prejudice, implying that Mrs Birling sees herself as superior to Eva. Therefore, those living in <b>poverty</b> have no way to escape it as they cannot challenge their exploitation. Eva's attempt to strike saw her fired and even the institutes meant to help those in her position are <b>prejudiced</b> against her.
	<b><i>"a girl of that sort would (not) ever refuse money"</i></b>	Mrs Birling claims that <b>"a girl of that sort would (not) ever refuse money"</b> , as she assumes that due to her lower-class origin, she is <b>inherently greedy</b> . Despite this, Eva is presented as a <b>moral force</b> , who never takes stolen money and won't marry Eric just for his wealth. This is <b>in contrast to Eric</b> , who steals money, and the Birlings, who arrange Sheila's marriage for financial gain; in the name of <b>"lower costs and higher prices"</b> .
	<b><i>"very pretty"</i></b> and having <b><i>"big dark eyes"</i></b> // <b><i>"leave after a strike"</i></b> and <b><i>"said something about the shop too"</i></b>	Gerald tries to alleviate his and the other characters' responsibility by claiming that Eva was many different girls, rather than the same one. This is despite him providing the evidence they were all the same when he <b>linguistically echoes</b> Sheila, describing Eva <b>"very pretty"</b> and having <b>"big dark</b>





		<p><b>eyes".</b> Furthermore, he recalls her telling him she had a job that she had to "<b>leave after a strike</b>" and "<b>said something about the shop too</b>". This makes it profoundly clear that the characters are <b>denying the Inspector's accusations for their own benefit</b> – so they can continue to live their materialistic lives without taking <b>responsibility</b> or trying to change.</p>
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Visualisation of  
the social  
hierarchy in An  
Inspector Calls



## First Impressions

### Character in context

Gerald is Sheila's fiancé and the son of the **wealthy businessman** Mr Croft. He is employed at his father's company which is called Crofts Limited. The Croft family business is in **competition** with, and also both bigger and older than, Birling & Co. Gerald's parents are Sir George Croft and Lady Croft, who are **socially superior** to the Birlings. Priestley describes Gerald, in the initial **stage directions**, as "**[an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred young man-about-town]**". He contributes to the "**chain of events**" which drive Eva to **suicide** by using her as a **mistress**.



- Priestley uses the character of Gerald to represent the **individualism** of the upper-class.
- He **disillusions** (disappoints) the audience, who hopes that by the end of the play he would change his **capitalist and selfish attitudes**, as he fails to do so.
- Therefore, Priestley uses Gerald's failure to develop his sense of **social responsibility**, to convey how entrenched these upper-class attitudes are; even death won't change them.

### Attractive appearance

Priestley portrays Gerald as a **physically attractive**, privileged but likable man.

- He describes Gerald in the stage directions as "**rather too manly to be dandy**", suggesting that he is very much content and confident in his own masculinity.
- The description of Gerald in the **stage directions** continues, as he is "**easy well-bred young man-about-town**". This **idiomatic phrase** suggests that Gerald is a **fashionable** socialite. Alternatively, this phrase could have **plural connotations**; perhaps, Priestley is **foreshadowing** the unfaithful nature of Gerald, as he literally goes about-town and into the **Palace bar** in the search of female companions.
- The relatively **minor role** of Gerald early on in the play allows Priestley to maintain a fairly vague and neutral portrayal which causes the audience to be **ambivalent** (uncertain) in how to feel towards him.

Exam tip -  
When analysing language techniques, ensure you refer to "Priestley" explicitly. This shows the examiner that you are considering his methods directly.

### Ideal husband and son-in-law

Gerald is portrayed as an **ideal** husband and son-in-law due to his **financial security** and **higher social status**. He chooses the **engagement ring** himself, Sheila asks "**is it the one you wanted me to have?**" which makes him look caring and thoughtful. Gerald's attitude is **genial**, he is polite to the Birling parents and comes across as humble as shown by his response to Mr Birling: "**I don't pretend to know much about it (port)**". (This humbleness is in stark contrast to the pompous and arrogant opinions of Mr Birling). Gerald's **social status** contributes to his attractiveness as in 1912 British society the **only route to wealth of a woman would be to marry into it** as women were forbidden from opening a bank account and therefore had no money of their own.



### Experienced Michetson (Customer of a prostitute)

The good natured portrayal of Gerald at the start of the play begins to break down as the audience learns about his nighttime activities. Priestley portrays Gerald as spending a considerable amount of time in bars and **socialising with and using prostitutes**. Priestley evidences this **familiarity with prostitutes** through Gerald's **vivid** description of them, "***I hate those hard-eyed dough-faced women***". This opinion of prostitutes is one that can only come from experience, rather than a one off or chance occurrence. For Eva to seem "**out of place**" he must have known what was ordinary for a prostitute and therefore have been experienced.

He only cared about Eva because of his own **lustful desires** as evidenced by Priestley's **ordering of words**: "***she was pretty - soft brown hair and big dark eyes - [breaks off] My God!***". Priestley's use of **aposiopesis** (abrupt break off in speech) comes directly after Gerald describes her beauty. Therefore, revealing that Gerald only felt attracted to Eva **physically** as he feels the greatest grief when remembering her physical beauty.

### Aware of the upper-class' immorality

Gerald is portrayed by Priestley as being conscious of the **cruelty** of the upper-classes, yet he shows no desire to change society and thereby compromise the **privilege that he commands**. It is important to understand why Priestley presents Gerald in this **aware, yet conformist**, state. Priestley portrays Gerald as stuck at a **moral crossroads**; he can either fight against the **class system** or continue to use it to his advantage. Despite Gerald's actions, he is presented by Priestley as possessing a conscious and a **moral compass** (despite failing to follow this).

- He condemns the actions of "**alderman Meggarty**" who is a "**notorious womaniser**", and he perceives himself as a **knight in shining armour** who saves Eva, the damsel in distress. Therefore, Gerald's desire to help Eva is clear, yet only to the extent of maintaining his own privilege and comfort, with his priorities at heart.
- The **public perception** of Gerald is of utmost significance to him as he is prepared to help Eva in private but maintains an image of an honest and **respectable upper-class** man in his public sphere of influence. He sees an inherited duty to uphold and preserve society as it is due to his family business and the need to fulfill his father's expectations of him. Therefore, Gerald needs to maintain the **systemic immorality** of the class-system even if he disagrees with it.
- Priestley sets Gerald apart from the Birling parents, as at least Gerald can recognise its flaws - something which Mr and Mrs Birling cannot fathom.

### Stuck in the middle

Priestley portrays Gerald as caught between the older and younger-generations - forming this **middle-generation**. This **liminality** (at a position between two boundaries) extends to his attitudes and ideology. Gerald is exhibited as **less flexible and less impressionable** than Sheila and Eric in his convictions, however he does accept his own responsibility.

Priestley portrays Gerald as deliberately ignoring his sense of morality and chooses to try and forget his actions. He intentionally chooses to only react to the injustice that is **visible** and obvious to him, rather than the **institutionalised prejudice** that the **class-system** causes. This is evident as he only helped Eva because it was visible to him and he couldn't ignore it as "**Old Joe**



***Meggarty, half-drunk and goggled-eyed, had wedged her into a corner with that obscene fat carcase of his”.***

### Temporary guilt

The guilt that Gerald has for his abuse of the **vulnerable** Eva Smith and making her his **mistress** is evidently short-lived. It is important to consider why Priestley portrays the degree of guilt that Gerald feels is almost insignificant.

- This **unsympathetic** response is exactly what the Inspector condemns and is attempting to **preclude** (prevent). The change in Gerald's attitudes has to be permanent for real change in society to occur and this is what the Inspector attempts to instill into the characters. He experiences **guilt** and has a **conscience** but tries to reason and **manipulate his conscience**.
  - This is not an outright rejection of responsibility, but a manipulation of events to **alleviate his responsibility** and to justify his actions.

### Pragmatically moral

Gerald is portrayed by Priestley as following a **moral stance**, only when it suits his own needs.

- Gerald is **content to lie** about his affair with Eva as “**awfully busy at the works all that time**” over the summer. Therefore, it is clear that Gerald is **unrepentant** until Sheila finds out. He tries to get Eva to leave and therefore limit the repercussions that could affect him, while throwing her onto the streets.



Why did Priestley create a character who can pick and choose when to be **moral**? His character reveals the **crux** of the Inspector's issue with the current society, as Gerald doesn't care about having done wrong until there are possible consequences that affect him.

### Materialism

Priestley portrays Gerald as viewing the world in a **materialistic light**. It is important to consider why Priestley presents Gerald as placing such great **emphasis on possessions**. Gerald tried to help Eva through **financial aid**, when it was his care for her that had the most significant impact; **human relations** are of greater importance and **wield greater power** than the power of money.

- It wasn't Gerald's ending of funding that impacted Eva, but rather the **end of a caring and intimate relationship**, which pushed her over the edge and onto **suicide** as this hurt her emotionally. Gerald drops Eva like a **possession** as she “**knew it couldn't last**”, due to her **lower-class origins**.
- His interactions with Eva are encompassed by a **semantic field of business** and **finance rhetoric** (language), such as “**Install her**” “**in return**” “**business**”. This evidence shows that **Gerald perceives** his relationships as transactions – like his marriage. Priestley, through the character of Gerald conveys the message that **money and class corrupts relationships**.





## Patronising and misogynistic

Priestley portrays Gerald as being **condescending to women** in particular. Priestley **incorporates rescue imagery** with regards to Eva, portraying her as a **victim of the capitalist society**. Gerald's rescue of Eva is a **façade**, as in actuality Gerald is merely taking her **captive** rather than rescuing her; her situation remains the same, it is just her **captor** who changes.

Gerald is attracted by Eva's **weakness and innocence**. Priestley evidences the **general perception of women** at the time as only being valued for **being pretty and sexual gratification**. This further reveals the **power imbalance between genders**, as Eva is powerless to **end the abuse that she is subjugated to**.

## Excludes women

Gerald consistently excludes women from the current situation, throughout the play. Gerald is one of the central male figures who tries to oppress women's voices.

- Gerald attempts to exclude Sheila as she recognises that ***"he means that I'm getting hysterical"***. **Hysteria** was a **fabricated disorder**, which has historically been used to **oppress women** and exclude them from politics and society for exhibiting 'unfeminine' traits. Gerald implies that Sheila is **too emotional** to think clearly and logically; she should leave the thinking to the men.
- He perpetuates a **demeaning cult of victimhood** as ***"young women should be protected from unpleasant and disturbing things"*** because they are **too fragile** to witness the harsh reality of the world. This conviction that Gerald holds is **ironic** as he failed to protect Eva from the ***"unpleasant and disturbing"*** **sexual desires** that he holds himself.
- Priestley also exposes the truth behind this conviction; it only exists to benefit men and for them to **maintain their own power**. Gerald's true motive behind his desire for Sheila to leave is that so she doesn't hear about his affair with Eva.

## Final impressions

### Not contemptible, not genial (not hated, not loved)

It is Priestley's intention for Gerald to be **neither hated**, not loved by the audience and thereby continue the theme of the **liminal**. Priestley maintains Gerald as a **surprisingly redeemable character**. This is caused by the relative **ambiguity** that Priestley presents Gerald in. As he is not clearly condemnable, like the Birling parents, the audience favour him.

- Arguably, this reaction from the audience exposes the problem with society, as Gerald (a man who is aware of immorality, yet does nothing to change it) is perceived as **slightly favourable**. The audience has been **indoctrinated** into the attitudes of the **class-system** and therefore into the system that favours them. Priestley exposes the **hypocrisy** of the audience, who will instantaneously respond to obvious suffering, yet they are content to ignore the **subtle exploitation** that is not made explicit.
- Yet, by the end of the play the audience is let down by the **speciously** (seemingly true, but false) respectable Gerald. This is due to Gerald showing promise of caring for Eva, yet he



returns to try and pretend that nothing happened. He **rejects the responsibility**, which he had partially accepted, by attempting to dismantle the theory of Eva Smith and suggest that she was a different girl in each character's interaction with the supposed Eva. Therefore, Priestley conveys that the apparent changes in attitudes of the upper-class are merely **superficial**.

## Dramatic techniques

### Gerald's monopoly on the narrative

The **one-sided story** of events that is provided by Gerald must be viewed with **scrutiny** as Eva is not alive to **validate** his story; he has little motivation to tell the truth. It is crucial to your understanding of the play to consider why Priestley only describes events from the perspective of the man.

- Gerald's motive is clearly to **absolve** himself from as much **responsibility** as possible; he will be self-preserving. Priestley has already evidenced Gerald's **tendency to lie** in order to save his own skin, as he hid his affair from Sheila with the **facade** of being **"busy at the works"**.
- His **guilt** is further shown through the immediately **defensive tone** of Gerald as he questions the Inspector **"where did you get the idea that I did know her"**. This allows Gerald to gauge how much the Inspector knows and therefore adapt his story to be **consistent** with the Inspector's knowledge.
- Gerald's character shows how men are in control of the stories of women, as Priestley's use of an **androcentric** perspective evidences this. Eva is **vocally absent** from the play – women are not represented and therefore this **allows their abuse to be covered up**.



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### Dramatic exit

Priestley's use of the **dramatic exit** of Gerald after he tells his story offers **alternate interpretations**, either Gerald leaves due to his guilt in telling a lie, or perhaps he has entrenched feelings for Eva and needs to be alone. Gerald's exit comes after his proclamation that **"I'd like to be alone for a while"** and that he wants **"to remember"**. Here, Gerald echoes Eva's desire to be away from Gerald as she wanted to **"be alone, to be quiet, to remember all that had happened"**. Perhaps, Priestley is implying that Gerald and Eva both, actually, cared for each other - beyond a **physical level**.

Priestley visually separates Gerald from the Birling parents through this exit which could show how he isn't as similar to them as we first thought. It is evident that despite their class similarities, Gerald feels a greater sense of grief and



**responsibility** than the older-generation. He is different to the Birling parents; his actions weren't just an **abuse of authority** – he actually did care for her and wanted to help. Gerald leaves, almost immediately after the Inspector asks "**were you in love with her?**" and Sheila **exclaims** "**just what I was going to ask!**" His leave could be to avoid the question, which he doesn't answer and therefore he may have **genuinely loved her**.

## Relationships with other characters

### Aligned with Mr Birling's capitalist views

Gerald, as a wealthy businessman, is inevitably similar to Mr Birling in their economic views. On the one hand, Gerald's support for Mr Birling's opinions is necessary for Gerald to uphold good relations with his future father-in-law. However, it seems more likely that this is Gerald's legitimate belief as he will **inherit the Croft family business** and is therefore entrenched in capitalism. Indeed, Priestley uses the **character of Gerald** to demonstrate the **future generation of capitalists**, who are essentially no different to their predecessors; the only difference between Mr Birling and Gerald is that he may show a little care to those below him but only if it benefits him and doesn't compromise his own privilege.

### Marriage to Sheila

Gerald's marriage to Sheila is strange as it is **unconventional** for an **upper-class** man to settle for a woman of a **lower-class** in 1912 British society. It is important for you to consider this marriage and why Priestley includes this **class disparity** between Sheila and Gerald.



- The significance of this **class difference** is signified through Mr Birling's concession to Gerald that his mother most likely "**feels you (Gerald) might have done better for yourself socially**". Women in British 1912 society were essentially used as **bargaining chips** in a transaction. Rich men would often marry women above them in **status**, trading their **wealth for social position** (for instance Mrs Birling is "**her husband's social superior**").
- Perhaps, Gerald settles for Sheila as he has a **genuine love** for her. Therefore, he is marrying her despite Sheila being lower in class than him.
- However, another interpretation is that Gerald enjoys the pursuit of women as Gerald admits that "**I've been trying long enough**"; This implies that Gerald was the initiator of their relationship. Perhaps, once Gerald has completed his chase of women and secured them, he gets bored.
- Similarly, Gerald pursued Eva too. As did Eric, who considers women "**a good sport**", **objectifying women as a prize to be won**.
- His marriage to Sheila and their relationship would be **unequal and unbalanced** as Sheila is a **clear social inferior** and the female in their relationship. Sheila is unable to **criticise her fiancé**, and is evidently uncomfortable with him as she is forced to disguise any criticism in a **half-hearted manner** as Priestley demonstrates in the **stage directions** "**[half serious, half playful]**". She doesn't have the **social clout** to challenge him.
- The gender norms of 1912 Britain dictate that as a woman, the expectation is that Sheila will be submissive and not challenge her husband's commands and decisions. Despite



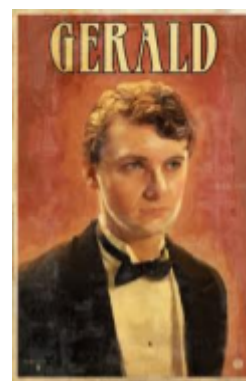
Sheila's serious issue with her suspicions of Gerald's affair, she cannot express her concern. Sheila is also **constricted by societal and familial pressure**, as she can't mess up the deal for her family that her marriage would secure.

- However, Sheila is also scared to be right about the affair, as she won't be able to do anything. Therefore, it is **easier to live in ignorance** and pretend there is no truth in it.

### Eva as Gerald's prey

The relationship between Eva and Sheila could be described as **predatory** as it is **intrinsically unequal** and he clearly has more power. It is important to understand why Priestley portrays Gerald as **predatory** towards Eva.

- Gerald's description of her as "**young and fresh and charming and altogether out of place down there**" is predatory. The **adjective "fresh"** has **connotations** of desire and fertility, it is clear he views her sexually from the start. Priestley's use of this **adjective** has **plural connotations** as Gerald views Eva like food - a possession and something to consume.
- Gerald expresses **connotations** of purity as Eva is "**out of place**", which is possibly a **euphemism** for her still being a virgin. Therefore, it is clear that she only recently turned to prostitution, she appeals to Gerald because she **seems innocent and sinless**.
- Gerald desires Eva because she isn't broken yet, like the other prostitutes that he frequents. This implies that he doesn't like prostitutes but she was different which meant it was acceptable, in Gerald's view, to use her as it didn't feel like prostitution.



### Misogynistic objectification

Gerald's abuse of his position (as Eva's provider) is caused by his perception of Eva as an object or possession and not as an **individual**. It is important to consider why Priestley portrays Gerald in this **misogynistic** way.

- His initial view of her is **misogynistic**; he **objectifies** her and views her in terms of her ability to satisfy his **lustful desire**. This **contradicts** and negates any favourable perception of Gerald that the audience may have developed.
- Priestley uses the character of Gerald to evidence that it is acceptable for the **upper-class** to use prostitutes as long as it's **clandestine** (in secret) so that the rest of the **upper-class** can pretend they don't engage in such **illicit activities**.
  - This is evident as Mrs Birling displays her disbelief that a seemingly respectable man with the public role of "**alderman**" would do such a thing as "**surely you don't mean alderman Meggarty**". Priestley uses **euphemistic language** to conceal his use of prostitutes. They are described as "**women of the town**".
- Gerald's relationship with Eva is an exploration of how women were **exploited and abused** in 1912 society.

### Imbalance of power

Priestley demonstrates a clear **imbalance** in power between Gerald and Eva in respect to both **social position** and influence. Gerald controls the narrative and thus has complete power over the



way in which the story of their relationship is told. Perhaps this is a **metaphor** for how women **don't get to control** how they are perceived.

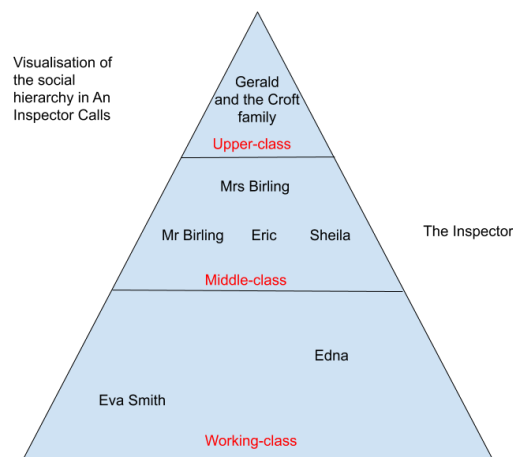
Gerald continually emphasises how Eva was in desperate need of his assistance and that he helped her. This is **evident through phrases** "***I made her take some money***" and "***I insisted on a parting gift***". These are both **monetary exchanges**, rather than financial aid. Therefore, Gerald is disguising prostitution as charity. In Gerald's **capitalist bubble**, money is the **be-all and end-all** in society, yet Eva is seeking **emotional** (not financial) support from him.

## Emotional reaction

Priestley portrays Gerald as having a **distinct emotional** reaction to the death of Eva which would have been classed as a **feminine trait** at the time.

- Gerald's delayed reaction to her death is diluted with **hyphens** as "***I – well, I've suddenly realised – taken it in properly – that she's dead***" as this **stammered and staggered** speech reveals the overwhelming sadness he feels.

Priestley reveals the internal conflict within Gerald, between his **natural emotional reaction** and his attempt to **suppress** any (feminine) emotion that he shows, as he has to **remain masculine** in a patriarchal society.



Evidently, Gerald had tried to forget his relationship with Eva and what he did to her in order to suppress any emotion that he may have felt. Therefore, Priestley **reveals the crux** (main issue) of the **upper-class'** deliberate ignorance: they ignore the consequences of their actions and forget so they can continue living life of **luxury** without guilt.

## Symbolism

### Manipulation

Gerald proposes that the Inspector was lying and that Eva was, in fact, several different girls. This is despite being the one who provided the evidence and **verified** that Eva was in fact the same person from his description.

- Gerald recognised that she was "***very pretty***" and had "***big dark eyes***".
- Also he remembered that Eva had to "***leave after a strike***" and "***said something about the shop too***".

Arguably, Gerald knows that Eva is the same person, but he is trying to **excuse** his own behaviour and also convince himself that he is innocent by later suggesting that "***there's still no proof it was really the same girl***".

Priestley presents this as a pattern of the **upper-classes**; they commit sinful actions which they know are wrong but **convince themselves it is acceptable**. This behaviour is displayed by other characters within the play:





- Eric euphemises his actions as "***when a chap easily gets nasty***".
- Mrs Birling claims that "***I did nothing I'm ashamed of***" and that with regards to Eva, "***she had only herself to blame***".
- Mr Birling **dogmatically** states that "***she (Eva) had to go***" and that "***it's my duty to keep labour costs down***".
- Even Sheila knew it was wrong and "***I felt rotten about it at the time***", yet she pushes it to the back of her mind and forgets about it, rather than changing her behavior.

The characters know their behaviour and treatment of the lower classes is wrong but manage to forget the things they do and go on living their **privileged lives** like nothing happened.

## Power

Priestley demonstrates how easy it is for the upper-class to **manipulate the truth**, through the character of Gerald. Priestley decides to give Gerald complete power over the narrative, which reflects the **patriarchal society**. Therefore, Priestley conveys the message that the **upper-classes** are **untouchable by law** and responsibility; they have too much power to be **stopped by the authorities or corrupt police force**.

## Possible 'Topic Sentences'

- Priestley explores the initial attractive appearance of Gerald and his idealised portrayal as a husband and son-in-law.
- Priestley presents Gerald as being in the liminal area between generations and explores how this liminality extends to his ideology and attitudes towards the lower-class.
- Priestley explores the extent of Gerald's morality and the degree to which he is prepared to lie in order to preserve his social status.





## Gerald quote bank by theme

Theme	Quote	Analysis
Responsibility	<b><i>"Where did you get the idea that I did know her?"</i></b>	Gerald's guilt is demonstrated through his immediate <b>defensive tone</b> as he questions the Inspector <b><i>"where did you get the idea that I did know her"</i></b> . This allows Gerald to gauge how much the Inspector knows and therefore adapt his story to be <b>consistent</b> with the Inspector's knowledge.
	<b><i>"Sorry - I - well, I've suddenly realised - taken it in properly - that she's dead"</i></b>	Gerald's delayed reaction to her death is <b>diluted</b> with <b>hyphens</b> as this <b>stammered</b> and <b>staggered</b> speech reveals the <b>overwhelming sadness</b> he feels. Priestley reveals the <b>internal conflict</b> within Gerald, between his <b>natural emotional reaction</b> and his attempt to <b>suppress any (feminine) emotion</b> that he shows, as he has to remain <b>masculine</b> in a patriarchal society.
	<b><i>"Leave after a strike" //</i></b> <b><i>"Said something about the shop too"</i></b>	Gerald remembers that Eva had to <b><i>"leave after a strike"</i></b> and <b><i>"said something about the shop too"</i></b> and therefore confirms the story of Mr Birling and Sheila. Therefore, Gerald knows that Eva is the same person, yet he later suggests that <b><i>"there's still no proof it was really the same girl"</i></b> . Here, Gerald is trying to <b>excuse his own behaviour</b> and also convince himself that he is <b>innocent</b> , through breaking the <b><i>"chain of events"</i></b> and therefore implying that his actions did not lead to a suicide.
	<b><i>"Yes I think you were (justified in getting Eva sacked" //</i></b> <b><i>"you couldn't have done anything else"</i></b>	On the one hand, Gerald's support for Mr Birling's convictions, is <b>necessary</b> for Gerald to uphold good relations with his future father-in-law and therefore he aligns himself with Mr Birling's views. <b>However</b> , it seems more likely that this is Gerald's legitimate belief as he will inherit the Croft family business and thus is a <b>true capitalist</b> at heart.
	<b><i>"He at least had some affection for her and made her</i></b>	The Inspector notes that Gerald's <b>kindness</b> towards Eva separates him from the rest of the characters as <b><i>"he at least had some affection for her and made her happy for a time"</i></b> . Yet, the help that he provided to Eva was in his own interest as he admits that he must have been a <b><i>"wonderful fairy prince"</i></b> to Eva.



	<i>happy for a time</i>	
Likeable appearance	<i>“[rather too manly to be dandy]”</i>	Priestley describes Gerald in the <b>stage directions</b> as “ <b>rather too manly to be dandy</b> ”, suggesting that he is very much <b>content and confident in his own masculinity</b> .
	<i>“[easy well-bred young man-about-town]”</i>	Priestley describes Gerald in the <b>stage directions</b> as “ <b>easy well-bred young man-about-town</b> ”. This <b>idiomatic</b> phrase suggests that Gerald is a <b>fashionable socialite</b> . Alternatively, this phrase could have <b>plural connotations</b> ; perhaps, Priestley is <b>foreshadowing</b> the unfaithful nature of Gerald, as he literally goes about-town and into the Palace bar in the search of female companions.
Capitalism	<i>“I insisted / I made her take some money”</i>	These are both <b>monetary exchanges</b> , rather than financial aid. Therefore, Gerald is disguising <b>prostitution as charity</b> . Priestley’s use of <b>imperatives</b> bears connotations of power and force; Gerald was always in power and in control.
Desire and lust	<i>“she was pretty - soft brown hair and big dark eyes - [breaks off] My God!”</i>	Priestley’s use of <b>aposiopesis</b> (abrupt break off in speech) comes directly after Gerald describes her beauty. Therefore, revealing that Gerald only felt attracted to Eva <b>physically</b> as he feels the greatest grief when remembering her physical beauty.
	<i>“A pretty girl in her early twenties” // “Looked young and fresh and charming”</i>	Perhaps Gerald is simply marrying Sheila for her attractive physical appearance as she is “ <b>a pretty girl</b> ” and in her “ <b>early twenties</b> ”, while Gerald is “ <b>about thirty</b> ”. Priestley has already evidenced Gerald’s <b>attraction to youth</b> and appearance through his description of Eva and why he pursued her as she was “ <b>young and fresh and charming</b> ”.
	<i>“young and fresh and charming and altogether out of place down there”</i>	Priestley incorporates a <b>predatory</b> description of Eva as there are <b>connotations</b> of <b>desire and fertility</b> from the <b>adjective “fresh”</b> , as Gerald views her <b>sexually from the start</b> . Priestley’s use of this adjective has <b>plural connotations</b> as Gerald views Eva like food - a possession.
	<i>“Women of the town”</i>	Priestley uses <b>euphemistic language</b> to evidence Gerald’s determination to conceal his use of prostitutes as “ <b>women of the town</b> ”.



	<b><i>"I hate those hard-eyed dough-faced women"</i></b>	Priestley evidences this familiarity through Gerald's vivid description of prostitutes as <b><i>"I hate those hard-eyed dough-faced women"</i></b> . This opinion of prostitutes is one that can only come from experience, rather than a one off or chance occurrence.
Class	<b><i>"It wasn't disgusting"</i></b>	Gerald refutes Mrs Birling's remark about his relationship with Eva being disgusting. Priestley does this to, perhaps, separate Gerald from the <b>older-generation</b> of characters and their traditional <b>classist</b> views.
	<b><i>"Knew it couldn't last"</i></b>	It wasn't Gerald's <b>ending of funding</b> that impacted Eva, but rather the end of a caring and intimate relationship, which pushed her over the <b>edge and onto suicide</b> as this hurt her emotionally. This sudden ending of their relationship is evidenced through Gerald dropping Eva like a possession as she <b><i>"knew it couldn't last"</i></b> , due to her <b>lower-class origins</b> .

