An Inspector Calls

J. B. Priestley
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An Inspector Calls was written in 1945 by J. B. Priestley. It was first performed in 1945 in the Soviet Union and the following year in the UK.

Wider Reading

• *An Inspector Calls: The Connell Guide* by David Hughes
• *Mrs Warren’s Profession* by George Bernard Shaw
• *The General Strike of 1926: The Connell Guide* by Laura Carter
• *Widowers’ Houses* by George Bernard Shaw
• *English Journey* by J. B. Priestley
• *English Journey* by Beryl Bainbridge
• *The Road to Wigan Pier* by George Orwell
• *Angel Pavement* by J. B. Priestley
• *Out of the People* by J. B. Priestley
• *The Masque of Anarchy* by Percy Bysshe Shelley
• *Down and out in Paris and London* by George Orwell
Context and Literary Tradition

• **The Industrial Revolution** – The 18th century saw the development of canals, factories and steam engines which changed the face of British economic infrastructure for good.

• **Urban growth** – Machines replaced labourers in many rural communities and this forced them to re-locate to cities and towns in search of work. As a result, towns grew rapidly.

• **Social mobility** – A rigid social hierarchy was deeply rooted in early 1900s Britain. The middle and upper classes seldom mixed with the working class, unless the latter were employed in their service.

• **Kier Hardy** – In 1892, Hardy stood as the first Labour candidate and was elected as the country’s first socialist Member of Parliament.

• **The Suffragettes** – After years of peaceful and strategic protests for women’s suffrage (led by Millicent Fawcett), Emmeline Pankhurst founded the Women’s Social and Political Union, a rather more militant organisation. Women were willing to use violence and martyrdom in an attempt to make their voices heard.

• **The Representation of the People Act** – In 1918, this act granted the vote to women over 30 who owned property. The same act granted the vote to men over the age of 21.
Context and Literary Tradition

• **RMS Titanic** – RMS Titanic was a British passenger liner which sank in the North Atlantic Ocean in the early hours of 15th April 1912.

• **World War One** – The Great War began in 1914 after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. By the time the war ended in November 1918, more than 16 million people – both soldiers and civilians – had lost their lives in the conflict.

• **The General Strike 1926** – The strike was called by the Trades Union Congress in an unsuccessful attempt to force the government to halt wage reduction and increased working hours for British coalminers.

• **Ramsay McDonald** – In 1924, the first Labour government was formed under Ramsay McDonald.

• **Economic recession** – After the First World War, there were understandable problems with the economy, and, in 1925, the government returned to the gold standard – it tied the value of the pound to the amount of gold in the Bank of England.

• **World War Two** – After Hitler’s invasion of Poland on 1st September 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany. Over 50 million people lost their lives. Among the dead were countless soldiers and innumerable civilians, including millions of Jews.
Act One Summary

Set in the spring of 1912, the Birling family are celebrating the engagement of Sheila Birling to Gerald Croft. Sheila’s father, Arthur Birling, is delighted with the engagement because it means he can work with, and not compete against, Crofts Ltd. Mr Birling lectures his son Eric, and Sheila’s fiancé, Gerald, on the importance of looking after yourself and your family.

Inspector Goole arrives and tells the family about Eva Smith’s suicide, a young girl with little money and little to live for. Goole shows Mr Birling a photograph of the girl and, after initially claiming he didn’t know her, he admits he fired her from his works a couple of years earlier. Birling justified his actions on the basis Eva was a ringleader and had encouraged a number of other women to go on strike over their pay and conditions.

Sheila is then shown the photograph – she recognises Eva as the girl she had dismissed from Milwards when she was in a foul mood. She instantly feels remorse for her actions. The inspector then tells us Eva changed her name to Daisy Renton; Gerald is visibly distressed by this.
Act Two Summary

Sheila questions Gerald on his whereabouts the previous summer, and he eventually admits he kept Daisy Renton as a mistress, partly because he felt sorry for her. He tells the inspector it started after he ‘rescued’ her from the grotesque advances of a well-known local dignitary, Alderman Meggarty.

Mrs Birling is shown the photograph next; she grudgingly admits she recognises Eva because she approached a charity chaired by Mrs Birling to ask for help. Eva was refused help because she claimed her surname was Birling, something which immediately prejudiced Mrs Birling against her. She told Eva she should find the father of her unborn child and force him to take responsibility. Like her husband, Mrs Birling refuses to take any responsibility for Eva’s death.

Mrs Birling denounces the child’s father and suggests on a number of occasions that the father of Eva’s child should be made to face his responsibilities publicly. Sheila pleads with her mother to stop; at the end of the act, Eric enters and we realise he is the father.
Act Three Summary

Eric admits he is the father and berates his mother for refusing to help Eva. He tells the inspector he met her at the Palace Bar and went back to her lodgings; two weeks later, he found out Eva was pregnant. Eric stole money from his father to support her, but when she realised it was stolen, she refused to accept any more.

The inspector claims they are all partly to blame for Eva’s death, and warns them the consequences of people not being responsible for one another. Eric and Sheila realise the part they have played in Eva’s suicide, whereas their parents refuse to accept any sort of responsibility for her death – their main concern is maintaining their unblemished reputation.

Birling calls the hospital and discovers there have been no suicides that day. The family believe they have been conned and the older Birlings start to joke, claiming everything is now different. Sheila and Eric are worried by their parents’ lack of remorse. The phone rings and the police tell Mr Birling a young girl has committed suicide and an inspector is on his way round to ask some questions...
Timeline of Events

- September 1910 – Eva sacked by Birling.
- December 1910 – Eva employed by Milwards.
- January 1911 – Eva sacked by Milwards.
- March to September 1911 – Eva is Gerald’s mistress.
- September to November 1911 – Eva leaves Brumley for two months.
- November 1911 – Eva meets Eric.
- January 1912 – Eva discovers pregnancy.
- March 1912 – Mrs Birling refuses help.
- April 1912 – Eva’s suicide.
Arthur Birling

• Mr Birling is a prosperous manufacturer who owns a factory in Brumley. He is the husband of Sybil Birling, and father to Sheila and Eric.

• At the start of the play, it is clear he only cares for his status and for materialistic things. He does not believe in community togetherness.

• He is selfish and egotistical, sitting firmly in the capitalist camp.

• The inspector’s visit has no impact on him and, like his wife, he is more concerned for his reputation.
Arthur Birling – Key Quotations

• “I’m not a purple-faced old man.” (A1)
• “Your engagement to Sheila means a tremendous lot to me.” (A1)
• “Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together – for lower costs and higher prices.” (A1)
• “I might find my way into the next Honours List. Just a knighthood” (A1)
• “I speak as a hard-headed man of business.” (A1)
• “Yes, yes. Horrible business. But I don’t understand why you should come here, Inspector.” (A1)
• “Just keep quiet, Eric, and don’t get excited.” (A1)
• “There’s nothing mysterious, or scandalous, about this business.” (A1)
• “Nearly two years ago – obviously it has nothing to do with this wretched girl’s suicide.” (A1)
• “Still, I can’t accept any responsibility.” (A1)
• “If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody we’d had anything to do with, it would be very awkward, wouldn’t it?” (A1)
Arthur Birling – Key Quotations

• “Well, it’s my duty to keep labour costs down.” (A1)
• “Inspector, I consider this uncalled for and officious.” (A1)
• “When this comes out at the inquest, it isn’t going to do us much good.” (A2)
• “I’ve got to cover this up as soon as I can. You damned fool.” (A3)
• “Look, Inspector – I’d give thousands – yes thousands” (A3)
• “Most of this is bound to come out. There’ll be a public scandal.” (A3)
• “Prejudiced from the start. Probably a socialist or some sort of crank” (A3)
• “This makes a difference y’know. All the difference.” (A3)
• “Leave this to us. I’ll admit this fellow’s antics rattled us a bit.” (A3)
• “The whole story’s just a lot of moonshine.” (A3)
Mrs Birling

• Mrs Birling is Arthur Birling’s wife, and is the mother of Sheila and Eric.

• She is described as being her husband’s social superior.

• She is narrow minded, defending Gerald when he claimed he was at work all of last summer, and supporting the view that men have to prioritise work over family.

• She is aloof and dismisses the inspector throughout.

• Like her husband, she is resistant to change and is immune to the inspector’s message.
Mrs Birling – Key Quotations

• “A rather cold woman and her husband’s social superior.” (A1)
• “Men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on their business. You’ll have to get used to that.” (A1)
• “That – I consider – is a trifle impertinent, Inspector.” (A2)
• “We’ve done a great deal of useful work in helping deserving cases.” (A2)
• “Though naturally I don’t know anything about this girl.” (A2)
• “She called herself Mrs Birling...and naturally, that was one of the things that prejudiced me against her case.” (A2)
• “I think she only had herself to blame.” (A2)
• “I didn’t like her manner.” (A2)
• “I did nothing I’m ashamed of or that won’t bear investigation.” (A2)
Mrs Birling – Key Quotations

• “She seemed to me to be not a good case – and so I used my influence to have it refused.” (A2)
• “I’ve done nothing wrong and you know it.” (A2)
• “Go and look for the father of the child. It’s his responsibility.” (A2)
• “I was perfectly justified in advising my committee not to allow her claim for assistance.” (A2)
• “Find this young man and then make sure he’s compelled to confess in public his responsibility.” (A2)
• “Eric, I’m absolutely ashamed of you.” (A3)
• “I answered more or less as he wanted me to answer.” (A3)
• “Gerald, you’ve argued this very cleverly, and I’m most grateful.” (A3)
• “They’re over-tired. In the morning they’ll be as amused as we are.” (A3)
• “I was the only one of you who didn’t give in to him.” (A3)
Sheila Birling

• Sheila is the daughter of Arthur and Sybil Birling, and is sister to Eric. She is engaged to Gerald Croft.

• At the start of the play, Sheila strikes us as being self-centred and naïve, appearing superficial.

• When the inspector arrives and she discovers Eva is dead, she feels responsible. Her character begins to change to one with more socialist views.

• By the end of the play, Sheila has changed a great deal. She agrees with the inspector and berates her parents for their selfish attitude and lack of remorse.
Sheila Birling – Key Quotations

• “Pretty girl in her early 20s; very pleased with life and rather excited.” (A1)
• “yes go on, Mummy. You must drink our health.” (A1)
• “Except for all of last summer, when you never came near me.” (A1)
• “Oh – Gerald – you’ve got it. Is it the one you wanted me to have?” (A1)
• “Oh – how horrible! Was it an accident?” (A1)
• “I can’t help thinking about this girl – destroying herself so horribly.” (A1)
• “You talk as if we were all responsible.” (A1)
• “It was a mean thing to do. Perhaps that spoilt everything for her.” (A1)
• “She looks at it closely, recognises it with a little cry, gives half a stifled sob, and then runs out.” (A1)
• “”You knew it was me all the time, didn’t you?” (A1)
Sheila Birling – Key Quotations

• “I felt rotten about it at the time and now I feel a lot worse.” (A1)
• “So I’m really responsible?” (A1)
• “If she’d been some plain creature, I don’t suppose I’d have done it.” (A1)
• “We were so pleased with ourselves until he started asking questions.” (A2)
• “You mustn’t try to build up a wall between us and that young girl.” (A2)
• “He’s giving us the rope – so we’ll hang ourselves.” (A2)
• “You were the wonderful Fairy Prince. You must’ve adored it, Gerald.” (A2)
• “I respect you more than I’ve ever done before.” (A2)
• “Oh – horrible – horrible! How could she have wanted to kill herself?” (A2)
• “Mother, I think it was cruel and vile.” (A2)
Sheila Birling – Key Quotations

• “We hardly ever told him anything he didn’t know. Did you notice?” (A3)
• “I suppose we’re all nice people now.” (A3)
• “I want to get out of this. It frightens me the way you talk.” (A3)
• “I remember what he said, how he looked, and what he made me feel.” (A3)
• “You’re pretending everything’s just as it was before.” (A3)
Eric Birling

• Eric is the only son of Arthur and Sybil Birling, and is brother to Sheila. He works for his father’s firm.

• At the start of the play, Eric comes across as naïve and irresponsible. He does, however, question his father on his decision to dismiss Eva from his works.

• Eric is shocked by the death of Eva and the part he has played in her suicide.

• By the end of the play, he, like Sheila, displays socialist behaviours. He also berates his parents.
Eric Birling – Key Quotations

- “In his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive.” (A1)
- “You’re squiffy.” (Sheila, A1)
- “Suddenly I felt I just had to laugh.” (A1)
- “He could have kept her on instead of throwing her out.” (A1)
- “Why shouldn’t they try for higher wages? We try for higher prices.” (A1)
- “I’m afraid he may have had rather too much to drink tonight.” (A2)
- “He’s been steadily drinking too much for the last two years.” (A2)
- “Eric, who seems to be in a silly, excitable mood.” (A2)
- “Eric enters, looking extremely pale and distressed.” (A2)
- “You haven’t made it any easier for me, have you, Mother? (A3)
Eric Birling – Key Quotations

• “You told her. Why, you little sneak!” (A3)
• “His whole manner of handling the decanter shows his familiarity with quick, heavy drinking.” (A3)
• “I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty.” (A3)
• “I wasn’t in love with her or anything.” (A3)
• “I was in a hell of a state about it.” (A3)
• “In a way, she treated me as if I were a kid.” (A3)
• “You’re not the kind of father a chap could go to when he’s in trouble.” (A3)
• “You killed her. She came to you to protect me and you turned her away – yes, and you killed her – and the child she’d have had too – my child.” (A3)
Eric Birling – Key Quotations

• “What does it matter now whether they give you a knighthood or not?” (A3)
• “You’re beginning to pretend now that nothing’s really happened.” (A3)
• “It’s what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters.” (A3)
• “You may be letting yourselves out nicely, but I can’t. Nor can Mother.” (A3)
• “It’s still the same rotten story whether it’s been told to a police inspector or to somebody else.” (A3)
Gerald Croft

- Gerald is the son of a very wealthy business man. He is engaged to Sheila Birling.
- At the start of the play, Gerald seems to support the Capitalist views of Mr Birling and doesn’t question him about his views on social responsibility.
- Gerald is unnerved and irritated by the inspector; he keeps quiet, but eventually reveals his guilt when the inspector mentions Daisy Renton.
- He is not adversely affected by Eva’s death; at the end of the play, he, like the older Birlings, feels like nothing has changed.
Gerald Croft – Key Quotations

• “An attractive chap about 30, rather too manly to be a dandy.” (A1)
• “Very much the easy, well-bred young man about town.” (A1)
• “I insist upon being one of the family now.” (A1)
• “I was awfully busy at the works all that time.” (A1)
• “You couldn’t have done anything else.” (A1)
• “Getting a bit heavy handed, aren’t you, inspector?” (A1)
• “After all, we’re respectable citizens and not criminals.” (A1)
• “D’you mind if I give myself a drink, Sheila?” (A1)
• “You gave yourself away as soon as he mentioned her other name.” (A1)
• “You wouldn’t look so guilty about it.” (A1)
Gerald Croft – Key Quotations

• "Were you seeing her last summer, during that time you hardly came near me and said you were so busy?" (A1)
• "Yes. We can keep it from him." (A1)
• "I think Miss Birling ought to be excused any more questions." (A2)
• "You’ve been through it and now you want to see someone else" (A2)
• "I met her first, in March last year, in the stalls at the Palace Bar." (A2)
• "It’s a favourite haunt of women of the town." (A2)
• "Old Joe Meggarty, half drunk and goggle-eyed, had wedged her into a corner with that obscene fat carcass of his." (A2)
• "He’s a notorious womaniser." (A2)
• "I insisted on Daisy moving into those rooms." (A2)
Gerald Croft – Key Quotations

• “I became at once the most important person in her life.” (A2)
• “I’m rather more upset by this business than I probably appear to be.” (A2)
• “There isn’t any such inspector. We’ve been had.” (A3)
• “Everything’s alright now, Sheila. What about this ring?” (A3)
The Inspector

• The inspector arrives at the Birling household to investigate the suicide of Eva Smith.

• After interrupting their celebratory dinner, he questions each character individually about their involvement with Eva Smith/Daisy Renton.

• The Birlings get increasingly agitated as he takes more and more control of the situation.

• He acts as a mouthpiece for Priestley and delivers a strong social message about collective responsibility and the consequences of being self-centred.
The Inspector – Key Quotations

• “He creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity, and purposefulness. He speaks carefully, weightily.” (A1)
• “Habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before speaking.” (A1)
• “Burnt her inside out of course.” (A1)
• “It’s how I like to work. One person and one line of enquiry at a time.” (A1)
• “What happened to her then may have determined what happened to her afterwards.” (A1)
• “It’s my duty to ask questions.” (A1)
• “It’s better to ask for the earth than to take it.” (A1)
• “It was the last real steady job she had.” (A1)
The Inspector – Key Quotations

• “You think young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?” (A2)
• “Massively taking charge. Allow me, Miss Birling.” (A2)
• “She died in misery and agony – hating life.” (A2)
• “We’ll have to share our guilt.” (A2)
• “Your daughter isn’t living on the moon. She’s here in Brumley, too.” (A2)
• “She came to you for help, at a time when no woman could have needed it more.” (A2)
• “Just used her, for the end of a stupid drunken evening, as if she was an animal, a thing, not a person.” (A3)
• “You made her pay a heavy price for that. Now she’ll make you pay.” (A3)
The Inspector – Key Quotations

• “You’re offering money at the wrong time, Mr Birling.” (A3)
• “And I tell you that the time will soon come, when, if men will not learn that lesson, they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.” (A3)
• “We don’t live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other.” (A3)
Eva Smith/Daisy Renton

• Eva Smith does not directly appear in the play.
• She killed herself after a series of events at the hands of the Birlings and Gerald Croft.
• She was sacked by Arthur Birling for being a perceived ‘ringleader’, got fired from Milwards because of Sheila’s jealousy, was refused help – for no good reason – by Sybil Birling, was kept as a mistress by Gerald, and was impregnated by Eric – all of which culminated in her suicide.
• She represents the many, not the few.
Eva Smith/Daisy Renton – Key Quotations

• “She was a lively, good-looking girl – country bred, I fancy.” (A1)
• “Both her parents were dead, so that she’d no home to go back to.” (A1)
• “She was very pretty – soft brown hair and big dark eyes.” (A2)
• “She gave me a glance that was nothing more than a cry for help.” (A2)
• “She was desperately hard up and at that moment was hungry.” (A2)
• “There are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears” (A3)
Social Responsibility – Key Quotations

• “A man has to make his own way – has to look after himself – and his family too.” (Mr Birling, A1)
• “You’d think everybody has to look after everybody else.” (Mr Birling, A1)
• “As if we’re all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense.” (Mr Birling, A1)
• “A man has to mind his own business and look after himself.” (Mr Birling, A1)
• “Sometimes we tried to put ourselves in the place of these young women counting their pennies in their dingy little back bedrooms.” (Inspector, A1)
• “You talk as if we were responsible.” (Sheila, A1)
• “You’re partly to blame. Just as your father is.” (Inspector, A1)
• “She’ll be alone with her responsibility, the rest of tonight.” (Inspector, A2)
• “And probably between us we killed her.” (Sheila, A2)
Social Responsibility – Key Quotations

• “Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.” (Inspector, A2)

• “Each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it.” (Inspector, A3)

• “All intertwined with our lives, with what we think and say and do.” (Inspector, A3)

• “Between us, we drove that girl to commit suicide.” (Eric, A3)
Social Class – Key Quotations

• “Dining room of a fairly large suburban house belonging to a prosperous manufacturer.” (A1)
• “Champagne glasses...decanter of port...cigar box...port glasses.” (A1)
• “All five are in evening dress.” (A1)
• “It’s the same port your father gets from him.” (Mr Birling, A1)
• “It’s about time you learnt to face a few responsibilities. That’s something this public school and Varsity life you’ve had doesn’t seem to teach you.” (Mr Birling, A1)
• “There are lots of young women living that sort of existence in every city.” (Inspector, A1)
• “You used the power you had, as a daughter of a good customer” (Inspector, A1)
Social Class – Key Quotations

• “I don’t suppose we can understand why the girl committed suicide. Girls of that class” (Mrs Birling, A2)
• “She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.” (Mrs Birling, A2)
• “She hadn’t a penny and was going to be turned out of the miserable back room she had.” (Inspector, A2)
Age – Key Quotations

• “What an expression! Really, the things you girls pick up these days.” (Mrs Birling, A1)
• “you don’t know what some of these boys get up to nowadays.” (Birling, A1)
• “I’m trying to tell the truth.” (Sheila, A1)
• “You seem to have made a great impression on this child.” (Mrs Birling, Act 2)
• “We often do on the young ones.” (Inspector, A2)
• “Don’t forget, I’m ashamed of you as well – yes, both of you.” (Eric, A3)
• “The point is you don’t seem to have learnt anything.” (Inspector, A3)
• “You two are being childish – trying not to face the facts.” (Sheila, A3)
Age – Key Quotations

• “Really, from the way you children talk, you might be wanting to help him instead of us.” (Mrs Birling, A3)
• “That’s what they don’t seem to understand.” (Sheila, A3)
• “So nothing really happened. So there’s nothing to be sorry for, nothing to learn. We can all go on behaving just as we did.” (Sheila, A3)
• “I tell you, whoever that inspector was; it was anything but a joke. You knew it then. You began to learn something. And now you’ve stopped. You’re ready to go on in the same old way.” (Sheila, A3)
Prejudice – Key Quotations

• “I felt rotten about it at the time. If she’d been some plain little creature, I don’t suppose I’d have done it.” (Sheila, A1)
• “I hate those hard-eyed, dough faced women.” (Gerald, A2)
• “Yes. We’ve done a great deal of useful work in helping deserving cases.” (Mrs Birling, A2)
• “She called herself Mrs Birling...and naturally, that was one of the things that prejudiced me against her case.” (Mrs Birling, A2)
• “I think she only had herself to blame.” (Mrs Birling, A2)
• “I didn’t like her manner.” (Mrs Birling, A2)
• “I did nothing I’m ashamed of or that won’t bear investigation.” (Mrs Birling, A2)
• “She seemed to me to not be a good case – and so I used my influence to have it refused.” (Mrs Birling, A2)
Prejudice – Key Quotations

• “She was giving herself ridiculous airs.” (Mrs Birling, A2)
• “She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.” (Mrs Birling, A2)
• “Prejudiced from the start. Probably a socialist or some sort of crank.” (Mr Birling, A3)
Lies and Deception – Key Quotations

• “Except for all of last summer, when you never came near me, and I wondered what had happened to you.” (Sheila, A1)
• “And I’ve told you – I was awfully busy at the works all that time.” (Gerald, A1)
• “Yes, that’s what you say.” (Sheila, A1)
• “I expect you’ve done things you’re ashamed of too.” (Sheila, A1)
• “Why should I have known her?” (Gerald, A1)
• “Alright I knew her – let’s leave it at that.” (Gerald, A1)
• “It was all over and done with last summer.” (Gerald, A1)
• “He’s been steadily drinking too much for the past two years.” (Sheila, A2)
• “We must stop these silly pretences.” (Sheila, A2)
Lies and Deception – Key Quotations

• “You recognise her?” (Inspector) “No, why should I?” (Mrs Birling, A2)
• “You’re not telling me the truth.” (Inspector, A2)
• “I got it from the office.” (Eric, A3)
• “You must give me a list of those accounts. I’ve got to cover this up as soon as I can.” (Birling, A3)
• “You see, Gerald, you haven’t to know the rest of our crimes and idiocies.” (Sheila, A3)
Capitalism

• Unlike socialism, capitalism is the political and economic theory of social organisation in which a country’s trade and industry are owned and administered by private companies, rather than by the state.

• Production of goods under a capitalist regime would be based on private companies making a profit.

• People (like Eva Smith) are paid to produce goods and services which are then sold at a profit.

• Capitalists (like Mr Birling) lived off the profits they made by exploiting working class people like Eva and other women in similar roles.

• In a money making cycle, capitalists will reinvest some of the profits for further accumulation of wealth.
Capitalism

• Some people would argue that the profit motive of capitalism is the root of many of the world’s problems today, especially starvation and war.

• In a capitalist society, the needs of the population will never come before the thirst for profit from the private companies.

• In 1912, socialist parties were finally coming into existence to challenge the status quo.
Socialism

• Socialism is the political and economic theory of social organisation which advocates collective or governmental (not private) ownership and administration of the production, distribution and exchange of goods.

• Production of goods under socialist regime would be entirely based on human need. Everybody would have access to the goods and services designed directly to meet their needs.

• Socialist ideals therefore, include production for use rather than profit.

• In the modern era, pure socialism is rarely seen and only then in communist regimes such as China, North Korea, Cuba and Vietnam. These regimes are evidently not without their problems.
Socialism

• Arthur Birling and his cronies are not interested in egalitarian distribution of wealth; they are interested in making huge profits by exploiting other people.

• Priestley was a socialist and uses the inspector as a mouthpiece to deliver his views.

• Sheila and Eric develop socialist ideals and Priestley’s intention here was to highlight the young person’s capacity to change.
The General Strike - 1926

• On 3rd May 1926, 850,000 coalminers went on strike. Their grievance was about the government’s plan to reduce pay and extend working hours.

• In a show of solidarity, workers from the railways, steel and gas, printing, construction, and road-transport industries also went out on strike.

• The strikers from non-mining unions amounted to around 1.5 million, the first and last of it’s kind, but this show of unity had been hard fought: the railways and transport industries had previously failed to support the miners in their inaugural strike on 15th April, 1921.

• The strike lasted nine days and as a result, The Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act was passed in 1927. This act made “sympathetic strikes” illegal. Many regarded this act as a Conservative attack on trade unionism.
The Suffragettes

• After years of peaceful and strategic protests for women’s suffrage (led by Millicent Fawcett), Emmeline Pankhurst founded the Women’s Social and Political Union, a rather more militant organisation. Women were willing to use violence and martyrdom in an attempt to make their voices heard.

• Violence seemed to be the only thing the powers that be did take notice of. The peaceful protests in the late 19th century had fallen on deaf ears.

• The Suffragettes burned down churches as they believed the Church of England was against women having the vote.
The Suffragettes

• A number of women vandalised Oxford Street and smashed all the windows on the well-known street. They also chained themselves to the gates of Buckingham Palace, believing the Royals were also against women’s suffrage.

• Women were happy to go to jail and would often go on hunger strike; the government worried that women dying in prison would mean the movement had created martyrs.

• Finally, in 1918, women who were over 30 and owned property, were given the right to vote, as were men over the age of 21.
Dramatic Irony

- “And unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable.” (Mr Birling, A1)
- “You’ll be marrying at a very good time.” (Mr Birling, A1)
- “There’s a lot of wild talk about possible labour trouble in the future.” (Mr Birling, A1)
- “The Germans don’t want war. I say there isn’t a chance of war.” (Mr Birling, A1)
- “We’re in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity.” (Mr Birling, A1)
- “You’ll be living in a world that’ll have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations.” (Mr Birling, A1)
- “There’ll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere.” (Mr Birling, A1)
- “We can’t let these Bernard Shaws and H G Wellses do all the talking.” (Mr Birling, A1)
- “And we don’t guess – we’ve had experience – and we know.” (Mr Birling, A1)
- “Look, Inspector, you’re not trying to tell us that my boy is mixed up” (Mr Birling, A2)
- “Find this young man and then make sure that he’s compelled to confess in public his responsibility.” (Mrs Birling, A2)
The Play’s Form

The three unities: The classic unities or Aristotelian unities are rules for drama derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics* (an ancient surviving work on dramatic theory). Priestley wanted his play to follow the three unities.

- **Unity of action** – The play should follow one main storyline, with very few, if any, sub-plots. The plot should move on smoothly throughout with a single set of incidents and without too many unnecessary interruptions.

- **Unity of place** – The play is limited to one set locality and should not take place anywhere else. In *An Inspector Calls*, the whole action takes place in the Birling household – even though other locations are referred to, the main action remains in one place.

- **Unity of time** – The timeframe, according to Aristotle, should not be lengthy and drawn out. The whole action of the play should be short lived and should take place in roughly no more than 24 hours.
The Play’s Structure

• The play follows a conventional structure with three acts and within this, there are several distinguishing features.

• The mood is bright and jolly prior to the inspector’s arrival, but this mood quickly changes once the inspector arrives and begins questioning the characters individually.

• The tension builds in act one with the audience left wondering about Gerald’s involvement with Eva/Daisy and curious about Sheila’s reaction.

• The tension mounts in act two as the inspector’s questions build up to the revelation that Eric is the father of Eva’s unborn child. The tension dissipates when the inspector departs.

• The inspector’s methodical approach to dealing with each character in turn allows him to link the chain of events of Eva’s story. The timing of character’s entrances and exits also lends itself to the questioning of each character in turn.

• Eva’s journey is mapped out very carefully through the inspector’s carefully thought out questions.
Key Vocabulary

- Capitalist (noun) – person who uses their wealth to invest in industry.
- Communism (noun) – all property is owned by the community.
- Coup de theatre (noun) – dramatically sudden action or turn of events.
- Denouement (noun) – final stages where strands are drawn together.
- Dialogue (noun) – a conversation between two or more people.
- Dramatic irony (noun) – when audiences know more than the characters.
- Euphemism (noun) – word or phrase used to avoid saying an unpleasant or offensive word.
- Hypocrite (noun) – a person who pretends to have virtues and beliefs.
- Irony (noun) – language which usually signifies the opposite.
- Monologue (noun) – a long speech by one actor in a play or film.
- Officious (adjective) – assertive or authoritative.
Key Vocabulary

• Polemic (noun) – writing which expresses an argument about society.
• Portentous (adjective) – something which is ominous.
• Prejudice (noun) – a preconceived opinion not based on reason.
• Provincial (adjective) – of or concerning a province of a country.
• Rhetoric (noun) – the art of effective persuasive speaking or writing.
• Sarcasm (noun) – the use of irony to mock or convey contempt.
• Scaremonger (noun) – a person who spreads frightening rumours.
• Socialist (noun) – a person who believes in fair distribution to all.
• Suburban (adjective) – outlying area of a city, especially a residential one.
• Suffrage (noun) – the right to vote in political elections.
• Voice (noun) – a particular opinion or attitude expressed.
How to Approach the Question

AQA Paper 2, Section A, Modern Texts

• This question is worth 34 marks and you should spend around 45 minutes answering it.

• You will be given a choice of two questions.

• You must only answer one of the questions.

• The question will be based on a character or theme.

• Read the question carefully and ensure you make a plan – this will provide you with a clear structure.
Gerald (slowly)
The man wasn’t a police officer.
Birling (astounded)
What?
Mrs Birling
Are you certain?
Gerald
I’m almost certain. That’s what I came back to tell you.
Birling (excitedly)
Good lad. You asked about him, eh?
Gerald
Yes. I met a police sergeant I know down the road. I asked him about this Inspector Goole and described the chap carefully to him. He swore there wasn’t any Inspector Goole or anybody like him on the force here.
Birling
You didn’t tell him –
Gerald
No, no. I passed it off by saying I’d been having an argument with someone. But the point is – this sergeant was dead certain they hadn’t had any inspector at all like the chap who came here.
Sample Question

Answer one question from this section.

1. How and why does Sheila change in the play?
2. How does Priestley explore the theme of responsibility in the play?

34 marks
Priestley uses various methods to expose Mr Birling’s lack of foresight. One way in which he does this is through the use of dramatic irony. On a number of occasions during the early stages of the play, Mr Birling makes a series of claims, all of which turn out to be inaccurate – he claims that the Titanic is “unsinkable”, that “there isn’t a chance of war”, and that the Capital versus Labour “agitations” will very soon be “forgotten”. Through these false predictions, Priestley portrays Birling as a fool who has no real understanding of the world around him, a view Priestley had of many capitalists. A contemporary audience would have been all too familiar with events in the first half of the century – indeed, some of the audience would have lost loved ones in the war and for those people, Mr Birling’s comments would be even more pertinent. Priestley’s intention was to ridicule capitalists and expose them for what they really were: selfish, narcissistic fat cats with no foresight and no regard for the lives of anyone else.

Building on this notion, Priestley...