

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

Context

Characters

1912 – when the play was set. Just before WW1 and the sinking of the Titanic. JBP wanted to make sure audiences in 1945 recognised the problems in society in 1912 before the wars (class system, capitalism, sexism) and weren't tempted to go back to living like that. He wrote the play to highlight the dangers of the capitalist lifestyle.

1945 – when the play was written and performed. After WW2, society changed for the better. The benefit system started to be introduced, and we had more equality for women and less of a class divide because of different classes and different genders mixing in the war effort. JBP supported and encouraged these changes and wanted to make sure he promoted them in his play by making capitalists like the older Birlings appear ignorant and selfish.

Socialism – JBP was a keen Socialist. This meant that he wanted everyone to look after each other rather than just caring about themselves. He was trying to promote this with the play, by making the Socialist characters like the Inspector much more respectable than the capitalist ones.

Capitalism – JBP hated capitalists – those who thought that everyone should only care about themselves and that making money was more important than human rights. He created Mr and Mrs Birling as capitalists, in order to make capitalism seem out-dated and selfish. Mr and Mrs B are portrayed in a negative way by JBP for this reason.

Outdated ideas – In 1912, the social classes were segregated, women got paid less than men for the same work, there was no benefit system or help with unemployment or housing. Society was patriarchal (men ruled).

Mr Birling	Arrogant and capitalist businessman who hates social equality and loves money. Sacks Eva from his factory when she asks for equal pay for women and threatens a strike.
Mrs Birling	Snobbish and cold-hearted capitalist who believes everyone is responsible for themselves. Doesn't help Eva when she comes to the charity for help.
Inspector	Priestley's mouthpiece (represents JBP's ideals), keen Socialist who fights for community responsibility and gets the Birlings to face up to what they have done.
Sheila	The daughter. Gets Eva sacked from the shop for smirking at her. Starts off as a spoilt rich girl but quickly changes her views, feels sorry for Eva Smith and starts to become Socialist as the play progresses. Is ashamed of her parents at the end.
Eric	The son. Typical young man – drinks too much and has a one-night stand with Eva. Ends up getting her pregnant and steals from his dad to give Eva money. Regrets his actions and changes his ways. Ashamed of his parents at the end.
Gerald	Sheila's fiancé. Businessman who has capitalist ideals and is similar to Mr Birling politically. Shows some regret for his affair with Eva, but happy to act like nothing has happened when it suits him.

Plot

ACT 1 The family are celebrating Sheila and Gerald's engagement. Birling makes speeches saying there will be no war, and the Titanic is unsinkable. An Inspector arrives and tells them Eva Smith has committed suicide. He gets Mr B to admit sacking her. He doesn't take blame. Inspector gets Sheila to admit getting her sacked for laughing. She feels guilty and ashamed of herself.

ACT 2 Inspector gets Gerald to admit having an affair with Eva Smith (now called Daisy Renton after a name change). Sheila is upset and questions her relationship with Gerald. Inspector gets Mrs B to admit not helping Eva when she came to Mrs B's charity for help when she became pregnant. Mrs B says it should be the father's responsibility. At the end of the Act, we realise that the father of Eva's baby was Eric.

ACT 3 Eric's involvement with Eva is revealed and a possible rape is hinted at, as he says he forced Eva. The Inspector gives his final speech about fire, blood and anguish. He is warning the family that if they don't start to take responsibility for others, they will live to regret it. Inspector then leaves. Gerald finds out that the Inspector wasn't a real inspector. Mr B rings to check and there is no Inspector Goole. Also, there is no dead girl! Mr and Mrs B (and Gerald) celebrate and act like nothing has happened. Sheila and Eric still feel guilty and can't go back to how they were before. Right at the end, the telephone rings and they are told that a girl has just committed suicide and an inspector is on his way over to ask some questions.

Why is the fact it is Morality Play significant?

Morality plays were first performed in the late middle ages. They are a type of allegory (a story which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one). In these types of plays, the main characters are met by supporting characters who are personifications of good and evil. They are used to prompt the main character to choose a good life over one of evil. The point of a morality play then, was to educate the audience and get them to lead a better life so that they would determine a better fate for themselves in the "after-life". The supporting characters sometimes represented the Seven Deadly Sins. The Seven Deadly Sins were vices that people believed if you committed, could lead to the eternal damnation of your soul- i.e. you would go to hell forever. Morality plays were popular during the 15th and 16th-centuries. Historically they sought to teach the audience lessons that focused on the seven deadly sins: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride. Whilst characters who committed these sins were punished, morality plays showed that if a character repented then they could redeem themselves. *An Inspector Calls* is a morality play because all of the Birlings and Gerald Croft commit crimes which are similar to the seven deadly sins. Mr Birling is greedy because he wants more money, Sheila is guilty of wrath and envy when she spitefully complains about Eva Smith and so on. Not all of the characters manage to redeem themselves. Priestley uses the morality play structure to teach a 20th-century audience a series of lessons that relate to his beliefs about social responsibility, age, gender and class. The audience is invited to enjoy judging these characters - they are also forced to question their own behaviour. Priestley would have hoped that people watching the play would have left the theatre as better people.

Key themes

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES
The older generation (Mr and Mrs Birling) are a symbol of capitalism, so they do not change their ways and they are reluctant to accept blame for their role in Eva's demise. The younger generation, on the other hand (Sheila and Eric) become a symbol of Socialism as the play progresses. They accept blame and want to change; they change throughout the play, for the better.

RESPONSIBILITY / JUSTICE
The Inspector, as Priestley's mouthpiece, is a symbol of Socialism – he wants everyone to look after each other and to view community as very important. He is sent to uncover the family's wrongdoings and to make them see that they should take responsibility for others. Sheila and Eric realise this, but Mr and Mrs B do not.

GENDER INEQUALITY
Priestley wanted to show his audience that there was a lot of inequality back in 1912 when it came to how women were treated. By making certain characters out to be sexist, he highlighted this problem and tried to shame audiences into changing their own views about gender equality too. This is perhaps why the victim of their actions is a woman, and why she is working class (working class women were at the bottom of the pile in those times).

Why is the structure important - Whodunit and the Well - Made play?

A **whodunit** is a plot-driven variety of the detective story in which the puzzle is the main feature of interest. The reader is provided with clues before the solution is revealed in the final pages of the text. The investigation is usually conducted by an eccentric detective. The "whodunit" flourished during the so-called "Golden Age" of detective fiction, during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, when it was the predominant mode of crime writing. Typical character types include an eccentric detective; an arrogant, dismissive and even abusive Lord or Lady of the manor; the posh, roguish 'playboy'; and a spoilt, over-indulged daughter. Structurally, the whodunit follows a very conventional route. At first, there is no *clear* culprit – but as the detective speaks to each potential criminal, more and more unsavoury events are uncovered. Eventually, the detective will gather the suspects together and elaborate on who would have wanted to commit the crime and why. This is followed by the final 'reveal'. Priestley uses the Whodunnit genre to explore social issues – the characters are thoroughly questioned by the detective so their thoughts, actions and opinions can be explored deeply. This is also perfect to demonstrate a social message as actions and consequences of a crime are shown and would make the audience think twice about making the same mistake. The message is directed to the upper class so Priestley needed to make sure they saw it. Going to the theatre was popular with the upper class until 1939 when the cinema became popular, so as an attempt to retain a theatre audience Priestley used a detective thriller as they were so popular.

A well-made play is a popular dramatic genre from the 19th-century. In a well-made play **the plot is intricate and complex** and the action builds to a climax. This is often concerned with events that happened before the events of the play. A well-made play usually ends with a return to order but Priestley moves away from this genre with the revelation at the end. *An Inspector Calls* is a well-made play because the events are all influenced by what happened to Eva Smith where the play takes place. This structure allows J B Priestley to manipulate the audience. They do not know what happened to Eva Smith and so each revelation about her treatment by the Birlings and Gerald Croft adds to the drama. Each revelation is more shocking than the last and so Priestley cleverly builds to the climax. In *An Inspector Calls* there is a twist at the end of the plot - the characters are unsure if the Inspector existed at all. This gives the audience time to reflect on the events of the play. When it is revealed that another inspector is on their way and the curtain falls, the audience would be stunned.

Genre - Crime Thriller

A crime thriller is a genre that tells a **gripping tale based around a crime**. The audience receives clues on who has committed the crime and will enjoy trying to guess what happened before the end of the action.

An Inspector Calls is a crime thriller because the action centres around the suicide of Eva Smith. Initially, as this is a suicide and not a murder investigation, it would seem that there is no clear suspect. It soon turns out that all the characters are potential suspects for different reasons.

The crime thriller genre encourages the audience to become involved in the events of the play. In this case they would be considering who is 'more' to blame for the death of Eva Smith. Ultimately, Priestley makes the audience suspects, their behaviour is questioned and they are left wondering if they had committed any 'crimes' like the Birlings had.

Key Quotes

The Inspector	<p><i>(massively)</i> Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges. (Act 2)</p> <p><i>(very deliberately)</i> I think you did something terribly wrong – and that you're going to spend the rest of your life regretting it. (Act 2)</p> <p>Each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it. <i>(He looks from one to the other of them carefully.)</i> But then I don't think you ever will. (Act 3)</p> <p>One Eva Smith has gone – but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, and what we think and say and do. We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and bloody and anguish. Good night. (Act 3)</p>
Sheila	<p>But these girls aren't cheap labour- they're people. (Act 1)</p> <p>Oh – Gerald – you've got it – is it the one you wanted me to have? (Act 1)</p> <p><i>(bitterly)</i> I suppose we're all nice people now. (Act 3)</p> <p><i>(flaring up)</i> Well, he inspected us all right. And don't let's start dodging and pretending now. Between us we drove that girl to commit suicide. (Act 3)</p> <p><i>(tensely)</i> I want to get out of this. It frightens me the way you talk. (Act 3)</p> <p>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. (Act 3)</p>
Mrs B	<p>I didn't see any reason to believe that one story should be any truer than the other. Therefore, you're quite wrong to suppose I shall regret what I did. (Act 2)</p> <p>I'm sorry she should have come to such a horrible end. But I accept no blame for it at all. (Act 2)</p>
Mr B	<p>Still, I can't accept any responsibility. 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? (Act 1)</p> <p>This girl, Eva Smith, was one of them, she'd had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go. (Act 1)</p> <p>Rubbish! If you don't come down sharply on some of these people, they'd soon be asking for the earth. (Act 1)</p> <p><i>(pointing to Eric and Sheila)</i> Now look at the pair of them – the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke- (Act 3)</p>
Eric	<p>Well, I don't blame you. But don't forget I'm ashamed of you as well – yes both of you. (Act 3)</p> <p><i>(bursting out)</i> What's the use of talking about behaving sensibly. You're beginning to pretend now that nothing's really happened at all. And I can't see it like that. This girl's still dead, isn't she? Nobody's brought her to life, have they? (Act 3)</p> <p>The money's not the important thing. It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters. And I still feel the same about it, and that's why I don't feel like sitting down and having a nice cosy talk. (Act 3)</p>

Subject Terminology

Dramatic Irony

Real Time

Tension

Monologue

Act

Language choice

Interruptions

Metaphor

Triplets / list of three

Stage Directions

Patriarchy

Contrast

Direct Address

Audience

Priestley's Mouthpiece/construct

Repetition

Cyclic structure

Playwright

Structure