An Inspector Calls: An EMC Study Guide
Acknowledgements

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All page references refer to the Longman edition of the play.
Responsibility

Before you start reading *An Inspector Calls*, here are two activities which introduce some of the ideas about responsibility and morality explored in the play.

**Individuals and society**

This activity is to get you thinking about whether each of us has any responsibilities to others living in our society.

- Look at the following statements. Alone, decide your views on each statement by ticking the column alongside. Then discuss each of the statements with your neighbour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There cannot be a better society; this is all there is</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We don’t live alone, we live in a community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>There is no such thing as society</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We are responsible for each other</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone should look after themselves</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are all connected to one another</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All this talk about ‘community’ is rubbish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What we all think and say and do affects the lives of others</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Doing the right thing**

This is a multiple choice activity to get you thinking about the moral choices we all have and whether there is a right and a wrong way to act.

- Alone, circle the action you would take in each of these situations. Then talk in a small group about the following:
  - is there is a right or a wrong thing to do in each situation?
  - are there situations where it would be difficult for you to do the right thing?

- When you have finished your discussion, feedback as a whole class on the issue of whether or not people in a community have any responsibility for each other.

1. You see two primary aged children shoving another child against the wall. A fight is obviously going to begin. Do you:
   a) ignore them because you don’t know what has been going on
   b) go up to them and try to stop the fight before it starts
   c) tell an adult that you think a young child is about to get beaten up
2. Someone who doesn’t speak English gets on the bus and tries to ask the bus driver if the bus goes to the hospital. The bus driver is impatient and can’t be bothered to make the effort to understand. Do you:
   a) push past the person, show your pass and get on
   b) tell the bus driver that the person wants the hospital
   c) speak to the person and reassure them that this is the right bus for the hospital

3. An old person falls down in the street. Do you:
   a) pass by because you are in a hurry
   b) rush to help them
   c) slow down so that someone else will help them first

4. There is a bottle bank near where you live but no one in your family uses it. Do you:
   a) think nothing of it because one family’s bottles won’t make any difference
   b) put a box in the kitchen and tell everyone to put the empty bottles in it
   c) tell your family that you’ll take bottles to the bank each week in return for not doing the washing up

5. A beggar asks you for money outside the station. Do you:
   a) ignore them because you disapprove of begging
   b) apologise for having no change
   c) pass by because you are in a hurry

6. Your class is involved in raising money for a charity. Some class members openly take some of the money for themselves. Do you:
   a) do nothing
   b) try to persuade them to put it back
   c) tell an adult in the hope that it will be dealt with by them
What sort of play is this going to be?

The first page

The very first page of *An Inspector Calls*, which gives the list of characters and establishes the setting, has been reprinted for you below.

■ Look closely at it adding to the annotated comments and questions to help you talk about what kind of play this is going to be.

CHARACTERS
ARTHUR BIRLING
SYBIL BIRLING *his wife*
SHEILA BIRLING *his daughter*
ERIC BIRLING *his son*
EDNA *the maid*
GERALD CROFT
INSPECTOR GOOLE

All three acts, which are continuous, take place in the dining-room of the Birlings house in Brumley, an industrial city in the North Midlands.

It is an evening in spring, 1912

Stage directions and characters

The first task here is designed to help you to read and visualise the stage directions that open the play. It should not take you long to do.

■ In small groups make notes about the details of the stage directions. Different pairs or individuals within groups could take responsibility for each of the following headings and report back to the rest of the group:
  – furniture
  – props
  – costume
  – lighting
  – characters/personalities

■ Get into groups of six, and each take the role of one of the characters present when the curtain rises: the four Birlings, Gerald and Edna. Organise yourselves around the dinner table according to Priestley’s instructions.

● Still in your dinner party groups, look at the details about clothes given in the second paragraph of the stage directions. Decide who feels most comfortable and least comfortable in their clothes.

● All the people playing Mr Birling should go to a corner of the room and talk about what it would be like to wear those clothes and how they would make you look and feel. What clues can you glean from the stage directions about how your character would look and feel and move?

● After two minutes’ preparation all the Mr Birlings should ‘enter’ the room and go to their places at the tables in character.
● Do the same with the other characters.

● Make notes about what each character reveals about themselves in a chart like the one below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>How they might feel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birling</td>
<td>‘heavy-looking’</td>
<td>proud to have status of evening wear but uncomfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘portentous’</td>
<td>due to overeating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘middle fifties’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘easy manners’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘provincial in speech’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

■ Read through the opening dialogue up to Edna’s exit (page 2). Talk together about the characters in the play and what we have learned so far about the way they treat each other and their own sense of themselves.

● What ideas about this play have you got so far? Think about:
  – your response to the opening scene
  – your impression of the characters in this play
  – the themes that are introduced that may be developed later in the play
  – your ideas about why an Inspector is going to call.
A family celebration

The Birling family and their guest, Gerald Croft, are finishing a formal dinner party to celebrate the engagement of the daughter of the family, Sheila, to Gerald. Mr Birling, Sheila's father and Sir George Croft, Gerald's father, were business rivals so Mr Birling is hoping this engagement will reduce competition and drive up prices for the family business. He's optimistic about prospects for the two families and for the world in general.

Mr Birling and Gerald appear to get on very well but there seem to be tensions between Eric, the son of the family, and his father. Just as Mr Birling is dismissing the idea of society as a ‘community’, the door bell rings and the maid tells Mr Birling that there is a police inspector at the door.

(From where BIRLING says ‘Give us the port Edna’ on page 1 down to where EDNA says ‘Inspector Goole’ on page 10.)

‘One of the happiest nights of my life …’

When the curtain rises on the scene of the family celebration, it seems on the surface that everything is right with the Birlings' world and there is a lot to look forward to. But this scene also suggests a subtle sense of unease.

■ Read the statements below and select 2 which you think most fully explain this sense of unease:

a) Birling knows the Crofts have snubbed him by not turning up, but he's got his revenge because they need each other – they can monopolise the market together.

b) Birling shows by his ignorance of social convention that he has beaten them all, his wife included. Class is irrelevant to him.

c) Because he’s a ‘self-made man’, he reckons he’s shown everyone how they can do it – he hasn’t time for weaklings. He's made ‘progress’ and that’s what he believes in.

d) He’s a man with quite a few skeletons in his cupboard.

e) They’re all putting on an act. They are all worried about what the other family might think of them.

f) The atmosphere of gaiety is forced. It's not good that Gerald’s parents haven't come.

g) Sheila's pleased about the ring, but still uneasy about last summer when ‘Gerald never came near her’.

h) Sheila shows by her language that she’s not going to be tied down by convention – Gerald can take her or leave her as he finds her – she’s a free agent.

i) Eric is very nervous about something.
Class tensions – the Crofts and the Birlings

As we read on we learn that this party is a rather one-sided party because Gerald’s parents, Sir George and Lady Croft, are not there.

■ Read up to where the engagement ring has been given and Mr Birling is about to start his long speech (‘And I want to say this’ – bottom of page 5). Gather up clues about the relationship between the Croft and Birling families. What can you find out about the following:
  – the connections Gerald and Mr Birling have with each other?
  – Mr Birling’s feelings about social status?
  – which characters have inherited their money (aristocrats) and which have earned their money (middle class)?
  – reasons for Gerald wanting to marry into the Birling family?

■ In groups of three (or four if you want a director), prepare a short improvisation in which Sir George and Lady Croft have a conversation with their son Gerald just after he has announced his intention to marry Sheila Birling. Decide for yourselves whether they know her very well.

  ● Show two or three of the improvisations to the class, or more if a group feels it has a very different version to offer. The secret is to keep them short – not more than two or three minutes each.

Birling’s speech-making

■ Look carefully at Birling’s speeches on pages 4 to 9. Give each speech a heading to sum up what it is about. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strikes</th>
<th>Look After Number One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>War Won’t Happen</td>
<td>Business Prospects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress</td>
<td>History Doesn’t Matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Such Thing as Society</td>
<td>The Future Looks Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

■ Now read what Barry Stanton, the actor who plays Birling in the Royal National Theatre production of An Inspector Calls, says about one of Birling’s speeches at this point in the play.

  ‘The speech is very early on. It’s informing Gerald of his philosophy about life; primarily, you have to look after yourself. Birling’s outlook is purely selfish. “Me, me, me; self, self, self – as long as I look after myself everything else will be okay. I am the head of a very important, very influential family and business, and if I look after myself then everybody else will be okay.”’

Writing suggestion

Write one or two short sketches to show a modern day Arthur Birling talking about some of his favourite topics. Imagine you meet him on work experience in an office. For example, a modern day Arthur Birling might start off like this if he saw a newspaper headline about rail strikes:

  ‘These people don’t know what it is to work hard. If I were in charge I’d sack the lot of them straight away, give their jobs to people who want to work, who are grateful for the chance to earn a decent wage...’
**Dramatic irony**

Dramatic irony is when the full meaning of a situation or a speech is understood by the audience but not by the characters on stage.

From the time this play was first performed in 1946, audiences have been able to see the irony of Birling’s early speeches in which he is so optimistic about the future.

- Compare the confident statements Arthur Birling makes about the future with the timeline on the following pages. Collect some quotations from Birling’s speeches which sum up his optimism and ignorance and alongside each one note down a few examples from the timeline to show the dramatic irony of his statements. Remember that the play is set in 1912.

**Timeline**

1893  The Labour Party founded by Keir Hardie supporting interests of organised labour, nationalisation and social welfare.

1894  Priestley born in Bradford to middle class parents. (His grandparents both worked in the mills.)

1895  H. G. Wells’ short story *The Time Machine* first published. (Wells was a socialist who wrote science fiction visions of apocalyptic futures. He supported the Suffragettes and believed society’s salvation could only come about through education and from learning from history.)

1900  General Election. Tories re-elected with huge majority.

1901  Queen Victoria dies. Edward VII comes to the throne.

1903  The Women’s Social and Political Union founded by Emmeline Pankhurst to fight for the vote for women. First powered aeroplane flight.

1904  Britain has more outdoor paupers than at any time since 1888. Dramatic increase in number of people receiving poor relief in the form of charitable aid from their parish. 1 in 41 people rely upon the parish for food. 3000 London cabbies go on strike.

1905  TUC calls for universal suffrage, old-age pensions and an eight-hour day.

156 die in Welsh pit disasters.

500 striking workers shot by Csar’s troops in St Petersburg, Russia.

First suffragettes sent to prison for assaulting police.
1906  General Election landslide victory for Liberals; Tory Representation reduced to 156 from 401; Labour wins 29 seats, an increase of 27. Jobless march from the Midlands to London to protest at Downing Street. Of a population of 33 million, 10 million workers are living in chronic destitution.

1907  Strikes and rioting in Belfast.

1908  2000 cotton workers go on strike in the north of England. 73 miners killed in Lancashire pit explosion. 10 miners die in Somerset pit explosion. Old-age pensions introduced for everyone over 70. 200,000 people join Suffragette demonstration in London.

1909  Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, introduces a radical ‘People’s Budget’ in which he raises taxes to pay for social reform. Tory opposition and Lords outraged and set out to block the budget. Panic in Parliament as Britain falls behind Germany in the arms race. 2,500 sick children in workhouses. Wife desertion rises by one third. Higher prices blamed. Suffragettes on hunger strike force-fed in prison. 26 miners killed in South Wales pit explosion.

1910  Miners’ strike for eight-hour day spreads and develops into violent riots. 700 mills in Lancashire lock out workers who are demanding higher wages. 350 men and boys killed in pit explosion in Lancashire. Edward VII dies, succeeded by George V.

1911  Nation-wide violent riots over low wages and rising prices. 200,000 on strike. Armed troops brought in to quell rioters. Several strikers shot dead. 21 die in mill explosion. 2,500 children die in heat wave. London the second unhealthiest city in the world. 300,000 mill workers locked out by owners retaliating against wage claims. Shop workers win 60 hour working week in proposed Bill reducing their hours from 80–90 hours worked over 7 days.
1912 The 'unsinkable' Titanic hits an iceberg and sinks. 1,500 die. 2% of Londoners dying weekly from the cold. 2,000 Derbyshire miners strike. Suffragettes smash windows in West End. 96 arrested. British Medical Association outraged by National Insurance plans which would extend medical aid to the poor. The year in which *An Inspector Calls* is set. Priestley is 18 years old.

1913 First Sick and Maternity Benefits introduced through the National Insurance Act. Emmeline Pankhurst blows up Lloyd George's house. 50 girls die in factory fire. Suffragette Emily Davison dies trying to stop the King's horse in the Derby. 400 miners killed in Welsh pit fire. 500,000 British children ill-fed and diseased according to Chief Medical Officer for Schools.

1914 Start of The First World War triggered by assassination of Austro-Hungarian heir to throne in Sarajevo by a Serbian student. For the first time modern killing technology includes tanks, shells, warships, submarines, machine guns, poison gas and bomber aeroplanes. Priestley serves in the trenches of France. Ulster on brink of civil war. 20,000 builders on strike. 140,000 miners on strike. Income tax doubled to pay for the war which is costing £1 million daily.

1915 Women urged to quit home for the factory. TUC and public opposition at plans for compulsory conscription. 1,000 suffragettes go to France to do war work. 33,000 women sign up for war service. Strikes continue. War costing £3 million daily.

1916 Dublin uprising protesting at British rule in Ireland.

1917 Russian Revolution. 200,000 women working the land in Britain. Women workers in nation-wide equal pay disputes.

1919 Over 200,000 strikers in many industries. Tube strike in London in protest at long working hours. TUC votes in favour of nationalisation of mines. 50,000 iron foundry workers go on strike for higher wages. Nancy Astor, first woman MP elected.


1921 In January 927,000 unemployed; in June 2.2 million unemployed.

1926 General Strike, in protest at mass unemployment and treatment of the miners, hits British industry.

1928 Equal Franchise Act gives vote to all women aged 21.

1933 Hitler, leader of the Nazi Party, elected Chancellor of Germany. During the 30s Fascists come to power in Spain, Italy and Germany. In Britain the Fascist movement gains popularity. Rise in anti-Jewish violence throughout Europe.


1937 Spanish Civil War attracts thousands of men and women from all over the world who join the fight against Fascism.

1939 Hitler starts the Second World War by invading Poland. Killing and atrocities take place during this war on a scale that exceeds even that seen in the First World War. Civilian deaths are higher than in any previous war. Aerial bombing of cities occurs on a massive scale (130,000 civilians killed in Dresden during one night of bombing).

1942 Welfare State proposed – social security from the cradle to the grave.
1945  End of the Second World War: 55 million dead (soldiers and civilians).
6 million Jewish men, women and children systematically killed in German concentration camps.
The world’s first atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the US. Each bomb kills 70,000 civilians instantly, many more die later of radiation poisoning.
Priestley writes *An Inspector Calls*.
Churchill’s wartime government resigns.
A reforming Labour government elected to power in landslide victory.
Priestley visits the Soviet Union.
*An Inspector Calls* first produced in Moscow.

### Staging the opening

All plays have some stage directions suggesting how the set might look, giving ideas about costume and props and so on. The amount of detail these directions go into varies depending on the edition of the play. The detail in them is not always what was offered by the playwright but may be an account of how the first production did the play. Therefore the stage directions are as open to interpretation as the play itself.

- Think about the opening of *An Inspector Calls* using the section you have worked on so far, up until page 10. Talk together about the ways in which it works as an opening to do the following:
  - hook the audience’s interest
  - introduce the characters
  - establish a sense of place
  - suggest the themes and ideas which the play will explore
  - set up the story or the structure around which the play will progress

- Using what you know of the play so far, talk together about how you would stage the opening of *An Inspector Calls* from the moment the curtain rises up until Edna announces the Inspector’s entry on page 10. Try acting out your ideas as you develop them. Think about the following:
  - set design and props
  - lighting, music and sound
  - costume
  - where actors will be on stage at different moments
  - delivery of key speeches – movements, tone of voice, gestures, expression, position on stage etc.

- Make notes on your ideas to refer back to when you come to your work on the video later on in this pack.
The Inspector’s investigation begins

The Inspector enters and tells everyone that a girl named Eva Smith is in the mortuary having committed suicide. After questioning, Mr Birling admits that she had been in his employment eighteen months ago but was sacked for her part in a strike at the works. He refuses to take any responsibility for her death. Sheila enters. The Inspector makes it clear that other members of the party are involved in the girl’s death.

(From where the INSPECTOR says ‘Mr Birling’ on page 10 down to where the INSPECTOR says ‘No’ on page 17.)

Enter Inspector Goole

All entrances and exits are significant in a play. The Inspector’s arrival is signalled in the play by ‘the sharp ring of a front door bell.’ Printed below is the dialogue that follows Edna’s announcement that the Inspector is at the door, but with all stage directions and character details left out. The dialogue is between Mr Birling, Gerald and Eric.

■ Read it over in groups of two or three and work out who says what and how e.g. angrily, jokingly, cheerfully, self-importantly etc.

– It may be something about a warrant.
– Sure to be. Unless Eric’s been up to something. And that would be very awkward, wouldn’t it?
– Very.
– Here, what do you mean?
– Only something we were talking about when you were out. A joke really.
– Well, I don’t think it’s very funny.
– What’s the matter with you?
– Nothing.
EDNA – Inspector Goole.

● When you have noted down your own stage directions, compare them with the piece of dialogue as Priestley wrote it, then talk together about the relationship between the three men. Write down your thoughts about their relationship as a triangular diagram. Write notes alongside each side of the triangle to show your comments and observations about the three men.

● Priestley could easily have had the Inspector right behind Edna when she announced him, so he would have walked straight into the room as she left. Why do you think Priestley put in the piece of dialogue you have just looked at?

● Talk about and make notes on the whole way in which he stages the entry of the Inspector; the announcement at the door; the ‘banter’ between the men; the stage directions; the refusal of a drink; the Inspector’s short replies to Mr Birling.

Family tensions

What is said, when and how, is always important in a play. The actor’s interpretation of certain key lines can signal a moment of dramatic importance to the audience or give a glimpse of underlying tensions between the characters. One example of a significant line in this play is on page 12 when Mr Birling turns and, apparently out of the blue, says:

‘You’ve had enough of that port Eric’

The actor can play this line in many different ways, which will convey to the audience quite different subtexts. He can be quiet and tactful, angry, panicky, bossy, etc.
INSPECTOR: It’s the way I like to go to work. One person and one line of
enquiry at a time. Otherwise there’s a muddle.
BIRLING: I see. Sensible really. (Moves restlessly, then turns.) You’ve
had enough of that port, Eric.

Working in pairs, find your interpretation of the section printed above, and in
particular be very clear about what is going through Mr Birling’s mind as he ‘Moves
restlessly’. Hold the final moment in a freeze.

- Get two or three groups to show their work to the class, or more if a group feels it
has something different to offer. While the work is being shown, the spectators
should make a guess at what is going through Mr Birling’s head as he ‘Moves
restlessly’. His thought processes will also, of course, depend on how the Inspector
delivers his lines – and perhaps on what Eric is doing at that particular moment.

The Inspector questions Birling

When the Inspector starts to ask questions, Birling realises he is not the sort of police
Inspector he is used to.

Look carefully through his questioning of Birling (pages 10–15) and collect some
examples of exchanges between them which are interesting or unusual. When
you’ve listed them in a chart like the one below talk about what these exchanges
reveal. Think about:
- further information concerning Birling and his life
- the Inspector’s techniques and intentions e.g. pausing or repeating things in a
  way that creates a sense of unease

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exchanges</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B: Have a glass of port – or a little whiskey?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: No, thank you, Mr Birling. I’m on duty.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Some trouble about a warrant?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I: No, Mr Birling.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: (after a pause, with a touch of impatience)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well, what is it then?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| B: 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?           |          |
| I: Very awkward.                                                        |          |
| B: They wanted the rates raised so that they could average about twenty-five
  shillings a week.                                                      |          |
| I refused, of course.                                                   |          |
| I: Why?                                                                 |          |
| B: I don’t see that it’s any concern of yours how I choose to run my business. Is it now? I: It might be, you know. B: I don’t like that tone. | |
| B: If you don’t come down sharply on some of these people, they’d soon be asking the earth. I: They might. But after all it’s better to ask for the earth than to take it. |
Talk about how Birling copes with this questioning. Does he get flustered or lose his cool at any point and if so why? Or do you think Birling feels more or less the same after the Inspector has questioned him as he did at the beginning of the play?

Sheila is the next person to be questioned by the Inspector. From what you know of her so far, brainstorm your ideas about how you think she will cope with the Inspector’s interviewing techniques.

Keeping a record as you read the play
As you read on, collect further examples of the Inspector’s questioning techniques with different characters, in the same way that you have done here. This will be useful for you later on when you come to the work on ‘Who is the Inspector?’ in After Reading.

The strike at Birling’s factory

Background information
Read the following background information and personal testimonies and annotate them with a few quotations from Birling’s speeches which show how little he knew or cared about the living and working conditions of his workers.

Working and living conditions
The years 1910 to 1912, when the play is set, were years of great industrial unrest. The strike in Mr Birling’s factory would have been just one of many in those years. Between 1910 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, relations between employers and workers deteriorated. Prices were rising but wages were not – a situation of which Mr. Birling obviously approved. It was at this time that many small unions were joining together to make larger organisations with greater bargaining power and international links. The Transport and General Workers’ Union, the National Union of Miners and the National Union of Railwaymen were formed at this time and joined themselves into ‘The Triple Alliance’. Together, they had the potential to bring the country to a standstill, just before the war.

The summer of 1911 was the nearest the country came to a general strike at this time. Starting with the miners’ unions, who took united action in favour of a minimum wage, the strikes spread to the docks and the railways and resulted in management lockouts, violent riots in which eight men were killed, and the deployment of troops to keep order and keep trade moving. During the next two years there were quarrels between the leaders of the older, smaller unions and the new amalgamations, which made industrial action ineffective, but the atmosphere remained uneasy and the threat of revolution was never far away.
‘There were some instances of efforts being made to improve the lot of the worker, and my mind goes back to a period round about 1910–11 when some big trouble was occurring in the coal industry. There was a national stoppage. I am not too clear on the causes, as I was only eight or nine, but I seem to remember a slogan, ‘eight hours work, eight hours play, eight hours sleep, and eight bob* a day.’ The children chanted this jingle in their streets, and I recollect a little band of children marching around the playground in Gayhurst Road School singing this at the top of their voices.’

Arthur Newton,
*Years of Change*, 1910–1911

‘Anyway, by now there was a bigger inclination of people toward the thinking of a more resistant frame of mind. Many wanted something different, perhaps they hardly knew what. But whatever it was, it incorporated a desire for a bigger slice of the cake. A few more people, not many mind you, were becoming union-minded, and they were helped in these thoughts by even more radical and socialist thinkers like Keir Hardie and George Lansbury†.’

Arthur Newton,
*Years of Change*, 1910–1911

‘If you’ve ever seen a tin of sardines you’ll know how we slept: three girls at the top, two boys at the bottom, the baby in a drawer in Mum’s room with Mum and Dad. We only had two rooms and a very tiny kitchen.

Lil Smith,
*The Good Old Bad Old Days*

‘The amount of food that came into that house seemed absolutely fabulous to me, the amount of food that was eaten and wasted too...when I used to think of my family at home where we seldom had enough to eat it used to break my heart... the milkman called three times a day. I’ve never seen so much milk, cream and eggs. Pints of cream every day were nothing in that household, even when they weren’t entertaining.’

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*Years of Change*, 1910–1911

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Margaret Powell,
*Ordinary Lives 100 Years Ago*

‘I do know this, that every time a child were born it was a tragedy, owing to the poverty.’

Lil Smith,
*The Good Old Bad Old Days*

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Margaret Powell,
*Ordinary Lives 100 Years Ago*

‘I do know this, that every time a child were born it was a tragedy, owing to the poverty.’

John Langley,
*Ordinary Lives 100 Years Ago*

* bob – slang word for a shilling (worth about 5 pence).

† Keir Hardie founded the Labour party in 1893. George Lansbury was founder of the Daily Herald newspaper which wrote about the problems of the working classes.
As we learn from Mr Birling (page 14 and 15), the strike was about wages, which at the time were not keeping up with the rise in prices.

**What families had to live on in Edwardian times**

The two family budgets listed below show what different families had to live on. One is for a working class household with children, the other for a suburban middle class household, also with children. The currency has been modernised.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Class Budget</th>
<th>Suburban Middle Class Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>based on an income of £1.12</strong></td>
<td><strong>based on an income of £5.75 a week</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>('twenty-two and six') a week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social club</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral Insurance</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood &amp; lamp oil</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap &amp; soda</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband’s dinners</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other food</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>0.96p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surplus</strong></td>
<td>0.16p</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Surplus after a raise of ‘about 12%’ to 1.25 ('twenty-five shillings a week') 0.29p

You can see from these budgets not only how much different classes spent, but also what they spent it on. The suburban middle class budget is probably typical of what a middle manager in Mr Birling’s company would earn and spend his money on – just the sort of man the workers would have to negotiate with when they put in for a wage rise. Mr Birling would earn a lot more, but his salary would be decided by the profits of the company.

**A simulation**

A central concern of this play is that of the Birlings’ responsibility for what happened to Eva Smith. This activity will help you to explore the extent of Mr Birling’s involvement and guilt.

■ Divide your class into groups A, B and C; workers, managers and arbitrators. The arbitrators are like a jury in a court of law, a group of people who are unconnected with anybody in Birlings, and their aim is to bring matters to a peaceful conclusion without industrial action.

**Sorting out your role**

Choose somebody in A to play Eva Smith and the ‘ringleaders’, and somebody in B to play Mr Birling. The rest of you make up a name, character and salary for yourself that you think would fit your station in life and decide how you yourself have to budget your money, which may differ according to family circumstances. (Female students playing managers may like to make up a male character for themselves because a female manager would have been an impossibility at the time.) Either talk to each other, or get a few people to stand up and present themselves to the class so you can get a good idea of who each other’s characters are.
Arguments for and against a wage claim
In separate groups, As and Bs, take a close look at the budgets and work out what you are going to say to the other group in a meeting to discuss a wage claim. Although you will be addressing each other, you are doing so by presenting your case to the arbitrators, who should prepare for the meeting by deciding on a fair way of letting everybody be heard within a time limit – say, 5 minutes. When all groups are ready, hold the first wage claim meeting.

Deciding on a course of action
After the first meeting has run its course, groups A and B should retire to consider what they have heard from each other, and group C can go between the two as mediators, making it clear to each group what the consequences would be if industrial action was decided on by either party – a strike by the workers or a lockout by the managers. It is worth remembering that trade unions were in a very undeveloped state at that time and very few workers would have a strike fund to help them through a lengthy period of industrial action.

Resolving the dispute
Whichever course of action you decide to take, play out the situation – whatever it is – that resolves the dispute. If a strike or a lockout was decided on, give time for it to bite – two weeks. Think for yourselves what this would mean for both sides of the dispute.

Sacking Eva Smith
Play out the scene where Eva Smith and the ‘ringleaders’ get the sack from Mr Birling. Follow it with a ‘sociogram’ among the workers. To do this, put the ringleaders in the centre of an empty space. The workers should then come in and stand near or far from the ringleaders, turned to them or turned away, body shapes expressive of what they feel towards them now the strike is over. Groups B and C then interpret what they see each worker expressing, and the ‘ringleaders’ feed back to the class whether the sociogram held any surprises for them.

Oral evaluation
Write an oral evaluation of the part you played in this simulation, the strengths and weaknesses of your own part in it, aspects of the simulation that you found interesting or surprising and anything about the play or subject matter that was made clearer for you. Use the headings given for the simulation to help you structure your writing.

For example:

Sorting out our roles
I was one of the people in Group C which meant I was an arbitrator. I didn’t realise what an arbitrator was but now I know what a difficult thing it is...
Sheila’s confession

The Inspector tells everyone how, after two months of unemployment, the girl got a job in a local dress shop called Milwards but lost it after a customer complained about her. Sheila asks to see a photograph of the girl and, after viewing it, runs out of the room crying. She returns a little later and tells the Inspector that she was the customer who complained, and she explains what happened. Later, Gerald seems shocked when the Inspector says that the girl changed her name to Daisy Renton.

(From where BIRLING says ‘Well of course if I’d known...’ on page 17 to the end of Act One.)

Sheila’s speech

Sheila’s speech which has been reprinted for you below and with a partner discuss and try out different ways of delivering it. Alongside the speech note down your ideas about how this speech should be spoken. Think about the points at which and the ways in which her voice might change as she remembers what happens and realises the consequences of her actions. Think about:
- tone of voice e.g. angry, confident, cheerful, matter of fact, full of shame
- pace i.e. times when she speeds up or slows down
- volume i.e. times when her speech is louder or softer
- who she is talking to – does she look at the Inspector all the time or somewhere else?
- gestures, expressions, movements

SHEILA I’d gone in to try something on. It was an idea of my own – mother had been against it, and so had the assistant – but I insisted. As soon as I tried it on, I knew they’d been right. It just didn’t suit me at all. I looked silly in the thing. Well, this girl had brought the dress up from the workroom, and when the assistant – Miss Francis – had asked her something about it, this girl, to show us what she meant, had held the dress up, as if she was wearing it. And it just suited her. She was the right type for it, just as I was the wrong type. She was a very pretty girl too – with big dark eyes – and that didn’t make it any better. Well, when I tried the thing on and looked at myself and knew that it was all wrong, I caught sight of this girl smiling at Miss Francis – as if to say: ‘Doesn’t she look awful’ – and I was absolutely furious. I was very rude to both of them, and then I went to the manager and told him that this girl had been very impertinent – and – and...How could I know what would happen afterwards? If she’d been some miserable plain little creature, I don’t suppose I’d have done it. But she was very pretty and looked as if she could take care of herself. I couldn’t be sorry for her.
Sheila’s visit to Milwards

Sheila’s visit to Milwards tells us how the attitudes of a wealthy middle class family are formed both by the image that it makes for itself and the image that others make for it.

- Look at the picture alongside of a smart dress shop in London in the 1900s and talk about:
  - what can you see?
  - what is happening here?

Storyboard tableau

To investigate this idea further here is a task which sets up a storyboard tableau. A tableau is a still picture where the arrangement of figures, expressions and gestures offer a representation of a situation or relationship in the play. The storyboard element of the task allows a sequence of key moments to be examined.

- Divide the class into groups of five or six and call each group A, B, C and D. The idea is to make a still picture out of four different moments during one visit to the store. Each group should now have a look at the characters in their tableau and the moment that they are to freeze.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group A: Moment One</th>
<th>Group B: Moment Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characters:</strong> Mrs Birling, Sheila, Miss Francis, the girl and the shop girls (and reflections?). <strong>Moment:</strong> When Mrs Birling and Miss Francis advise against the dress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characters:</strong> Sheila, Miss Francis, the girl and the shop girls (and reflections?). <strong>Moment:</strong> When the girl holds up the dress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group C: Moment Two</th>
<th>Group D: Moment Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characters:</strong> Sheila, Miss Francis, the girl and the shop girls (and reflections?). <strong>Moment:</strong> When the girl giggles behind Sheila.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Characters:** Mrs Birling, Sheila, Miss Francis, the shop girls (and reflections?). **Moment:** When Sheila notices them giving her ‘a sort of look’.

Preparing for the tableau

- Because Sheila’s story is about ‘image’, you could think carefully about how you use the mirror and what people see in it. One or more of you could play the reflection.

- It is important that everybody is very clear about their attitudes to each other and finds a way of showing it in the tableau. Questions the shop girls should ask themselves in preparation for the tableau are:
  - how do you like working for Miss Francis?
  - are you aware of how important the Birlings are as customers?
  - what is your own attitude to Miss Birling?
  - how worried are you about losing your job?
  - do you have a particular shop job within the tableau?
Showing the tableau
The tableau should be shown sequentially – A, B, C, D. When you show your work, you can invite suggestions about the picture you are making and questions to any of the individuals that make it up.

Writing suggestion
Write an account of your part in the storyboard tableau including the preparatory work you did with the picture and your discussions. Try to explain some of the decisions made by your group in arranging its moment. Finally, write about the still moments that other groups showed, commenting on the effects of each and any questions or suggestions that arose from them.

The end of Act One
Just before the end of Act One, the Inspector returns to the room and says ‘Well?’ to Gerald and Sheila. Sheila and her father respond very differently to the Inspector’s questioning. Birling is indignant and arrogant but Sheila is compliant and filled with remorse. Here Priestley is giving the audience the chance, during the theatre interval, to think about how Gerald will react to the Inspector.

In groups of three, talk together about Gerald and how you think he will behave – both to the Inspector and to Sheila – from what you know about him already and from what you know about the way the Inspector questions people. You should also guess at the kind of involvement Gerald will turn out to have had with the girl.

Writing suggestions
1. Write up your interval conversation between yourself and one or two friends as a playscript. In it you should be trying to show how much you know already about the play and the characters, the expectations you have about what is to happen next and some idea about what each of you think of the play so far.

2. Write the first scene of Act Two in which Gerald is interrogated about his involvement with the dead girl.
You will need to consider what you know so far of:
– Priestley’s writing style
– his use of some dramatic techniques (e.g. entrances and exits, moments of tension)
– the Inspector’s way of questioning people (how does he get people to tell their stories?)
– Gerald himself and the kind of involvement he might have had with the dead girl
Later, when you’ve read Priestley’s version of the scene, add a paragraph comparing what actually happens with your own script. Did Gerald disappoint you, behave as you expected, or better?
Gerald’s affair is revealed

Gerald and Sheila are left on their own to talk about the girl, their relationship with each other and how to treat the Inspector. The Inspector enters as they speak, followed by Mrs Birling. The Inspector starts to interview Mrs Birling who reacts to him in a hostile way in spite of Sheila's warnings. It becomes clear that Eric, who is talking with his father in another room, has a serious drink problem.

Unexpectedly, the Inspector turns his attention to Gerald. He confesses, after some pressure from Sheila and the Inspector, that he had an affair with the girl, now called Daisy Renton, after ‘rescuing’ her from the Palace Variety Theatre, which is ‘a favourite haunt of women of the town’. After that he kept her as his mistress in a set of rooms lent by a friend, from March to September of 1911. Mrs Birling is scandalised by these revelations. Gerald asks permission to leave and ‘be alone for a little while’. Just before he goes, Sheila hands him back his engagement ring.

(From the beginning of Act Two to GERALD’S exit on page 38.)

The Palace Variety Theatre

Background information
The Palace Variety Theatre was a music hall. The music hall was important socially as it was a place – one of the only places – where people of different classes might mingle. It is hard to underestimate the effect of theatres pre-TV, cinema and radio. The music hall was a vision of another world in an industrial, provincial town. Priestley wrote and talked about it a lot although in this play, the seedy side is being shown.

- Look at the poster advertising The Palace Variety Theatre and talk about the impression given here of music hall entertainment.

Gerald in the hot seat

- The hot seating task that follows is designed to allow you to question Gerald yourself about Daisy Renton.

The situation
Imagine that Gerald’s affair has come to light – a matter of interest locally because he is from a prominent family. While the rest of the class prepare their questions, three people should prepare to share the role of Gerald, sharing the answers to the questions or appointing a spokesperson. The whole class should read over Gerald’s account of the affair again carefully before the interview.

Debriefing the activity
- what was revealed about Gerald’s motives and behaviour?
- what light was thrown on Daisy Renton’s?
- did the activity throw light on the play or did it merely reinforce prejudices among the group about sex and class?
Sheila’s reaction to Gerald’s affair

Sheila is present while Gerald is questioned about his affair with the dead girl. She reacts very calmly to the revelations of his infidelity. She even says ‘I don’t dislike you half as much as I did half an hour ago.’ This is what Annabel Mullion, the actress who plays Sheila in the Royal National Theatre production says, about Sheila’s reaction:

‘She’s confused because what she really wants to do is get at the truth now. She’s suddenly got hold of the flame of truth, and the fact that Gerald’s had an affair, which mattered to her quite a lot earlier on, suddenly doesn’t matter so much. “We aren’t the same people who sat down to dinner”, that’s what she wants to get across more than, “Why did you do this to me?” because she’s changing, she’s growing up.’

Read through the scene where Gerald is questioned on pages 32–38 and make a list of some of the truths that become clear to Sheila at this point in the play. Find quotations to go with them. You could use some of these headings to help you:

- the Inspector
- love
- marriage
- men
- Mrs Birling
Mrs Birling’s part in Eva Smith’s life and death

The Inspector shows Mrs Birling a photograph of the girl. At first she denies ever having seen her before but after pressure from Sheila and the Inspector she admits that the girl had come to the organisation of which she is the chairwoman – the Brumley Women’s Charity Organisation – to ask for assistance.

Mrs Birling explains she was angry that the girl called herself Mrs Birling, and disapproved of the fact that she was pregnant and refused to name the father. She also refused to believe the girl when she claimed that, although the father had been stealing to support her, she would not take any more money from him because it would get her into trouble. The organisation rejected the girl’s request for money.

When asked by the Inspector who she blamed, she says not only the girl but also the father and, in spite of Sheila’s warnings to stop, tells the Inspector to punish him severely. At that moment the door opens and, just as everybody in the room realises who the father is, Eric enters.

(From page 38 where SHEILA says ‘You know you never showed him...’ to the end of Act Two.)

Mrs Birling’s character

Look at the exchanges between Mrs Birling and the Inspector and Mrs Birling and Sheila. Talk about the following:
– what sort of a character is Mrs Birling in this play?
– what do her exchanges with Sheila reveal about their relationship?
– what is her attitude towards ideas of responsibility and reputation?

Make a list of some of her characteristics based on your discussion of the points above and alongside each one add a quotation or refer to the play to illustrate what you mean.

Charities and the Welfare State

Background information

Mrs Birling is the chair of a charity that raises money for and gives aid to ‘deserving causes.’ At the time when this play is set, 1912, people who were unemployed, homeless, or ill had no Welfare State to rely on as they do today. Charity organisations were the only help available. When Eva Smith finds herself unemployed, pregnant and penniless, a charity organisation such as the BWCO is the only place she can turn to for help.

Serious unrest in Britain

In 1912, the time in which An Inspector Calls is set, British society was in a state of great unrest. Prices were rising and unemployment was high. The rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer. There were genuine fears of a revolution.

The beginnings of the Welfare State – radical new ideas about society

Mr Birling has mentioned ‘labour agitations’, but the impulse for reform was coming not only from the people but from within the Liberal government itself, and in particular from Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer. In 1909 he proposed a sweeping series of reforms that would have laid the foundations of the Welfare State as we know it today at one stroke. He presented them in his 1909 Budget and they took four hours to read out.
The pace of change is slow
These reforms required tax increases on the rich which were fiercely opposed by the Tory opposition. Parts of the programme of reform were carried out, but were interrupted by the First World War, and never fully implemented till the Beveridge Report of 1942 and the legislation of the post Second World War government. William Beveridge, author of the report, had devised many of the schemes presented in the 1909 budget and says in his autobiography: ‘I had to wait thirty-five years to use in writing the Beveridge report what I had learned in 1907.’

What is the Welfare State?
The recommendations of the Beveridge Report, published in 1942, during the Second World War, formed the basis of the legislation that the Labour government brought in between 1945 and 1950. William Beveridge, in a broadcast to the nation about the report, said:

‘The Plan... is a completion of what was begun a little more than thirty years ago when Mr. Lloyd George introduced the National Health Insurance and Mr. Winston Churchill, then president of the Board of Trade, introduced Unemployment Insurance. The man who led us to victory in the last war was the Minister responsible for Health Insurance. The Minister who more than thirty years ago had the courage and imagination to father the scheme of Unemployment Insurance, a thing then unknown outside Britain, is the man who is leading us to victory in this war; I’d like to see him complete as well the work that he began in social insurance then.’

What he does not say is that he, Lloyd George and Winston Churchill had got the bulk of their ideas about welfare from tours of Germany before the First World War.

Income Support, the National Health Service, Child Benefit
Beveridge summarised the recommendations of his report thus:

‘...my Plan for Social Security is a unified comprehensive scheme of social insurance to be administered by one Department, to provide cash benefits adequate in amount and in time without a means test, at a flat rate of benefit in return for a flat rate of contributions. With this goes a comprehensive health service and a system of children’s allowances.’

This was the beginnings of what are now known as the Department of Social Security, the National Health Service and Child Benefit.

How was it paid for?
The essence of the schemes was National Insurance, covering the areas of sickness, unemployment and old age pensions. The poster above shows how it was to work for Health Insurance. Approximations in today’s money would be:

- 4d = 1.75p
- 3d = 1.25p
- 2d = 0.75p
- 10/- = 50p
- 5/- = 25p
- 30/- = 1.25p

The pennies were weekly amounts to be paid compulsorily into the scheme.

Radical new ideas about responsibility to others
It was the compulsory nature of the contributions that caused a huge stir at the time. It was the first time the government had insisted that every member of society that had an income was to pay for those not able to earn.
Improvisation

- Using the background information to help you, talk in character as either Gerald, Sheila, Eric, Mr Birling, Mrs Birling or Edna as if you were giving a short speech about Lloyd George’s proposals. You could if you prefer write a short scene involving several characters in a conversation about the welfare state.

Mrs Birling changes her mind; a door slams three times

In a short space of time Mrs Birling moves from denial of any knowledge of the girl to an admission that she had seen her two weeks ago.

Performing the scene

- In groups of five, read from Gerald’s exit on page 38 to Mrs Birling’s admission on page 41, ‘Yes, quite true.’ Four of you play the characters and one of you read the stage directions and provide the all-important sound effect of the door slamming – bang a book on the table. Start with the sound of the door when Gerald exits.

- When you reach her first denial, ‘No, why should I?’ take three minutes to write down, as fast as you possibly can and with no pauses, at least half a page of Mrs Birling’s thoughts rushing through her mind as she looks at the photograph.

- Do the same again when you come to her admission and then talk together about what you have written.

This kind of writing is called stream of consciousness and has been used by many well known writers to throw up surprising and illuminating ideas from the subconscious.

Entrances and exits

When the door slams a third time, Eric returns. The last time the front door was put in our thoughts was when the Inspector rang on page 9. Doors, entrances and exits have formed an essential part of the stage drama since the earliest times and have provided many of the most dramatic moments in theatre.

- Look at some of the exits and entrances so far in the play. Think about the function of each one in terms of the following:
  - does it alter the mood or atmosphere of the play in any way?
  - how is it connected to what has just been said and with what effect?
  - how does it allow the play to progress or change and in what way?

Tom Stoppard, a well known contemporary playwright, says that ‘an exit here is an entrance somewhere else’.

- Talk about what you think he means by this.

Writing suggestion

Write five minutes worth of script for one of the characters’ entrances when they exit from Priestley’s play and make an entrance somewhere else. Their entrance somewhere else should be in a place that you think up e.g. Gerald exits and talks to Edna.
‘A girl in her position’ – class and sex as themes in the play

By the end of Act Two, Birling, Sheila, Gerald and Mrs Birling have all revealed their involvement and culpability in Eva Smith's death. The nature of their involvement rests on their abuse of the girl's vulnerable position because she is working class and dependent upon them for money. There is also an added dimension that makes Eva Smith open to exploitation which is her sex, placing her in a doubly inferior position in the eyes of some people.

Look at the following quotations from the play which each make some reference to class and/or sexual prejudice. Select a few from the list and find out who says it. What do the quotations tell you about:
- the speaker?
- Edwardian attitudes to working class women?
- Eva’s position in society and the possibilities open to her?

- 'The girl had begun by telling us a pack of lies'
- 'We've several hundred young women there and they keep changing'
- 'She'd had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go'
- 'She was very pretty – soft brown hair and big dark eyes'
- 'It was simply a piece of gross impertinence'
- 'The girl had begun by telling us a pack of lies'
- 'Have you any idea what happened to her after that? Get into trouble? Go on the streets?'
- 'I caught sight of this girl smiling at Miss Francis...and I was absolutely furious'
- 'Girls of that class'
- 'She was giving herself ridiculous airs. She was claiming fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position'
- 'She was a lively good-looking girl. Country-bred I fancy'
- 'I don’t suppose for a moment that we can understand why the girl committed suicide'
- 'She was young and pretty and warm-hearted – and intensely grateful'
- 'She'd had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go'
- 'Have you any idea what happened to her after that? Get into trouble? Go on the streets?'
- 'I caught sight of this girl smiling at Miss Francis...and I was absolutely furious'
- 'Girls of that class'
- 'She was giving herself ridiculous airs. She was claiming fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position'
- 'As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money'
Creating dramatic tension – the end of Act Two

Act Two ends, not with an exit, but with an entrance – Eric’s. Like the end of Act One, there is an atmosphere of tension and expectancy that has been building up towards this point. When the curtain falls, the tension is considerable.

In groups of three or four read through the end of Act Two. Experiment with ways of reading it to create maximum tension. Talk about your ideas and what worked best and then make notes on the ways in which dramatic tension has been built up at this point in the play. The points below suggest some of the things to look out for:

- Mrs Birling’s general speech and behaviour
- the tone of each character’s speech
- the length and confidence of characters’ speeches
- the use of interruption
- the stage directions including gestures, looks and sounds
- how the audience might make links between what has been said earlier
- the pace and timing of the whole extract

Writing Suggestion

Write a detailed account of how you would stage the end of Act Two. Explain the reasons behind your ideas and decisions. Include an annotated copy of the playscript to illustrate some of your ideas.
The final link in the chain – Eric

Eric tells everyone that he was the father of the girl’s child and stole money from his father’s business to help her. Eric is told by Sheila and the Inspector of his mother’s refusal of help to the girl. Just as he seems on the verge of violence towards her, the Inspector steps in and, before he leaves, sums up their involvement in the girl’s fate, emphasising the lessons they must learn from it all. The Inspector leaves.

(From the beginning of Act Three to where the INSPECTOR exits on page 54.)

Inspecting Eric

The Inspector’s questioning of Eric reveals as much about tensions in the Birling family as it does about Eric’s involvement with the dead girl.

- Here are some examples of the different kinds of tension that exist in the family and which Eric’s confession highlights. For each one, if you think it is a true statement, find a quote from this section to support it and discuss whether or not that problem has been hinted at before:

  - Eric has a drink problem
  - Eric has not had much success with girls

  - Eric has been stealing from his father
  - Eric has never felt close to his father

  - Eric has never felt close to his mother

Attitudes to women

Background information

You may have noticed that Mr Birling is constantly trying to shield the women of the family from hearing any scandal that may involve people they know, but Sheila refuses to leave the room when Gerald tells his tale and resists leaving the room with Mrs Birling now that Eric is telling his (page 50). And within a very short time, not only Sheila – who we would expect to go against her father’s wishes – but also Mrs Birling return to the room.

- Select one of the following pairs of characters to focus on: Sheila and Mrs Birling; Eric and Birling; Sheila and Gerald; Edna and Mrs Birling. Now read the following background information and role play a conversation between your pair of characters about some of the events described.

1912, the year in which An Inspector Calls is set, was the year in which the Suffragette Movement was at its most violent and bitter, with attacks on property, constant disruption of political meetings and prison hunger strikes by the women arrested for these acts.

The Suffragette Movement was spearheaded by educated middle and upper middle class women who had the time, money and social opportunities to devote to the cause. The acknowledged leader, Mrs. Pankhurst, was just such a person.
By 1912 the movement had reached the status of a terrorist campaign, such was the frustration of its activists, who felt repeatedly fobbed off by both Liberal and Tory governments. Mrs. Pankhurst had declared war on property and there were systematic campaigns of bombing, arson, stone throwing, window breaking, chaining to railings, disruption of political meetings and, in 1913, a suicide when Emily Wilding Davison threw herself under the King’s horse at the Derby, and her funeral procession became a spectacular show of strength. Thousands of women, dressed in the Suffragette colours, paraded in the streets of London behind the hearse.

Suffragettes were arrested in large numbers and imprisoned. When they went on hunger strike they were force-fed. A flavour of the extreme opposition the Suffragettes faced can be got from the following quotations of the time, the first from a man and the second from a woman.

‘...there are no good women, but only women who have lived under the influence of good men ...’

‘When a suffragette has been convicted, first have her well birched (by women), then shave off her hair, and finally deport her to New Zealand or Australia.’

The ‘Votes for Women’ campaign, which began roughly at the start of the century and grew in intensity until the start of the First World War, grew out of a concern for just such girls as the suicide in An Inspector Calls, and the many other millions employed as sweated labour. Working women had far fewer rights than even the men in heavy industry. A single working girl with no family support was indeed vulnerable.

Improvisations and writing suggestions

1. Work in pairs to improvise the conversation between Sheila and Mrs Birling offstage, working out how they come to return in spite of Mr Birling’s obvious wish that they should not be there.

2. Get into small groups and think about what the two generations of the Birling family would have had to say at breakfast when the morning papers brought news of a fresh Suffragette outrage, such as the explosion of a bomb in Lloyd George’s front room (March 1912 – just the date when the play is set). Your short scene should take place just before the evening that the Inspector calls.
‘We don’t live alone’ – the Inspector’s final speech

■ Look carefully at the Inspector’s last speech which has been reprinted for you below. Try out different ways of reading it aloud and annotate the speech to show what you would do to make this last speech powerful and memorable. Think about:
- speed
- volume
- pauses
- tone of voice and where this might change
- gestures, expression, stance, gaze etc.

“But just remember this. One Eva Smith has gone – but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, with what we think and say and do. We don’t live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Good night.”

You may have noticed that what the Inspector says here does not sound like ordinary conversation. The way it is structured and the language that is used makes it clear that Priestley wanted the audience to listen carefully. It is a speech rather than a piece of conversation.

■ A writer called Max Atkinson spent some time analysing political speeches to see what went down well with audiences. He noticed a few simple techniques were often used. Look at some of these which are listed below and see whether you can find examples of them in the Inspector’s final speech:

| a) | listing things in threes (e.g. ‘Government of the people, by the people, for the people.’ Gettysburg Address, 1863.) |
| b) | the use of contrastive pairs (e.g. ‘That’s one small step for man. One giant leap for mankind.’ Moon broadcast, 1969.) |
| c) | that talking positively about ‘us’ or ‘we’ makes the audience identify with what is being said |
| d) | that talking negatively about ‘them’ makes for a strong speech |
| e) | the use of the first person singular (‘I’) to make the audience feel the speaker is sincere |
| f) | the use of powerful or memorable words and phrases |
| g) | the rhythm of the language e.g. the length of sentences, the effect of pauses |
‘Fire and blood and anguish’

Background information
The words of the Inspector’s last speech were written at the end of a war that had seen the Holocaust, by a man who had served on the Western Front in the First World War and seen the horrors of trench warfare. He had seen how the lessons of one war could remain unlearned and, through the misery of the Depression years, lead not to an improvement of the lives of ordinary people but to another war that involved, on a global scale, even more suffering.

Look at the drawings and extracts below. Look back through the play and annotate them with any significant quotations and references that you can find. What connection do you think Priestley is making between those wars and the fate of Eva Smith?

‘The rain drives on, the stinking mud becomes more evilly yellow, the shell-holes fill up with green-white water...the black, dying trees ooze and sweat and the shells never cease...annihilating, maiming, maddening they plunge into the grave which is this land; one huge grave and cast upon it the poor dead. It is unspeakable, godless, hopeless...’
(Paul Nash, Artist, November 1917)

‘You smug-faced cowards with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you’ll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go.’
(Extract from Suicide in the Trenches by Siegfried Sassoon)

Autumn Blitz
Unshaken world! Another day of light
After the human chaos of the night;
Although a heart in mendless horror grieves,
What calmly yellow, gently falling leaves!
(Frances Cornford, 1948)
Isn’t this the end?
As soon as the Inspector has finished his final speech he leaves. And yet this is not the end of the play.

Talk about the effect of the Inspector’s exit on you, the audience at this point in the play, after such a speech. Why doesn’t the play end here? What are your expectations about what might happen in the rest of the play?

Writing suggestions
1. Write about the dramatic impact of the Inspector’s final speech and exit. In what ways does this speech connect with the central messages of the play?

2. All entrances and exits are important in a play. Write in detail about the effect and staging possibilities of two or three entrances and exits in An Inspector Calls. (Look back at the work done on page 12, 25 and 27, to help you with this assignment.)
The end of the play

Immediately after the Inspector's departure the family start to blame each other for what has happened. Eric and Sheila are against Mr and Mrs Birling. Mr Birling's main worry is whether there will be a scandal or not. Gerald returns with the news that Inspector Goole is not a real police inspector and no girl has died in the infirmary that day. He calms the family down and helps them see they've been tricked. Mr and Mrs Birling see the funny side and are ready to put it all behind them and get back to the family celebration. Eric and Sheila are shocked by their parents' behaviour and remain disturbed by what the Inspector has revealed about them all. The play ends with a ring from the police station to say that a girl has just died in the infirmary and a police Inspector is on his way to ask a few questions.

(From the INSPECTOR'S exit on page 54 to the end of the play.)

Eric and Birling

As soon as the Inspector has left, Birling turns on Eric angrily and says 'You're the one I blame for this.' A little earlier, the Inspector had intervened in a fight that was about to break out between the younger Birlings and the parents.

Talk about what the Inspector's visit reveals about this father and son relationship and the way that it changes through the play.

To explore this in more depth, look at some key moments in the play. For each moment describe the attitude and behaviour of Birling and Eric towards each other. E.g. patronising, reasonable, determined, dismissive, embarrassed, aggressive, controlling, violent etc. Look at pages 3–4; 6; 8–10; 12–15; 48–53; 54–56; 58; 62–63; 65–66; 68.

Now discuss what Barry Stanton, the actor who plays Birling in the Royal National Theatre production, says about what the Inspector's visit reveals about the father son relationship in this play. Talk about how far you agree with what he says.

'I think what it reveals is all his worst fears. He's on about Eric right from the beginning of the play, before the Inspector arrives, putting him down instantly. Eric is the worst possible choice for a son, whereas Gerald is the best possible choice. Gerald is everything that's right and proper, Eric is everything that's wrong. He's useless in the business.'

Writing suggestion

Write a short response to Barry Stanton's views on Eric. Take on the role of Eric and tell him what you think.
Sheila – listening to conscience

One definition of conscience is ‘the sense of right and wrong that governs a person’s thoughts and actions.’

Try ranking the Birlings and Gerald in terms of who has got a conscience about their role in the death of Eva Smith and the extent to which that conscience will change the way they think and act in the future. For example, if you think that Gerald has the most conscience about his role, put him at the top of your list.

Like Eric, Sheila is very affected by what has happened and by what she has learned. Below is a list of some of the things she says at the end of the play.

- Look at each quotation and talk about:
  - who she is saying it to
  - what she means when she says it
  - what it tells us about Sheila

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page 56 ‘It’s queer – very queer –.’</th>
<th>Page 56 ‘And it was true wasn’t it?’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Page 59 ‘He was – frightening.’</td>
<td>Page 60 ‘I suppose we’re all nice people now.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 63 ‘Well he inspected us all right.’</td>
<td>Page 68 ‘It frightens me the way you talk.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page 68 ‘So there’s nothing to be sorry for, nothing to learn.’</td>
<td>Page 69 ‘I must think.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Writing suggestions

1. What clues do we get throughout the play that it is Sheila who is going to be the one character capable of real change? Why do you think Priestley chose her rather than any of the other characters for this role?

2. ‘Sheila is the emotional centre of the play. Take away her autonomy as a force for good and there really is no hope for the Birlings or for any of us – we can only be made to behave by being bullied and frightened. She is of this world: the Inspector is not.’ Use this statement about the play to write about the importance of Sheila’s role.
How does it end?

The way that a play ends is always important. Some plays end with order being restored, the characters sadder but wiser, and the sense of a new beginning such as in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*. Some plays, particularly those written in the 20th century end in a way which makes the audience feel less comfortable. For example, *A View from the Bridge* by Arthur Miller leaves the audience feeling very uneasy, on a note of threatened violence.

■ Look back at the closing moments from where Birling says, ‘But the whole thing’s different now’ on page 68 to the end of the play.

● In pairs, talk about the final moments of the play, paying attention to each character. Try reading each character’s final speech as a continuous speech and after each one, talk about how much that character has changed, developed and learned since the beginning of the play.

■ Now talk about the effect on each of the characters of Birling’s last line, ‘a police inspector is on his way here – to ask some – questions’ (page 69). Think about how you would stage these final moments if you were directing the play. You will need to consider the following:

  – the final image of the Birlings and Gerald compared to the image we saw when the curtain went up at the beginning of the play
  – where and how you are going to group the characters and how this might work to suggest their different responses to the final words of the play e.g. shock, disbelief, dread, resignation, guilt
  – where you would have each one looking, what expression and gestures would you suggest for each to convey what you intend?

What do you make of this ending?

The way that Priestley has written the end of this play makes it seem as though the play is about to begin all over again – an Inspector is about to call.

■ Look back at your ideas about the effect on the play and the characters when the Inspector left and talk about whether the play could have ended with his exit or not. What happened between that moment and the end of the play?

● What do you understand by this ending? Discuss each of the ideas suggested below and select three that you agree with the most:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priestley wants us to know that the Inspector may call for us at any time.</th>
<th>Priestley wants us to think that the whole play has been a joke – it’s a comedy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priestley wants us to leave the theatre wondering how each character will react to the Inspector the second time around.</td>
<td>Inspector Goole was a device to get us all to examine our consciences – it’s not supposed to be realistic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ending gives all of the characters a second chance, to do it right this time.</td>
<td>The ending is easier to understand if you believe in reincarnation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Priestley is suggesting that learning happens through time and from experience.

Writing suggestion
‘The way that it ends suggests that the whole play is about to begin again. We’re just back where we started!’ Use this as the starting point for a playscript between two or three friends who have just watched *An Inspector Calls* at the theatre. In your play try to include different reactions to this ending and different ideas about what it all means.

The final line is a device to round off the play dramatically and memorably because Priestley couldn’t think of any other way of ending it. Priestley wants to create the eerie impression that what we’ve watched is a ghostly premonition of what might happen – if...
Responsibility and guilt

The activity in this section allows you to think about the whole play. It might be useful as a revision activity if you want to remind yourselves of the play some time after finishing reading it in class.

One of the central concerns of this play is the responsibility we all have for what our society is like and the responsibility of care we have to people in it. The chain of events in Eva Smith’s life that lead to her death illustrate our connection to each other and show that our treatment of others has consequences.

To the Birlings and Gerald, it is easy to see a single working class girl, not as the human being they know, deep down, she is, but:

- as cheap labour
- as someone who should be punished for not showing respect
- as a temporary mistress to be discarded when no longer wanted
- as easy prey for sex
- as an undeserving cause

Until forced to inspect themselves, each of the characters involved in Eva Smith’s downfall never much questioned their own right to a powerful and wealthy position in society, nor how that position had been obtained, nor how it was maintained.

Who is most to blame?

On page 28 the Inspector tells the Birlings ‘we’ll have to share our guilt.’ The following activity is to allow you to revise each character’s involvement with the dead girl and to decide upon how the blame should be shared according to who you find most guilty of doing wrong. Eva Smith/Daisy Renton is referred to in this activity as ‘Miss X’ because Priestley deliberately blurs her identity in the play. As Sheila points out, she could be lots of girls.

- Look back at the work you did on ‘Doing the right thing’ on page 1 and the work you did on ‘Conscience’ on page 34. Talk first about whether your ideas about morality have changed or remained the same since reading this play.

- Get into groups of five. Each group should have a photocopy of one of the stages of Miss X’s life when she crosses paths with one of the Birlings or Gerald. These stages are printed below and numbered 1–5. When you’ve read the stage of her life out loud in your group your task is to talk about how right or how wrong that person was to behave as they did to Miss X. Add as many details as you can remember of that particular story from the play but don’t talk about other stages in Miss X’s story. Like the Inspector, you’re taking it one stage at a time.

- Next, using a scale of 1–10, agree a judgement on how wrong, morally, the person named in that stage of Miss X’s life was, given the situation described. 10 is completely in the wrong and very much to blame and 0 is completely in the right and utterly blameless. Remember that you are not judging Miss X at this stage.

- When you have recorded your judgement and the other groups are ready, swap photocopies and do the same with another stage of Miss X’s story. Do as many stages as there is time for.

- To finish the activity, the whole class needs to feedback their scores of blame which can be totalled on the board and the result discussed. Alternatively, each story could be discussed by the whole class separately with each group justifying their decision. Whichever way you do it, everyone in the class will need to have a copy of all stages of the story in front of them.
The stages of Miss X’s story

1 – Mr Birling
A young woman called Miss X works in the local factory. She has a good work record. The workers in this factory receive very low wages as do most workers in this industry. They decide to ask Mr Birling, the factory owner, for a small wage rise. The wage claim is refused. Miss X leads the workforce in a strike to protest about their pay. After a short strike, Mr Birling sacks her and the other strike leaders.

2 – Sheila
An unemployed young woman called Miss X applies for and gets a good job as a shop assistant in an expensive clothes shop. She enjoys working there and her prospects seem good. One day a wealthy and important customer of roughly her own age called Sheila Birling comes into the shop. She complains that she saw Miss X smiling impertinently at another assistant while looking at Sheila in the dress that she was trying on. Sheila is very angry and threatens to take her custom elsewhere unless Miss X is sacked. Miss X loses her job.

3 – Gerald
Miss X is a young woman who goes to a bar one evening where a very drunk old man starts bothering her. When she tries to ignore him he gets nasty. Gerald, a rich young man who sees what’s happening, gets rid of the drunk. He sees her back to her bedsit and arranges to meet her again. When he discovers that she’s out of a job and about to be made homeless he suggests that she stays in his friend’s flat which is empty for six months. Miss X and Gerald become lovers. At the end of the six months Gerald, who is about to get engaged to his girlfriend, tells Miss X that the relationship is over. Miss X leaves and they never see each other again.

4 – Eric
Miss X is a young woman who goes to a bar one evening to meet a woman about a job. While she is waiting a young man called Eric gets talking to her. She accepts his offer of a drink because she is feeling miserable; she can’t find a job, she’s lost her flat and her boyfriend has left her. Eric gets very drunk and Miss X decides to go. He insists on coming too. When they get to where she is living he starts shouting and banging on the door to let him come in. Afraid her landlady will throw her out if there’s trouble, she reluctantly lets him in. Sex occurs. A fortnight later he sees her in the bar. He is not so drunk this time and they get talking. They have sex again. When Miss X realises she is pregnant, Eric asks if she thinks they should marry but Miss X knows neither of them love each other and that he’s just a kid. She refuses to marry him but has no money so Eric gives her some that he steals from his father’s office. When Miss X realises the money is stolen she stops seeing Eric.

5 – Mrs Birling
Miss X is a single young woman who is pregnant. She has no family and no job and doesn’t want to see the father of the child again. She applies for a handout from an organisation which offers help and she is interviewed by Mrs Birling. When Miss X is asked to give her name, she says it is Mrs Birling – which the real Mrs Birling takes as a piece of impudence, which makes her furious. When pressed as to why the father of the child cannot support her, Miss X says that he had given her some money but that she believed he was stealing it and she didn’t want to receive any more. Mrs Birling can’t believe a girl like Miss X would refuse money from anyone and questions her further about who the father is. She turns down Miss X’s application for help.
Writing suggestions

1. ‘But each of you helped to kill her.’ Do you agree with Inspector Goole’s words (page 53) or do you think that some of the characters are more responsible for the death of Eva Smith than others?

2. The Inspector doesn’t condemn – his job is to warn – he’s more concerned with the principle of collective responsibility. ‘We’ll have to share our guilt’ (page 28). He’s only concerned with individuals insofar as they help or hinder society as a whole – ‘We are members of one body’ (page 54).

Discuss this view of responsibility, guilt and blame in *An Inspector Calls*.
Who is the Inspector?

The mystery of the Inspector’s identity is one that the play never answers. One answer of course is that he is a dramatic device; without him the play could not happen. But given that the other characters are all believable and realistic, audiences often want to ask about the reality of the Inspector too.

It is Gerald who discovers that the Inspector is not who he says he is. He helps the Birlings unpick the Inspector’s story of the girl until there seems to be nothing left of it. Sheila and Eric hang on to the conviction that ‘it was anything but a joke’ while accepting that there may have been more than one girl and that no girl may have committed suicide.

- Sort out your own ideas about who the Inspector is. Talk through some of these suggestions to get you started:

  - He’s Priestley
  - He’s God
  - He’s the voice of conscience
  - He’s the child Eva Smith was pregnant with
  - He’s a dream
  - He’s a time traveller
  - He is a real police Inspector

Some of the Inspector’s parting words are ‘We do not live alone. We are all members of one body.’ Priestley himself was particularly interested in the ideas of the famous psychologist Jung, who believed that in our dreams we lose our identity and enter the world of the ‘collective subconscious’ where we all share ancient, universal experiences and the things we dream of have a common significance.

A particular passage in Jung struck Priestley because of a dream he himself had had. Jung stated that ‘Dreams may give expression to... telepathic visions.’ Priestley had dreamt of being shot in the person of a much younger man – ‘a student or something of that kind’ – by uniformed officers. Describing this experience he says ‘I will swear that... the blind weakness that washed over me there’ was ‘somebody’s last moments and that my consciousness had re-lived them.’

It is not a great step from such ideas to the notion of time and space travelling telepathically, but the more important idea is that such telepathy is possible because, in our collective subconscious, ‘We are all members of one body.’ The idea of an individual’s identity thus becomes more shadowy and less definite.

It is clear on a number of occasions that the Inspector knows what is to happen.

- Look again at these moments in the play and talk about what they reveal about the Inspector, adding other moments if you can find them.

  - at the end of Act Two he says he is ‘waiting’ (page 48), just before Eric enters
from the beginning of Act Three to his exit (pages 50–56) it is quite clear that the Inspector is working under terrific time pressure, presumably because he knows that news of a girl’s suicide is about to reach the household. But he claims there are limits to his knowledge

– when he has shown Sheila the photograph he professes not to know why she is upsetting herself over it: ‘That’s something I have to find out’, he says (page 20)

– has he ever actually lied to them about what he knows and how he knows it, or about the identity of the girl – or girls?

– ‘We often do on the young ones. They’re more impressionable’. (Page 28). Is the Inspector implying that there are lots of inspectors? Who are the others?

The Inspector as a dramatic device

If you think about the play as a whole, the Inspector is central to the structure and narrative of the play. Think about the role the Inspector plays in the following:

– moving the story forward (the dramatic structure)
– creating dramatic tension (moments of intensity or tension on stage)
– presenting Priestley’s central themes
– engaging the audience

Writing suggestions

1. Write about the function of the Inspector in the play as a whole. You should consider the following:

– what he represents in terms of some of the central concerns of the play
– the way that he affects the structure and pace of the play
– his effect on the characters in the play – what he makes them see or what he fails to make them see
– his effect on the audience, both during and after the play

2. Imagine that Sheila is able to meet the Inspector again. This time she questions him about the visit he paid her family all those years ago in 1912...

3. ‘I’d like to ask you a few questions.’ Taking two or three characters from the play, write about the questioning techniques of the Inspector. How do the different characters respond to being ‘inspected’? (Look back at the notes you made on page 13, ‘The Inspector questions Birling’.)
Strengths and weaknesses of the play

While you were reading *An Inspector Calls* you would have been developing your own views about the good and the bad points of the play.

In small groups, talk about all the strengths and weaknesses that you feel this play has. You could discuss the following to get you started:
- your thoughts and expectations when you began the play
- moments in the play that you particularly remember, perhaps part of a speech or a scene
- things that the play made you think about that you hadn’t really considered before
- ideas you had during reading about how well this play might work on stage

Draw up a list of strengths and weaknesses and compare it with other groups.

Reviews of the first British production of *An Inspector Calls* in 1946

Here is a series of extracts from a cross-section of reviews, some favourable and some unfavourable, but all interesting for what they tell us about the original London production of October 1946. Ralph Richardson played Inspector Goole.

Read these reviews aloud in your groups and talk about the following:
- are there comments here which are similar to your own views?
- are there comments here which you strongly disagree with?
- what do these reviews tell you about the possible strengths and weaknesses of *An Inspector Calls* as a play to be performed rather than just read?

‘...who is this caller, this man-from-the-street with the polite urgency and the sudden frost in the voice? ...No policeman, we feel, would probe so deeply. Is he indeed a police inspector, and if not who (in this world or the next) can he be? Does he, in short, speak with the tongue of man or of angel?

...Is, then, this omniscient inspector Priestley’s idea of the angel with the flaming sword? Who can tell? He comes in such a questionable shape. He may be the embodiment of Conscience or the representative of a celestial Watch Committee*...

...The play, not a long one, could have been stripped to half its length: though their offence is rank we feel that the Birlings are hardly worth this elaboration, this prolonged clatter of skeletons...’

J C Trewin, *The Observer*, 1946

* Watch Committee – a local government committee responsible for the efficiency of the local police force.
An Inspector Calls first appeared as part of a programme of classic plays and this critic considered it wise of Priestley, when appearing in the company of Sophocles and Shakespeare, ‘to give us a simple and straightforward example of the craftsmanship that, in hands like his, the contemporary dramatist can offer.’

...the play holds us completely – indeed at the end of the second act the characters are tied so immovably into their strait jackets that there seems to be nothing more to be done. Nevertheless in Act III the cords are unpicked one by one, only to be crushed together again in one suffocating grip by the best coup de theatre* of the year.’

He picks up on an interesting detail of the set: ‘On the wall-paper, prophetically coloured dark red with the congealed blood of future wars, the pictures of well-fed cattle peer symbolically through the mist.’


‘... The play reaches a ...dead end.

Who is the Inspector? ...Did the dead girl ever exist? The theatre hates indecision.

... It is an indication of the play’s lack of theatrical truth that the author was obliged to put it into an Edwardian scene and costume. Mr. Richardson, looking for something to act in a nebulous part, paraded like some dummy in a ‘Britain Used to Make It’ Exhibition. A pitiful sight for a fine actor.’

Lionel Hale, *Daily Mail*, 1946

‘The piece is magnificently played. By Mr. Julian Mitchell who gives the manufacturer a boisterous ebullience that never lets up. By Mr. Alec Guinness who makes of the tragic libertine something that is a long way from being wholly vile. By Mr. Ralph Richardson who gives the Inspector a stern, unangry poise far more effective than all the thunder he obviously has up his sleeve. (I found this performance intensely moving.) But the whole cast is excellent and it is not until you leave the theatre that you ask yourself by what magic dullness has been kept away from this modern morality play* in which nobody does anything except talk.’

James Agate, *The Sunday Times*, 1946

‘...more than any other living dramatist he has searched consistently for theatrical forms that would offer him a wider range of expression than that permitted by the naturalistic convention. Constantly I wish to applaud his courage; yet I am overwhelmed by the triteness of his pen in contrast to the poetry of his ideas. ...I wish that his... pen would sometimes go a little mad and run away with his urbanity and staid good sense and reveal, instead of simply displaying, characters.'

And yet:

‘I must confess that I have yet to see a play that shows more succinctly or in such a telling manner an example of man’s inhumanity to man. If ever a play was of its time, it is this. Priestley’s play shows just how far in fact we are involved in mankind and the measure of our responsibility for the tolling of the bell for the suicide of the dispossessed.’


* Coup de theatre – a dramatic turn of events or a stage success.

* Morality play – a type of drama written between the 14th and 16th centuries concerned with the conflict between personified virtues and vices.
**Writing suggestion**

This is an assignment for people who would like to write about the whole play but have not seen a production of it.

Write about what you see as the main strengths and weaknesses of this play, from your reading of it and from reviews you have read about the first London production in 1946. The following may help you structure your writing:

- your thoughts and expectations when you began the play
- moments in the play that you particularly remember, perhaps part of a speech or a scene
- some of the ideas that the play made you think about
- your views on how one or two key moments in the play might work on stage
- your thoughts on some of the reviews of the original production
- whether or not you think this play, written in the 1940s and set in the 1910s, has anything important to say to your generation