

ENGLISH LITERATURE- AN INSPECTOR CALLS

A CONTEXT: J.B. PRIESTLEY

1	J B Priestley	John Boynton Priestley was born in Yorkshire in 1894. He knew early on that he wanted to become a writer. However, he became a junior clerk with a local wool firm at the age of 16. When the First World War broke out, Priestley joined the infantry and only just escaped death on a number of occasions. After the war, he wrote successful articles and essays. During the Second World War he broadcast a massively popular weekly radio programme which was eventually cancelled by the BBC for being too critical of the Government.
2	Political Views	During the 1930's Priestley became very concerned about the consequences of social inequality in Britain, and in 1942 Priestley and others set up a new political party, the Common Wealth Party. Priestley was influential in developing the idea of the Welfare State which began to be put into place at the end of the war.

B CONTEXT: 1912

1	1912	The year the play was set.
2	Description	Priestley deliberately set his play in 1912 because the date represented an era when all was very different from the time he was writing. In 1912, rigid class and gender boundaries seemed to ensure that nothing would change. Yet by 1945, most of those class and gender divisions had been breached. Priestley wanted to make the most of these changes. Through this play, he encourages people to seize the opportunity the end of war had given them.
3	World Wars	The First World War would start in 1914. Birling's optimistic view that there would not be a war is completely wrong.
4	Class distinction	There were strong distinctions between the upper and lower classes.
5	Women	Women were subservient to men. All a well off women could do was get married; a poor woman was seen as cheap labour. Men and woman had specific roles and expectations. Women were seen as the 'weaker' sex.
6	Political views	The ruling classes saw no need to change the status quo. Trade unions however, were beginning to form in order to gain better working conditions for workers.

C CONTEXT: 1945

1	1945	The year the play was written.
2	World Wars	The Second World War ended in Europe on 8 May 1945. People were recovering from nearly six years of warfare, danger and uncertainty.
3	Class distinction	Class distinctions had been greatly reduced as a result of two world wars. Men of different classes fought side by side despite previous differences.
4	Women	As a result of the wars, women had earned a more valued place in society due to their determination to keep the country running during the war. Woman were encouraged to take on jobs that prior to the war they were not encouraged to do.
5	Political views	There was a great desire for social change. Immediately after The Second World War, Clement Attlee's Labour Party won a landslide victory over Winston Churchill and the Conservatives.

D KEY CHARACTERS

1	Inspector	Priestley's mouthpiece; advocates social justice.
2	Mr Birling	Businessman, capitalist, against social equality.
3	Mrs Birling	Husband's social superior, believes in personal responsibility.
4	Sheila	Young girl, comes to change views and pities Eva, feels regret.
5	Eric	Young man, drinks too much, gets Eva pregnant, and regrets actions.
6	Gerald	Businessman, engaged to Sheila, politically closest to Birling.
7	Eva	Unseen in play, comes to stand for victims of social injustice.



E KEY THEMES	
Social responsibility	Personal responsibility
Morality	Inequality
Gender	Young and old
Generations	Love

D KEY QUOTATIONS		
1	Goole	<p>"she'd swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course." "But after all it's better to ask for the earth than to take it." "(dryly) I don't play golf." "(harshly) Yes, but you can't. It's too late. She's dead." "Each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it."</p>
2	Mr Birling	<p>"Unsinkable. Absolutely unsinkable" "The Germans don't want war!" "Community and all that nonsense" "Still, I can't accept any responsibility." "Look Inspector, I'd give thousands – yes thousands"</p>
3	Mrs Birling	<p>"Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things" "Girls of that class" "That – I consider – is a trifle impertinent, inspector" "Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility" "I'm sorry she should have come to such a horrible end. But I accept no blame for it at all."</p>
4	Sheila	<p>"Now I really feel engaged" "Sorry Daddy. Actually I was listening" "But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people." "I'll never, never do it again" "Why you fool – he knows!"</p>
5	Eric	<p>"I don't know – really. Suddenly I felt I just had to laugh" "Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?" "You haven't made it any easier for me, have you, mother?" "I wasn't in love with her or anything – but I liked her" "you killed her – and the child she'd have had too"</p>
6	Gerald	<p>"You seem to be a nice well-behaved family" "Getting a bit heavy-handed, aren't you, Inspector?" "So – for god's sake – don't say anything to the Inspector" "Sorry – I – well, I've suddenly realized – taken it in properly – that's she's dead-" "I didn't feel about her as she felt about me"</p>

E KEY WORDS		
1	Guilt	Having committed a specified or implied offence or crime.
2	Capitalist	A person who uses their wealth to invest in trade and industry for profit.

3	Social class	A division of a society based on social and economic (money) status.
4	Scandal	An action or event that is morally or legally wrong
5	Social responsibility	A person's responsibility to look after everyone in society.
6	Conscience	A person's moral sense of right and wrong
7	Edwardian	A period or era of time
8	Society	People living together in a community.
9	Hypocritical	Behaving in a way that suggests a person has higher standards or better social beliefs.
10	Socialism	A political theory that means of production and distribution are owned by the community as a whole.

F METHODS		
1	Dramatic irony	A technique where the audience knows more than a character.
2	Foreshadowing	A hint or a warning of something in the future.
3	Symbolism	The representation of ideas in images or motifs.
4	Emotive language	Words that create feeling and emotion.
5	Juxtaposition	Two concepts, themes, ideas or characters that are contrasting or opposite.
6	Dialogue	Words that are spoken by a character.
7	Semantic field	A group of words that follow the same theme.
8	Colloquial language	Words that are informal and slang.



PLOT SUMMARY: ACT 1

1	The play is set in 1912, in the fictional city of Brumley, North Midlands. The stage directions reveal that the play takes place in a large suburban house, owned by a wealthy business man. Mr Birling, his family and Gerald all sit around the dining table after dinner. They talk and Sheila mentions how Gerald did not contact her very much last summer. Eric appears to be a little drunk.
2	Mr Birling gives a short speech on Sheila and Gerald getting married. Gerald gives Sheila a ring.
3	Birling gives a long speech on progress. Sheila & Mrs Birling leave.
4	Birling tells Gerald that he might get a knighthood. Birling talks to Gerald and Eric about the idea of 'community'.
5	The Inspector enters and tells the family of the death of a young woman called Eva Smith.
6	The Inspector questions Birling and shows him the photo.
7	Despite Mr Birling's statues, the Inspector is confident, abrupt and mysterious.
8	Mr Birling sacked Eva Smith from his factory 2 years ago, in September 1910. She led a group to strike in order to obtain a pay rise, which was unsuccessful and the ring leaders were sacked.
9	Mr Birling defends his action and Gerald supports him.
10	Sheila enters and hears about Eva Smith, she is upset by the news of the girl's suicide.
11	The Inspector informs the Birlings that after being sacked, she began working in Millwards in December 1910. However, she was sacked one month later after a complaint by a customer.
12	The Inspector shows Sheila the photo and she runs out upset. The Inspector talks to the men.
13	The Inspector questions Sheila. he talks about how she knew Eva Smith and that she believed it was her fault that the girl was sacked.
14	She explains that she was in a bad mood and felt the girl was laughing at her. She also admits she was jealous at how pretty Eva was.
15	The name 'Daisy Renton' comes up after the Inspector explains that this is the name Eva Smith began calling herself and Sheila and Gerald have a heated discussion about this.
16	Sheila realises that Gerald was having an affair with Daisy at some point the previous year.

PLOT SUMMARY: ACT 2

1	The Inspector begins to talk about joint responsibility.
2	Mrs Birling acts in a superior manner, referring to Eva's lower class and talking down to Sheila.
3	Sheila indicates that Eric drinks too much, which Gerald agrees with. Mrs Birling is shocked and annoyed.
4	Sheila warns her parents that they are making the situation worse.
5	Gerald explains how he met Daisy in a bar. Sheila's parents do not want her to hear the story but she refuses to leave..
6	Gerald is visibly distressed by the reality of Daisy's death.

7	He discusses how he took Daisy for a drink having helped her get away from an old council man, who he describes as a "womanising drunk".
8	Gerald explains how Daisy had no money and was hungry/ He then moved her innocently into a friend's apartment and they later became lovers. Mrs Birling is disgusted by his behaviour.
9	Gerald explains that he did not love Daisy and that he broke up with her in September 1911.
10	Sheila returns her engagement ring – she says she respects Gerald's honesty but that they are now different people.
11	The Inspector shows Mrs Birling the photo. The front door slams and Birling leaves then returns.
12	The Inspector questions Mrs Birling, revealing that Eva was pregnant and that she had asked Mrs Birling's charity, the Brumley Woman's Charity Organisation, for help.
13	Mrs Birling reveals that Eva was using the name Mrs Birling ad that it was therefore her duty to have her claim for help refused.
14	The Inspector reveals that Eva was pregnant – but clarifies it wasn't Gerald's child.
15	The Inspector manipulates Mrs Birling into stating that it was entirely the father of Eva's child who was to blame for her death.
16	The audience and characters gradually realise that Eric is the father.
17	Sheila cries and Eric enters.

PLOT SUMMARY: ACT 3

1	Eric talks to Sheila, Mrs Birling, Mr Birling and the Inspector. Eric has a drink.
2	The Inspector questions Eric. Sheila and Mrs Birling leave.
3	Eric tells the story of how he knew Eva Smith. He discusses how he became and drunk and aggressive before Eva allowed him into her flat.
4	Eric says that when the two met up again, they began a short relationship. Eric tried to help Eva by stealing money from his father's company, which she refused to take.
5	Sheila and Mrs Birling return. Eric accuses Mrs Birling of killing his child.
6	The Inspector makes his final speech. Telling them that they all killed Eva Smith, summing up what each family member had done, before reminding Mr. Birling that he had destroyed a girl over a small pay rise.
7	The Inspector then discusses the state of the country and how we are all "responsible for each other."
8	The Inspector leaves.
9	The family argue and question whether he was a real inspector or not. The doorbell rings. Gerald enters.
10	Gerald tells them he wasn't a real police officer. Mr Birling calls the Chief Constable to check.
11	The family argue. Mr Birling and Mrs Birling are happy, while Sheila & Eric are not.
12	Gerald questions if there was in fact one girl that all the separate events happened to and if a girl died at all that evening. Gerald calls the infirmary, who say that no girl has been brought in and they have not had any suicides.
13	Everyone is happy apart from Sheila and Eric.
14	The phone rings and Birling answers. It was the police saying an inspector is coming to ask some questions as a girl has just died on her way to the infirmary.