

English Literature: 'An Inspector Calls' Knowledge Organiser

Context Notes: Edwardian England (1912)

- **Priestley was a socialist** and the play reflects his views that we should all look after one another, and that those who have power over others should use it for the common good, not just for their own benefit. He uses the character of the Inspector as a mouth-piece for his ideas to send a message that if people were more considerate of one another; this would improve the quality of life for all. He believed that it was the younger generation who had the ability to change and bring hope.
- **The play was written in 1945 at the end of two World Wars. It is set in 1912**, Edwardian England, just two years before the first war. This was a very difficult time for England. It was a period when there were many strikes, food shortages and great political tension. **There was also a divide between the people of England at that time; the rich and the poor. In 1912, England had very little welfare system or support for the poor in need.**
- **John Boynton Priestley was born into a working class family** in 1894. He knew early on that he wanted to become a writer, but decided against going to university as he thought he would get a better feel for the world around him by working. Instead, 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 gained a degree from Cambridge University, and then moved to London to work as a freelance writer. Much of his writing was ground-breaking and controversial. He included new ideas about possible parallel universes (Ouspensky and Dunne's Theories of Time) and strong political messages.
- **During the Second World War he broadcast a massively popular weekly radio programme** which was attacked by the Conservatives for being too left-wing. The programme was eventually cancelled by the BBC for being too critical of the Government.
- **Gender** – as men went to fight during the war, their positions had to be filled by women, this changed perception and men had to admit that women were just as capable as them. Not all men saw this change as positive though and remained sexist.

Writer's methods in a play

- **Any language devices/word classes** – E.g. The use of the noun 'sort' to describe Eva in a derogatory way
- **Dramatic irony** – When the audience are aware of something that the characters aren't 'the titanic is unsinkable'
- **Stage directions** – used to indicate the specific body language or actions of a character
- **Interruptions** – To represent growing power or shifts in hierarchy
- **Entrances/exits** – Used in a dramatic way to create tension or focus in on a particular character
- **Cyclical structure** – The 'sharp ring of the doorbell' and 'sharp ring of the telephone' at the beginning and ending which both times interrupts Mr Birling when he is talking about the younger generation
- **Dramatic pauses** – To build tension and to emphasise shock or hesitation
- **Contrasts** – Contrasting 'substantial and heavily comfortable' lives of The Birling Family with the working classes' struggle to survive
- **Use of lighting** – The light is 'intimate' when The Birling Family are blissfully unaware of their sins and then 'brighter' when the inspector arrives
- **Use of props** – The cigars to represent the separation of men and women when they retire to the drawing room
- **Microcosm** – When a character represents a larger group – Eva Smith represents all of the working class

Themes

- Capitalism
- Socialism
- Morality
- Gender
- Younger and older generation/ age
- Social Responsibility
- The Supernatural
- Selfishness
- Class
- Ambition

I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty – and I threatened to make a row.

... a man has to make his own way—has to look after himself—and his family

The famous younger generation who know it all.

There's every excuse for what your mother and I did – it turned out unfortunately, that's all.

...no work, no money [...] no relatives to help her, few friends, lonely, half-starved, she was feeling desperate.

Don't stammer and yammer at me again, man. What did she say?

We are responsible for each other...if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire, blood and anguish.

As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!

I was perfectly justified in advising my committee not to allow her claim for assistance.

I behaved badly too. I know I did. I'm ashamed of it.

You began to learn something. And now you've stopped.

I didn't even remember – that's the hellish thing. Oh – my God! – How stupid it all is!

It's the same rotten story whether it's told to a police inspector or to somebody else.

...a notorious womaniser...one of the worst sots and rogues...

I knew her. Let's leave it at that.

Sorry – I –well, I've suddenly realised – taken it in properly – that's she's dead –

I speak as a hard-headed business man, who has to take risks and know what he's about.

The lighting should be pink and intimate until the Inspector arrives, and then it should be brighter and harder.

She'd swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course.

But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people.



NOTORIOUS



Réalisation



JUSTIFY YOURSELF



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