

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT OUR VISIT

1. DBS CHECKS FOR OUR PERFORMERS

We operate a rigorous selection process where the identity of all prospective performers is checked thoroughly. All of our performers are recently DBS checked to enhanced level, and they are all instructed to bring their DBS disclosure with them for every performance we do. They will also have Photo-ID with them. Under Data Protection law, we are not permitted to share personal data of our performers on their behalf, either prior to, or during their visit, ie. DBS disclosure numbers, dates of birth, photographs. However, should you wish to see this information on arrival, they will produce this for your inspection. We are equally happy to confirm their identity by telephone, should you require this, during the time that they are on your premises.

Please be aware that retention of and/or copying or photographing of our performers' personal data documents contravenes GDPR regulations and as such we politely request that you do not retain or replicate any such documents unless the following process is followed:

1. The performer consents in writing to their personal data being retained and/or copied.
2. The performer has their documents returned to them personally and witnesses any such copies being securely destroyed before departure from your premises.
3. You email brian@manactco.org.uk to confirm that this information has been consensually copied and furthermore securely destroyed.

2. PROFESSIONAL INSURANCE:

manACTco has Public and Employers Liability Insurance: Policy number 550.194.951; dated 24/09/2021, arranged with AXA Insurance UK plc, where the minimum amount of cover provided by the policy is no less than £5 million. Contact us if you would like to see a copy of the evidence of cover.

3. GENERAL RISK ASSESSMENT:

The performers will bring with them bags containing soft costumes and small props, but we do NOT use scenery, lighting rigs, or any equipment whatsoever. During set-up we have requested that we have the performance space to ourselves for preparation, therefore no children should be in the performance hall whilst we are setting up. It is important that this is adhered to. By the time we are ready to allow the audience into the performance space all the preparations will be complete without any risk to the children.

Please note that MANACTCO (Manchester Actors Company) is NOT responsible for the supervision of your children at any time; therefore your school must ensure that there is sufficient supervision throughout the performance, and that the performance hall is clear of children before and after the session.

4. USE OF RECORDING/PHOTOGRAPHY EQUIPMENT DURING THE PERFORMANCE:

UNDER THE LAWS OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS , Video or other recording of the performance and workshop is strictly **NOT PERMITTED**. If you wish to take STILL PHOTOGRAPHS then this is possible, but must be arranged with the performers BEFORE the performance has commenced.

COVID-SECURE PRESENTATIONS 2022

Despite Government changes to the legal requirements with regard to COVID, things are still far from normal, and the risk from Covid-19 variants is ever-present, so our school presentations will continue to reflect the on-going risk associated with Covid-19. We have laid down some ground rules with regard to visiting schools to ensure that all of our visits are SAFE and COVID SECURE, in order to best protect school staff, students, and also our performers. These procedures have worked extremely well since we resumed touring back in early November 2021, and we will continue these procedures through for the foreseeable future. It is our intention that at all times the performers will have as little close contact as possible with students and school staff during the entirety of our visit, and we request that schools assist us to achieve that aim. Where we need action from school staff to achieve a secure visit then this will be highlighted below **in yellow**. These arrangements will remain in place for as long as necessary.

1. GENERAL:

All of our performers have been fully (double) vaccinated before contracted to work with us, and they will be routinely health-checked in Manchester each morning before setting off to visit schools. They will apply hand sanitiser BEFORE entering school premises, and will wear face-masks upon arrival at school and throughout their time on school premises, EXCEPT during the period of setting up the performance area; during the actual performance; and during the follow-up Q&A session. It is our intention throughout our visit that the performers will remain at least two metres from school staff when arriving at school and being escorted to and from the performance area; and will remain at least five metres from the audience during the whole presentation.

2. ARRIVAL AT SCHOOL RECEPTION:

In advance of our visit we will inform our school booking contact of the names of the performers who will be visiting you on the day, in order to make the signing-in process as easy as possible. All our performers have recently been DBS checked to enhanced level. They will bring with them their DBS certificate, and also relevant Photo-ID. As soon as the performers arrive at the school gates they will telephone the school reception to inform them of their arrival and to receive any instructions, if necessary, about entering the school building.

It is our intention that our performers have as little contact as possible with students and school staff during the entirety of our visit, and so **it would be extremely helpful that once the group arrives with you and have signed in, that they should be escorted to the performance area as quickly as possible, and not left in your school reception area unattended for any length of time.**

3. SETTING UP IN THE PERFORMANCE AREA.

There is no set to erect, and our group will arrive each with a bag containing costume changes and small props that are specific to each performer. During set-up we request that we have the performance space to ourselves for preparation, therefore no students and a minimum of staff should be in the performance hall whilst we are setting up. By the time we are ready to allow the audience into the seating area all the preparations will be complete. Our performance is presented front-on to the audience, and **we would request that the seating is arranged to accommodate this prior to our visit.** For our part, we will work to a maximum audience size of 240. Up to that number, how many you actually want to have attending the performance is entirely up to you: it's all a matter of how many you can fit into the performance seating area, and still maintain any social distancing rules your school has in place at the time of our performance. **We request that school staff are responsible for ensuring that the audience are seated correctly, and that our performers will not be involved in seating the audience.** It is our intention that the performers will remain a **MINIMUM of 5 metres from the audience at all times, and so we request that the front occupied row of the seating area is at least 5 metres from the performing area** to allow the performers the chance to keep their distance from the audience at all times. The performers will mark out a boundary on the performing area itself which we will not cross, to ensure that we maintain the minimum of 5 metres from the front of the audience throughout.

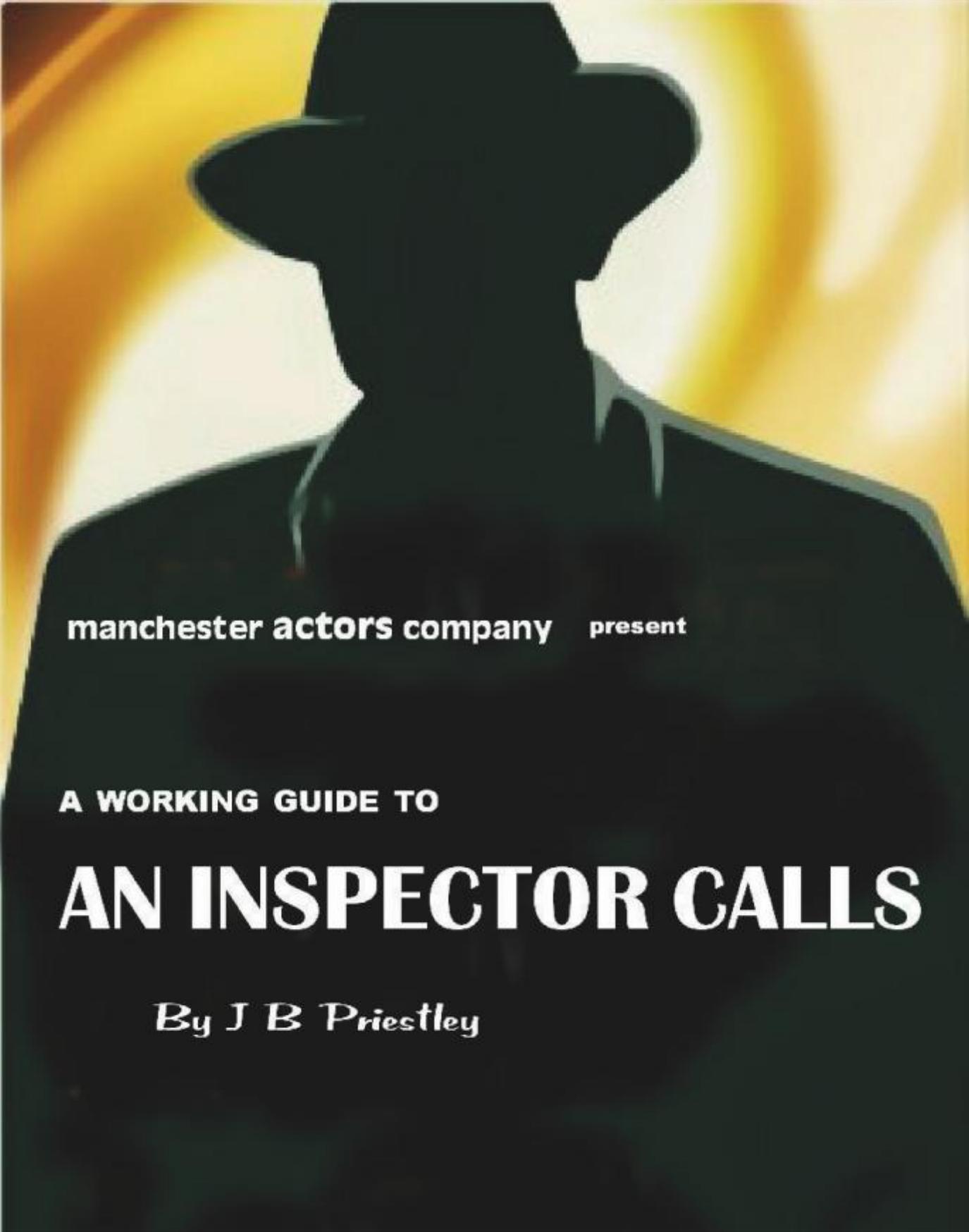
4. DURING THE PRESENTATION.

Each performance lasts approx. 60 minutes. Despite any restrictions, you can expect that our performers will present a robust, lively, powerful, well-spoken, well-acted professional performance of the play. After the performance there is an **OPTIONAL** Q&A session that can last up to a maximum of 30 minutes. This session will be directed by the performers, and will involve a dialogue with the audience, to encourage the students to delve deeper into the text, and ask any relevant questions that they would like to be answered. These Q&A sessions are often quite lively, but we will maintain our 5 metre minimum distance **AT ALL TIMES.**

5. AFTER THE PRESENTATION IS COMPLETE.

Once the presentation is complete then the performers will retreat to the rear of the performance area. **Often at schools, once the presentation has finished some students and staff members like to have quick chat with the performers, which we usually like to encourage, but under these current conditions we CAN NOT allow this to happen.** We want to maintain our distance at all times throughout our visit. Once the seating area is totally cleared of staff and students, our performers will start to pack up costumes and props, and prepare to leave the premises, replacing their face masks. **We request that one member of staff remains behind to safely escort our group back to the school reception and off the premises,** to ensure that we do not encounter other staff or students on the way.

These measures will ensure that our school visit will be as safe as possible for all parties, and also ensure that the presentation to the audience will be as robust as ever.



manchester actors company present

A WORKING GUIDE TO

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

By J B Priestley

INFORMATION PACK

SPRING 2022

"..... We cannot go forward and build up this new world order, and this is our aim, unless we begin to think differently..... one must stop thinking in terms of property and power and begin thinking in terms of community and creativity....."

J.B. Priestley

HELLO TEACHERS!

This is our Teachers' Pack to compliment the performance of 'AN INSPECTOR CALLS' we will presenting at your school. Inside this pack there is lots of information about Priestley's tense three-act drama, and about our version, which is a working guide to the play. In this pack you will find articles about the plot, characters and themes of the play, as well as some background information about life at the time it was set; about Priestley; and about Manchester Actors Company, as well as a quiz about the performance to do after we have left, and some model questions about the play.

Our performance is a concise, abridged version of the entire play, performed by our four talented actors. Concentrating on key scenes, characters and confrontations, the story flows seamlessly, and our detailed dramatic overview of this compelling story is constructed to create a strong, lasting impact with students: and brings the plot, the characters, and the themes vividly to life. Of course, with only 60-minutes and only four actors, we have had to trim the text, and lose some of the characters, but the whole production is tight and tense, and packs quite an emotional punch: accurately capturing the drama of the play. We are well known for our energetic, vigorous, physical theatre performances where close attention is paid to the language, bringing the performance alive as a dynamic, well-spoken display of theatre, and this production of 'An Inspector Calls' will have a strong and lasting impact on anyone studying this great play, and will bring the text, and the characters, vividly to life.

As a theatre company, we believe that live entertainment is far more effective in the educational arena than DVDs, film or television, where involvement is passive, and so often quickly forgotten. A live performance has a much greater impact on learning, and stays in students' minds long after we have left the school. 'An Inspector Calls' is one of the classics of mid-20th century English theatre, and a joy to read, but our live performance concisely lifts the story and the characters off the pages and makes it easier to understand the plot, characters, themes, language and style of Priestley's time-play.

After the performance, of course, we have our 30-minute interactive workshop, 'Meet The Characters', which is a face-to-face interactive discussion, guided by actors in the company, where the audience can talk directly to any of the featured characters, and ask any questions they may have. This invaluable, practical teaching aid allows students to examine the contrasting personalities and motives of the characters, and helps to explain/expand/explore the text of the play even more. This allows the students to better understand the motives of these characters, and to clarify parts of the story that students may otherwise not fully understand. It is a great opportunity for students to unlock the story and to examine it in greater detail. **Please, if there is any part of the play, or any specific characters that you would like this Q&A session to concentrate on, or any area you would specifically like us to mention, then let the actors know before the Q&A session begins, and we'll do our best to meet your needs.**

Many thanks for inviting us into your school this Spring. We hope you enjoy the performance and workshop, and trust that this pack will add value to our visit..... And after our visit we would love to hear from your students about what they think of our presentation. Why not get them to Email us with their reviews of our visit? The details of how to do that is shown on the final page of this pack.

Regards,

A HISTORY OF 'AN INSPECTOR CALLS'

An Inspector Calls was written by established English dramatist J. B. Priestley and was completed in February of 1945, and it was first performed in late September 1945, staged simultaneously at two Moscow theatres, as an appropriate venue in England could not be found. Critics have speculated that the play's themes were considered too negative and critical, and too politically biased for wartime British audiences who were facing up to a General Election in July 1945. The play received rapturous plaudits from the Russian audiences, and Priestley was well-received by his hosts as '*An Inspector Calls*' played a 2-month run. Its first production in London came the following year, 1946, when it opened on 5th May at the New Theatre, with Ralph Richardson as Inspector Goole, Harry Andrews as Gerald Croft, Margaret Leighton as Sheila Birling, Julian Mitchell as Arthur Birling, Marian Spencer as Sybil Birling and a young Alec Guinness as Eric Birling. It became an immediate success with the British public. The first Broadway production, staged by Sir Cedric Hardwicke, opened at the Booth Theatre on 21 October 1947 and ran until 10 January 1948.

Highly successful after its first and subsequent London productions, the play is now considered one of Priestley's greatest works, and has been subject to a variety of critical interpretations. However, after the new wave of social realist theatre in the 1950s and 1960s, the play fell out of fashion, and was dismissed as an example of outdated bourgeois "drawing room" dramas, and became a staple of regional repertory theatre. Following several successful revivals (including Stephen Daldry's 1992 production for the National Theatre), the play was "rediscovered" and hailed as a damning social critique of capitalism and middle-class hypocrisy in the manner of the social realist dramas of Shaw and Ibsen. It has been read as a parable about the destruction of Victorian social values and the disintegration of pre-World War I English society, and Goole's final speech has been interpreted variously as a quasi-Christian vision of hell and judgement, and as a Socialist party manifesto.

The struggle between the embattled patriarch Arthur Birling and Inspector Goole has been interpreted by many critics as a symbolic confrontation between capitalism and socialism, and arguably demonstrates Priestley's Socialist political critique of the selfishness and moral hypocrisy of middle-class capitalist society. Whilst no single member of the Birling family is solely responsible for Eva's death, together they function as a hermetic class system that exploits neglected vulnerable women, with each example of exploitation leading collectively to Eva's social exclusion, despair and suicide. The play also arguably acts as a critique of Victorian-era notions of middle-class philanthropy towards the poor, which is based on presumptions of the charity-givers' social superiority and severe moral judgement towards the "deserving poor". The romantic idea of gentlemanly chivalry towards "fallen women" is also debunked as being based on male lust and sexual exploitation of the weak by the powerful. In Goole's final speech, Eva Smith is referred to as a representative for millions of other vulnerable working class people, and can be read as a call to action for English society to take more responsibility for working class people, prefiguring the development of the post World War II welfare state.

There have been many theatre versions of this play around the world, and once production was performed at the Ferdowsi Theatre in Iran in late 1940s based on the translation by Bozorg Alavi. Elsewhere, Tom Baker played Inspector Goole in a 1987 production directed by Peter Dews and designed by Daphne Dare that opened at the Theatr Clwyd on 14 April then transferred to London's Westminster Theatre on 13 May 1987. The cast included Pauline Jameson as Sybil Birling, Peter Baldwin as Arthur Birling, Charlotte Attenborough as Sheila

Birling, Simon Shepherd as Gerald Croft and Adam Godley as Eric Birling.

Then the play was successfully revived by English director Stephen Daldry for the National Theatre's Lyttelton Theatre on 11 September 1992 and later transferred to the Aldwych Theatre on 25 August 1993 and then to the Garrick Theatre on 24 October 1995. The original production featured Kenneth Cranham as Inspector Goole (later played by Barry Foster and Philip Whitchurch), Richard Pasco as Arthur Birling (later played by Julian Glover, Edward Peel and William Gaunt), Barbara Leigh Hunt as Sybil Birling (later played by Judy Parfitt, Margaret Tyzack and Marjorie Yates), Diana Kent as Sheila Birling (later played by Sylvestra Le Touzel) and Louis Hillyer as Gerald Croft. Daldrey's production was transferred to Broadway in 1994, where it ran at New York City's Royale Theatre from 27 April to 28 May 1995. Kenneth Cranham recreated his role as Inspector Goole with Philip Bosco as Arthur Birling and Rosemary Harris (later Siân Phillips) as Sybil Birling. It won the Broadway Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Revival of a Play. It is this Stephen Daldry production, with a dramatic new set designed by Ian McNeil, that was widely praised for re-invigorating the play for a new generation of theatregoers, and for making the play involving and politically relevant for a modern audience. The production is often credited with single-handedly rediscovering Priestley's works and "rescuing" him from the reputation of being obsolete and class-bound. The success of the production since 1992 has led to a critical reappraisal of Priestley as a politically engaged playwright who offered a sustained critique of the hypocrisy of English society. Daldry's production was revived in London at the Novello Theatre in September 2009 with a new cast, though retaining McNeil's original sets and staging. The dynamic staging was considered to be a radical break with previous UK stagings of the play (which usually adhered to a single realistically depicted Edwardian drawing room set and a static dialogue-based performance style) and emphasised the metaphorical elements of the "inspection" and the themes of social exclusion and class warfare. Many theatre critics in 1992 read the production as a critic of Thatcherite Conservative politics, with Goole's final speech reading as a direct rebuttal of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's well-known statement "There is no such thing as society".

A film was produced in the UK by Watergate Productions Ltd in 1954. The screenplay was adapted by Desmond Davis and directed by Guy Hamilton. Alastair Sim starred as Inspector Goole, renamed "Poole" for the film, with Jane Wenham as Eva Smith, Eileen Moore as Sheila Birling, Arthur Young as Arthur Birling, Brian Worth as Gerald Croft, Olga Lindo as Sybil Birling and Bryan Forbes as Eric Birling. A three-part television mini-series was produced by BBC in 1982, directed by Michael Simpson. Bernard Hepton starred as Inspector Goole, and the cast included Sarah Berger as Sheila Birling, Nigel Davenport as Arthur Birling, Simon Ward as Gerald Croft, Margaret Tyzack as Sybil Birling and David Sibley as Eric Birling.

On 14 July 2007 BBC Radio 7 broadcast an adaptation by John Foley originally aired on the BBC World Service, starring Bob Peck as Inspector Goole, John Woodvine as Arthur Birling and Maggie Steed as Sybil Birling. The production was directed by Rosalyn Ward. A full-cast unabridged audio adaptation and analysis was released on audio CD and MP3-CD in the UK by SmartPass in 2004 as part of their Audio Education Study Guides series.

A second 90 minute BBC Radio adaptation was transmitted on BBC Radio 4 on 29 May 2010 in the Saturday Play slot. It starred Toby Jones as Inspector Goole, David Calder as Arthur Birling, Frances Barber as Sybil Birling and Morven Christie as Sheila Birling. The production was directed by Jeremy Mortimer.

Manchester Actors Company first toured with 'A Working Guide To An Inspector Calls' in the Spring of 2010, then again in the Autumn of 2012, and both productions were met with great critical success from Schools and Colleges in the North West and surrounding counties.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY

To understand the background to the play, it's helpful to know a little about J B Priestley's life and his political views during the early 20th century - a time of great global change. He wrote *An Inspector Calls* just as the Second World War was coming to a close and like much of his work contains controversial, politically charged messages.

Keen to pioneer a new 'morality' in politics, Priestley's chief concern in early 1945 involved social inequality in Britain. The characters we see as the curtain rises are not the same as those at the play's conclusion. The events of the evening change everyone, as well as their expectations of the future. Inspector Goole is instrumental in disturbing the self-satisfied harmony of the Birling family; a purposeful, mysterious character who forces the characters to confront each other's social responsibility, snobbery and guilt. But is the inspector as genuine as he seems? All these changes take place because of the visit of Inspector Goole. But who is Inspector Goole? And who is the girl whose suicide he is apparently investigating?

Priestley deliberately set his play in 1912 because the date represented an era when all was very different from the time he was writing, and he wanted to remind people how wrong things had been, yet taken for granted in their day. In 1912, rigid class and gender boundaries seemed to ensure that nothing would ever change. Yet by 1945, most of those class and gender divisions graphically outlined in his play had been breached. Priestley wanted to make the most of these changes and to see that these changes continued and developed. Through this play, he encourages people to seize the opportunity the end of the war had given them to build a better, more caring society.

1912 was a time when people in Britain, at least, were still buoyed by the sheer certainty of the Victorian age. Yet things were festering under the surface, and in turn ignored or dismissed by the class represented by the Birlings. Throughout Europe unrest was rife, and on the continent there had been labour unrest in many countries, most notably in Russia where the ruling-class held such dominance over the vast working class who were still treated as serfs and peasants. Even in England there had been labour disputes, and there was the rise of the Unions and the newly-formed Labour party. The violent unrest that had hit most of central Europe had not been seen in Britain, but it would only be a matter of time.

Europe, and much of the world, was dominated by great European-based empires in 1912: The Russian Empire, The Habsburg Empire of Austro-Hungary, the German Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire, the French Republic, and the Italian Empire. These large imperial nations had nurtured several secret alliances with each and other European countries formed over the previous decades to protect each other, and the crown heads of these countries were loosely related to each other. After decades of peace old rivalries began to surface between the nations, and once the fuse was lit Europe became a powder keg ready to explode. The lit fuse was the assassination on 28 June 1914 of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, by a Yugoslav nationalist in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. It resulted in a Habsburg ultimatum against the Kingdom of Serbia, which was protected by Imperial Russia. The alliances were quickly invoked by nations almost eager for conflict, so within weeks the major powers were at war; and via their colonies, the conflict soon spread around the world. Yet what started as a spat between rival Royal families soon became the means to the greatest social revolution the world had seen. The working classes fought the war, almost with a sense that this would be the war that would change the class system forever. In the background working-class political activists looking for a change to the old order would

act to take advantage of the uncertainties created by the war. The workers revolution in Russia in 1917 is the most stark result of this, but socialism rose generally through Europe, and the ruling class system everywhere was gradually dismantled. Of the 23 ruling Royal families that existed in 1913, only 6 survived beyond 1919. And in those countries where Royal families continued - such as in Great Britain - the role of the royals had changed dramatically. Central Governments took power and democracy took a hold, and with it socialism changed the social inequalities forever. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the rights of the working classes improved greatly, and there was much more equality for women. The 1930s was dominated by an economic depression which slowed change with the working classes again bearing the brunt of the poverty and shortages, but World War II ended the economic depression, and whilst the population of Europe again had to suffer warfare, danger, death, and shortages there was also great strides taken to break down the remaining social and gender inequalities. Priestley was conscious that once the war was over there would be great opportunities for more social change and strove to ensure that those opportunities should not be wasted. By setting 'An Inspector Calls' back in the period of 1912 he was able to show people how things were against how they had become, and let people glimpse a egalitarian future. Indeed, once the Americans had entered World War II, and the fortunes of the war had turned against Nazi Germany in mid-1943, then there became a great appetite in Britain for a social change once the war was finally over. Socialism had become popular and it was down to Priestley, and caring intellectuals like him, to help forge the post-war future. In the general election of 1945 the Conservatives, who been in power from 1934 up to the outbreak of the war, were heavily defeated by the Labour Party, who had won their first-ever majority in a General Election. The people of Britain had elected its first socialist government.

The comparison between life in 1912 when the play was set, and 1945 when it was written, is very different:

In 1912 the Birlings optimistic view that there would not be a war was very wrong, whereas by 1945 the people had just survived a second world war in thirty years.

In 1912 there were very strong distinctions between the upper and lower classes, whereas in 1945 those class distinctions had been greatly reduced as a result of the two world wars.

In 1912 Women were subservient to men. All a well off women could do was get married; a poor woman was seen as cheap labour, and little more, whereas by 1945 women had earned a more valued place in society.

In 1912 the ruling classes saw no need for a change to the status quo. By 1945 there was a huge desire for social change, which led to the first-ever socialist government. Clement Atlee had replaced Churchill as Prime Minister, and the people had voted for a government whose priority was the kind of social reform that J.B. Priestley - and Inspector Goole - had demanded.

During the 1930s 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, which argued for public ownership of land, greater democracy, and a new 'morality' in politics. The party merged with the Labour Party in 1945, but Priestley was influential in developing the idea of the Welfare State which began to be put into place at the end of the war. He believed that further world wars could only be avoided through cooperation and mutual respect between countries, and so became active in the early movement for a United Nations. And as the nuclear arms race between West and East began in the 1950s, he helped to found CND, hoping that Britain would set an example to the world by a moral act of nuclear disarmament.

THE SETTING TO THE STORY

There are no recorded interviews with J.B. Priestley which give a direct answer to why Priestley wrote the play in 1945 but set it in 1912. Judging by what we know of J.B. Priestley it is possible to guess. Priestley fought in WWI, and was a radio newscaster during WWII. He witnessed both of these wars that were being fought in order to save society. In 'An Inspector Calls' written just after WWII, Priestley seems to be asking the question, "Just that kind of society are we fighting to save?"

The social issues that were so prevalent in the labour strikes of 1912 were still important in 1946, because the very definition of society means that human beings don't live alone and that each one is responsible for their actions towards the other. By setting his characters in a time of innocence and hope, Priestley can speak even more strongly to his audiences who have lived through a time of despair. At the start of the play there is a self-satisfied air to the Birlings that was prevalent throughout British society of 1912. The arrogance, pride and complacency of the Birlings seems all the more foolish to an audience who knows what is about to happen to English people through two world wars, and the inter-war economic depression. The lessons that Eric and Sheila learn are even more poignant when one realizes that very soon all classes in England, upper, middle and lower, will be involved in those same tragic wars.

It is necessary and also highly important to look closely at the physical setting of 'An Inspector Calls'. The play is set in a fictitious industrial city called Brumley. Priestley grew up in the industrial northern city of Bradford and this may have been highly influential to him because in the play, Brumley, although not a real place, has a lot of background information given about it. Brumley is a town of some importance. It has a Lord Mayor and a police force that boasts its own Chief Constable. In the play it is mentioned that there is to be a forthcoming visit by a member of the Royal Family and one of the main characters, Arthur Birling, is hoping for a knighthood through his activity in local politics and having once been Lord Mayor of Brumley. There are clearly a large number of poor and needy women living in Brumley as there is mentioned in the play a place called the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation. Another of the characters, Mrs Birling, is involved with this organisation and this gives us an insight into some historical context. In the time when the play was set a good many of these organisations were in existence and relied mainly upon financial support from wealthy people, such as Mrs Birling, and help was given to individuals at the discretion and decision of those benefactors. Priestley makes other references, apart from the Birlings, towards social injustice.

As for the action of the play - it all happens in the Birling's dining room. The room is described as being 'substantial and heavily comfortable, but not cosy and homelike'. This description of the room mirrors the lives of the Birlings. They are outwardly respectable and enjoy a comfortable and well off way of life and yet their relationships with one and other are not at all cosy and there are a great number of tensions between them. The realism of the stage set is important as it gives the audience a sense that they are in the safe confines of normality. This is something that Priestley often liked to begin his plays with. However, the mysterious role of the inspector and the telephone call at the end of the play suddenly introduce the audience to an element of the unreal.

THE PLOT

ACT I

The play begins at dinner at the Birlings' home in 1912. Arthur Birling, a wealthy mill owner and local politician, and his family are celebrating the engagement of daughter Sheila to Gerald Croft, son of a competitor of Birling's. In attendance are Sybil Birling, Arthur's wife and Sheila and Eric's mother, and Eric Birling, Sheila's younger brother, who has a drinking problem that is discreetly ignored. Mr Birling makes grand speeches giving his views on technology and industrial relations, emphasising his opinion that a man should only care about himself and his family and no-one else. Their evening is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of a police inspector by the name of Goole who is making enquiries into the suicide of a young woman called Eva Smith. The inspector has a photograph of the woman and from it Mr Birling admits that he once employed her in his factory but had sacked her over an industrial dispute over wages. Gerald Croft backs Mr Birling's belief that he acted within reason. Sheila and her brother Eric react differently, feeling that their father was harsh in sacking her. However, upon seeing the photograph herself, Sheila realises that she also sacked the same woman from her job as a shop assistant. During the course of Act I it becomes clear that the inspector has an uncanny knowledge about the family's dealing with the girl. He then announces that the girl has in fact changed her name from Eva Smith to Daisy Renton. The reaction that this causes in Gerald makes it obvious that he knows the girl also. By the time we reach the end of the act the inspector is already suggesting that many people share the responsibility for the miserable existence of the young girl which prompted her to take her own life.

ACT II

There is by now an evident tension between Sheila and Gerald which becomes heightened when he admits that he had had an affair with Daisy Renton in the spring of the previous year. Whilst feeling angry with Gerald for his involvement with the girl she does have a certain respect for his openness and honesty with his admission. Mrs Birling makes attempts to intimidate the inspector and control the situation. Despite this, Sheila feels that it is foolish to try and hinder the inspector's enquiries and this appears to be well founded. At the point when Eric is out of the room Mrs Birling is forced to admit that she also has an involvement with the girl. Two weeks earlier she had refused the girl who had come to her seeking help. It is then revealed that the girl was pregnant and the suspicion now points at Eric as being the father of the unborn child.

ACT III

Eric confesses that he was he who had got the girl pregnant. He also admits to having stolen money from his father's firm in an attempt to support her. When he hears that his mother refused to help the girl he is horrified and blames her for both the death of the girl and of the unborn child. At this point it becomes clear that any family unity has now dissolved. The inspector has therefore done his job by showing each of them that they had a part to play in ruining the girl's life. He then goes on to make a speech about the consequence of social irresponsibility which is in direct contrast to the speeches made by Mr Birling at the start of the play. The inspector then leaves. Gerald and Mr Birling begin to have doubts about the inspector's identity and are gradually able to prove that the man was not a real police inspector.

This then raises further doubts between them all about whether they have been talking about the same girl or indeed whether any girl had actually killed herself at all. Gerald telephones the infirmary who confirm that they have no record of any girl dying there that afternoon. Naturally there is a general feeling of relief upon hearing this. Sheila and Eric still feel guilty about their action although they seem to have been changed by the recent events. The others, however, feel a greater sense of relief and their confidence in the rightness of their own actions is restored. The play ends abruptly with a telephone call, taken by Arthur, who reports that a young woman has just died on her way to the infirmary, a suspected case of suicide by disinfectant, and that the local police are on their way to question the Birlings. The true identity of Goole is never explained, but it is clear that the family's confessions over the course of the evening are true, and that they will be disgraced publicly when news of their involvement in Eva's demise is revealed.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Arthur Birling - husband of Sybil and father of Sheila and Eric Birling. He represents the capitalist ruling class, repeatedly describing himself with pride as a "hard-headed businessman", and the head of a patriarchal family structure, and is arguably the main subject of Priestley's social critique.

Sybil Birling - the wife of Arthur and mother of Sheila and Eric Birling. She is her husband's social superior and is keen to show him the correct etiquette. She seems detached from the rest of the family as she does not realise Eric's alcohol problem. She is described as a snob who doesn't care about second class people, only respecting the people of her class.

Sheila Birling - the Birlings' eldest child, described as a very pretty girl in her mid-twenties, 'excitable and very pleased with life', and rather excited about her engagement to Gerald. She starts out as a playful, self-centred girl who loves attention.

Eric Birling - the son of Arthur Birling and Sybil Birling. Eric is revealed to be an alcoholic in the play. In the beginning of the play, Eric is shown as a rebellious, full of himself young man, a true jack the lad, however towards the end of the play his true personality is revealed.

Gerald Croft - the son of Sir George Croft of Crofts Limited, a competitor of Birling and Company, he is at the Birling residence to celebrate his recent engagement to Sheila Birling.

Inspector Goole - a mysterious interrogator who introduces himself as "Inspector Goole", claiming that he has seen the dead body of Eva/Daisy earlier that day after her slow and painful suicide by swallowing disinfectant, and that he has "a duty" to investigate the Birlings' responsibility for her death. Goole forces the characters to question their very own lives, and if the ones they were living were true. In addition he also feels a responsibility to make the Birling family feel guilt for their actions.

Eva Smith/Daisy Renton - the unseen working class woman who Goole claims has committed suicide whilst pregnant with Eric Birling's baby, and who has been mistreated by each member of the Birling family and by Gerald Croft. Eva/Daisy appears to be a victim of her class, and is judged by the (female) characters for not acting appropriately for her class.

Edna - who does not have much to do in this play, although she is the only person we see in the play who has a similar background to Eva Smith. We see the Birlings ordering her around, and it is she who shows in the Inspector.

CHARACTER PROFILES

ARTHUR BIRLING

He is described at the start as a "heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties but rather provincial in his speech." He has worked his way up in the world and is proud of his achievements. He boasts about having been Mayor and tries (and fails) to impress the Inspector with his local standing and his influential friends. However, he is aware of people who are his social superiors, which is why he shows off about the port to Gerald, "it's exactly the same port your father gets." He is proud that he is likely to be knighted, as that would move him even higher in social circles. He claims the party "is one of the happiest nights of my life." This is not only because Sheila will be happy, but because a merger with Crofts Limited will be good for his business. He is optimistic for the future and confident that there will not be a war. As the audience knows there will be a war, we begin to doubt Mr Birling's judgement. (If he is wrong about the war, what else will he be wrong about?) He is also extremely selfish: He wants to protect himself and his family. He believes that socialist ideas that stress the importance of the community are "nonsense" and that "a man has to make his own way"; He wants to protect Birling and Co. He cannot see that he did anything wrong when he fired Eva Smith - he was just looking after his business interests. He wants to protect his reputation. As the Inspector's investigations continue, his selfishness gets the better of him: he is worried about how the press will view the story in Act II, and accuses Sheila of disloyalty at the start of Act III. He wants to hide the fact that Eric stole money: "I've got to cover this up as soon as I can." At the end of the play, he knows he has lost the chance of his knighthood, his reputation in Brumley and the chance of Birling and Co. merging with their rivals. Yet he hasn't learnt the lesson of the play: he is unable to admit his responsibility for his part in Eva's death.

MRS. SYBIL BIRLING

She is described at the start as "about fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior." She is a snob, very aware of the differences between social classes. She is irritated when Mr Birling makes the social gaffe of praising the cook in front of Gerald and later is very dismissive of Eva, saying "Girls of that class." She has the least respect for the Inspector of all the characters. She tries - unsuccessfully - to intimidate him and force him to leave, then lies to him when she claims that she does not recognise the photograph that he shows her. She sees Sheila and Eric still as "children" and speaks patronisingly to them. She tries to deny things that she doesn't want to believe: Eric's drinking, Gerald's affair with Eva, and the fact that a working class girl would refuse money even if it was stolen, claiming "She was giving herself ridiculous airs." She admits she was "prejudiced" against the girl who applied to her committee for help and saw it as her "duty" to refuse to help her. Her narrow sense of morality dictates that the father of a child should be responsible for its welfare, regardless of circumstances. At the end of the play, she has had to come to terms that her son is a heavy drinker who got a girl pregnant and stole money to support her, her daughter will not marry a good social 'catch' and that her own reputation within the town will be sullied. Yet, like her husband, she refuses to believe that she did anything wrong and doesn't accept responsibility for her part in Eva's death.

SHEILA BIRLING

She is described at the start as "a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited." Even though she seems very playful at the opening, we know that she has had suspicions about Gerald when she mentions "last summer, when you never came near me." Does this suggest that she is not as naive and shallow as she first appears? Although she has probably

never in her life before considered the conditions of the workers, she shows her compassion immediately she hears of her father's treatment of Eva Smith: "But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people." Already, she is starting to change. She is horrified by her own part in Eva's story. She feels full of guilt for her jealous actions and blames herself as "really responsible." She is very perceptive: she realises that Gerald knew Daisy Renton from his reaction, the moment the Inspector mentioned her name. At the end of Act II, she is the first to realise Eric's part in the story. Significantly, she is the first to wonder who the Inspector really is, saying to him, 'wonderingly', "I don't understand about you." She warns the others "he's giving us the rope - so that we'll hang ourselves" (Act II) and, near the end, is the first to consider whether the Inspector may not be real. She is curious. She genuinely wants to know about Gerald's part in the story. It's interesting that she is not angry with him when she hears about the affair: she says that she respects his honesty. She is becoming more mature. She is angry with her parents in Act III for trying to "pretend that nothing much has happened." Sheila says "It frightens me the way you talk:" she cannot understand how they cannot have learnt from the evening in the same way that she has. She is seeing her parents in a new, unfavourable light. At the end of the play, Sheila is much wiser. She can now judge her parents and Gerald from a new perspective, but the greatest change has been in herself: her social conscience has been awakened and she is aware of her responsibilities. The Sheila who had a girl dismissed from her job for a trivial reason has vanished forever.

ERIC BIRLING

He is described at the start as "in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive." Eric seems embarrassed and awkward right from the start. The first mention of him in the script is "Eric suddenly guffaws," and then he is unable to explain his laughter, as if he is nervous about something. (It is not until the final act that we realise this must be because of his having stolen some money.) There is another awkward moment when Gerald, Birling and Eric are chatting about women's love of clothes before the Inspector arrives. Do you feel that there is tension in Eric's relationship with his father? It soon becomes clear to us (although it takes his parents longer) that he is a hardened drinker. Gerald admits, "I have gathered that he does drink pretty hard." When he hears how his father sacked Eva Smith, he supports the worker's cause, like Sheila. "Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?" He feels guilt and frustration with himself over his relationship with the girl. He cries, "Oh - my God! - how stupid it all is!" as he tells his story. He is horrified that his thoughtless actions had such consequences. He had some innate sense of responsibility, though, because although he got a woman pregnant, he was concerned enough to give her money. He was obviously less worried about stealing (or 'borrowing' from his father's office) than he was about the girl's future. So, was Eric, initially, the most socially aware member of the Birling family? He is appalled by his parents' inability to admit their own responsibility. He tells them forcefully, "I'm ashamed of you." When Birling tries to threaten him in Act III, Eric is aggressive in return: "I don't give a damn now." Do you think Eric has ever stood up to his father in this way before? At the end of the play, like Sheila, he is fully aware of his social responsibility. He is not interested in his parents' efforts to cover everything up: as far as he is concerned, the important thing is that a girl is dead. "We did her in all right."

GERALD CROFT

He is described as "an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred man-about-town." He is an aristocrat - the son of Lord and Lady Croft. We realise that they are not over-impressed by Gerald's engagement to Sheila because they declined the invitation to the dinner. He is not as willing as Sheila to admit his part in the girl's death to the Inspector and initially pretends that he never knew her. Is he a bit like Mr Birling, wanting to protect his own interests? He did have some genuine feeling for Daisy Renton, however: he is very moved when he hears of her death. He tells Inspector Goole that he

arranged for her to live in his friend's flat "because I was sorry for her;" she became his mistress because "She was young and pretty and warm-hearted - and intensely grateful." Despite this, in Act III he tries to come up with as much evidence as possible to prove that the Inspector is a fake - because that would get him off the hook. It is Gerald who confirms that the local force has no officer by the name of Goole, he who realises it may not have been the same girl and he who finds out from the infirmary that there has not been a suicide case in months. He seems to throw his energies into "protecting" himself rather than "changing" himself (unlike Sheila). At the end of the play, he has not changed. He has not gained a new sense of social responsibility, which is why Sheila (who has) is unsure whether to take back the engagement ring.

INSPECTOR GOOLE

He is described on his entrance as creating "an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit. He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking." He works very systematically; he likes to deal with "one person and one line of enquiry at a time." His method is to confront a suspect with a piece of information and then make them talk - or, as Sheila puts it, "he's giving us the rope - so that we'll hang ourselves." He is a figure of authority. He deals with each member of the family very firmly and several times we see him "massively taking charge as disputes erupt between them." He is not impressed when he hears about Mr Birling's influential friends and he cuts through Mrs Birling's obstructiveness. He seems to know and understand an extraordinary amount: He knows the history of Eva Smith and the Birlings' involvement in it, even though she died only hours ago. Sheila tells Gerald, "Of course he knows." He knows things are going to happen - He says "I'm waiting... To do my duty" just before Eric's return, as if he expected Eric to reappear at exactly that moment He is obviously in a great hurry towards the end of the play: he stresses "I haven't much time." Does he know that the real inspector is shortly going to arrive? His final speech is like a sermon or a politician's. He leaves the family with the message "We are responsible for each other" and warns them of the "fire and blood and anguish" that will result if they do not pay attention to what he has taught them. All this mystery suggests that the Inspector is not a 'real' person. So, what is he? Is he a ghost? Goole reminds us of 'ghoul'. Is he the voice of Priestley? Is he the voice of God? Is he the voice of all our consciences?

EVA SMITH/DAISY RENTON

Of course, we never see Eva Smith on stage in the play: we only have the evidence that the Inspector and the Birlings give us. The Inspector, Sheila Gerald and Eric all say that she was "pretty." Gerald describes her as "very pretty - soft brown hair and big dark eyes." Her parents were dead. She came from outside Brumley: Mr Birling speaks of her being "country-bred." She was working class. The Inspector says that she had kept a sort of diary, which helped him piece together the last two years of her life: However, in Act III we begin to wonder whether Eva ever really existed. - Gerald says, "We've no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl." - Birling adds, "There wasn't the slightest proof that this Daisy Renton really was Eva Smith." Yet the final phone call, announcing that a police inspector is shortly to arrive at the Birlings' house to investigate the suicide of a young girl, makes us realise that maybe Eva Smith did exist after all. Eva is similar to Eve, the first woman created by God in the Bible. Smith is the most common English surname. So, Eva Smith could represent every woman of her class.

THEMES

The themes of the play are closely connected and at times indistinguishable from one another.

SOCIAL MESSAGE

Priestley uses the play to put across a social message that reflected his own views of society:

- ◆ The comparison between the Birlings and the contrast with the workers in Birling's factory striking for a few pennies a week more
- ◆ The fact that someone like Mrs Birling can have a say in whether the Eva Smith's of the world get help or not
- ◆ Mr Birling as representative of capitalism and the Inspector championing the poor
The inspector counters Birling's selfish attitude by talking about the need to be 'responsible for each other'

RESPONSIBILITY

Priestley shows the attitudes of the different characters towards responsibility:

- ◆ Mr Birling does not have a sense of responsibility to his workers, just to making a profit and towards his family
- ◆ Mrs Birling has a sense of responsibility to do good deeds by being on the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation but feels no sense of responsibility for what happened to Eva Smith after she turned her away
- ◆ Gerald seems to show a responsible attitude when he rescued the girl from the attentions of Alderman Meggarty but then used her for his own purposes, discarding her once she was of no further use to him
- ◆ Eric shows little responsibility for his own actions, forcing himself upon Eva when he was in a drunken state and even when he tried to help her, he did it by stealing from his own father
- ◆ Sheila does show a sense of responsibility somewhat belatedly, realising that her actions in Milwards had a devastating consequence for one young woman's life.

The words 'responsible' and 'responsibility' are used by most characters in the play at some point. Each member of the family has a different attitude to responsibility. The Inspector wanted each member of the family to share the responsibility of Eva's death: he tells them, "each of you helped to kill her." However, his final speech is aimed not only at the characters on stage, but at the audience too:

"One Eva Smith has gone - but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, and what we think and say and do."

The Inspector is talking about a collective responsibility, everyone in society is linked, in the same way that the characters are linked to Eva Smith. Everyone is a part of "one body", the Inspector sees society as more important than individual interests. The views he is propounding are like those of Priestley who was a socialist. Remember at the time the ethos was based on the individualism ethos of laissez faire (leave alone), Priestley wanted the characters to consider a social conscience and to embrace a collective responsibility.

He adds a clear warning about what could happen if, like some members of the family, we ignore our responsibility:

"And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, when they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish."

CLASS

Apart from Edna the maid, the cast of the play does not include any lower class characters. We see only the rich, upwardly mobile Birlings and the upper class Gerald Croft. Yet we learn a lot about the lower class as we hear of each stage in Eva's life and we see the attitude the Birlings had for them.

This table looks at the way the Birlings saw lower-class Eva when they came into contact with her, and the way that they see themselves within their own class.

| Characters | At the start of the play, this character was: | To this character, Eva Smith was. . . |
|-------------|---|--|
| Mr Birling | keen to be knighted to cement his hard-fought rise to the upper class | cheap labour |
| Mrs Birling | socially superior to her husband, and embarrassed at his gaffes | a presumptuous upstart |
| Gerald | prepared to marry Sheila, despite her lower social position | a mistress who could be discarded at will |
| Eric | awkward about his 'public-school-and-Varsity' life | easy sex at the end of a drunken night out |
| Sheila | happy spending a lot of time in expensive shops | someone who could be fired out of spite |

The stalls bar of the Palace Variety Theatre is where Eva Smith met both Gerald and Eric. The Palace Variety Theatre was a music hall, and it was not seen as quite 'respectable' entertainment - probably not somewhere where Sheila would ever have gone. The stalls bar was for the lower classes and a favourite haunt of prostitutes. We could ask what Gerald and Eric were doing there in the first place! Alderman Meggarty, a local dignitary, also went there a lot.

Priestley is trying to show that the upper classes are unaware that the easy lives they lead rest upon the hard work of the lower classes.

GENDER

Why did Priestley decide to hinge his play on the death of a young working class woman rather than the death of a young working class man? This is because Eva was a woman living in the days before women were valued by society and had not yet been awarded the right to vote, and as such she was in an even weaker position than a lower class man. Even

upper class women had few choices. For most, the best they could hope for was to impress a rich man and marry well - which could explain why Sheila spent so long in Milwards. For working class women, a job was absolutely crucial. There was no social security at that time, so without a job they had no money. There were very few options open to women in that situation: many saw no alternative but to turn to prostitution.

Look at these quotations from the play, showing the attitude to women of some characters: Mr Birling is dismissive of the value of several hundred women in his factory: "We were paying the usual rates and if they didn't like those rates, they could go and work somewhere else."

Gerald saw Eva as "young and fresh and charming" - in other words, someone vulnerable he could amuse himself by helping, and then drop as soon as he tired of the affair.

Mrs Birling couldn't believe that "a girl of that sort would ever refuse money." Her charitable committee was a sham: a small amount of money was given to a small amount of women, hardly scratching the surface of the problem.

AGE

The older generation and the younger generation take the Inspector's message in different ways. While Sheila and Eric accept their part in Eva's death and feel huge guilt about it, their parents are unable to admit that they did anything wrong.

This table looks at these contrasting ideas:

| The Older Generation (Mr. & Mrs. Birling) | The Younger Generation (Sheila and Eric) |
|---|---|
| The old are set in their ways. They are utterly confident that they are right and they see the The young are open to new ideas. | The young are open to new ideas. This is first seen early in Act 1 when both Eric and Sheila express sympathy for the strikers - an idea which horrifies Birling, who can only think of production costs and ignores the human side of the issue. |
| The old will do anything to protect themselves: Mrs Birling lies to the Inspector when he first shows her the photograph; Mr Birling wants to cover up a potential scandal. | The young are honest and admit their faults. Eric refuses to try to cover his part up, saying, " <i>the fact remains that I did what I did.</i> " |
| They have never been forced to examine their consciences before and find they cannot do it now - as the saying goes, 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks.' | Sheila and Eric see the human side of Eva's story and are very troubled by their part in it. They do examine their consciences. |
| Mr and Mrs Birling have much to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they know they will lose everything. | Sheila and Eric have nothing to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they have already admitted what they have done wrong, and will change. |

Gerald Croft is the character who is caught in the middle, being neither very young nor old. In the end he sides with the older generation, perhaps because his aristocratic roots

influence him to want to keep the status quo and protect his own interests.

Ultimately, we can be optimistic that it will always be the young - those who will shape future society - who are able to take on board the Inspector's message.

MORALITY

Apart from Eric stealing money from his father, no crime has been committed in the play, yet the characters are examined as if it has. What is being put on trial to some extent is the MORALITY of their different actions or inactions. Although they may not have acted illegally, could each of the characters be said to have acted immorally in their dealings with Eva Smith, using their relative power over her to have her sacked [twice]; to seduce her and then discard her when she was no longer wanted; to force her into having sex against her will and leaving her pregnant; and refusing her money and turning her away when she was destitute. This was Priestley way of showing the way that the upper classes treated the working class in the Britain of 1912.

POLITICAL VIEWPOINT

The play could be seen as a microcosm of society with different attitudes being shown through the different characters. Through the character of Birling, we are shown the antithesis of everything that Priestley believes in; in the Inspector we get a glimpse of what Priestley would advocate instead. Unlike Birling, Priestley believes that everyone has responsibility towards others. In *An Inspector Calls*, Priestley shows his fear that the country would not stand up to scrutiny, that as a society we might be like Birling although he shows some hope, in the characters of Sheila and Eric, that things might change for the better.

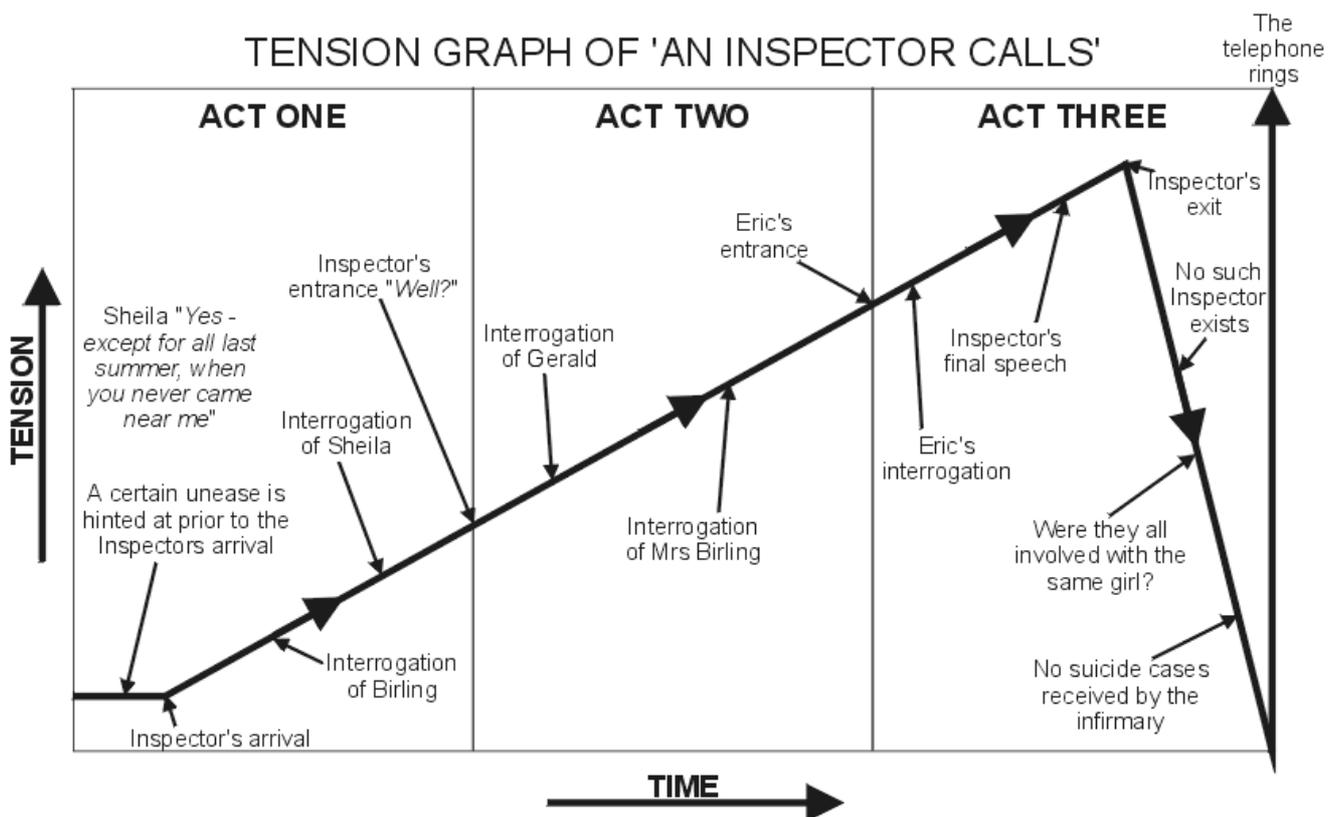
DRAMATIC DEVICES USED IN THE PLAY

- ◆ Stage directions are used at the beginning of the play to give information about the set; it tells us that the Birlings are well off and middle class [it is 'a fairly solid suburban house' with 'good solid furniture' which is 'substantial and heavily comfortable' rather than cosy]
- ◆ Stage directions are used at the beginning of the play to give information about characters; Priestley tells us not only about their appearance but also about their character [Birling is 'heavy-looking' and 'rather portentous' (it means self-important or pompous); Mrs Birling is 'rather cold', Sheila is a 'pretty girl...very pleased with life and rather excited'; Gerald is an 'attractive chap' whilst Eric is 'not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive'; when the inspector enters, we are told that he 'has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking']
- ◆ Stage directions are widely used to give information about the feelings or actions of the characters which would help the actors playing the characters ['bitterly', 'distressed', 'after a pause, with a touch of impatience', 'massively taking charge']
- ◆ Lighting is used to create effect - at the beginning the lighting is described as 'pink and intimate'; after the inspector enters there is a reference to his moving 'nearer a light - perhaps a standard lamp'. This suggests that the inspector is shining a harsh light on the Birlings and Gerald Croft
- ◆ Sparing use of sound effects help to enhance the drama - the doorbell in the first act and the ringing of the telephone in the final moments of the play are both highly significant
- ◆ Priestley frequently makes use of the dash - to show a character's emotional state; the dash represents the fact that the character is speaking in a disjointed rather than a flowing and articulate way
- ◆ Not all the characters are on stage all the time; exits and entrances are cleverly used to create dramatic tension [see separate notes about this] with some characters being unaware of what has happened whilst they were out of the room [examples include; the entrance of the inspector shortly after Birling has made his pompous speeches; Mrs Birling's not knowing that the inspector is implicating everyone with his clever questioning techniques and Eric's re-appearance at the end of Act 2 just at the moment when the audience and the characters on stage realise that Eric is the father of Eva Smith's baby]
- ◆ Dramatic irony - this is particularly evident in Birling's speeches at the beginning of the play when he makes pronouncements about war, the state of the nation in 30 years' time and, more immediately, the unsinkable nature of the Titanic; compare this apparent foolishness with the inspector's talk of 'blood and anguish'. An audience seeing this immediately after the second world war with knowledge of the first war would think of Birling as a fool and the inspector as a prophet
- ◆ The major dramatic device used by Priestley is that of the Inspector himself. He is used to good effect to move the plot along, controlling the pace of events and deciding in which order the characters are questioned. He is also used to voice Priestley's socialist views and opinions
- ◆ Contrast between characters is another effective dramatic device - the juxtaposition of Birling and the inspector provides an effective contrast of beliefs; the attitudes of Sheila and her father to the fate of Eva Smith also provides effective contrast
- ◆ Symbolism is a further dramatic device used by Priestley: Birling represents capitalism whilst the inspector as a mouthpiece for Priestley himself represents socialism. Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald Croft represent the old order of things whilst Sheila and Eric are symbolic of hope for the future
- ◆ Cliff-hangers - Priestley uses this device several times to make the audience wait in anticipation for what they know will happen: The end of Act 1 and beginning of Act 2 begin with the inspector saying 'Well?' to Gerald; the beginning of Act 3 is 'exactly as at the end of Act 2'

BUILDING THE TENSION IN THE PLAY

An Inspector Calls is a play that is filled with dramatic tension, and this is achieved by using the following devices:

- ◆ There is a very compact structure to the play, nothing is allowed to distract the audience from the central theme. There is no sub-plot
- ◆ The play is set in just one location; the action is continuous and takes place over one evening
- ◆ Act One begins by introducing the characters and establishing the idea of a happy and united family looking forward to the future with a degree of confidence. There are a number of hints that all is not as it seems but these are not particularly obvious until later in the play. There is nothing to warn us of the shock of the Inspector's visit
- ◆ Events soon gather speed and it is not long before we are being informed of Birling and Sheila's involvement with Eva Smith
- ◆ Tensions increase, firstly as Gerald's affair is unveiled (and the scandal it would cause) and Sheila realises that they are all implicated in some way 'he is giving us rope - so that we'll hang ourselves'. As an audience we realise that all the characters are going to have secrets to reveal under the questioning of the inspector; the anticipation of the audience raises the level of tension
- ◆ Mrs Birling's attempts to shift the blame for the girl's suicide lead her to blame the father of the unborn child. Despite Sheila's attempts to prevent her from digging herself deeper into a hole, Mrs Birling ploughs on relentlessly adding to the dramatic tension as the audience waits to see what will happen
- ◆ The tension is heightened at this point by the dramatic entrance of Eric.
- ◆ With the departure of the Inspector it would appear that what follows will be something of an anti-climax as the Inspector's identity is put into doubt by a series of observations made by the Birling family and Gerald. Even the existence of Eva is called into question. However, the tension remains to some extent as the two generations show a split in their attitudes, confirming the differences highlighted by the Inspector's questioning - the moral divide is very great indeed
- ◆ The final denouement, the phone call announcing that a police inspector is on his way to ask some questions about a girl who has just died in the infirmary, is as shocking as it is surprising and ensures that the audience will leave the auditorium in a state of real shock



J.B. PRIESTLEY BIOGRAPHY

Playwright and novelist J.B. (John Boynton) Priestley, OM, was born on 13th September 1894 in Manningham, which he described as an "ultra-respectable" suburb of Bradford. His father was a local headmaster. His mother died when he was just two years old and his father remarried four years later. Priestley was educated at Belle Vue Grammar School, which he left at sixteen to work as a junior clerk at a wool firm in Bradford. During this time he started writing at night and had articles published in local and London newspapers. He was to draw on memories of Bradford in many of the works he wrote after he had moved south, including *Bright Day* and *When We Are Married*. He served during the First World War in the 10th Battalion, the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, and was wounded in 1916 by mortar fire. In his autobiography, *Margin Released* he is fiercely critical of the British Army and in particular of the officer class. After his military service Priestley received a university education at Trinity Hall, Cambridge. By the age of 30 he had established a reputation as a humorous writer and critic. His novel *Benighted* (1927) was adapted into the James Whale film *The Old Dark House* (1932).



Priestley's first major success came with the novel, *The Good Companions* (1929), which earned him the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction and made him a national figure. His next novel, *Angel Pavement* (1930), further established him as a successful novelist. In 1934 he published the travelogue *English Journey*, which is an account of what he saw and heard while travelling through the country in the autumn of the previous year. In 1932 he moved into a new genre and became equally well known as a dramatist. *Dangerous Corner* was the first of a series of 'Time Plays' that enthralled West End theatre audiences. His plays are more varied in tone than the novels, several being influenced by J. W. Dunne's theory of time, which plays a part in the plots of *Dangerous Corner*, *Time & The Conways*, and *I Have Been Here Before*, but also his uproarious Yorkshire farce, *When We Are Married*. More openly experimental were *Music At Night* and *Johnson Over Jordan*. His best-known play is *An Inspector Calls* (1945), later made into a film starring Alastair Sim released in 1954. During the 1930s he was partner in a production company, putting on most of his plays, from *Eden End* on. It was an incredibly busy time, with plays to develop, books to publish, film scripts to write, and the endless sequence of articles looking forward to the oncoming war. Two notable books were his so-called 'Chapters of Autobiography' - *Midnight On The Desert* and *Rain Upon Godshill* - reflections on his activities and the times he was living in, with especial reference to America. He had been visiting the USA since the early 30s and the whole family had spent two winters in Arizona, while he picked up work from Hollywood. Many of his works have a socialist aspect. *An Inspector Calls*, as well as being a "Time Play", contains many references to socialism - the inspector was arguably an alter ego through which Priestley could express his views.

Once the war began in 1939, he established yet another branch of his career, this time as a broadcaster. He referred to this as his contribution to the war effort, and his wartime writing and speaking focussed largely on the need to sustain morale while beginning to plan for a better life post-war. His 'Postscripts', short talks which followed the evening news, were immensely popular, though not appreciated by those on the Right. The text of the Postscripts appears in its entirety in *Priestley's Wars*. He also broadcast regularly to the USA and the Commonwealth countries. But he continued writing novels and plays, some with the background of the war such as *Blackout In Gretley* and *Daylight On Saturday*, and the plays *How Are They At Home* and *Desert Highway*, written specially for the Army. Towards the end of the war he put his hopes for a better future into his play *They Came To A City*, and his belief in a better post-war society in *An Inspector Calls* (1945) which had its first premier in Moscow - there was no theatre available in London at that time, so he allowed the play to open in Russia, and was invited there for an extraordinary seven week tour immediately after the war ended in the autumn of 1945. He wrote about his experiences in articles in the Daily Express, later published in pamphlet form as *Russian Journey*. During World War II, he was a regular broadcaster on the BBC. *The Postscript*, was a programme broadcast on Sunday night through 1940 and again in 1941, and drew peak audiences of 16 million; only Churchill was more popular with listeners. But his talks were cancelled: It was thought that this was the effect of complaints from Churchill that they were too left-wing; however, Priestley's son has recently revealed that it was in fact Churchill's Cabinet that brought about the cancellation by supplying negative reports on the broadcasts to Churchill. In 1942 Priestley was a co-founder of the socialist Common Wealth Party. The political content of his broadcasts and his hopes of a new and different England after the war influenced the politics of the period and helped the Labour Party gain its landslide victory in the 1945 general election. Priestley himself, however, was distrustful of the state and dogma. After the war he was a founding member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in 1958, and he travelled the country speaking at numerous meetings, and became a UK delegate to UNESCO. Yet despite increasing post-war political interests he maintained the other strands of his career with his usual energy, producing one of his finest plays, *The Linden Tree* (1947) which had the best first London run of any of his plays, and arguably his best novel, *Bright Day* (1946), recently republished as the first in a series of handsome new editions.

Although Priestley never wrote a formal book of memoirs, his literary reminiscences, *Margin Released* (1962), provide valuable insights into his work. The section dealing with his job as a teenage clerk in a Bradford wool-sorter's office manages to weave fine literature from an outwardly unpromising subject - a characteristic of many of his novels. His interest in the problem of time led him to publish an extended essay in 1964 under the title of *Man and Time*. In this book he explored in depth various theories and beliefs about time as well as his own research and unique conclusions, including an analysis of the phenomenon of precognitive dreaming, based in part on a broad sampling of experiences gathered from the British public, who responded enthusiastically to a televised appeal he made while being interviewed in 1963 on the BBC programme, *Monitor*. He continued to successfully write novels throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and continued to be a high-profile political commentator. He rejected the offer of both a knighthood and a peerage, but gladly accepted the Order of Merit (OM), the Queen's own gift with no political connections. After a remarkably productive lifetime, spanning most of the 20th century, the Grand Old Man of English letters, J.B.Priestley OM, died on August 14th 1984. His ashes are buried at the charming old church at Hubberholme in the Yorkshire Dales. But he is not forgotten, his plays are performed all over the world, and AN INSPECTOR CALLS remains a firm favourite everywhere. His books are gradually being reprinted and revived by Great Northern Books, and there is an active J.B.Priestley Society.

POST PERFORMANCE WORK SHEET

Find a partner. In pairs, discuss, and make detailed notes, on the following questions. Share your responses with the whole class later on.

1. Were the characters in the performance as you had envisaged them? What was especially good about the portrayals? Would you have played any of the characters differently? Why?
2. What aspects of the performance were most memorable, and why? Have they enhanced or altered your views or understanding of the play in any way? Explain in as much detail as you can with specific reference to the text and performance.
3. Which themes in the play were highlighted in the performance, and the after-show discussion? Which ideas were stressed in particular? (Eg. Responsibility / Politics).
4. Did this production help to bring to life Priestley's use of language? In which ways did it add to our understanding and enjoyment of the story?
5. Do you think that 'An Inspector Calls' is still relevant to people today? Why?
6. Character and Motivation. Think about the key characters you have seen in the performance. Why do they behave as they do in the play? (The Inspector / Mrs. Birling / Gerald / Sheila).
7. The Director's Choices. Every stage production of 'An Inspector Calls' will be different. What choices were made for this performance, and how effective were they? (Delivery of Priestley's text/use of the hall, room or space - positioning of the audience/body language and movement/props and costumes). What choices would you make?

PERFORMANCE QUIZ

Here's some quiz questions directly related to the performance of 'AN INSPECTOR CALLS' presented by MANCHESTER ACTORS COMPANY.

1. True or false?

- (a) Mr. Birling sacked Eva Smith for leading a pay strike.
- (b) Eva changes her name to Hayley Benson.
- (c) When Eva approached Mrs. Birling's charity, she was pregnant.
- (d) Arthur, Sybil and Gerald congratulate themselves that the Inspector's visit has been a hoax, and think they can just carry on as before.
- (e) "An Inspector Calls" was written with the intention of supporting the Conservative party in the 1945 election.
- (f) In his highly-detailed stage directions, J.B. Priestley says that an ordinary, realistic set is not the only option when presenting the play.

2. How does Inspector Goole say Eva Smith killed herself?

3. Where did Gerald first meet Eva?

4. Inspector Goole treats Mrs. Birling the most harshly. Why?

5. When the inspector finally leaves, who is it who states "He made us confess" ?

6. The political struggle of Arthur Birling versus Inspector Goole in the play has been widely described as a symbolic battle between which two political ideals?

7. Supply the missing words: Gerald admits that Eva was his -----and leaves the room, ashamed. Sheila credits him for speaking -----, but also signals that their----- is over.

8. Who says the following?

- (a) "There'll be peace and prosperity everywhere - except of course in Russia"
- (b) "In a way, she treated me as if I were a kid"
- (c) "She needed not only money, but advice, sympathy, friendliness"
- (d) "A friend of mine had gone off to Canada for six months"
- (e) "I was almost certain for a knighthood in the next Honours List"

9. Spot the characters. Here is one word to describe 7 characters in the play. Can you guess who they are?

- (a) capitalistic (b) impressionable (c) sophisticated (d) enigmatic (e) innocent (f) weak (g) snobbish.

QUIZ ANSWERS

Here's the answers to the quiz on the previous page:

1. (a) True.
(b) False - Daisy Renton
(c) True.
(d) True
(e) False - it was intended to support the Labour Party.
(f) True.
2. By drinking strong disinfectant.
3. The Palace Music Hall, Brumley.
4. Because she resists the truth more than anyone else.
5. Sheila.
6. Capitalism (Birling) versus Socialism (Inspector Goole)
7. mistress / truthfully / engagement
8. (a) Mr.Birling
(b) Eric
(c) Inspector Goole
(d) Gerald
(e) Mr.Birling.
9. (a) Mr.Birling (b) Sheila (c) Gerald (d) Inspector Goole (e) Eva Smith (f) Eric (g) Mrs.Birling.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

1. The mood in this Act 1 changes from relaxed to tense. Explore the ways Priestley transforms the tone throughout the Act.
2. How does Priestley hint at the tensions within the group that later become more clear in Act I?
3. How does Priestley present the Inspector as an unusual policeman in the play?
4. What do we learn about Eva Smith from Act II? How does Priestley contrast her behaviour with that of the Birling family and Gerald Croft?
5. Act II ends with Mrs. Birling finally weakening. What is the cause of this? How does the Inspector trap her into condemning her own son?
6. Compare and contrast the reaction of Gerald Croft and Mrs. Birling to interrogation by the inspector.
7. How has Eric's guilt been suggested by Priestley in Acts I and II?
8. Write about Inspector Goole's role in the play. How far is he a believable policeman? How does Priestley use the inspector in the play?
9. Write about the way the relationship between Gerald and Sheila develops during the play.
10. An Inspector Calls is full of lies and deceit. Write fully about the way Priestley exposes weakness and wickedness, not only in the characters on stage, but also in society.
11. Write fully about ONE of the characters in the play. Take into account what they have done before the play begins as well as their actions, words and attitudes during the course of the play. Write about the way attitudes, moods and opinions change and develop during the course of the action on stage.
12. The Inspector's inquiries make the Birlings quarrel among themselves. How does Priestley develop these internal conflicts during the play?
13. Compare and contrast the attitudes of Birling and the inspector throughout the play.
14. How does Priestley show the confidence of the Birlings in their position?
15. Compare and contrast the reaction of Arthur Birling and Sheila Birling to interrogation by the Inspector.
16. Who do you believe is responsible for the death of Eva Smith?
17. How are views on gender presented in the play?
18. How are the views of the youthful characters contrasted with the older characters and how does this reflect the social context of the play?
19. How is the theme of gender inequality explored in the play?
20. What is revealed about family relationships through the events of the play?
21. How does the Inspector build sympathy with the character of Eva Smith throughout the play?
22. How does the play portray the themes of morality and responsibility?
23. How do the dramatic devices help to add suspense to the action of the play?
24. How does the play portray social attitudes and political views of the time?
25. How is the theme of class represented in the play?

WHO SAID THAT...?

Here are some quotes from the play. Can you match the quote to the characters, and explain the significance of the quote within the story...?

1. "You're squiffy."
2. "I speak as a hard-headed businessman."
3. "Unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable."
4. "We really must stop these silly pretences."
5. "Girls of that class."
6. "She was very pretty - soft brown hair and big dark eyes."
7. "You're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble."
8. "We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other"
9. "Everything's alright now, Sheila."
10. "Each of you helped to kill her."
11. "Look, Inspector, I'd give thousands...."
12. "Look at the way he talked to me."
13. "That doesn't matter to me."
14. "I suppose we're all nice people now."
15. "That was the police. A girl has died - on her way to the infirmary."

WHO SAID THAT...? - ANSWERS

Here are the answers to the quotes from the previous page:

1. Sheila to Eric (in Act I). It shows Eric/Sheila's brother/sister relationship. The language is colloquial in the period that it was set, and it establishes that Eric drinks too much.
2. Mr. Birling (in Act I). It shows that Mr. Birling is hard-hearted, and has pride in his hard-won success.
3. Mr. Birling (in Act I). This is for dramatic irony - because the audience knows something that the characters don't. The Titanic is a metaphor for the Birling family and its privileged position
4. Sheila to Mrs. Birling (in Act II). It shows Sheila understands the the Inspector's message, and highlights a division growing between Sheila and her mother. It shows that Sheila understands the need to stop lying.
5. Mrs. Birling (in Act II). It shows that Mrs. Birling thinks she is socially and morally superior, as though the poor are by definition squalid and worthless. The emphasis on 'that' shows her disgust at the working class.
6. Gerald (in Act II). The language stresses the difference between Eva and 'women of the town' who he calls 'hard-eyed and 'dough faced'. By stressing the positive aspects of Eva, it makes her mistreatment even more cruel.
7. Eric (in Act II). The Birlings are not only hard-hearted towards the working class, but are inadequate parents. Birling says his son has been spoilt, and is more concerned with covering up Eric's wrong doings so as to avoid a social scandal.
8. The Inspector (in Act III). This is the core message of the Inspector and the play, and contrasts with Birling's message of 'every man for himself'.
9. Gerald to Sheila (in Act III). This shows that Gerald has not understood the message, and neither can he see that Sheila has been changed by the revelations.
10. The Inspector (in Act III). The Inspector sums up, showing that the morally neglectful actions of the upper class family have condemned a working class girl to her death, and that nobody in the family is without blame.
11. Mr. Birling (in Act III). Birling wouldn't pay Eva an extra two shillings and sixpence, but now offers thousands. The offer is meaningless because it is not possible now to save Eva, but it shows that Birling thinks he can solve everything with money
12. Mr. Birling (in ACT III). He feels that his social status entitles him to different treatment.
13. Eric (in Act III). The theories of innocence that Gerald and Mr. Birling are concocting do not take away the fact that Eric feels guilty for his actions, and he is not willing to bury his head in the sand and pretend he has done nothing wrong.
14. Sheila (in Act III). She is bitter about her family's reaction, and is appalled that they think they have done nothing wrong simply because they think the girl is not dead. She wants them all to acknowledge that they have behaved appallingly.
15. Mr. Birling (in Act III). The twist in the tale. Mr. And Mrs. Burling, and Gerald, must now face the reality of their actions.

MANACTCO is the trading name for MANCHESTER ACTORS COMPANY.

We have over **42 years** experience of bringing professional theatre to the north west and neighbouring counties..... Providing an exciting, relevant, non-condescending and unpretentious theatre service in a full range of mostly non-theatre venues.

We are well known for our energetic, vigorous, physical theatre performances where close attention is paid to the language, bringing the plays alive as a dynamic, well-spoken display of physical theatre, performed by some of the UK.'s hottest young stage talent.

Almost 100,000 watch our productions annually in school.....

FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES we have presented a series of theatre projects aimed at keystage 3 and keystage 4 students annually for almost twenty years, which in recent years have included: *MACBETH; ROMEO AND JULIET; THE TEMPEST; MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING; OF MICE AND MEN; AN INSPECTOR CALLS; A CHRISTMAS CAROL; THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*; and *'FIGHTING FOR WORDS'* - our Poetry-In-Performance play, bringing to life the poetry contained in the AQA 'Power & Conflict' poetry cluster. All of our schools projects are always very well received by both students and staff as we bring the stories vividly to life with exciting, incisive scripts, tight direction and fantastic performances. Our performances are followed by a thirty-minute interactive discussion where, guided by actors in the company, the audience can expand and examine the texts in greater detail.

FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS we have presented a series of both well-established favourites and new writing projects - aimed directly as a springboard for keystage 1 and keystage 2 classwork - all of which are always very well received by schools and their young audiences. All of our primary school projects are hugely successful and each a total sell-out.

Why not check out our website?

www.manactco.org.uk

It tells you about the history of MANCHESTER ACTORS COMPANY and is packed full of photos of our productions, and includes details about all forthcoming productions for 2020.

**And why not Email us and tell us what you thought
of our presentation of 'AN INSPECTOR CALLS'?**

Email all contributions and reviews to:

feedback@manactco.org.uk

COMPANY BIOGRAPHIES

DANIEL AMBROSE-JONES (*Eric/Gerald and ensemble*)

Daniel has been acting professionally since graduating with a degree in drama from Northampton University. He has done a variety of things since: ranging from odd days work for a 'Paypal' advert, or a mental health app.; to six months touring comedy shows throughout Italy for Action Theatre; appearing at the Edinburgh Festival as Guy Montag in FARENHEIT 451 for Exodus Theatre; or scaring visitors at the London Dungeon. Daniel also won the Derby Arts Festival Laurie Cup for most promising actor, and has recently been training in Jeet Kune Do for a martial arts movie trailer. His previous appearances for Manchester Actors Company were in 'POWER & CONFLICT' and 'A CHRISTMAS CAROL' in Autumn 2021.

ROSE GRAY (*Sheila/Mrs. Birling and ensemble*)

Rose trained in Manchester at The Arden School of Theatre and graduated with a first class degree in Professional Stage Practice in 2012. Since then her work spans from international street theatre (her first role was playing a rat on the streets of Stockholm in a production of The Pied Piper) to local pop-up performances (Girl Gang Manchester).

She is an Associate Artist for Sheffield based theatre company The Bare Project and has toured their shows at Camden People's Theatre, HOME Manchester and Sheffield Crucible among others. She is co-founder of Creative Collective, a multi-platform company creating immersive productions and working with the local community (The Talk in association with 42nd Street) and has won places on boot camps at The RSC, with Slunglow's Lucy Hind and RashDash theatre.

Rose is passionate about theatre and is thrilled to be working on her third tour with Manchester Actors Company, having just toured with us through November & December 2021 with 'A Christmas Carol' and 'Power and Conflict'.

SIMON PENNICOTT (*Mr. Birling and ensemble*)

Simon trained at The Bridge Theatre Training Company in London, where he appeared at numerous fringe theatre venues. Since then he has worked all over the UK, for theatre companies such as Kinetic, Pendle Productions and K22. He played Feste in TWELFTH NIGHT and the Duke of Venice in OTHELLO amongst many appearances for Rainbow Theatre, plus many productions for Talegate Theatre, including Crabstick in THE LITTLE MERMAID, and the Tin Man in THE WIZARD OF OZ. Other appearances include Dicken in THE SECRET GARDEN at Salford Arts Theatre, Jacques in JACQUES BREL: A LIFE A THOUSAND TIMES on tour throughout the UK, and also previously for Manchester Actors Company in THE LEGEND OF KING ARTHUR, and as Ebenezer Scrooge in our Autumn 2020 presentation of 'A CHRISTMAS CAROL'.

STEPHEN BOYES (*Director*)

Stephen is an Associate Member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, and trained as an actor at The Drama Studio London. He is the winner of a Manchester Evening News Theatre Award. He has appeared in over sixty regional repertory productions, in theatres such as Sheffield Crucible, Manchester Royal Exchange, Nottingham Playhouse, Coventry Belgrade, Derby Playhouse, Bolton Octagon, Liverpool Everyman, Oldham Coliseum, Manchester Library Theatre, and Edinburgh International Festival. His TV credits include the BBC1 sitcom SORRY! with Ronnie Corbett, THE COPS, CORONATION STREET, HOME JAMES, HILLSBOROUGH, THE KRYPTON FACTOR, CONTINENTAL DRIFT, NO ANGELS and IN SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES. He played Frisk in the film THE FOOL with Derek Jacobi and Miranda Richardson. His most recent appearances have been playing Mr. Libby in the film MRS. PEPPERCORN'S MAGICAL READING ROOM, as well as various alternative comedy credits for BBC Radio 4.