

Knowledge Organiser - An Inspector Calls: overview of key points and issues

Act	Plot	Character	Vocabulary	Context
1	<p>The Birling's are celebrating the upcoming marriage of Sheila Birling to Gerald Croft.</p> <p>An Inspector arrives claiming that a young woman called Eva Smith has just committed suicide.</p> <p>Eva was employed by Mr Birling and was fired unfairly. She was then taken on by a shop, Millwards, where Sheila used her influence and got Eva fired too.</p> <p>Sheila feels terrible remorse.</p>	<p>Mr Arthur Birling: the head of a family, and is arguably the main subject of Priestley's social critique. Dominant, arrogant, self-centred and morally blind, he is insistent throughout about his lack of responsibility for Eva/Daisy's death.</p>	Capitalist	<p>IAC is set in 1912, a time of immense inequality and there were no rights for workers, such as Eva Smith</p> <p>The play was first performed in 1945, just after a sweeping Labour election victory.</p> <p>The Labour victory used the Beveridge Report as its core message for a better world post WW2, "everyone regardless of class should be looked after by the state from the cradle to the grave."</p> <p>The Beveridge Report called for a Nationalised Health Service, benefits for those poor who needed it and good housing for all as a basis for a moral society.</p> <p>Priestley's play was a call to his audience to believe in this new society as a better way to protect the poor and vulnerable.</p>
		<p>Sheila Birling: accepts responsibility for their part in Eva/Daisy's death and becomes more rebellious toward her parents, supporting her brother against them and assisting Goole in his interrogations. By the end of the play, she represents the younger generation's protests against the morality of the older generation and seems the most responsive to Goole's Socialist views about moral responsibility towards others.</p>	Hierarchy	
		<p>Edna: Has limited contribution in the play; however she is the only person in the play that can provide an insight into the life of Eva Smith/Daisy Renton, a character to whom Edna has a similar background (working class). It is she who opens the door to allow the Inspector into the Birlings' lives, although she is often taken for granted and treated somewhat despicably at times, as if she is not actually there.</p>	Socialist	
			Welfare State	
			Socialised Medicine	
			Libertarian	
			Aristocracy	
			Communism	
			Beveridge Report	
		Act 2	<p>Gerald admits that he used Eva as a mistress and leaves upset.</p> <p>Mrs Birling was also involved by refusing to give Eva (now pregnant), any money when she came to beg for charity. Mrs Birling is adamant that the father of the child take responsibility. This turns out to be her son, Eric and she is seen as a hypocrite.</p>	
<p>Sybil Birling: Sybil Birling is 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. As the leader of a women's charitable organisation, she assumes a social and moral superiority over Inspector Goole, whose questioning style she frequently refers to as, "impertinent" and "offensive". Like her husband, she refuses to accept responsibility for the death of Eva Smith/Daisy Renton. She is described as a snob who doesn't care about working class people, only respecting the people of her class.</p>	The State			
	Benefits			
	Aspiration			
	Living Wage			
	Collective			
	Welfare Dependency			
	Nationalise (state control)			
	Working Poor			
	Nanny State			
Act 3	<p>Eric admits that he is the father of Eva's child. He feels terrible for what he has done. The Inspector leaves and they are all shocked. Gerald returns and informs the Birling's that there is no Inspector Goole working at the local police station.</p> <p>A phone call confirms this. However, the final lines in the play state that a girl has just died and they are all to be interviewed by an inspector.</p>	<p>Eric Birling: Eric Birling is the son of Arthur Birling and Sybil Birling. Eric is revealed to have made Eva Smith pregnant as well as stolen some money from his father's business to support Eva when the Inspector is revealed to be a fake, he and Sheila are the only two who still feel guilty over Eva's death. By the end of the story he seems to have learned his lesson and feels as guilty as Sheila does for his part in Eva Smith's death.</p>	The Establishment	
		<p>The Inspector: A mysterious interrogator who introduces himself as, "Inspector Goole" (as in "ghoul"), 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.</p>	Living Wage	
		<p>Eva Smith/Daisy Renton: the unseen working class women who Goole claims has committed suicide whilst pregnant with Eric's baby, and has been mistreated by each of the Birling family.</p>	Community	
			Basic standard of living	

