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YORK NOTES

# ***Rapid*** **Revision**

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## **An Inspector Calls**

**AQA GCSE English Literature**



# York Notes Rapid Revision

# **An Inspector Calls**

**AQA GCSE English Literature**

Written by Mary Green with Mike Gould

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# INTRODUCTION Who was J. B. Priestley?

## Three key things about J. B. Priestley

1. He had a comfortable middle-class childhood.
2. He decided to leave school at sixteen to experience real life.
3. He fought in the First World War, worked in a wool company as a clerk, and had newspaper articles published before he wrote *An Inspector Calls*.



## What was his early life like?

- He was born John Boynton Priestley in 1894 in Bradford, Yorkshire, where his father was a headmaster.
- He went to Cambridge University in 1919 after fighting in the First World War.
- In 1922, he began working in London as a journalist and his first collection of essays, *Brief Diversions*, was published.

## Why did he write *An Inspector Calls*?

- He travelled around Britain during the Great Depression and saw mass unemployment.
- He developed a concern for the working classes and the poor, and became a socialist.
- After the Second World War, many people felt the need for social change. Priestley's play about social inequality reflected the mood of the time.

## What was the response to *An Inspector Calls*?

- *An Inspector Calls* was first performed in the Soviet Union in 1945 and in London in 1946.
- It received mixed reviews from the British critics. Some found it too 'moralising', but others loved it – especially the ending.
- The play was given a new lease of life in 1992, after Stephen Daldry's production was widely praised for its power and inventive stage set.

# INTRODUCTION Plot summary

## Act One, Part 1

- Spring evening 1912; the Birling family celebrates Sheila and Gerald's engagement.
- Mr Birling gives a pompous speech about his views on business and the economy.
- Gerald presents Sheila with an engagement ring.
- The evening is interrupted by a police inspector.

## Act One, Part 2

- Inspector Goole is enquiring about the suicide of a young girl (Eva Smith).
- He questions Mr Birling about his treatment of Eva as his factory worker.
- Sheila admits she treated Eva (then a shop assistant) badly.
- Gerald reveals to Sheila that he knew Eva by the name Daisy Renton.

## Act Two, Part 2

- Mrs Birling is forced to admit that she knew Eva.
- Eva was pregnant and Mrs Birling refused to help her.
- Mrs Birling says the father of the unborn child is to blame. Sheila tries to stop her speaking.
- There is a realisation that Eric is the father. Eric enters.

## Act Two, Part 1

- Gerald and Sheila argue.
- Mrs Birling enters and tries to bully the Inspector. Gerald gives details of his affair with Eva/Daisy (then a prostitute).
- Sheila expresses shame for the way she treated Eva.
- Sheila gives the ring back to Gerald.

## Act Three, Part 1

- Eric confesses that he got Eva pregnant. Mrs Birling is distressed.
- Eric reveals that he stole money to give to Eva.
- Eric learns that his mother refused to help and accuses her of killing her grandchild.
- The Inspector gives a monologue on social justice, then exits.

## Act Three, Part 2

- Mr and Mrs Birling refuse to accept responsibility for Eva's death. Sheila and Eric acknowledge their part in it.
- Gerald returns, having discovered that there is no evidence of an Inspector Goole on the force.
- The family works out that the Inspector was an imposter and that there was no suicide.
- The phone rings – a police inspector is on his way to talk to them about a suicide.

# PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act One, Part 1

## Five key things about Act One, Part 1

In the first part of Act One, Priestley presents all the onstage characters, the setting and several key **themes**:

1. We meet the **Birlings**: **Arthur Birling**, a manufacturer; **Sybil**, his wife; **Sheila** and **Eric**, their children; Sheila's fiancé **Gerald Croft**, the son of Sir George and Lady Croft; and **Edna** the maid.
2. The play's setting is established: the Birling's **dining room**, on a spring evening in **1912** in the city of **Brumley**, North Midlands.
3. We learn that Mr Birling feels Sheila's **marriage** will be useful for his **business** and **social ambitions**, that he has no concern for his **workers' welfare** and that his **judgement** about future world events is poor.
4. There are **hints** that **secrets** could affect both the Birling family's future and Gerald's.
5. Key themes are introduced: **inequality** between rich and poor; **social responsibility**; **morality** and judgement; relationships between **men and women**.



## What happens at the start of the play?

- The wealthy Birlings are having a celebratory dinner for Sheila and Gerald's engagement.
- Sheila teases Gerald about his neglect of her last summer. Eric, slightly drunk, is an embarrassment.
- Mr Birling emphasises the profits to be made should the Birling and Croft businesses combine. Gerald produces an engagement ring.
- Mr Birling dismisses recent strikes and predicts a rosy future for business, with no possibility of war.

## What happens after the women and Eric exit?

- Birling tells Gerald that he may get a knighthood, although there are no certainties. They joke about avoiding scandal. Eric returns, still **'squiffy'**.
- Mr Birling declares that a man's only responsibility is to himself and his family.
- Edna announces the arrival of a police inspector on an **'important'** matter.

## Five key quotations

1. Structure: *'At the moment they have all had a good dinner, [and] are celebrating a special occasion'* (stage directions)
2. The male role: *'men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on their business'* (Mrs Birling about Gerald)
3. A shift in mood/action: *'Unless Eric's been up to something. (Nodding confidentially to BIRLING.)'* (Gerald)
4. Social responsibility: *'a man has to ... look after himself and his own'* (Mr Birling)
5. The character of Mr Birling (poor judgement): *'you'll hear some people say that war's inevitable. And to that I say – fiddlesticks!'* (Mr Birling)

### Note it!

Note how the Inspector moves the action forward. Because Mr Birling is a magistrate, he assumes the Inspector has come in connection with a warrant. However, the audience suspects that the **'important'** matter will mark a major shift in the action.

## Exam focus

### How can I write about structure? AO2

You can use the first part of Act One to write about structure because it contains a turning point in the action.

Priestley carefully structures the opening scene. The happy mood shifts when Gerald suggests, jokingly, that perhaps an inspector at the door means Eric has *been up to something*. We suspect that ironically this may be true, and that it hints at a turning point in which the mood and action will change dramatically.

Topic sentence makes overall point

Quotation used to explain

Term relating to structure

Develops point to complete analysis

## Now you try!

Finish this further paragraph about structure. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Priestley also uses the stage directions to signal the trouble to come. The happy mood in which the wealthy Birling family are .....

# PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act One, Part 2

## Five key things about Act One, Part 2

In this part, Inspector Goole is introduced and the main **theme** is explored further:

1. The **mood** of the play changes when **Inspector Goole** enters.
2. **Mr Birling** begins to **lose control** of events.
3. The Inspector links **Eva Smith's** downfall first with **Mr Birling**, then **Sheila**.
4. **Sheila and Gerald's relationship** is threatened and we see that Gerald will be the next link in Eva Smith's story.
5. Priestley presents the main theme of **social responsibility** through the character of the **Inspector**.



## What happens when Inspector Goole enters?

- The Inspector says he is making enquiries about the suicide of a young woman.
- Eva Smith died after drinking disinfectant. The Inspector reveals he has found a letter and a diary in her lodgings.
- He shows a photo to Mr Birling, who recognises Eva as one of the strike leaders he dismissed for '**causing trouble**'. He justifies the dismissal, supported by Gerald. Eric condemns it.
- Sheila enters. She is shocked to hear of the suicide, but she, Eric and Gerald do not recognise Eva's name. The Inspector tells them that Eva found a new job at Milwards dress shop.

## What happens when Sheila recognises the photo?

- Sheila is angry that a customer's complaint led to Eva's dismissal, but when she sees the photo she rushes out in tears. Mr Birling goes after her.
- Sheila returns, distraught, and admits that her petty jealousy caused Eva's dismissal. The Inspector mentions that Eva had changed her name to Daisy Renton. Gerald is alarmed.
- The Inspector and Eric exit. Gerald admits that he had an affair with Daisy Renton. He begs Sheila to say nothing to the Inspector, but Sheila is aware that the Inspector already knows.



## Five key quotations

1. Structure: **'It's the way I like to go to work. One person and one line of inquiry at a time.'** (Inspector Goole)
2. Mr Birling's threat: **'I consider this uncalled-for and officious. I've half a mind to report you.'** (Mr Birling to Inspector Goole)
3. Sheila's function: **'these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people'** (Sheila to the Inspector)
4. Morality: **'so you used the power you had, as a daughter of a good customer ... to punish the girl'** (Inspector Goole to Sheila)
5. Men and women: **'You not only knew her but you knew her very well.'** (Sheila to Gerald)

### Note it!

Note how the **'chain of events'** is important in the structure of the play. It will allow Inspector Goole to link each of the Birlings and Gerald to Eva's downfall.

## Exam focus

### How can I write about power and authority? AO1

You can use this part to write about who controls events.

Mr Birling struggles to maintain his authority.

He accuses the Inspector of being **officious** and threatens to report him. **However**, the Inspector ignores Mr Birling's threats and, in this way, Priestley shifts the **focus** to the Inspector, who begins to take charge of events.

Topic sentence introduces the main point

Quotation embedded in the text

Connective links two main points

Term relating to structure

## Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about Sheila's function. Use one of the quotations from the list.

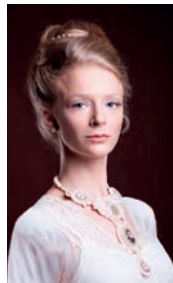
One of Sheila's functions is to challenge her father's opinions. About his workforce, she declares that .....

# PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act Two, Part 1

## Five key things about Act Two, Part 1

In this part, the Birling family's unity begins to fall apart under the Inspector's interrogation:

1. **Sheila** and **Gerald's** quarrel reveals a **lack of trust** in the relationship.
2. **Sheila** recognises the **Inspector's** ability to **break down defences**.
3. The **gap** between **Sheila's views** and **those of her parents** is revealed.
4. The **Inspector's authority** is established and he **takes control**.
5. The following **themes** are explored: relationships between **men and women**; relationships between **young and old**; **morality** and judgement; **inequality** between rich and poor.



## What happens at the start of Act Two?

- As Sheila and Gerald continue to quarrel, the Inspector enters.
- Although Sheila is hurt by Gerald's betrayal, she stays to hear the full story. She remains troubled by her own part in Eva's downfall.
- Gerald resents Sheila's insistence on staying while the Inspector speaks to him. She thinks he no longer loves her because of the way she treated Eva. The Inspector acknowledges Sheila's remorse, but says the guilt must be shared.
- Mrs Birling enters, unaware of events. She ignores Sheila's warning that the Inspector will not be bullied, and realises that Eric has a drinking problem. Mr Birling joins them.

## What happens when the Inspector questions Gerald?

- Gerald recounts how he rescued Daisy Renton from the advances of Alderman Meggarty at the Palace Variety Theatre. She had been forced to resort to prostitution to avoid poverty.
- Gerald explains that he felt sorry for Eva/Daisy and was kind to her, but he later ended the relationship and gave her money. Her diary revealed that she went to the seaside to think and reflect on their relationship.
- Gerald is troubled by Eva/Daisy's death and Sheila remarks that at least he acted out of pity. However, as Gerald exits, Sheila returns his ring.

## Five key quotations

1. Men and women: **'you've made up your mind I must obviously be a selfish, vindictive creature'** (Sheila to Gerald)
2. Young and old: **'You mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl.'** (Sheila to Mrs Birling)
3. Eva/Daisy: **'she stopped being Eva Smith ... and became Daisy Renton'** (Inspector Goole)
4. Mockery: **'Well, we didn't think you meant Buckingham Palace.'** (Sheila to Gerald)
5. Morality and judgement: **'And now at least you've been honest.'** (Sheila to Gerald)

### Note it!

Note how the diary is a **device** to reveal how much the Inspector knows about Eva/Daisy. Only he has this information, which adds to his authority and control.

## Exam focus

### How can I write about relationships? AO2

You can use this part of Act Two to write about changes in relationships.

In the first part of Act Two, Priestley shows how relationships are beginning to break down. In particular, the effect on Gerald and Sheila's relationship is explored. For example, Sheila accuses Gerald of regarding her as **'a selfish, vindictive creature'** for her part in Eva's death. Her feelings of shame and rejection are shown in her use of these derogatory terms.

Topic sentence linked to part in play

Useful connective to narrow the focus

Quotation embedded in the sentence

Explanation

## Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the theme of young and old. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Another function of this part of Act Two is to show how difficulties between Mrs Birling and Sheila are growing. Sheila tells her mother .....

# PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act Two, Part 2

## Five key things about Act Two, Part 2

In this part, Mrs Birling's involvement with Eva Smith is revealed:

1. Mrs Birling's **snobbery and heartlessness** are exposed.
2. Sheila becomes increasingly **agitated** by her mother's **behaviour**.
3. The Inspector's **power and control** grows.
4. The act **ends** on a **dramatic** and **ironic** note, making way for Eric's story in Act Three.
5. The following **themes** are explored: **morality** and judgement; relationships between **men and women**; relationships between **young and old**.



## What happens after Gerald leaves?

- When Gerald leaves, the Inspector questions Mrs Birling about her knowledge of Eva.
- Sheila observes that Gerald was never shown the photograph. When Mrs Birling sees it, she denies any knowledge of Eva. Sheila encourages her mother not to lie to the Inspector.
- The front door slams and Mr Birling exits to see if Eric has left the house.
- We learn that as chair of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation, Mrs Birling had met Eva, who was calling herself 'Mrs Birling'. Mr Birling returns without Eric.

## What happens when the Inspector questions Mrs Birling?

- The Inspector reveals that Eva was seeking help because she was pregnant. She did not want to take more money from the father because she believed it was stolen. Mrs Birling claimed this was '**silly nonsense**' and refused to help her.
- Sheila is horrified by her mother's refusal to help. Mr Birling is worried about a scandal. Mrs Birling declares that the father of the unborn child is to blame, not herself.
- Inspector Goole repeats Mrs Birling's accusations back to her. Sheila, realising who the father is, begs her mother to stop blaming him. Eric enters.

## Five key quotations

1. Mrs Birling's power: **'I wasn't satisfied with the girl's claim ... and so I used my influence to have it refused.'** (Mrs Birling to Inspector Goole)
2. Inequality: **'She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.'** (Mrs Birling to the Inspector)
3. Dramatic tension: **'If, as she said, he ... was some drunken young idler, then ... he shouldn't escape.'** (Mrs Birling, about the father of Eva's unborn child)
4. Social responsibility: **'No hushing up, eh? Make an example of the young man, eh?'** (Inspector Goole); **'Certainly. I consider it your duty.'** (Mrs Birling)
5. Structure at end of Act Two: **'ERIC enters, looking extremely pale and distressed'** (stage directions)

### Note it!

Note that **foreshadowing** is used to hint at what will happen. For example, when Eric leaves the house in an **'excitable'** mood and the Inspector remarks that he will be needed soon, we suspect that Eric will turn out to be connected to Eva in some important way.

## Exam focus

### How can I write about dramatic tension? AO2

You can use this part to show how Priestley uses the character of Mrs Birling to build tension.

Priestley builds dramatic tension when Mrs Birling refuses to accept any blame for Eva Smith's death. She insists that the Inspector should hold the father of Eva's unborn child, **'the drunken young idler'**, responsible. Sheila pleads with her mother to stop, suggesting but not yet revealing that she has guessed his real identity.

Technical term

Main point

Quotation embedded in the sentence

Shows how tension builds

## Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about structure. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Priestley controls the climax to Act Two so that, too late, Mrs Birling suddenly realises what .....

My progress

Needs more work

Getting there

Sorted!

# PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act Three, Part 1

## Five Five key things about Act Three

In this part, Eric is the final character to be questioned by the Inspector:

1. The links between **Eva** and **Eric** are established, and Eric is **ashamed of his behaviour**.
2. **Mr and Mrs Birling** place **loyalty** to the family above **honesty**.
3. **Eric** is **angry** with his parents and accuses them of not supporting him.
4. The **Inspector** is in complete charge and becomes the voice of **social justice**.
5. The main **theme**, **social responsibility**, takes prominence. Other themes, such as the relationship between men and women and morality and judgement are further explored.



## What happens when Eric is questioned?

- The Birlings are shocked as the details of Eric's dealings with Eva Smith emerge.
- Eric confesses that he met Eva at the Palace bar when he was drunk. They went to her lodgings, where he forced himself on her.
- When Eric learned that Eva was pregnant he gave her money, but she refused to take any more when she suspected it was stolen. Sheila and Mrs Birling return.
- Mr Birling begins to plan how to cover up Eric's theft from his company.
- When Eric discovers that his mother refused Eva help, he accuses her of killing her own grandchild and failing him as a mother.

## What happens when the Inspector accuses the Birlings?

- The Inspector silences the quarrelling family and accuses them all of being responsible for Eva Smith's death, while acknowledging that at least Gerald was kind to her.
- He delivers a dramatic **monologue** about social responsibility, and warns that without it society will descend into conflict.
- The Inspector exits, leaving the Birlings in a state of shock.

## Five key quotations

1. Avoiding the truth: **'you're not the type – you don't get drunk'** (Mrs Birling to Eric)
2. The character of Eric: **'I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty'** (Eric)
3. Morality and judgement: **'You made her pay a heavy price for that'** (Inspector Goole to Mr Birling, about Eva asking for a wage increase)
4. Social responsibility: **'But just remember this. One Eva Smith has gone – but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us'** (Inspector's Goole)
5. The Inspector's exit: **'He walks straight out, leaving them staring, subdued and wondering'** (stage directions)

### Note it!

Note how the rift between Mrs Birling and Sheila has widened. Mrs Birling would prefer Eric not to be told about her involvement with Eva Smith, but Sheila decides Eric must know.

## Exam focus

### How can I write about language? AO2

You can use the Inspector's speech in this part to explore key techniques.

Priestley gives the Inspector's speech great dramatic impact, partly by using techniques such as rhetoric. For example, the opening words of his speech, 'But just remember this', are a command. This demands the attention of the audience as well as the Birlings, in preparation for the main part of the speech.

Main point

Literary technique mentioned

Example and explanation

Shows the effect created

## Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about another technique. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Priestley uses other techniques to create impact – for example, the way in which characters enter and exit. Once his speech is finished, the Inspector .....

# PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act Three, Part 2

## Five key things about Act Three, Part 2

In this part, the Birlings and Gerald have to deal with the **aftermath** of the Inspector's visit, and some discoveries are made:

1. **Mr and Mrs Birling** ignore the **Inspector's speech**, and still cling to their **values**.
2. There is now a profound **divide** between **Sheila, Eric** and **their parents**.
3. **Sheila** and **Eric** have both been **deeply affected** by the **Inspector's message**.
4. **Gerald** is affected by Eva Smith's death, but **does not accept** the **Inspector's views**.
5. Priestley explores further the **themes** of **morality** and judgement, **social responsibility**, and the relationships between **young and old** and **men and women**.

## What happens when the Inspector leaves?

- After the Inspector's exit, the Birlings are highly agitated and begin to quarrel again.
- Mr Birling and Eric argue over the stolen money. Mr Birling is afraid of a scandal and the loss of his possible knighthood.
- Divisions increase between young and old. Sheila and Eric accuse their parents of learning nothing from the encounter with the Inspector.
- Sheila wonders if Inspector Goole was really a police officer. Gerald returns.



## What happens after Gerald enters?

- Gerald confirms Sheila's suspicions – there has been no recent suicide. Thinking back to how the Inspector showed each of them the photograph, they deduce that Eva was probably several different women.
- Sheila and Eric are still troubled by the Inspector's message, but the elder Birlings and Gerald relax.
- Gerald offers Sheila the ring back, but she refuses it. Mr Birling answers a phone call. An inspector is on his way to question them about a young girl's suicide.



## Five key quotations

1. Reputation: **'there'll be a public scandal ... and who here will suffer from that more than I will?'** (Mr Birling)
2. Morality: **'don't you see, if all that's come out tonight is true, then it doesn't much matter who it was who made us confess. And it was true'** (Sheila to Mr Birling)
3. Plot twist: **'(slowly) That man wasn't a police officer.'** (Gerald)
4. Responsibility: **'the fact remains that I did what I did'** (Eric, on his behaviour towards Eva)
5. The photograph: **'What girl? There were probably four or five different girls.'** (Gerald to Eric)

### Note it!

Note how Mr Birling remains resistant to the Inspector's words. By referring to him as **'some sort of crank'**, Mr Birling justifies not taking the Inspector's message seriously.

## Exam focus

### How can I write about structure? AO2

You can use this part to write about how Priestley uses characters to structure the action.

Priestley carefully times the characters' movements so that certain events can happen. For example, Gerald leaves the house in Act Two. This allows him to discover that Inspector Goole 'wasn't a police officer' but an imposter. He then reports this to the Birlings in Act Three.

Topic sentence gives main point

Example given

Key effect noted

Link to later in the play

## Now you try!

Finish this further paragraph about structure. Use one of the quotations from the list.

This then allows Gerald and the Birlings to work out that Eva Smith probably wasn't one person. From the way the Inspector reveals the photograph to.....

# PLOT AND STRUCTURE Form and structure

## Three key things about form and structure

1. This is a **well-made play** in **three acts**, set in **real time** with a **strong plot**, **revelations**, a **backstory** and an **unresolved** end.
2. **Inspector Goole** links the events in **Eva Smith's story** to the **family**, helped by the use of the **photograph** and the **diary**.
3. There are **two twists** in the **final act**, when the **realistic setting** seems to **shift** into **fantasy**. Is the Inspector a phantom and the play a **ghost story**? Is **time repeating itself**?



## How is the opening of the play linked to the end?

- The events that take place after the Inspector's arrival are about to be repeated at the end, so the play has a circular structure.
- At the beginning of Act One, the mood is celebratory and the family are united. By Act Three, although the setting is the same, the mood is fearful and there are deep family divisions between young and old.

## In what way is the play like a journey?

- Eva Smith's story is like a journey from hopefulness through poverty to despair and finally death.
- Sheila's transformation is like a journey from ignorance to knowledge.
- Priestley takes the audience on a journey that emphasises inequality at a time (the end of the Second World War) when major social change was possible.

## In what way is the play like a crime drama?

- Priestley presents the Inspector as a man of authority, suggesting that the events under investigation are serious.
- As the play unfolds, clues are given about wrongdoing and who the guilty parties might be.

## Five key quotations

1. Eva's positive start: **'she'd been working in one of our machine shops ... A good worker too.'** (Mr Birling)
2. Chain of events: **'Because what happened to her then may have determined what happened to her afterwards ... A chain of events.'** (Inspector Goole to Mr Birling)
3. Eva's final weeks: **'She was here alone, friendless, almost penniless, desperate.'** (Inspector Goole to Mrs Birling)
4. The main **climax**: **'This girl killed herself – and died a horrible death. But each of you helped to kill her.'** (Inspector Goole)
5. The final twist: **'That was the police. A girl has just died – on her way to the Infirmary'** (Mr Birling)

### Note it!

Note how in Act Three, the Birlings decide that the Inspector's visit is a hoax. So, the audience assumes that the play is simply a **moral tale** with a resolution. However, the final phone call, when Priestley creates a time loop, gives the play a more complex form.

## Exam focus

### How can I write about structure? AO2

You can write about how the play is organised.

Priestley has carefully structured the play to follow a repeating pattern. There is a build-up of tension, a climax and a revelation that exposes how each of the Birlings and Gerald are linked in the 'chain of events'. This leads to Eva Smith's downfall. The pattern occurs at the end of Act One and in Act Two (where the climax is greater). The revelation is usually followed by a release of tension.

Introduces point about structure

Explains pattern

Explains effect

Gives relevant evidence

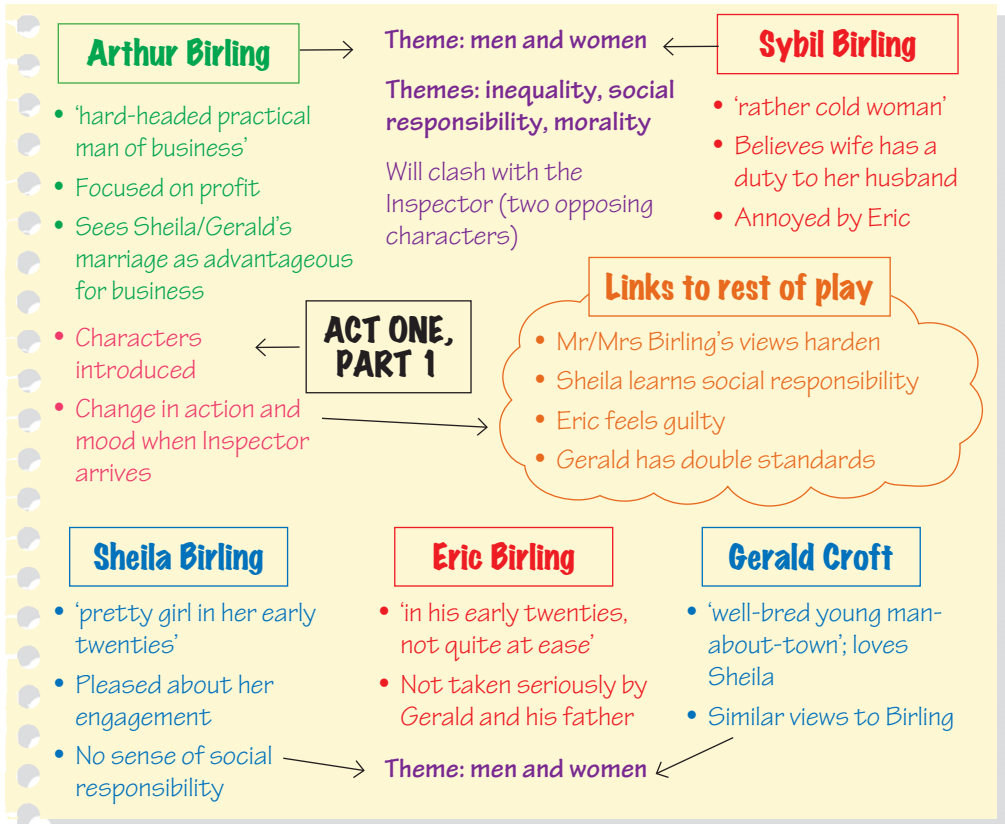
## Now you try!

Finish this further paragraph to discuss the main climax. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Act Three is similar, except that Priestley builds towards the main climax of the whole play, when the Inspector .....

# PLOT AND STRUCTURE Quick revision

1. Look at this ideas map representing the first part of Act One. Is there anything else you could add?



2. Create your own ideas map for one of the other parts of the play.

## Quick quiz

Answer these quick questions on plot and structure:

1. What are the Birlings celebrating?
2. What does Sheila say to Gerald about last summer?
3. What does Mr Birling confide in Gerald?
4. What does Mr Birling think the Inspector has come for?
5. What is Mr Birling's attitude to the Inspector?

6. What did the Inspector find of importance in Eva's lodgings?
7. What does the Inspector show Mr Birling, but not Gerald or Eric when they ask to see it?
8. What dispute occurred at the factory?
9. Why was Eva dismissed and others weren't?
10. Why does Sheila rush out of the room?
11. Why did Sheila behave badly towards Eva Smith?
12. How does Eric react to Sheila's behaviour towards Eva?
13. What happened to Eva after she was dismissed from Milwards?
14. How did Gerald meet Eva/Daisy?
15. What does Sheila do just as Gerald leaves the room after revealing his relationship with Eva/Daisy?
16. What charity does Mrs Birling chair and what is its purpose?
17. Why did Mrs Birling refuse to help Eva?
18. What does Sheila (and the audience) realise at the end of Act Two that Mrs Birling seems unaware of?
19. Who first suggests that the Inspector did not act like a real police officer?
20. What is the final twist?

## Power paragraphs

Write a **paragraph** in response to **each of these questions** about Mr Birling in Act One. For each, try to **use one quotation** you have learned from this section.

1. What is our first impression of Mr Birling at the dinner table?
2. What does the audience realise about Mr Birling's true interests?

## Exam practice

Re-read the section in Act One in which only Mr Birling and Gerald remain in the dining room, before Eric enters.

Why is this moment significant in the text as a whole? Write **two paragraphs** explaining your ideas. You could comment on:

- the reason why Mr Birling wants to speak to Gerald
- what they joke about and its significance.

# SETTING AND CONTEXT 1912 and 1945-6

## Five key things about Edwardian society (when the play is set)

1. **Edwardian England** refers to the **reign of Edward VII** (1901–10). It was preceded by the Victorian era.
2. In **1912**, there were **sharp divides** between the **classes** in **wealth, education and health**, and **workers' wages** were low.
3. **Industrialisation** meant that large numbers of men and women were employed in **factories** that had **poor safety records**.
4. **Seebohm Rowntree** (1871–1954), a wealthy manufacturer, researched **poverty** and published several reports on **the effects of low wages**.
5. Being **unmarried and pregnant** was seen as a **disgrace**, and abortion was the most common form of birth control.



## What was life like for wealthy Edwardians?

- For the middle and upper classes, life in Edwardian Britain was comfortable and often leisurely.
- Both male and female servants were employed to do domestic chores and to ensure the home was well run.
- Most upper- and middle-class boys were educated at private schools and at universities, although few girls received the same education.
- Marriage was often regarded as a means of consolidating wealth and privilege.

## What was life like for the Edwardian poor?

- The working classes in rural areas experienced great hardship, and poor people like Eva Smith flocked to the cities in search of jobs.
- Wages were low and the poor relied on charity if they were unemployed, but this was not always forthcoming.
- Many poor women were undernourished and, as a result, infant mortality among the working classes was high.

## Four key things about 1945-6 (when the play was first performed)

1. The **Second World War** ended in 1945; it had left many **cities** in **ruins**.
2. Food, clothes and many domestic goods were **rationed** to deal with **shortages**.
3. Many lived in **poor housing** without proper **sanitation**.
4. In 1946, **Family Allowance** was introduced – a **benefit** paid directly to **mothers**.

## Three key quotations

1. The Birling's home: *'The dining-room of a fairly large suburban house ... substantial and heavily comfortable'* (stage directions, Act One)
2. Eva's poverty: *'she was desperately hard up and at that moment was actually hungry'* (Gerald, about Eva/Daisy, Act Two)
3. Low wages: *'she hadn't been able to save much out of what Birling and Company had paid her'* (Inspector Goole, about Eva Smith, Act One)

## Exam focus

### How do I link context to the play? AO3

Priestley depicts a marked contrast between rich and poor. According to the stage directions, the Birlings' house is 'heavily comfortable' and they employ a maidservant, Edna, and a cook, so they belong to the Edwardian rich and are financially secure. In contrast, Eva Smith rents a meagre room in lodgings, and is low paid, so is financially insecure. Low pay was one of the main reasons why strike action occurred during the Edwardian period.

Topic sentence gives main point

Example and explanation

Provides contrast

Relevant reference to context

## Now you try!

Finish this further paragraph about the play's context. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Priestley also includes other contrasts between rich and poor, including their access to food. The meal at the celebratory dinner ... On the other hand, Gerald notes .....

## My progress

Needs more work ☐

Getting there ☐

Sorted! ☐