

An Inspector Calls



Scheme of Work (Exam Text)

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Aim

- **To provide a scheme which will ensure all pupils of all abilities have good knowledge of the text.**

Objectives

- **To know the text in detail**
- **To provide practise for answering questions on characters, themes, plot and structure.**

About the Scheme

- **The main aim of the scheme is to make sure that pupils have a good knowledge of the themes, character, plot and setting of the play.**
- **The play has been divided up into seven phases with notes on each and activities for the pupils to help them discuss the major issues and, in some cases, write about them.**
- **There are also worksheets for the less able if they are to study literature for the exam.**
- **The scheme is not totally comprehensive but does provide information on each of the areas to be studied.**
- **There are oral and written activities at the end which will provide good exam practice.**
- **There are some extra worksheets which might be useful included at the back of the scheme.**

An Inspector Calls

Introduction

- Discuss the meaning of the following terms: Community, responsibility, society, paternalistic.
- Then complete worksheet 1. The best way to do this is to give them two minutes to fill in the table then discuss answers for at least five minutes and no more than ten. The second part of the worksheet can be done in about five minutes. This should be done alone. Then ask one pupil to guess what another put for his/her answer. This can be done for all the questions.
- Sum up conclusions found about modern approaches to society and community responsibility. Explain that in Edwardian times, feelings were very different.
- Briefly explain the class system and what this meant to the characters in the play.

Phase One

- Provide a *brief* background on JB Priestly and the Historical Setting of the play. (See Worksheet 2).
- Read the stage directions at the opening and make notes on what this tells us about the Birlings. (Note: *'heavily comfortable, but not cosy and homelike'*.)
Possible Activity: Pupils design the stage for 'An Inspector calls'. See worksheet.
- Read to page 10 (*as far as 'Edna enters'*) and then make notes about what has been learnt about each of the characters so far.
- **Useful Notes**
 - The solid and substantial house, the champagne glasses, decanter of port and the cigars reflect the comfortable, rich lifestyle of the well-respected Birling family.
 - The light-hearted conversation shows Sheila as excitable, youthful and enthusiastic. However there is an edge to her on pg 3 when she mentions 'last summer'. It is clear that they've had the conversation before but as she won't let it go it shows she's got a nagging feeling about it. She even gives Gerald a 'half playful, half serious' warning.
 - Eric seems shy, awkward and close to being drunk. However also a hidden edge to him. His sudden laughter is strained. What is he laughing at?
 - Gerald appears self-assured and someone who knows how to behave at all times. As we'll find out later, he's an easy liar.
 - Mrs Birling takes little part and what she does say reinforces the idea that she is a cold person who stands apart from the others.
 - Mr Birling is in a good mood but cannot resist making speeches. His comments show how wrong he can be: the Titanic would sink on its maiden voyage; there would be two world wars; depression, social unrest, unemployment and strikes would characterise the next three decades.

CLASS ACTIVITY: (All levels) Look closely at Birling's speech on pages 6-7. How many things does he say that we know are wrong? What does this tell you about his character?

(Higher Tier) Pupils should work in groups of four. Each group is given one character to look at (possibly make sure that the majority of groups have Birling) and make notes - underlining parts of the text which give evidence for these points. Remind them before they start that evidence is vital. Report back to the class - notes made on the board.

(Foundation Tier) Give out Character File on Birling. As a class activity, fill it in together – including quotes from the text. Make sure page references are included. If time also fill one in on Sybil and on Sheila.

(Support Group) Fill out worksheet on **Questions on Phase One**. Pupils use text to help them find the answers.

Quote Quest (for exam classes): See worksheet.

POSSIBLE WRITTEN WORK (DIFFERENTIATION BY OUTCOME): **Birling is a fool. How far do you agree with this?** Remember to include character traits that show him to be aware of what he has to do to succeed. E.g. What Gerald's marriage to Sheila will mean to him and his ability to make money (although this is also tied in with blindness towards the consequences of social inequality.)

Phase Two

Read from page 10 – 16 (to where Sheila enters).

- Worth reminding the class of the stage directions at the beginning of the Act before they start reading. *'The lighting should be pink and intimate until the INSPECTOR arrives, and then it should be brighter and harder.'* This is of course symbolic. The Birlings etc lead comfortable, protected lives until the Inspector brings in the harsh reality of life outside their household. Point out that this does **two** things. First it signals the change in mood of the play. With the arrival of the Inspector a note of *tension* and *menace* is introduced. Secondly, the increased intensity of the light suggests the inspector is going to throw some light on events in the past which have been concealed.
- *Useful Notes*
 - Gerald's comments that perhaps Eric has been 'up to something' proves to be ironic as they have all been up to no good. Make sure stage directions are noted, especially with Eric's behaviour.
 - Priestly has built up the tension before the inspector arrives on stage. He has created a sense of false security in the relaxed dinner party but has also occasionally introduced a note of tension. Look at Sheila's manner to Gerald, to her comment he kept away from her last summer and to Eric's behaviour.
 - The fact the inspector only shows the photograph to one person at the time, raising doubt it might be different women, doesn't matter. The moral point is still made quite successfully.
 - The inspector's response to the introduction of Gerald suggests that at this early stage in the play Gerald could be involved too in some way.
 - Birling begins to show his true colours as his impatience grows. He refers to Eva Smith's death as 'the wretched girl's suicide'. (pg 13)
 - The inspector soon adopts a very moralising tone which continues throughout the play. From this early stage the inspector is presented by Priestly as more than a policeman. He becomes social commentator, philosopher, judge and jury. Important that his point is stressed early on with examples of his language which back it up.
 - Birling mentions responsibility being awkward (pg 14). This echoes his earlier statement to Eric and Gerald about responsibility on pages 9 – 10.
 - Look at how Birling tries to intimidate the inspector by naming the people he knows. The fact he plays golf is also telling. It was very much a rich man's game.

Class Activity (All levels): Read the description of the Inspector carefully. Pupils make notes on his appearance, his manner and his speech.

(Higher Tier): Divide the class into pairs. Some pupils work on building up the character profiles (Don't include the Inspector). For the brighter pupils in the class, ask them to look at the relationships between the characters, specifically that of Birling and Eric. A few key questions might be helpful here.

- How is Eric behaving?
- Why does Birling tell Eric to stop drinking on page 13?
- Look at the stage directions for how Eric should speak. What do they tell you about his character and about how he talks to his father?
- Does Eric agree with his father's actions over Eva Smith? What proof can they find for their answer?

Report back to the class and make notes on the board.

(Foundation Tier): Give out character files on the rest of the characters. In pairs the pupils pick one to fill in. (10 minutes). Go through with the class, adding what page references are needed.

(Support Group): Fill in the question sheet on phase two.

The Inspector:

Give the following notes:

- Look at his physical description – in the text books make notes about what intention Priestly has in introducing him as such.
- He adopts a moralising tone which continues throughout the play.
- This presents him as the voice of social conscience, as well as being a philosopher and, for the Birlings and Gerald, judge and jury. E.g. He says on pg 14 '*...what happened to her then may have determined what happened to her afterwards, and what happened to her afterwards may have driven her to suicide.*'
- The Inspector often speaks more like a judge or a prophet, making comments about the actions of the characters in the play and about society in a way that would be quite inappropriate for a policeman. E.g. bottom of pg 13 when he pronounces the cause of Eva's death.

POSSIBLE WRITTEN WORK: What attitudes Birling, Eric and Gerald show towards the sacking of Eva Smith. What does this tell us about their characters.

Phase Three

Read from pg 16 – 26.

▪ *Useful Notes*

- Sheila reacts emotionally to Eva Smith's story. The younger members of the family throughout show more sympathy and concern for others than their elders do. Make sure in reading, pupils are aware how Sheila's character is far deeper than originally thought – this is shown through her reaction to Eva Smith's story and what she appears to have learnt from it.
- The inspector's speech on page 19, beginning 'There are a lot of young women...' is worth looking at in some detail, to point out the general philosophical point Priestly is making.
- One of Priestley's central themes in the play is stressed; that is that there is no clear dividing line between different elements in society. We can't just write one section off as criminals and see another section as upright citizens. (Gerald says: '*we're respectable citizens not criminals!*' To which the Inspector replies '*Sometimes there isn't as much difference as you think.*') We are all part of humanity and we need to share problems and difficulties, good fortune and comfort. We need to accept some measure of responsibility for other people.
- Notice Priestley's stage craft. The inspector has a solid motive to leave the stage just before the curtain falls. It gives Sheila time to get the truth out of Gerald. Giving the inspector the final word of the act is dramatic and gives the audience a lot to anticipate.

(Higher Tier): Pupils make notes on Sheila's character as seen in this section. Detailed character notes should be made. They should also look specifically at her relationship with Gerald and how she reacts towards the inspector.

(Foundation Tier): Fill out character file on Sheila, either in pairs or as a class activity.

(Support Group): Fill out worksheet on Phase three. Then they should complete the activities on Sheila Birling worksheet.

Round up Activities for Act 1

(Higher Tier) Pupils are divided up to make notes on the major themes so far:

- Social responsibility = everyone is responsible for everyone else. Who makes this point clear? How is it proved in the plot? Who disagrees? Does anyone in the play come to understand this? What message does that give and why does Priestly allow two characters to change?
- Love = What kinds of love have been shown so far in the play? Look at relationships between the parents and the children, husband to wife, brother to sister and sister to fiance.
- Time = What sense of time passing by is given in the opening Act? What references to the future? What do those references suggest about Birling's society and what do they suggest about him.
- Role of Women = Look at how women are presented in the play and what this says about their position in society.

(Foundation Tier) Give pupils notes on the Themes.

- Possible Written Work: **What are the main themes introduced in Act One and how does Priestly put them across.** (This is more of a revision activity than an essay question. Differentiation by outcome.)

Phase Four

Read from page 27 – 40

▪ *Useful Notes*

- The inspector is getting skilful at getting people to condemn themselves. He gets Gerald to suggest (pg27) that young women should be ‘protected against unpleasant and disturbing things’ and then says, ‘Well, we know one young woman who wasn’t, don’t we?’
- The inspector’s role as some sort of mystic, all-knowing power, is reinforced when he explains to Gerald Croft why Sheila wants to stay to hear his confession. His comment, ‘If nothing else, we’ll have to share our guilt’ has universal significance and is not restricted to the immediate concerns of the family. Sheila’s appreciation of the inspector’s power grows in this Act. She seems to sense his super-human qualities when she says to him, ‘I don’t understand you.’
- The inspector’s comment to Mrs Birling about young people – ‘They’re more impressionable’ (pg 30) – adds weight to our feelings that the older generation is fixed in its attitudes and that if society is to become more caring and more just it will have to be through the efforts of the young.
- Another major theme appears. Sheila says to Eric (pg 32) ‘But we really must stop these silly pretences’. Priestly is saying that we all tend to hide our weaknesses from ourselves – that the veneer of pretence needs to be stripped from society.
- It is in this Act that the inspector strips away their veneer of respectability, although the older Birlings do not yet realise it. The audience is meant to feel that it is not only the Birling family which is on trial. Men like Alderman Meggarty, from a privileged social position, also treated Daisy Renton (and other girls) badly. In one sense, the whole society is on trial.
- A lot is meant to be inferred from Charlie Brunswick’s lending of his rooms to Gerald. They were probably meant for taking women back to. This reveals a lot about the attitudes of the men about town from this social class.
- There is some development in the relationship between Gerald and Sheila – it moves from the romantic illusion to a more realistic understanding of each other.

Activities

(Higher Tier): Pupils work in groups to brainstorm all they have learnt about the world of the Birlings so far. Feed back to the class. Then they should give evidence from the text to prove the statements they have made.

(Foundation Tier): Class activity. Brainstorm what has been learnt about Edwardian England with reference to the text.

POSSIBLE WRITTEN WORK: (Possible work for folder - English Language – Best Writing).

Write a short story based on Gerald’s rescue of Daisy Renton from the clutches of Joe Meggarty and their conversation at the Country Hotel. Use your imagination to fill out the facts provided by the play.

Phase Five

Read from pg 40 to 49.

- Look closely at what the inspector tells Birling on pg 40. People who have a position of strength in society have to accept the privileges and the responsibility that comes with it. This is Priestley's deeply held socialist philosophy coming through again.
- Sheila's speech is also worth looking at in detail. It summarises the situation so far and helps make Mrs Birling realise she will have to tell the truth about her dealings with Eva Smith. What Mrs Birling says on pg 45 that it is the father's responsibility to look after the baby is very telling. Not only is she condemning her son, but it also reinforces one of the major themes of the play – the notion of responsibility.
- Birling reinforces the importance he places in acquiring a good status. Pg 45 'I must say, Sybil, that when this comes out...'

Activities

(Higher Tier): Add to character profiles. In pairs describe how the inspector trapped Mrs Birling into condemning her son, Eric. Feedback.

(Foundation Tier): Fill in sheets on all the characters. By now, pupils will have to go onto the back of the sheets. Teacher led.

(Support Group): Answer the question sheet on this phase.

Round up Activity of Act Two

- What has been learnt about Eva Smith so far?
- Possible Written Work: **In what ways has the inspector managed to get Birling, Gerald, Sybil and Sheila to confess their involvement in Eva Smith's death?**
- Trace how the characters have reacted to the inspector pointing the finger of blame at them. How has each one changed, if at all, as a result.

Phase Six

Read from page 50 – 56

▪ *Useful notes*

- Daisy Renton's activity as a prostitute is only hinted at. 'She wasn't the usual sort. But – well, I suppose she didn't know what to do.' (pg 51) Eric's sexual encounter with her is only half stated – 'And that's when it happened...' (pg 52).
- Eric puts another dent in the veneer of respectability which cloaks the privileged classes. His coupling of 'these fat old tarts around town' with the 'respectable friends' of Arthur Birling makes the same dramatic and philosophical point as the earlier references to Alderman Meggarty.
- Eva Smith emerges as the character with the strongest principles and the most sincere sense of truth and decency. She doesn't want Eric to marry her because he doesn't love her. She refuses to accept his money when she discovers that he has been stealing it (pg 53).
- Arthur Birling seems to be more concerned with the theft of money from the business than with Eric's treatment of Eva Smith. His first instinct is damage limitation – to put the money back into accounts where it should be to cover up the scandal. (pg 54)
- The enormous gulf between parents and children becomes apparent when Eric discovers his mother rejected Eva Smith. 'You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried...' (pg 55).
- The inspector's final speech (pg 56) has a strange, powerful and prophetic quality. This is not the language of a policeman. His images are almost biblical. He has taken on the role of the prophet of doom. His departing lines summarise the play's philosophy. From the point of view of the audience in 1946, just recovering from the horrors of the Second World War the statement, 'if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught in fire and blood and anguish' must have had great power. For the characters on stage in 1912 when the play is set, the Great War is looming. Priestly is telling his audience, we haven't learnt anything.

Activities

(Higher Tier): Pupils look in detail at the inspectors words. Look at what he says and list all the warnings and philosophies he issues. Pupils work in pairs to build up a character profile of the Inspector.

- Possible Written Work: **How does this section of the play reveal the deep rift between Eric and his parents. Pay particular attention to what he says to them.**

(Foundation Tier): Half the class look at the relationship between Eric and his parents. Half at the relationship between Sheila and her parents. How does Priestly show that Eric and Sheila might become better people as a result and how does he show that Birling and Sybil are stuck in their ways?

(Support Group): Answer the question sheet on this phase.

Phase Seven

Read pages 56 – 72.

▪ *Useful Notes*

- The family seem to disintegrate after the inspector leaves. Birling is anxious about his knighthood, Eric and Sheila are emotionally drained and deeply ashamed – of themselves and their parents.
- Sheila has been emerging during the play as the character with the greatest sensitivity and the keenest awareness of the inspector's role. It is significant that she is the one first to suspect the inspector's authenticity.
- When they all think they have been hoaxed by a fraud, only Eric and Sheila stick by their remorse. Birling and Sybil are glad to be off the hook. Sybil is even 'amused' by the hoax (pg 71). Gerald thinks that 'Everything's all right now, Sheila' and expects her to take back his engagement ring.
- The word 'joke' returns. Just before the first inspector was shown in by Edna, Gerald replies to the uneasy Eric, 'Only something we were talking about when you were out. A joke really.' (pg 10) Just before the telephone rings at the end of Act Three to announce the imminent arrival of a second inspector, Birling looks at Sheila and Eric and says, 'they can't even take a joke...' (pg 72).

Activities

(Higher Tier): In pairs or groups. Discuss what the point of the play is and why there is such a twist at the ending. Is it successful?

(Foundation Tier): Add to the character files on the Birlings and Gerald. Write a paragraph about each of the main characters, describing how they react after the inspector has left the stage. What are the feelings and attitudes of each of them at this point in the play?

(Support Group): Answer the questions on phase seven.

ROUND UP ACTIVITIES

(Higher and Foundation Tier): WRITTEN:

1. Write about Inspector Goole's role in the play.
2. 'An Inspector Calls' is full of lies and deceit. Write about the way Priestly exposes weakness and wickedness, not only in the characters on stage, but also in society.
3. Priestly ends each act on a note of high drama. Write about the way he builds up tension towards the end of each act. Describe how he leaves the audience with plenty to think about during the intervals and after the play has finished.
4. Sheila says to Gerald in Act Two, 'You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner here'. Write about the way the relationship between Gerald and Sheila develops during the play.

Points to note:

- a. the impression Sheila makes at the beginning of the play – clearly happy and excited – teasing and flirtatious but with an edge;
- b. note her willingness to allow Gerald to dominate her in some things – remember the engagement ring;
- c. relationship before the play begins – you will need to speculate here a little – but remember her suspicions about his activities during the previous year;
- d. show how Sheila's personal growth during the play allows her to view Gerald and her relationship with him as something that can be questioned, that it ceases to have the schoolgirl inevitability that it has at the beginning of Act One.

Possible Oral Work

- In groups of four or five. Who was the most to blame for Eva Smith's life? Discuss the characters in the play and their involvement with Eva. Try to decide which one was the most responsible for her death.

Worksheets & Other Resources

