

## Responsibility

Before you start reading *An Inspector Calls*, here are two activities which introduce some of the ideas about responsibility and morality explored in the play.

- Look at the following statements. Alone, decide your views on each statement by ticking the column alongside.

|   | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Not Sure</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| There cannot be a better society; this is all there is.       |                       |              |                 |                 |                          |
| We don't live alone, we live in a community.                  |                       |              |                 |                 |                          |
| There is no such thing as society.                            |                       |              |                 |                 |                          |
| We are responsible for each other.                            |                       |              |                 |                 |                          |
| Everyone should look after himself.                           |                       |              |                 |                 |                          |
| We are all connected to one another.                          |                       |              |                 |                 |                          |
| All this talk about 'community' is rubbish.                   |                       |              |                 |                 |                          |
| What we all think and say and do affects the lives of others. |                       |              |                 |                 |                          |

### **Doing the right thing**

This activity is to get you thinking about the moral choices we have and whether there is a right and wrong way to act.

- Alone, circle the action you would take in each of these situations.
- 1 You see two primary aged children shoving another child against the wall. Do you:
    - a) ignore them because you don't know what's going on
    - b) go up to them and try and stop the fight before it starts
    - c) tell an adult that you think a young child is about to get beaten up.
  - 2 Someone who doesn't speak English gets on the buss and tries to ask the bus driver if the bus goes to the hospital. The bus driver is impatient and can't be bothered to make the effort to understand. Do you:
    - a) push past the person, show your pass and get on
    - b) tell the driver that the person wants the hospital
    - c) speak to the person and reassure the person and tell him that it's the right bus

- 3 An old person falls down in the street. Do you:
- a) pass by because you are in a hurry
  - b) rush to help him/her
  - c) slow down so that someone else will help first.
- 4 There is a bottle bank near where you live but no one in your family uses it. Do you:
- a) think nothing of it because one family's bottles won't make any difference
  - b) put a box in the kitchen and tell everyone to put their empty bottles in
  - c) tell your family that you'll take the bottles in return for not doing the washing up.
- 5 A beggar asks you for money outside the station. Do you:
- a) ignore him/her because you disapprove of begging
  - b) apologise for having no change
  - c) pass by because you're in a hurry.
- 6 Your class is involved in raising money for a charity. Some class members openly take some of the money themselves. Do you:
- a) do nothing
  - b) try to persuade them to put it back
  - c) tell an adult in the hope that it will be dealt with by them.

**Edwardian England**  
**The Setting for *An Inspector Calls***

For many plays and novels, the historical setting may have little relevance, but Priestley's characters are so involved with social conditions of the time, and Eva Smith is such a vivid example of the fate of many young women living in poverty then, that some understanding of the historical background of the play is necessary.

**1912: Arthur Birling's England**

- The society of Birling's England exhibited huge social divisions and distinctions. One historian has observed that '*class divisions were never so acutely felt as by the Edwardians*'. The most *acutely* felt divisions were those of income and wealth, and, as a consequence, of living standards. In fact 87% of the country's total personal wealth was in the hands of 5% of the population.
- Eight million people had to get by on less than 25 shillings a week and as a result were '*underfed, under-housed and insufficiently clothed... Their growth is stunted, their mental powers are cramped, their health is undermined.*'

'Look at the people who swarm the streets to see the Lord Mayor's Show, and where will you see a more pitiable sight? These beef-eating, port-drinking fellows in Piccadilly, exercised, scrubbed, groomed, they are all well enough to be sure; but his other side of the shield is distressing to look at. Poor, stunted, bad complexioned, shabbily dressed, ill-featured are these pork-eating, gin drinking denizens of the East End. Crowds I have seen in America, in Mexico, and in most of the great cities of Europe... nowhere is there such squalor, such pinching poverty, so many undersized, so many plainly and revolting diseased, so much human rottenness as here...'

*(England and the English from an American Point of View, 1909.)*

Working conditions were much harder for most people than today. A typical basic working week was about sixty hours — that" eleven hours a day plus half-day on Saturday. Trade unionism was still in its very early days and workers had very few rights or protection, or control over their working conditions. There were rules and fines in most workplaces for the workers to obey, but few regulations about safety, working conditions and sufficient work breaks. By and large, a worker was at the mercy of his or her employer.

It was estimated in 1899 that for a family of two adults and three children to survive they needed about 21 shillings a week (£1.05). On average, men working in towns earned just under a pound but in the country 15 shillings (75p) was more common. Women's wages were, on average, half that of men's.