Eva Smith/Daisy Renton’s downfall. Now think about Sheila, Eric and Gerald the more unchanging hand, we have the two generations.

By the end of the play, there is a clear divide between the older generations and the ideas of a fairer society. Is it going to be the older, more traditional generation that are likely to change, or is it the younger, more forward-looking generation that could change society for the better, making it fairer?

Finally, make sure you look at the Inspector’s final speech – it is the climax of the play!

There are four main themes that immediately come to mind. Doing this means that you are enlightened.

The title of the play is An Inspector Calls, so the chances are that the Inspector is an important figure. Ask yourself the following questions about him:

b) What is the Inspector’s function?

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Remember that dialogue can have an effect on the pace, mood and tension of a play. Map these shifts as you read the play.

Context of the play

Think of the context like the backdrop to the play: without understanding it, the play will not make complete sense. Make sure you are familiar with:

a) Social position/hierarchy in the early 20th century.
b) Working conditions and relationships between workers and bosses.
c) Why Priestley sets the play in 1912 and not in his day (i.e. when he was writing the play), post-Second World War?
d) The setting of the play itself – are there many scene changes in the play? What does this tell us about the focus of the play?

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Quotations

Get some key quotations under your belt for themes, language and characters – sometimes you can find quotations that touch on all three. Remember: always embed your quotations into the points of your essay. This will ensure a more sophisticated answer and allow your ideas to flow.

Literary terms

It will impress the examiner if you can identify and comment on the effect of the literary techniques used by an author. Grasping some of Priestley’s dramatic techniques and using the proper terms is a sure way to boost your grade! For example, do you know what a euphemism is? How about irony and symbolism? Does Priestley use imagery? What’s a coup de théâtre?

Dialogue and stage directions

Paying attention to the stage directions and the way Priestley structures the dialogue in the play is key to picking up on the important moments in the play and what he wants to communicate to the audience.

a) Notice how, towards the end of the play, the dialogue speeds up through short sentences and quick shifts in mood. What does this do to the pace of the play? What are we building towards?

b) Can you note any specific stage directions that convey Priestley’s intentions? Which stage directions are particularly interesting?

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5 The Inspector

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b) What is the Inspector’s function?

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Quick check

Test your knowledge of the play! Try to answer these questions – if you’re not sure, go back to the play, or use the York Notes study guide to help you.

a) Why is Mr Birling so afraid of a scandal?
b) How did Eric obtain the money he gave to Daisy?
c) In which town is the play set?
d) What happens when Sheila is shown a photograph of the girl?
e) Who do you think is mostly responsible for the death of Eva Smith/Daisy Renton? List your reasons and support them with evidence.
f) Think of the play as a ‘chain of events’. What are the key turning points and why?

Further questions

It is important to practise for exams or assessments by writing extended written responses. Here are a few exam-style questions to get you started. For more, see our Progress Booster section in the study guide.

a) In what ways does Sheila change over the course of the evening?
b) How does Priestley present the relationship between Eric and Eva/Daisy in the play?
c) How does Priestley explore the importance of family ties in the play?