

# AN INSPECTOR CALLS

BY J. B. PRIESTLEY

## AN INTRODUCTORY PACK FOR GCSE

Whether you're looking at this at home, or are back in school, this pack is a great way to get to grips with one of your key GCSE English Literature texts. Put together by the English Literature experts at York Notes, it will really kickstart your studies!

### So – what's in the pack?

1. Find out about J. B. Priestley, his times and the plot of *An Inspector Calls*.
2. Explore the settings of the play – which characters and what key events are linked to these places.
3. Have a go at some warm-up tasks and activities to keep your brain active, and get a head start on your studies.
4. Follow up with our suggested links and ideas: websites, videos, and so on.

We hope you enjoy your introduction to this great text!



# 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, working as a clerk in a wool company, while **writing articles** for local papers.
3. He **fought** and was **badly wounded** in the **First World War**, so saw the **effects of war** first hand.



## 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.

# ***An Inspector Calls – the plot***

*An Inspector Calls is set in 1912 in the Midlands, just a couple of years before the outbreak of the First World War.*

## **Act One, Part 1**

- A spring evening at the **Birlings' house**; the Birling family celebrates **Sheila Birling** and **Gerald Croft's** engagement.
- **Mr Birling** gives a pompous speech about his views on business and the economy.
- Gerald presents Sheila with an engagement ring.
- **Eric Birling**, Sheila's brother, enters and eagerly takes a drink.
- 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**) whom he has just seen in the **hospital/infirmary**.
- He questions Mr Birling about his treatment of Eva as his **factory** worker. Birling admits he sacked her for leading a strike for more money.
- Sheila admits she met Eva in her next job as a shop assistant at **Milwards department store**. She treated Eva badly, because she was envious of her appearance, and got her fired.
- The Inspector reveals that Eva then changed her name to **Daisy Renton**, and Gerald's reaction makes it clear that he knew her too.
- Sheila confronts Gerald, who is forced to admit he knew Eva/Daisy.

## **Act Two, Part 1**

- **Mrs Birling** enters and tries to bully the Inspector.
- Gerald reveals to the Inspector where he met Daisy, in the **Palace Variety Theatre** Bar. Now a prostitute, she was being harassed by a drunk alderman, **Joe Meggarty**.
- Gerald helped her '**escape**'. He gives further details of his affair with her, including keeping her in a friend's flat for several months.
- He recounts how she ended the affair, and went away for a while.
- Sheila expresses shame for the way she treated Eva. She gives the engagement ring back to Gerald, who goes out for a walk.

### Act Two, Part 2

- Mrs Birling is forced to admit that she knew Eva/Daisy, who had come to her charitable organisation for help as she was pregnant. But Mrs Birling refused to help her.
- She objected to Eva/Daisy as she'd used the name '**Mrs Birling**' and then admitted she wasn't married so in her view had '**no right**' to call herself that.
- 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 Three, Part 1

- Eric confesses that he got Eva pregnant. Mrs Birling is distressed. It is clear that Eric is a heavy drinker from his reaction to the revelations.
- Eric learns that his mother refused to help Eva when she went to her and accuses her of killing her grandchild.
- Eric reveals that he met Eva/Daisy in the **Palace Variety Theatre** Bar, and then forced himself on her back at her lodgings.
- He then saw her on several more occasions, until she told him she was pregnant.
- Eric stole money to give to her but she refused it when she found out it was stolen.
- The Inspector gives a powerful monologue on social justice and responsibility, 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 decide that the Inspector was an imposter and that there was no suicide.
- However, the phone then rings – a police inspector is on his way from the **police station** to talk to them about the suicide of a young woman.





## The settings of *An Inspector Calls*

Look at these pictures of some key settings in *An Inspector Calls*. Can you label each setting with any of the important events or characters linked to it?



**The factory**



**Milwards**



**Palace Variety  
Theatre**



**The Birlings' house**



**The police station**



**Hospital/Infirmary**

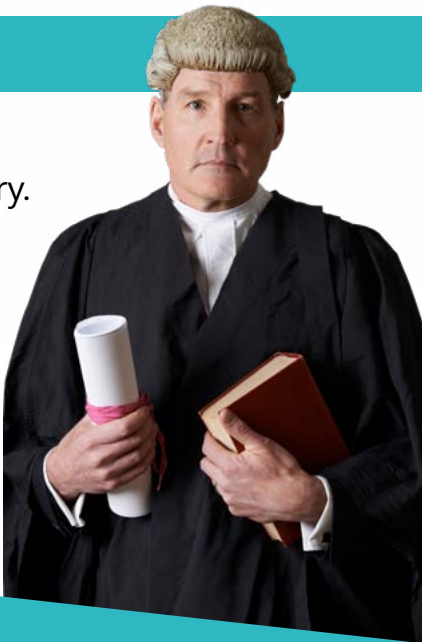
# Things to do

## 1. The guilt scale

Now that you have read the plot summary or the play itself, it's time for you to take on the role of judge and jury.

Looking back over the events of the play (or the events which happened before the play began), who would you say is most responsible for Eva/Daisy's death?

Using the scale below, label it with the names of the characters from the box. Then add your evidence – why you think that person deserves to be higher or lower on the list.



MOST GUILTY	EVIDENCE?
LEAST GUILTY	



Gerald Croft



Eric



Sheila



Mrs Birling



Mr Birling

## 2. You, the detective

You will need to have read Act One for this and be *really* forensic in finding clues.

Priestley gives lots of hints at the start of the play about what is going to happen in the story. Can you find these clues in Act One? Either write in actual quotations or your own words what is said or happens.

Hint: They all occur before the Inspector arrives!



Clues that Eric Birling is a drinker and possibly slightly unstable. Or that he might have done something wrong.

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Clues that Arthur Birling is *not* a sound judge of the future!

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Clues that Arthur Birling is self-centred and likes to control people.

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Clues that suggest the whole Birling family might only *appear* to be decent. (Look for what Gerald says!)

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Clues that Sheila and Gerald's relationship isn't as solid as it seems to be. (Look for something Sheila says about the summer that has just passed.)

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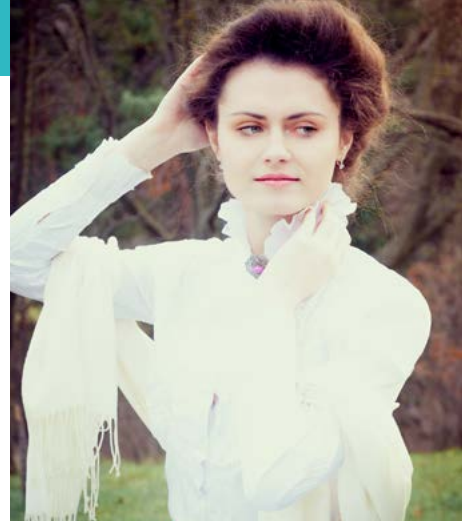
### 3. My perspective

Choose **one** of the following characters. Imagine they decide to write a letter to Eva/Daisy after her death to explain or excuse their actions, or to express their guilt or regret.

Sheila

Eric

Gerald



You could start it like this:

*Dear Eva/Daisy,*

*I know this is too late for you to read, but I wanted to write to you in order to...*





# Want to know more?

If you are reading or studying the play for the first time, here are some really useful and interesting resources you could check out.

## Background to the play and information on J. B. Priestley himself

1. The J. B. Priestley society have a website dedicated to him and his work. There is a lot to take in here, but the section on *An Inspector Calls* includes a speech introducing a production of the play, and links to other resources, including the National Theatre's production.  
Go to: [www.jbpriestleysociety.com](http://www.jbpriestleysociety.com), click on 'Works' and find 'An Inspector Calls'.
2. YouTube has interesting and accessible resources on the context of the play – for example, how Priestley's own war experiences and the social conditions of the time influenced his political views.  
Go to: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), search 'An Inspector Calls ClickView' and click on the playlist.  
Also go to: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search 'An Inspector Calls Historical and Social Context'.
3. The **British Library** has many excellent resources about the play in general and about Priestley's own life, including a letter he wrote to his parents from the First World War trenches in 1916.  
Go to: [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk) and search for 'Priestley war letter'.



## Finding out more about the plot, themes and characters

1. The play has been produced numerous times, but there have been several stand-out versions. Perhaps the best known of these is Stephen Daldry's National Theatre production which has been revived several times. This has its own website where you can watch a trailer and find out a bit more about his interpretation:  
Go to: **[www.aninspectorcalls.com](http://www.aninspectorcalls.com)**
2. The BBC produced its own version in 2015. You can watch a trailer and clips from the production online, but as with the National Theatre production, bear in mind these are adaptations, so might have slight differences from the original. Remember, Eva/Daisy never actually appears in the original play. Just search the web for 'BBC An Inspector Calls 2015' to find them.
3. There are also various clips and podcasts with actors, directors, etc. talking about the characters and themes, as well as educational sites with explanations.  
Go to: **[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)** and search for 'An Inspector Calls cast interviews BBC drama'.
4. Finally, for resources on all these aspects, the BBC website has several short videos worth watching.  
Go to: **[www.bbc.co.uk/teach](http://www.bbc.co.uk/teach)**, click 'Secondary', select 'English Literature 14–16', click 'Invasion of the Bookreaders' to find resources on *An Inspector Calls*.



# Finally, don't forget that York Notes has lots more resources to help you with your studies!

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Workbook



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