

Top 10 Study Tips

The Top 10 things you **need** to know when studying...

An Inspector Calls

1 Read the play!

If you haven't already read the play in class, you could **read it on your own**, or with your friends, **playing different parts**. Whilst reading, **highlight** your favourite moments/lines and anything that really **stands out for you**. Doing this means that you are **critically interacting with the text**, which will serve you well when you come to study the play more closely.

2 Key themes

Understanding the **themes** will help you to understand both the **context** of the play and Priestley's **characterisation**. There are four main themes that immediately come to mind when considering *An Inspector Calls*. They are:

- a) An equitable (fairer) society
- b) Responsibility
- c) Love and marriage
- d) Time

Draw a spider-diagram for each theme, noting any **specific moments** in the play that can be **linked to these themes**. For example, for **Time**, one key point is Mr Birling's comment about the Titanic being 'unsinkable'. Why is this important when thinking about the time that the play is **set** (1912) and when it was **written** (1940s)? What are Priestley's **motives**? What is he trying to get us to **consider**?

3 Writing about the two generations

By the end of the play, there is a clear divide between the **two generations** of characters in the play. On the one hand, we have the **stuffy, supercilious** (snobby) and **unchanging** views of **Mr and Mrs Birling**. Then, we have the more **enlightened** and **responsible reactions of Sheila, Eric and Gerald**, who acknowledge their part in Eva Smith/Daisy Renton's downfall. Now think about these questions:

- a) How does this **generational difference** link to the theme of **responsibility**?

- b) What link is there 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?

4 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?

Knowing the context will give your answers **more depth** and **maturity**. But make sure you apply the **social/historical context** to the play, don't just repeat what you know. For example, how does the industrial setting of Brumley **add** to the oppressiveness of the play? You may well find that understanding the context will allow you to **empathise** with the **characters** more fully.

5 The Inspector

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:

- a) What is the Inspector's **function**?
- b) How does the Inspector **differ from** the other characters – **Mr Birling**, for instance?

- c) Think about his name, **Goole** – **what does that evoke**? How does this relate to the somewhat spooky, eerie ending?

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

6 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**.

7 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**?

8 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?



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

9 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 most **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?

10 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?