

## An Inspector Calls Key Quotations

### Role of women/Women's rights

- ⇒ At this time women couldn't vote.
- ⇒ Mr Birling uses women as cheap labour: "We were paying the usual rates and if they didn't like those rates, they could go and work somewhere else".
- ⇒ Sheila however, views these women as individuals rather than a group: "But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're *people*"
- ⇒ As Eva Smith is the only character that is part of the lower class we see that she is used in many ways: Gerald sees her as a mistress who could be discarded at will, he only saw her as "young and fresh and charming".
- ⇒ When poor girls couldn't find a job they only had one option and that was to become a prostitute: "she stopped being Eva Smith, looking for a job, and became Daisy Renton, with other ideas". Those ideas would be to become a "women of the town".
- ⇒ At the Palace Variety Theatre, both Gerald and Eric use Eva for sex.
- ⇒ The husband was usually chosen for benefit of the family, Sheila marrying Gerald is getting Mr Birling thinking about how "perhaps we may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together".
- ⇒ We can guess that the role of a woman in those times would have been to get married, we are told about Eric's "public-school-and-Varsity life" but it never talks about Sheila going to school or doing any sort of work.
- ⇒ Mrs Birling doesn't believe that "a girl of that sort would ever refuse money" she must see the lower class as beggars that would take money from anywhere or anyone.
- ⇒ We are not told much about Edna but we can tell she is a women of lower class that is working in an upper class family, a job like that would have been lucky in that time; she respects her bosses calling them "Sir" and "Ma'am".

- Because Eva was a woman - in the days before women were valued by society and had not yet been awarded the right to vote - she was in an even worse position than a lower class man. Mrs. Birling describes Eva as: "A girl of that sort" Her charitable committee was a sham: a small amount of money was given to a small amount of women, hardly scratching the surface of the problem. She couldn't believe that: "a girl of that sort would ever refuse money."
- Even upper class women had few choices. For most, the best they could hope for was to impress a rich man and marry well - which could explain why Sheila spent so long in Milwards. "I'd persuade mother to close our account with them [if Eva isn't fired]" proves she goes there a lot.
- For working class women, a job was crucial. There was no social security at that time, so without a job they had no money. There were very few options open to women in that situation: many saw no alternative but to turn to prostitution. "Women of the town"
- Mr. Birling is dismissive of the several hundred women in his factory: "We were paying the usual rates and if they didn't like those rates, they could go and work somewhere else." He also describes his workers as: "cheap labour".
- Gerald saw Eva as "young and fresh and charming" - in other words, someone vulnerable he could amuse himself by helping.

### THE THEME OF WORK

Work is important to each character and plays a vital part in the story...

Mr Birling uses his position in his job to

Sheila's part in the death of Eva Smith is highly based around 'work'. **'It was the real steady job she had'**. Work was very important to her and once she lost this job she went off the rails. **'When she lost it- for no reason that she could**

**discover- she decided she might as well try another type of life.'** This implies that work was so important to her that once she lost one job she had no other option. But why did she have no other option? Maybe she couldn't get another job because of the power behind getting a good reference from a previous employer. This also shows the hierarchy of work in those days- if you didn't have a job, you literally had nothing.

### **Character: Sheila Birling**

- She is described at the start as “a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited.”
- Sheila shows her compassion immediately towards the workers when she hears of her father's treatment of Eva Smith: “But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people.”
- She feels full of guilt for her jealous actions towards Eva and blames herself as “really responsible.”
- She is very perceptive. She is the first to realize Eric's part in the chain of events. Also, she says to the Inspector: “I don't understand about you.” She is the first to question whether the Inspector is real or not towards the end of the play.
- Sheila is curious. She genuinely wants to know about Gerald's part in the story. It's interesting that she is not angry with him when she hears about the affair: she says that she respects his honesty. She is becoming more mature.
- Moreover, she is angry with her parents in Act 3 for trying to “pretend that nothing much has happened.” She says “It frightens me the way you talk:” She is feeling against her parents for their selfish and immature manner.
- Towards the end of the play Sheila changes from a selfish girl who gets Eva fired to a mature woman who understands her responsibilities and is more aware of the working class world: “we are all to blame”

- ⇒ At the start she is described as “a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited”.
- ⇒ Even though she is engaged to Gerald, she still has her suspicions from the start: “except for all last summer, when you never came near me” and even though Gerald insists that he was working she replies with: “that’s what *you* say”.
- ⇒ Sheila blames herself instantly when she finds out the horrific story: “so I’m really responsible?”
- ⇒ When describing to the Inspector why she got Eva Smith fired she admits that she was jealous of her: “And it just suited her”. Even though she accepts some responsibility she is still selfish: “I feel now I can never go there again” even though she is a regular customer.
- ⇒ She realises very quickly that Gerald has something to do with this chain of event: “You gave yourself away as soon as he mentioned her other name”.
- ⇒ She also understands the Inspector’s little game fairly quickly: “you haven’t finished asking questions – have you?”
- ⇒ She tries to look out for her mum, advising not to do the same things they’ve done so far: “you’re beginning all wrong”.
- ⇒ She is interested to listen to Gerald’s part of the story, “you’re forgetting I’m supposed to be engaged to the hero of it” making the situation humorous, which might be to make herself feel better.
- ⇒ As the play goes on she is the first to accept collective responsibility “between us we killed her”.
- ⇒ Sheila matures during the play, this whole suicide story has completely changed her: “You and I aren’t the same people who sat down to dinner here.”
- ⇒ She is also the first to realise that Eric is the father of the unborn child, begs her mum to stop so she doesn’t embarrass herself: “Mother – stop – stop!”
- ⇒ She gets angry at her parents: “The point is, you don’t seem to have learnt anything” it is as if she has become a parent trying to teach her kids a valuable lesson. She says to her parents: “it’s you two who are being childish” which is ironic.
- ⇒ She is the first to spot out suspicions about the Inspector not being a real one: “Is that when the Inspector came, just after father said that?”
- ⇒ When Gerald comes back she describes how the Inspector was “frightening” which is a sign she is looking for comfort.

- ⇒ She tries to defend what the Inspector has said when her parents think it's all fine because he isn't real: "He inspected us all right [...] Between us we drove that girl to commit suicide".
- ⇒ At the end of the play it is as if she is the Inspector repeating his exact words "Fire and blood and anguish", he has had a huge impact on her.

### **Gerald quotes:**

- He is described as 'an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred man-about-town.'
- 'You're just the kind of son in law I always wanted'- Mr Birling sees Gerald as being like himself- a determined business man; Mr Birling sees the engagement as bringing the two businesses together.
- 'We're respectable citizens and not criminals'- This is an obvious reference to class. Gerald is so sure of himself at the beginning, when first talking to the inspector, that he makes such a bold statement. In this Priestley is showing us how before the wars and the less segregated classes, the higher classes were so sure of themselves and that no one had the right to question this.
- 'Why stay when you'll hate it?'- Gerald says this as he knows that eventually, the Inspector will force him to reveal everything about him and Daisy Renton to the family and Sheila, who already has figured some things about them
- He did have some genuine feeling for Daisy Renton, however: he is very moved when he hears of her death. He tells Inspector Goole that he arranged for her to live in his friend's flat 'because I was sorry for her;' she became his mistress because 'She was young and pretty and warm-hearted - and intensely grateful.'
- 'I'm rather more upset by this business that I probably appear to be'- Gerald hides his feelings like an English gentleman is expected to do. Deep down he is greatly saddened by the girl's death and has a strong feeling of responsibility.

### **Context/setting quotes:**

Priestley deliberately set his play in 1912 because the date represented an era when all was very different from the time he was writing. In 1912, class and gender boundaries seemed to ensure that nothing would change. Yet by 1945, most of those class and gender divisions had changed. Priestley wanted to make the most of these changes.

- 'You're squiffy'- colloquial language used in 1912; Sheila to Eric telling him that he is drunk.
- 'A friend of mine went over this new liner last week - the Titanic - she sails next week - forty-six thousand eight hundred tons - forty-six thousand eight hundred tons - New York in five days - and every luxury - and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable.'- dramatic irony – Mr Birling to family; now in 2014 we know that it sank after 3 days after hitting an iceberg.
- 'The Germans don't want war'- shows that the play was set before the First World War; makes Mr Birling look foolish as there was war 6 years later

### **Eric Birling Quotations**

~Act 1~

*"Eric is in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive."*

*"Eric suddenly guffaws. His parents look at him."*

**"Sheila** You're squiffy / **Eric** I'm not."

**"Sheila** Don't be an ass, Eric."

*"([Sheila] kisses Gerald hastily ) / Eric* Steady the Buffs!"

**"Eric** What about war?"

*"(Takes decanter and helps himself )* Mother says I musn't stay long. But I don't think it matters."

"(Eagerly) Yes, I remember - (But he checks himself) / **Birling** Well, what do you remember? / **Eric** (Confused) Nothing." - foreshadowing/ mystery

"**Eric** Somebody's at the front door. "

"**Eric** Yes, you've piled it on a bit tonight, father. "

"**Eric** (defiantly)"

"[**Inspector** ] Burnt her inside out, of course. / **Eric** (involuntarily ) My God!" - only one to react out of Mr Birling, Gerald and himself.

Showing a difference of opinions - "[**Birling**] It's a free country, I told them. / **Eric** It isn't if you can't go and work somewhere else."

[Later...] "**Gerald** You couldn't have done anything else. / **Eric** He could. He could've kept her on instead of throwing her out."

[Later...] " **Eric** I'd have let her stay. / **Birling** ... it's about time you learnt to face a few responsibilities. That's something this public-school-and-Varsity life you've had doesn't seem to teach you." - Also giving background knowledge.

~Act 2~

"We hear the front door slam again"

"**Birling** .. he was in one of his excitable queer moods"

"Eric enters, looking extremely pale and distressed. He meets their inquiring stares"

~Act 3~

"**Eric** (bitterly ) You haven't made it any easier for me, have you, Mother?"

(Sheila reveals she told their mother about his drinking,) "**Eric** You told her. Why, you little sneak!" "**Sheila** ... I could've told her months ago..."

"**Eric** (miserably ) Could I have a drink first?"

*"Eric goes for whiskey. His whole manner of handling the decanter and then the drink shows his familiarity with quick heavy drinking"*

**Inspector** When did you first meet this girl? / **Eric** One night last November"

**Eric** ...she was pretty and a good sport"

**Eric** I intended to pay it back / **Birling** We've heard that story before" - suggesting a past of him borrowing money/being in debt to his father.

**Eric** You're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble"

**Birling** ...you've been spoilt"

(He blames his mother for Eva's death, just as she blamed him:)"you killed her - and the child she'd have had too - my child - your own grandchild - you killed them both - damn you"

**Birling** Why you hysterical young fool"

**Eric** I'm ashamed of you as well - both of you."

**Eric** You told us that a man had to make his own way... that we weren't to take any notice of these cranks... and then one of those cranks walked in... I didn't notice you told him that it's every man for himself"

**Eric** He was our police inspector alright"

**Eric** (*sulking* )"

**Eric** Whoever that chap was, the fact remains that I did what I did. And mother did what she did. And the rest of you did what you did to her."

**Eric** We all did her in alright"



## The Inspector

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He establishes they each did something cruel or unkind to Eva Smith/Daisy Renton.

He takes control of the situation, and while being polite, refuses to let anyone else be superior to himself.

His leaving speech is an impassioned speech about social justice.

There are various possibilities of who or what the Inspector represents including Priestley and God.

He has the biggest impact on Sheila and Eric, the least on Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald lies in between.

A man of 'massiveness, solidity and purposefulness'.

The inspector is an imposing figure who will dominate the play and will achieve his aims.

'One person and one line of enquiry at a time. Otherwise there's a muddle.'

He wants to do things his way and he likes to do things in an orderly way. They allows J.B. Priestley to build the play as a 'chain of events'.

'It's my duty to ask questions.'

He takes his responsibilities seriously and shows the others that they haven't done so.

'He never seemed like an ordinary police inspector.'

The word 'ordinary' could mean 'usual' or it could mean that he was somehow 'extraordinary', more than human.

'It's better to ask for the earth than to take it.'

The Inspector's lesson to Mr Birling is that at least Eva Smith only asked for a rise. Mr Birling just takes all of his money without asking anyone.

'You were annoyed with yourself and passed the annoyance onto her.'

The Inspector knows why Sheila did what she did to Eva Smith.

'One Eva Smith has gone... but there are millions... of Eva Smiths... all intertwined with our lives... if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.'

### Eva Smith

-never seen in the stage play

-described as being pretty. "a pretty, lively sort of girl, who never did anybody any harm"

-belongs to the working class, Mr Birling says that she is "country-bred"

### Death timeline

- 1) Eva Smith approaches Mr Birling for a salary raise  
"they wanted the rates raised so that they could average about twenty-five shillings a week"
- 2) Arthur Birling sacks Eva Smith from Birling and Co. At the "end of September, nineteen ten" "she was one of my employees then I discharged her"
- 3) Eva Smith fired from the dress shop. By Sheila "I told the manager at Milwards that if they didn't get rid of the girl that, I'd never go near that place again"
- 4) Daisy Renton gets dumped by Gerald "I broke it off completely"

- 5) Eric finds out his mother refused to help her, whilst she had their child. “ You killed her and the child she’d have had too my child” “your mother refused that help”
- 6) She’s dead. “A girl has just died on her way to the Infirmary after swallowing some strong disinfectant”

### INSPECTOR CALLS

### THE THEME OF WORK

Work is important to each character and plays a vital part in the story...

Mr Birling uses his position in his job to make a girl redundant. He is overly obsessed with the power that his work gives him. He tells Eric **‘Unless you brighten your ideas you’ll never be in a position to let anybody stay or to tell anybody to go’** He also believes that one day he can combine with the Croft family, which also represents the theme of class and how business only happens between the same classes. **‘Perhaps we may look forward to a time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together’** It is, however, the women like Eva Smith, who actually work there, while he sits idly and refuses to pay them more than any other company. **‘They were averaging about twenty two and six, which was neither more nor less than is paid generally in our industry.’** He is greedy for money, and will not give in.

Similarly to Mrs Birling, Eric and Sheila don’t seem to work. Sheila spends her time shopping in Millwards, whilst Eric lives **‘Varsity lifestyle’**.

Sheila’s part in the death of Eva Smith is highly based around ‘work’. **‘It was the real steady job she had’**. Work was very important to her and once she lost this job she went off the rails. **‘When she lost it- for no reason that she could discover- she decided she might as well try another type of life.’** This implies that work was so important to her that once she lost one job she had no other option. But why did she have no other option? Maybe she couldn’t get another job because of the power behind getting a good reference from a previous employer

(Mr Birling). This also shows the hierarchy of work in those days- if you didn't have a job, you literally had nothing.

Mrs Birling, despite not having a job, still has some power in the chair of Brumley Women's association, a status which she uses to promote her own upper class values; hence not helping women like Eva Smith. **'First she presented herself as Mrs Birling'** this shows that she disliked her from the start. Her repetition of the word **'impertinence'** makes her seem pretentious and like she is above everyone else, although Eva, has actually worked for a living and made an effort.

The only people in the play who seem to actually do work are Eva Smith and the Inspector. Putting this into perspective with the context of the play (the war years), it was not uncommon for women to work in this time period. **'A good worker too.'** Despite showing the working conditions for lower classes and also Eva's desperation that she ended up working for him. Eva links to the theme of gender and represents the independent women who emerged to take the roles and jobs of the men who went to fight in the war.

The inspector, works harder than anyone else in the play as it is his 'duty' to work towards finding the truth.

### Responsibility/Duty

- 'I consider I did my duty'
- 'I consider it your duty'
- 'To do my duty'
- 'Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility'
- 'and now you're pretending you don't recognise her'
- 'She feels responsible'
- 'Cheap labour'
- 'It's my duty to ask questions'
- 'It's my duty to keep labour costs down'

- 'One Eva Smith has gone - but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, and what we think and say and do.'
- 'And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, when they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish'
- 'Brumley's women's charity organisation'
- 'Each of you helped to kill her'
- 'Between us we killed her'
- 'Still, I can't accept any responsibility'

### Mr Birling

- 'Heavy looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties but rather provincial in his speech'
- 'I speak as a hard headed businessman, who has to take risks and know what he's about'
- 'It's exactly the same port your father gets'
- 'The Germans don't want war'
- 'Unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable'
- 'She had to go of course'
- 'Cheap labour'
- 'A man has to make his own way'
- 'The whole story's just a lot of moonshine'
- 'Feels like you might have done better for yourself socially'
- 'Public-school-and-varsity-life'
- 'I've got to cover this up as soon as I can'
- 'You're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble'
- 'Still, I can't accept any responsibility'

- 'But take my word for it, you youngsters - and I've learnt in the good hard school of experience - that a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own'

### ✧ **Time in *An Inspector Calls***

- ✧ Time is an important theme in the play "An Inspector Calls". At the end of the play, you wonder whether the actions has taken place in the characters mind, or whether it's a premonition, something that could be avoided if there were time to make changes in the casual chain of events unraveled by the Inspector's presence.
- ✧ The play is set in 1912, before WW1 and the Titanic. BUT it is written in 1945. It's very ironic because as a modern reader, we are aware of the facts such as the eruption of WW1 and the sinking of the Titanic.
- ✧ "The Titanic, she sails next week.....absolutely unsinkable" by using dramatic irony here, it made the speaker Mr. Birling seems foolish.
- ✧ "If it didn't end tragically, then that's lucky for us" Priestley was trying to show that all our actions have consequences and that as a result of unsuitable social system, people think it was acceptable to not worry about what they have done because even if it didn't turn out badly.
- ✧ "between us we killed her"
- ✧ Most of the story lines are memories traced back by each character, so although the whole play happens all in one night, it managed to develop dramatically.
- ✧ "I blamed the young man who was the father" the play was set during when people were getting nostalgic about pre-world war. Community was non-existence, so a pregnant girl like Eva Smith , have no other choice but to end her own life.

## Class and Society

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### **Mr Birling (pg 10)**

- 'you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else...community and all that nonsense'

### **Mr Birling (pg11)**

- his 4 lines after the Inspector arrives - *portrays how Mr. Birling was establishing his authority and perhaps to belittle the inspector in his commanding approach to first meeting him.*

### **Mr Birling (pg 16)**

- 'Perhaps I ought to warn you that he's an old friend of mine, and that I see him fairly frequently' *Reminding the Inspector of his status and authority*

### **Mrs Birling (pg 30)**

- '...Girls of that class.' *takes a very stereotypical view of the different classes and depicts them in a demeaning manner*

Mrs. Birling treats Eric and Sheila as if they are two small children even though Sheila is engaged to Gerald and so is a young woman. This is shown when Sheila refers to Eric as 'squiffy' and Mrs. Birling scolds her by saying 'What an expression, Sheila! Really the things you girls pick up these days!' This also shows the difference between the generations; Sheila is younger and so does not act in the same way that her mother thinks women should act. It also suggests that she is reluctant to let her children grow up because once they reach a certain age they would move away and she would live with just her husband, a prospect that she seems unlikely to look forward to. Although the audience is unaware of any problems she and Birling may have, we are given a hint later when she tells Sheila that 'When you're married you'll realise that men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on their business. You'll have to get used to that, just as I had.' This suggests that their relationship is not very close. Later, Eric says that he sees some of Birling's 'respectable friends' with 'fat old tarts round the town'. Birling's reaction to this is angry and he clearly does not want any further mention of that topic. From this reaction, it is possible to conclude that Birling might also go to prostitutes, as that sort of behaviour was fairly common amongst upper middle-class men at that time.

## Mrs Birling

'Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things.' - Shows that Mrs Birling is of a higher class originally, and is socially superior to her husband.

(To Sheila) 'when you're married, you'll realise that men with important work to do sometimes have to spend all their time and energy on their business. You'll have to get used to that, just as I had.' - Backing up Gerald whilst he's explaining what he was doing last summer, which of course she doesn't realise at the time that he was cheating on Sheila.

(To Inspector Goole) 'You know of course that my husband was Lord Mayor only two years ago...' - Mrs Birling tried using her social superiority to threaten the Inspector.

'Girls of that class.' - Portraying the social snobbiness of Mrs Birling

(On Eric's drinking) 'he's only a boy.'

'We've done a great deal of useful work in helping – defending her honour and the Brumley committee

'I didn't like her manner. She impertinently made use of our name.' – Her social status clouded her judgment over Eva Smith's case.

'I did nothing I'm ashamed of.' - unwilling to accept any form of responsibility

'She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl of her position.'



'I blame the young man. He ought to be dealt with very severely.' – dramatic irony used to emphasize the bizarre and quite farcical situation the Birling family find themselves in.