

AN INSPECTOR CALLS by J.B, PRIESTLEY
Are Daisy and Eva The Same Girl?

notes taken from Mr. Salles' Revision Guide for An Inspector Calls

EVAN AND THE TIMELINE

None of the characters who describe her – Birling, Sheila, Eric, Gerald and The Inspector, say anything about her physical appearance which is contradicted by the other characters. In fact, they all believe it is the same girl because she sounds the same to them in each encounter

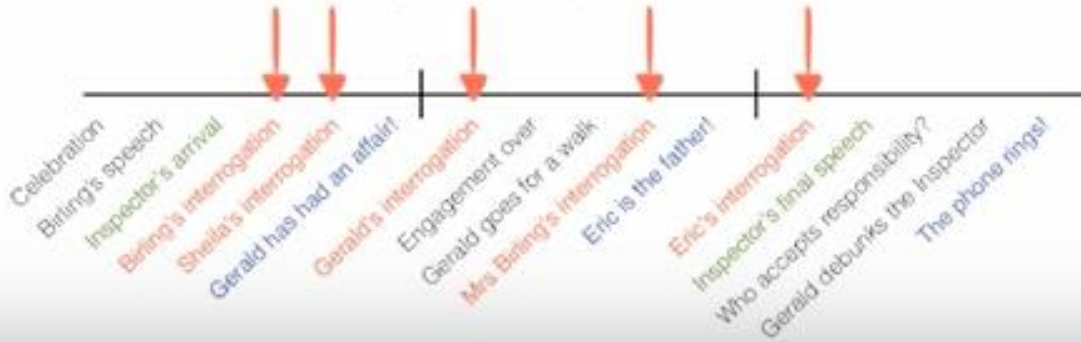
RESPONSIBILITY EXERCISE

THEME: RESPONSIBILITY		
Dramatic method	How does Priestley use this method to present the theme?	Example quotations
<i>The plot</i>	Think about: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The focus on the inquiry upon responsibility• The significance of the beginning and the ending	
<i>Characters</i>	Think about <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr. Birling's responsibilities as an employer, magistrate and father• Mrs. Birling's responsibilities as chairwoman of a charity and as a mother• The responsibilities brought by wealth and position• The inspector's responsibilities to discover the truth	
<i>Dialogue</i>	Think about <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual characters' direct comments about responsibility	
<i>Vocabulary</i>	Think about <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Figurative language related to responsibility• Repetition• irony	
<i>Related themes</i>	Think about <ul style="list-style-type: none">• how references to duty, power and influence support the theme of responsibility	

INTERROGATION STRUCTURE

Structural Features

The Inspector questions the characters in the order he chooses for maximum impact. Gerald's interrogation is 'in the middle': he neither accepts responsibility or fully denies his guilt



1. Act One – Birling, Sheila
 - **ends with a cliffhanger for suspense**
2. Act Two – Gerald, Mrs. Birling
 - **ends with a cliffhanger for suspense**
3. Act Three – Eric, Inspector leaves house
 - **ends with a cliffhanger for suspense**

CLIFFHANGERS: GENERAL

Each act ends with a cliffhanger

- each is chosen by Priestley as a blackout moment because they represent dramatic highpoints: the most suspenseful moments in the play.
 - They are designed to heighten suspense in order to keep us engaged with the question of 'who is responsible for the death of Eva Smith?'
 - We are kept eager to find out the answer to the question

CLIFFHANGERS: ACT ONE

at the end of Act One, the Inspector slips out of the room so Sheila can make Gerald confess and he walks back in just at the point where Gerald is saying to Sheila “we can keep it from him”

- in other words, he is trying to persuade Sheila to lie to the Inspector
 - he wants her to lie to him in order to abdicate his responsibility of Eva's death
 - this may be a criticism by Priestley about upper classes and goes along with the theme surrounding secrecy and lies
 - the upper classes are more willing to lie than to take responsibility for their actions
 - Sheila calls Gerald a “fool” because “of course he knows”
 - She is already preparing herself mentally to accept the truth and therefore responsibility

CLIFFHANGERS: ACT TWO

Act Two begins with the same line Act One ended in

- as though time has frozen while the curtain has been closed
 - both times the Inspector asks “well?”
 - A similar scenario happens again at the end of Act Two
 - here, the family has just realized that Eric is the father of the dead girl’s child and the curtains have closed, freezing time, just as Eric has walked back into the house, ready to confess.

CLIFFHANGERS: ACT THREE

The final cliffhanger occurs right at the end of the play, long after the Inspector has left

- With the Inspector gone and the security of their home restored, the older Birlings and Gerald spend the last portion of the play rebuilding the safe world they live in
 - They want to return to the ‘pink’ rosey-tinted world that the Inspector took them away from; back to a world of irresponsibility
 - This is gives the play a circular structure
 - They try to dismiss everything the Inspector has said to them
 - this is important because we remember that each one of them admitted to playing some sort of role in the downfall of the girl and yet when they think they have got away with everything; they return to the same sort of mentality as they had in the beginning;
 - that of abdicating responsibility
 - but then the phone rings with the revelation that there is a girl in the morgue and that by inquiring about something so obscure such as “a girl... who committed suicide by drinking disinfectant”, Gerald has incriminated himself and the rest of the Birlings.
 - This is a huge cliffhanger which forces the Birlings and the audience to question everything they have seen throughout the evening.
 - It also means that they family are going to have to go through the entire interrogation all over again.

THE PURPOSE OF THE ACT THREE CLIFFHANGER

the Inspector’s goal is to force each member of the family to accept responsibility in some measure, for the death of Eva Smith

- by the end of the play, we could argue that only the younger Birlings have done so
 - Sheila and Eric are devastated
 - They both appear ready to accept responsibility
 - while their parents do not really care
 - they have not learnt to accept responsibility and change

- and Gerald sits somewhere in the middle;
 - he appears to feel some remorse for what he has done and perhaps is slightly close to accepting responsibility, before ultimately deciding the whole affair is not worth worrying about after all:
 - not even the bit where he betrayed Sheila's trust by having a relationship with a homeless girl.
 - He says "everything's all right now Sheila. What about this ring?"
 - Clearly, he has not learnt anything more powerful than his own sense of denial and uses his skill of manipulation to try and win Sheila back.

TIME AND RESPONSIBILITY

by going through the interrogation again, it is suggested that the Birling family will have another opportunity to confront their own guilt and make a different choice

- In a sense, time will repeat itself
 - They will have another opportunity to take responsibility
 - The repetition of time could also link to Oesperky's theory of time (Priestley was known to have studied this), which suggests that time repeats itself until we learn from our mistakes.

TIME AND RESPONSIBILITY

Consequently, we have moments frozen in time at the end of each act and time repeating itself at the end of the play

- When we factor in the way the Inspector says "my trouble is – that I haven't much time" and that Priestley studied both Oesperky's and Dunne's theories on time, it becomes apparent that he is trying to make some sort of statement on the subject of time
 - These are some of the main reasons why 'An Inspector Calls' has been labelled a 'time-play'
 - time does some strange things in the play and by playing with it, and leaving so many of the play's questions unanswered, Priestley forces the audience to ask themselves questions about what they have just seen
 - These unanswered questions reveal the play's ambiguous nature.

PRIESTLEY'S MESSAGE

In the climactic speech of the play, the Inspector warns the Birlings that 'We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other', he is echoing Priestley's wartime message,

- and his hopes for the postwar world
 - But he also speaks for the whole English radical and socialist tradition of which Priestley was a part, and its rejection of Birling's laissez-faire individualism
 - It was this tradition that seemed to make the political running during wartime, when collectivism was not just an ideal but a necessity, and which came to power in the 1945 election, when Labour won a landslide victory and formed its first majority government
 - That government went on to found the National Health Service, nationalise key industries, and institute the managed economy based on full employment

- all of which remained in place for the next three decades, until Margaret Thatcher tried to roll them back in the 1980s
 - Not surprisingly, when the play was revived at Britain's National Theatre in 1992, the production was hailed as an explicit critique of the prevailing Thatcherite – or should we say Birlingite – values.

TIME SETTING

if *An Inspector Calls* is 'really' about 1945, why is it set in 1912?

- The Edwardian years had a particular fascination for Priestley
 - They were the years of his Bradford youth
 - a lost arcadia when he was working in a wool merchants' office and trying to become a writer
 - before enlisting in 1914, aged 20, at the start of the Great War, after which nothing was ever the same again
 - For Priestley, these were years of missed opportunity: there was a fork in history's path, and the wrong direction was taken
 - In the ferment of Edwardian ideas – reflected in Birling's contemptuous dismissal of the 'cranks', Bernard Shaw and H G Wells – a more democratic England had seemed to be in the offing
 - but the hope was lost in the mud and blood of Flanders and the monstrous betrayal of the survivors after the war ended
 - These were years which Priestley revisited repeatedly in his novels and plays, as well as in his remarkable memoir *Margin Released* (1962)

Perhaps, ever preoccupied with time, as we know from plays like *Dangerous Corner* and *I Have Been Here Before*, he wanted to rewind history to the point where things could have turned out differently

- Arthur Birling is a man of that time
 - He believes in progress, which has put him where he is; he believes in the technological future: aeroplanes, motor-cars, even (a little obviously, perhaps) the Titanic, that great enduring metaphor which is just about to make its first and last voyage; and he believes that progress has made war impossible
 - So that when the Inspector, shamelessly invoking the hindsight of the audience, threatens 'fire, blood and anguish' if people in 1912 will not learn the lesson that we are responsible for each other, we know something the Birlings don't, and we may well wonder what history has in store for the two young men in the cast
 - This is dramatic irony on a historic scale: unlike the Birlings, 1945 audiences are being told, you've had two doses of 'fire, blood and anguish': have you learned the lesson yet?
 - And this, remember, was written before Hiroshima.

PRIESTLEY THE VISIONARY

An Inspector Calls is the work of Priestley the socialist

- but even more so of Priestley the visionary
 - Priestley's socialism was never of what he called the 'agenda-programme' kind:
 - he came to think that Labour had lost its way after 1945 in the minutiae of legislation and reform and committee-work, and failed to keep alive the shared vision and creative gusto of wartime

- The play is not about social reform, better health care or full employment, important though these things are
 - but about a vision of how life could be different if we acknowledge the truth that we are all members of one another

Later in 1945, Priestley recalled for his radio audience the summer of 1940, when ‘we had a glimpse of what life might be if men and women freely dedicated themselves, not to their appetites and prejudices, but to some great communal task’

- and amidst the brute threat of war there appeared on the horizon ‘the faint radiance of some far-off promised land’
 - Everyone must find their own interpretation of the play’s enigmatic ending, but Priestley may be telling us that second chances do come, even out of the most unpromising circumstances; and if the vision was lost in 1914, and even in 1945, all may not be lost forever
 - Let us hope he is right.