



AN INSPECTOR CALLS: SHEILA: MODEL ANSWER

Adapted from Nabiha's Answer

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AN INSPECTOR CALLS: SHEILA: QUESTION

Explore How Priestley presents Sheila in the play.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]





AN INSPECTOR CALLS: SHEILA: 100% MODEL ANSWER OUTLINE

ESSAY OUTLINE

Introduction

Hook (quote, question, metaphor, shocking fact/statistic)	"The point is, you don't seem to have learnt anything" - Sheila. One particular theme which Priestley revisited in plays such as Dangerous Corner, I have Been Here Before (1937) and Time and the Calways (1937) that was to feature in An Inspector Calls was that of the effects of an individual's actions over time.
Building sentences (some background/contextual info)	The audience and, to a certain extent, the characters in these plays are shown possible projections of their actions which contrast poignantly with their present conditions. A second major theme which occurs is that of responsibility, both individual and collective, for those actions and the consequences.
Thesis statement (your position on the argument you are presenting)	When we get to the end of the play, the audience will have to decide if Sheila has crossed the threshold into womanhood, or whether she is still a "girl", who will still follow her father's wishes, and marry Gerald, partly for his status.

Body paragraph 1

Topic sentence (introduce what this paragraph is about)	One way we can view Sheila is that Priestley constructs her as a foil for Eva to highlight the precarious role status plays in the quality of a person's life, especially with regards to women.
Supporting sentences (your your analytical and contextual evidence)	For example, near the beginning of the first act, when Mr. Birling is talking about Sheila's engagement to Gerald, he makes the remark that 'Sheila's a lucky girl'. As with so much of what Mr. Birling says, there is a sense of irony about this statement because when we think more closely about Eva's description, we realise that Sheila is not just lucky to be marrying Gerald, but she is extremely fortunate to have been born into her circumstances because if she hadn't, she might well have been in the same situation Eva was in. Priestley also highlights the similarities between Sheila





	and Eva through the Inspector when he describes Eva, in almost exactly the same way as Sheila is in the stage directions: 'Yes. Twenty-four ... She wasn't pretty when I saw her today, but she was pretty – very pretty.' Here, Priestley appears to be drawing attention to the ironic difference in quality of life between two people, who appear to be similar in so many ways, yet live contrasting lives simply because of the class of family they are born into. Priestley also points to the irony in their contrasting situations explicitly through Sheila words who 'can't help thinking about this girl – destroying herself so horribly – and I've been so happy tonight'. The wider point Priestley is making here is about the inequality inherent in a capitalist society like the one the Birlings and Gerald are working towards.
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Concluding sentence(s) (final thoughts this paragraph)	He seems to be suggesting that a woman's position in this type of society is possibly the most fragile of all because if she lacks the power of status, then she may have to live through a plethora of degrading and life-destroying experiences such as Eva did at the hands of the entire Birling family.
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Body paragraph 2

Topic sentence (introduce what this paragraph is about)	However, Priestley's focus on the effects of the capitalism on women's lives not only has a dramatic function, but it also has a very specific political function.
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Supporting sentences (your your analytical and contextual evidence)	In the Equal Franchise Act 1928, about 15 years before Priestley wrote the play, all women over 21 (not just those over 30 with property) had received full equal rights to vote, thus nearly doubling the number of eligible women to 15 million over the previous legislation of 1918; Priestley saw an opportunity to create an entirely new political system, which he believed was crucial to preventing future wars. Therefore, we could infer that Priestley needed to affect women most, because they had the most to lose if the country rejected socialism in the 1945 election and it is quite possible that around half of his audience would have been made up women. Consequently, he makes sure The Inspector is an ally to Edna, Eva and to Sheila. Sheila reacts straight away with seemingly genuine concern to hearing about Eva's suicide: 'Oh – how horrible!' Recognising this, The Inspector begins to use Sheila's emotions to turn her into an ally of his and we see this beginning to work when she says, 'But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people', thus directly reflecting Priestley's socialist message. This allied partnership between The Inspector and Sheila can be seen as a symbolic reflection of Priestley trying to persuade the women of all classes to see the failures of capitalism and vote in the socialist Labour Party as the solution; Sheila then begins taking on heroic and rebellious qualities that oppose her parents' ignorance, culminating with these words: 'but the point is you don't seem to have learnt anything'. However, whether she truly changes is ambiguous because although the audience will generally see her as the heroine of the play and as hope for change, when we look at her final words after Gerald offers her the ring back, she creates doubt with the following reply: "no, not yet. It's too soon. I must think."
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<p>Concluding sentence(s)</p> <p>(final thoughts this paragraph)</p>	<p>Sheila uses the phrase ‘not yet’ meaning that she may actually be considering getting back with Gerald despite him not willing to change, raising a number of questions such as: What does she mean by “it’s too soon”? What “must” she “think” about? And, what does this say about her character?</p>
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Body paragraph 3 (OPTIONAL)

<p>Topic sentence</p> <p>(introduce what this paragraph is about)</p>	
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<p>Supporting sentences</p> <p>(your your analytical and contextual evidence)</p>	
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<p>Concluding sentence(s)</p> <p>(final thoughts this paragraph)</p>	
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Conclusion

<p>Restated thesis</p> <p>(your position of the argument you are presenting)</p>	<p>In conclusion, although Sheila's attitude changes significantly throughout the play, Priestley does not make it clear if she really has crossed the threshold into womanhood, or whether she is still a “girl”, who will still follow her father’s wishes, and marry Gerald for his status.</p>
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<p>Summary of controlling concept</p> <p>(central theme)</p>	<p>In fact, it could be said that the play’s second death carries with it Priestley’s political point that the lessons of World War 1, represented by the death of Eva, were, in reality, not learnt, so the Birlings now face, in the final word of the play, “questions”. Priestley’s question in 1945 is about how the ruling classes allowed World War 2 to occur, so that millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths lost their lives again. Eric and Sheila, therefore, represent the younger generation who grew up in the interwar years and failed to live up to their responsibility. To emphasise this point, 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. In fact, it can be argued that Priestley more directly</p>
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	answers the question Dickens posed about responsibility a hundred years before. We need only substitute Eva Smith for Jo, the sweeper in Bleak House, and he goes further than posing it;
Author's purpose (why the author wrote the text)	he warns us, realistically, the disaster that continued irresponsibility will bring. Priestley's play, therefore, reflected the mood of the country, who, in 1945, ousted Winston Churchill and his Conservative government, that had taken them to war and replaced them with the socialist Labour government; therefore, it is not Sheila and Eric, but their children who have learnt the Inspector's lesson.
Final thought (What key idea(s) do we learn?)	However, through all the tragedy and disaster of the two world wars, Priestley may be telling us that second chances do come, even out of the most unpromising circumstances; and if all hope was lost in 1914, and even in 1945, all may not be lost forever if we can just learn the lesson.

MAKE SURE YOUR ESSAY CONTAINS ALL OF THESE QUALITIES

Tick these off when you have added them to your essay

- Methods - author's techniques
- ~~Context~~
- ~~Effects of the author's methods on the audience/reader~~
- Link to another part of the text - talk about the meaning of the connection
- Symbolism
- Themes
- Author's purpose

MCELSTA





AN INSPECTOR CALLS: SHEILA: 100% MODEL ANSWER

Explore How Priestley presents Sheila in the play.

“The point is, you don’t seem to have learnt anything” - Sheila. One particular theme which Priestley revisited in plays such as *Dangerous Corner*, *I have Been Here Before* (1937) and *Time and the Calways* (1937) that was to feature in *An Inspector Calls* was that of the effects of an individual’s actions over time. The audience and, to a certain extent, the characters in these plays are shown possible projections of their actions which contrast poignantly with their present conditions. A second major theme which occurs is that of responsibility, both individual and collective, for those actions and the consequences. When we get to the end of the play, the audience will have to decide if Sheila has crossed the threshold into womanhood, or whether she is still a “girl”, who will still follow her father’s wishes, and marry Gerald, partly for his status.

One way we can view Sheila is that Priestley constructs her as a foil for Eva to highlight the precarious role status plays in the quality of a person’s life, especially with regards to women. For example, near the beginning of the first act, when Mr. Birling is talking about Sheila’s engagement to Gerald, he makes the remark that ‘Sheila’s a lucky girl’. As with so much of what Mr. Birling says, there is a sense of irony about this statement because when we think more closely about Eva’s description, we realise that Sheila is not just lucky to be marrying Gerald, but she is extremely fortunate to have been born into her circumstances because if she hadn’t, she might well have been in the same situation Eva was in. Priestley also highlights the similarities between Sheila and Eva through the Inspector when he describes Eva, in almost exactly the same way as Sheila is in the stage directions: ‘Yes. Twenty-four ... She wasn't pretty when I saw her today, but she was pretty – very pretty.’ Here, Priestley appears to be drawing attention to the ironic difference in quality of life between two people, who appear to be similar in so many ways, yet live contrasting lives simply because of the class of family they are born into. Priestley also points to the irony in their contrasting situations explicitly through Sheila words who ‘can’t help thinking about this girl – destroying herself so horribly – and I’ve been so happy tonight’. The wider point Priestley is making here is about the inequality inherent in a capitalist society like the one the Birlings and Gerald are working towards. He seems to be suggesting that a woman’s position in this type of society is possibly the most fragile of all because if she lacks the power of status, then she may have to live through a plethora of degrading and life-destroying experiences such as Eva did at the hands of the entire Birling family.

However, Priestley’s focus on the effects of the capitalism on women’s lives not only has a dramatic function, but it also has a very specific political function. In the Equal Franchise Act 1928, about 15 years before Priestley wrote the play, all women over 21 (not just those over 30 with property) had received full equal rights to vote, thus nearly doubling the number of eligible women to 15 million over the previous legislation of 1918; Priestley saw an opportunity to create an entirely new political system, which he believed was crucial to preventing future wars. Therefore, we could infer that Priestley needed to affect women most, because they had the most to lose if the country rejected socialism in the 1945 election and it is quite possible that around half of his audience would have been made up women. Consequently, he makes sure *The Inspector* is an ally to Edna, Eva and to Sheila. Sheila reacts straight away with seemingly genuine concern to hearing about Eva’s suicide: ‘Oh – how horrible!’ Recognising this, *The Inspector* begins to use Sheila’s emotions to turn her into an ally of his and we see this beginning to work when she says, ‘But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people’, thus directly reflecting Priestley’s socialist message. This allied partnership between *The Inspector* and Sheila can be seen as a symbolic reflection of Priestley trying to persuade the women of all classes to see the failures of capitalism and vote in the socialist Labour Party as the solution; Sheila then begins taking on heroic and rebellious qualities that oppose her parents’ ignorance, culminating with these words: ‘but the point is you don't seem to have learnt anything’. However, whether she truly changes is ambiguous because although the audience will generally see her as the heroine of the play and as hope for change, when we look at her final words after Gerald offers her the ring back, she creates doubt with the following reply: “no, not yet. It’s too soon. I must think.” Sheila uses the phrase ‘not yet’ meaning that she may actually be considering getting back with Gerald despite him not willing to change, raising a number of





questions such as: What does she mean by “it’s too soon”? What “must” she “think” about? And, what does this say about her character?

In conclusion, although Sheila's attitude changes significantly throughout the play, Priestley does not make it clear if she really has crossed the threshold into womanhood, or whether she is still a “girl”, who will still follow her father’s wishes, and marry Gerald for his status. In fact, it could be said that the play’s second death carries with it Priestley’s political point that the lessons of World War 1, represented by the death of Eva, were, in reality, not learnt, so the Birlings now face, in the final word of the play, “questions”. Priestley’s question in 1945 is about how the ruling classes allowed World War 2 to occur, so that millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths lost their lives again. Eric and Sheila, therefore, represent the younger generation who grew up in the interwar years and failed to live up to their responsibility. To emphasise this point, 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. In fact, it can be argued that Priestley more directly answers the question Dickens posed about responsibility a hundred years before. We need only substitute Eva Smith for Jo, the sweeper in Bleak House, and he goes further than posing it; he warns us, realistically, the disaster that continued irresponsibility will bring. Priestley’s play, therefore, reflected the mood of the country, who, in 1945, ousted Winston Churchill and his Conservative government, that had taken them to war and replaced them with the socialist Labour government; therefore, it is not Sheila and Eric, but their children who have learnt the Inspector’s lesson. However, through all the tragedy and disaster of the two world wars, Priestley may be telling us that second chances do come, even out of the most unpromising circumstances; and if all hope was lost in 1914, and even in 1945, all may not be lost forever if we can just learn the lesson.

