

What is priestly's
main aim in an
inspector calls essay
sample



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J. B. Priestly was a writer born 13th September 1894 and died in 1984 aged 89. Throughout his life he wrote an abundance of novels and plays, which were admired by many. From a young age, Priestley wanted to write. He left school at 16 instead of going on to university, he thought that out of the confines of the classroom would come his inspiration to write. His father mixed with socialist friends and from an early start he was exposed to many political conversations. These usually turned into heated arguments, in which he joined and expressed his opinion.

In his autobiography he said; 'I was politically-minded to some extent but never able to put politics first'. By this Priestly probably meant that even though he had a love for politics he wasn't as passionate about it as writing. At the beginning of his career, his works did not seem to reflect politics, but after a few years politics crept back in, such as in *An Inspector Calls*. At a first quick glance the story of the play looks like a typical murder mystery of coincidence and deception; An affluent industrialist, Arthur Birling, lives at home with his wife and their two grown children Sheila and Eric.

Sheila is engaged to Gerald Croft, son of Lady Croft. The opening scene begins with a family celebration to congratulate Sheila and Gerald's engagement. An inspector arrives telling them that a girl has just died in the infirmary from suicide. He then goes on with his enquiry and manages to get a confession out of all of them into how they were all involved in the girl's death - her suicide. The inspector leaves and they are left shocked. Soon they question the inspector and ring the infirmary to see if it is true about the girl dying. The infirmary says that no girl has been brought in.

The family is relieved. The phone rings again. A girl has just been found. She had committed suicide. The story line alone keeps the audience captivated, but Priestley was much cleverer than that. He encompassed his personal views on the society of the time and by doing so, he drew attention to its own selfish and narrow – minded ways. Ironically, Birling says: ' I say there isn't a chance of war... ' and ' the Titanic ... every luxury and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable. ' Priestley believed that all human beings should be responsible for one another.

The Birlings and the Crofts had a responsibility to their work force, which they did not recognise: ' They wanted the rates raised so that they could average about 25 shillings a week. I refuse of course. ' They were so relieved to learn that no girl had committed suicide. Only Sheila and Eric remained shocked and expressed amazement at the callous behaviour of their family: ' You began to learn something and now you've stopped. You're ready to go on in the same old way. ' We are left in no doubt when, in the final scene, the phone call revealed that a girl has committed suicide that Priestley wants the audience to change its attitude.

He wanted everyone to become one big community and not be in strict divisions of class. He wanted everyone to look after each other ' Just because she had a bit more spirit than the others. You said yourself she was a good worker. I'd have let her stay. ' Said Eric in defence of Eva. Each individual in the play was a caricature of the people of the day he wanted to expose and possibly try to change. The play was set in 1912 but written in 1944 and performed in October 1945. If this was to be a simple detective story why was it not set in the present time?

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The answer to that was easy. Priestley had lived and fought in the two of the world's bloodiest wars. He had therefore witnessed the changes in people's attitudes before and after. Before the war, society was very divided.

Everyone was expected to have his or her own place. There was a working class (the Eva Smith or Daisy Rentons) the middle class (the Birlings) and the upper class (the Crofts). Before the war, Priestley's audience would have been much more restricted to what it was after the war. This was because before, only the upper and middle class went to the theatre.

The war brought people more closely together and they were forced into letting the class barriers fall. They all had to fight together. No one was better than anyone else. They all had their rations and, in theory, there were no extras for the rich or poor. Now that the war was over, people mixed more freely between the classes and in the theatre, there was a much wider audience, including the young. It was now much easier for him to convey his views.

As I have already written, the characters were representations of the people. Priestley made it quite clear that Birling was only interested in himself: 'A man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own' Even after Birling finds out about the girl, he is only preoccupied with himself: 'Yes, yes horrid business, but what does it have to do with me' Birling was a self-made man, not born into wealth so the marriage between Gerald Croft and Sheila was quite an occasion, uniting the classes.

However, Birling knew Lady Croft, Gerald's mother, disagreed: 'You may have done better for yourself socially...' Birling was at the ready to make

himself look better by telling Gerald about his possible knighthood: I was Lord Mayor two years ago when Royalty visited us... I gather there is a very good chance of a knighthood. ' He then joked about how he must not allow himself to get into a police scandal, to which Gerald replied: ' You seem like a nice, well-behaved family. ' It seems as if the Birlings thought themselves untouchable by the police, or they thought how could they do anything wrong.

They seemed to think that their actions did not have consequences or repercussions. He was totally adamant that he had nothing to do with the girl's death and accepted no responsibility whatsoever: I was quite justified' Although the majority of the audience may have been older people set in their ways, Priestley's target audience was the young, like Eric and Sheila: ' The young are more impressionable' The inspector uttered. Priestley believed that the young people were not so set in their ways and were more open-minded. He used this technique to make a bigger impression on the audience.

Unlike Mr. and Mrs. Birling and even Gerald, Eric and Sheila showed remorse for what they had done and felt sorry for the working class. Even at the beginning, Eric sticks up for Eva when his father scorned her: She still had rights' Eric said to his father. Sheila could not believe what she and her family did and when she found out it was a hoax she would not let it go and was shocked at how her family dismissed it. She knew that their actions and attitude would not solve anything: ' You're pretending everything's just as it was before' she said passionately. In conclusion, I think Priestley was

successful in conveying the injustices of the class system at this point in time. The audience is made aware of his strong beliefs in equality.

The responsibility we have for one another and how closely we are connected is a central theme. These are the two main issues in the play. The audience is left wondering just who the inspector was - if he was real or just a figment of their imagination. I believe that the inspector was a manifestation of their consciences and prompted them to admit the truth and realise the error of their ways. Although Priestley knew that he could not alter everyone's perceptions of society, he had faith in the youth who would react more kindly to his philosophy and hoped in the future for a more caring and united country.