

What purpose does
the inspector serve in
an inspector calls
essay sample



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When J. B. Priestley sat down to write "An Inspector Calls," he deliberately decided to set the novel in the year 1912. This was the same historic year that the "Unsinkable" Titanic sank, the class system in Britain was at its height, and was two years before the beginning of the First World War. A middle class family; who have worked their way up the social ladder, sit down to dinner to celebrate their daughter's engagement to wealthy business man, Gerald Croft. However simultaneously a police inspector arrives by the name of Goole, he is investigating the suicide of a young working class girl Eva Smith.

It soon comes to light that each family member knew the poor girl and became intertwined with her life, bringing about her downfall. Our first views of the Inspector's appearance are "he creates a sense of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness ... he is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period." For the Inspector to dress in "a plain darkish suit of the period," it ensures that his character gives away no personality traits or questions where he comes from. His surname also strikes questioning - "Goole."

The unusual name seems quite similar to the words "Ghoul," or "Ghost." This "play on words" suggests suspicion and questions what is really known about him. He could be from any era because nothing is known about him. When the Inspector enters the area where Arthur Birling was previously addressing his son Eric, and Gerald Croft. He comes inside with an assertive manner, immediately silencing all present and forces the celebrative mood out. His extreme presence dominates the room intentionally, showing he is brimming with confidence. Arthur Birling's characteristics show that he is a

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clear know-all, who has never been challenged about his knowledge because of his high role in society.

Therefore, he knows his family inside out, how they behave, how much the individual respects him, and whom they should be hard-pressed to marry. Gerald Croft is a wealthy upper class business man who has very fortunately fallen into love with Birling's daughter, Sheila, This arrangement also helps Birling's and Gerald's businesses expand. With Birling's experience in life, he is able to share his knowledge with Eric and Gerald. He tells them " a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own," which he believes is a wise way to live a prosperous life.

So when the Inspector arrives and upstages Birling, embarrassing him in front of his family, Birling is obliged to pleasantly greet the Inspector " what can I do for you? " this politeness is in no doubt short lived. The powerful Inspector is unrecognisable to Birling, as he knows all of the officers on the Brumley force, from previously being mayor. But no real hesitations are shown, so to cover himself the Inspector tells Birling that he has only just been recently transferred to Brumley so is not surprised that Birling doesn't recognise him.

Being an Inspector, he wastes no time in questioning Birling about a previous workhouse girl. The Inspector asks Birling to recite his account of Eva Smith, and so Birling tells the Inspector, Eric and Gerald of how he simply fired several workers who had been protesting about their wages. " After they came back from their holidays August, they were all rather restless, and they suddenly decided to ask for more money.

They were averaging about twenty-two and six ... they wanted to rates raised so they could average around twenty five shillings a week. Birling continues to talk about how he refused their protest, allowing them to go on strike because he knew they would have to come back as they would have had no money left from the holidays. Birling tells the Inspector that he personally fired several ringleaders, including Eva Smith because they all had too much to say and with society the way it was, this would have been seen as rebellion. Whilst Birling is expressing his little concern for what happened to the fired workhouse girls, the Inspector sits quietly absorbing the conversation, adding little remarks and sly gazes in Birlings direction.

The stage directions show this " the Inspector is watching Birling and now Birling notices him. " Birling is under close scrutiny from the Inspector and is discontent with the fact that the Inspector is able to do this without even having to open his mouth, showing weakness on Birling's behalf. Birling acknowledges the Inspectors presence and is polite to him until he tries to implicate Birling's daughter Sheila. "(Angrily) look here, Inspector, I consider this uncalled for and officious, I have half a mind to report you. " Sheila is a simple minded, well mannered individual who rarely gets into trouble.

Her manners disintegrate as soon as her story is unveiled; she unrespectfully questions her own family's actions like an Inspector would. As Sheila tells the Inspector about one of her many shopping trips to Milwards, she " almost breaks down" and cries. She went to Milwards to try on a dress which her mother and the shop assistant - Francis had been against, but Sheila had insisted. " As soon as I tried it on I knew they had been right. It just didn't suit me at all ... This girl... had held up the dress, as if she was wearing it.

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And it suited her. This small incident made Sheila angry and then whilst looking in the mirror she caught glimpse of how Eva Smith smiling at Francis the assistant, and became instantly jealous as she thought it suited Eva Smith more. From one smile to a life of misery, Eva Smith was instantaneously fired, just as Sheila had demanded. Throughout the rest of the play, Sheila feels she is partly to blame, but the way she deals with it, you would think Sheila had killed Eva by herself. The Inspector treats Sheila like a gullible child. As soon as he speaks, Sheila believes he is going to tell her off and no one else.

Furthermore, he has been able to get inside her head and plant a seed which is growing; as it gets bigger she chooses to believe more and more. Like a puppeteer is in perfect harmony with his puppet, the Inspector is able to pull a string and without hesitation Sheila reacts the way he wants her to. He pulls another string and reminds her of hat she did, and causes Sheila's second breakdown of the evening. Sheila comes to terms with her involvement and is sorry as she was not in a pleasant mood.

She now sees that it is fit for her family to see the light as she has done. I have behaved badly too. I know I did. I'm ashamed of it. But now you're ... pretending that nothing much has happened... The point is you don't seem to have learnt anything. " Sheila says this mostly towards her mother, Mrs Birling. Sheila shows the readers and her family that she wants to repent for what she did, but finds it impossible to understand why her family cannot do the same. Sybil Birling is a headstrong character, who likes to think she is always right and that her judgement is final. She is like a female Arthur Birling.

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She runs a charity organisation for women in need; the Inspector targets this for the improper use which Mrs Birling gave her position as chair to dismiss Eva Smith's case on the grounds that she was rude to Mrs Birling and the Committee members. " You're a member of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation, aren't you? ... Mrs Birling spoke to and saw her only two weeks ago. " The Inspector builds up to this line of questioning by distracting Mrs Birling and then casually ask if she is part of a charity organisation. The stage directions show that the " door slams again ...

Mrs Birling; you're a member - a prominent member - of the Brumley Women's Charity organisation. " Mrs Birling tells us how she assumed that Eva Smith must have been trouble, because Eva " impertinently" used her name. She used her position to convince the other committee members to refuse her all possible help as well, because Eva shouldn't have come to her with a " bad case". The committee became less and less interested in what Eva had to say so Mrs Birling took it upon herself to decide on behalf of the committee that all which Eva had said was lies, so it was just as easy to blame everything on the unknown father (Eric).

Mrs Birling decides that it has nothing to do with the committee and without realising, starts to implicate Eric. " It was her business to make him responsible. If he refused to marry her - and in my opinion he ought to be compelled to - then he must at least support her. " Mrs Birling is demanding that Eric marry Eva even though Mrs Birling doesn't care or want to be associated with Eva Smith. Mrs Birling has made it crystal clear that she doesn't want to be associated with Eva Smith, and yet she is still connected because Eric is the father.

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The Inspector controls Mrs Birling, by placing words in her mouth and suggesting things which he knows will connect her to Eric. " So he's the chief culprit anyhow" the Inspector interrupts Mrs Birling, so that he can get his point in, and Mrs Birling sternly replies " Certainly. " During this scene, Priestley uses the technique of dramatic irony, allowing the audience to work out that Eric drinks, and is the father before the characters do so. The Inspector knows the story of each family member in detail, and so adds questions and phrases to get more of the story out; even though he still denies it " I don't know yet.

That's something I have to find out. " As a result when Mrs Birling comments on Eva Smith " a girl in her position," the Inspector directly replies " her position is that she now lies with a burnt - out inside on a slab. " Reminding Mrs Birling of what she has helped to do, but Mrs Birling doesn't worry like Sheila so this doesn't affect her controlling character. The Inspector's final speech has a hidden moral inside of it. He talks to the main culprits - the Birling family, like a real Inspector would and then decides to remind them again, and again, and again.

This repetition shows that he seems to be focused on that point and quite emotionally attached to the girl Eva Smith. Priestley uses two main techniques in the Inspector's last speech, repetition and metaphors. In the third and final part of the Inspector's speech, he talks about " millions and millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives. "

Here, Priestley is trying to communicate with the reader and tell us the moral of his play, which is that our actions affect everyone; millions (and millions ... of people are affected by one action which can mean the beginning or end. Nonetheless, for an Inspector to say this, it is understandable but yet doesn't feel right to read an Inspector saying that phrase, as it is emotional and an Inspector should not be emotionally attached at all. Priestley subsequently decided to use a powerful extended metaphor to end the Inspector's speech and for him to speak about the lesson which humanity should learn, " they will be taught it in fire and blood and in anguish.

Implying that what we do in this life will be paid for in the next, furthermore if you treat people in the same way as the Birlings have done, you will then pay your price in war, chaos and hell, suffering the same amount you made those suffer before you. The moral is simple in words but deep in meaning what you do really does affect others, and if you don't realise this and right your wrongs, you will pay, eventually. For such a deep meaning like this to have been written, it must have been written for a great person. I therefore think that the person behind the moral is God.

He is conducting his message through the writings of Priestley, who is preaching the message through the play. Around the year 1912, the class system was at its height. Everyone was divided by wealth and inheritance. There was an exceptionally wealthy upper class which contained those people who had inherited their wealth, a middle class which would have contained people similar to the Birlings who had worked to become noticed, and finally a deprived lower class who would work all their lives. Priestley

reminds people through his writings that even though the class system isn't in existence, we still divide ourselves to improve our wealth.

This system should have ended long before Priestley had begun writing, 1945 - 2006, and it still hasn't changed. Priestley is trying to fix the problem, but words are not as strong as actions. His writing helped society to understand the issue, warning everyone to see how our actions supposedly good harm others. Inspector Goole is a tool created by Priestley, like a narrator who appears in children's programs, he will tell the audience the main story, but then add little comments to embellish the point.

The Inspector is used to bridge the gap between the play and real life; he is the character which carries the message Priestley has been taught over time. The Inspector adds dramatic tension to the play by startling the Birlings, as he knows their stories better than they do. This extra knowledge frustrates the Birlings. " He had a suspicious manner. " To them, it seems that the Inspector is accusing people when he is really telling the truth. Who or what the Inspector really is, no one will know only Priestley, no matter how much research is done among the ages you cannot research someone's inner thoughts.

Therefore, my assumption is Inspector Goole is an apparition or conscience of the Birlings, who reminds them of their secrets, and warns them of the dark future that they could be in for. The audience and the Birlings realise that inspector Goole was definitely not an Inspector, when Gerald returns and tells the family that he spoke to local sergeant on the way and described the Inspector to him, only to find that the officer had no recognition of

Inspector Goole at all. " That man wasn't a police officer. " The Inspector's extreme knowledge, unrecognisable face, sarcastic and strange comments, all makes his character seem peculiar.

His manner towards the Birlings is presented as forceful and strong, instructing rather than asking. " Look here, I'm not going to have this, Inspector. Apologize at once. " Nonetheless, others will possibly believe that the Inspector was a real Inspector, a member of Eva Smith's family, or didn't exist and the whole novel was a dream which all of the Birlings and Gerald had simultaneously. In 1945, the War was ending and people were moving forward and trying to forget the last thirty-one years (including the First World War).

The class system had disappeared as many people of all classes had to fight in the two wars, women took over the men's roles, and they would have supported each other and become friends thus abolishing the class system by simply interacting. The play being set in 1912, two years before the start of the First World War, meant that people who were so optimistic and patriotic towards Britain, like Mr Birling, enjoyed the fact that Britain had the class system. This would have meant that it showed other countries that Britain contained superior people.

It would have been known around the world that Britain had the glorious unsinkable Titanic which would sail to America. On that boat there were divisions between classes so much so that the lifeboats were only filled with 1st and 2nd class passengers. Priestley shows the divisions between classes by each character's personality - Mr & Mrs Birling talk down and forcefully

towards their workers, “ a girl in her situation”. Whereas Eric and Sheila are a little more impenetrable “ I don’t see much nonsense about it when a girl goes and kills herself”.

Eric calls Eva Smith a girl, indicating nothing to do with the class system showing that it isn’t always on his mind like it seems to be on Mr & Mrs Birling’s. In conclusion, I do agree with Priestley’s message because it is a strong message which has been around for thousands of years but the world doesn’t seem to really have understood it yet. In our modern day world there are wars in Iraq, poverty and homelessness on every doorstep and yet so many million and billionaires around the world; invisible divisions. As one world we should tackle those problems by abolishing these invisible divisions which effect everyone’s growth.