

The character of eric birling in the inspector calls by j.b. priestley



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Eric is a character in the book "The Inspector calls" which is presented by J. B. Priestley. Eric is Mr. Birling's son and brother to Sheila. He is portrayed to be "half shy", which suggests that he has a lack of confidence because he feels that doesn't fit in with the family because he the youngest, therefore, he is the least important. His serious drinking habits were known by everyone. Except his mother thinks he is innocent and treats him as an ungrown child, this is because he is immature and young in comparison to the rest of the family who is older and mature, this isolates him to feel out of place. He is also been described to be "half assertive" which depicts that he can voice his opinions when he feels passionate about a topic. His spoilt life has made him immature because he has been wrapped in cotton wool away from the harsh society. Eric also has the characteristic of being confused about his future, Nervous about mistreating the poor and uncomfortable by the notion of capitalism.

At the beginning of the play, Eric is very uncertain about himself, he was anxious about his future, he tried to speak for himself, but he was usually oppressed by his father and unable to do what he wanted to do. Thereafter his behavior is awkwardness. From 'I don't know - really. Suddenly I felt I just had to laugh.' This sentence have described Eric as being "half shy, half assertive" and this comes across in his dialogue he cannot explain his sudden laughter. The first time we hear Eric is when he "guffaws" which is a crude laugh which suggests that he feels uncomfortable around the family which creates a tense atmosphere. Which creates tension, and unease foreshadowing the inspector's arrival, as we can know he has forced himself on Eva Smith, and he has the ability to change. Seems he get a bit of

drinking problem at the beginning of the play. He gets squiffy and he acts in a slightly strange uncomfortable way, his drinking problem represents the sin of gluttony, it's symbolic of capitalist exploitation, his greed has created distress for Eva. His drinking also helps him cope with his compromising of socialist views in favor of conservative views. "When a chap easily turns nasty", the adverb "easily" has disturbing connotations here.

The action of "rape" has extended metaphor showing how Capitalism abuses the poor and working classes. The language used also frightens the audience "when a chap easily turns nasty", the adverb "easily" has implications that this type of behavior is almost commonplace, therefore we wonder if the Conservative Party and their ideas too are used in perhaps a trivial manner, at the expense of lower classes. When he is revealed to have impregnated Eva Smith, he had some innate sense of responsibility. However, Eric Birling has presented himself as immature and puerile when Sheila revealed to Mrs. Birling about Eric being an alcoholic and the father of Eva Smith's baby, he responded by accusing her of betrayal, "You told her. Why you little sneak!" His juvenile nature can be identified through his instant reaction to insult Sheila, calling her a 'sneak'! The use of the exclamation mark in his speech reveals his helplessness and true powerlessness. The pronoun 'you' highlights his need to search for others to hold liable because he can't cope with the disrespect and betrayal. Eric has represented the clash between socialist and capitalist views, his troubled relationship with Mr. Birling reflects his Oedipal urge for boys to challenge authority.

Family money has protected Eric from the realities of the real world. His

immature world view means he pursues pleasure regardless of the
<https://assignbuster.com/the-character-of-eric-birling-in-the-inspector-calls-by-jb-priestley/>

consequences, for example, treatment of Eva. As we know, Eric was part of the 'chain of events', as he raped Eva Smith and got her pregnant and treated her 'as if she were an animal, a thing, not a person'. Eric abused his power of a working class girl, highlighting his limited sense of social responsibility. Eric displayed an acute sense of responsibility as he was concerned enough to give her money, which he was 'borrowing' from his father. However, his sympathy for the working class is clear, "Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?" Foreshadowing his change by the end of the play.

In the last place, Eric is emotional, we can know by Eric's experience with the Inspector causes him great emotional turmoil, unlike some of the other characters. "What's the use of talking about behaving sensibly. You're beginning to pretend now that nothing's really happened at all. And I can't see it like that. This girl's still dead, isn't she? Nobody's brought her to life, have they?" Eric suddenly shows how he has been affected emotionally by Eva's death. He asked the stark question "This girl's still dead, isn't she?" He is clearly distressed and understands the gravity of the situation, he can't understand why the others don't. He feels guilt and frustration with himself over his relationship with Eva Smith. This presented by the testimony: "Oh-my God! how stupid it all is!"

Eric is the last to be interrogated by the Inspector and we learn that his alcoholic obsessions led to him reaching a state where a "chap turns nasty" and he forced himself upon Eva. In today's society, we would see this as rape which makes Eric appear immoral, cruel and selfish. Therefore their relationship can be seen as immature and a product of alcohol consumption.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-character-of-eric-birling-in-the-inspector-calls-by-jb-priestley/>

This makes Eric appear out of control and irresponsible. However, unlike his parents, he is completely remorseful, feels guilty and wishes he had never got involved with her. He accepts complete responsibility and realism that they all did "what they did" and there is no escaping this. Priestley's intention is to show how the younger generation was more impressionable. Under the surface of Eric's nasty exterior is a boy who is ashamed of himself and his family.