

How would you bring
out the key themes
and ideas of an
inspector calls in a
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The play "An Inspector Calls" is set within the dining room of a wealthy Midlands family in 1912, the play was written in 1945 by J. B. Priestley. In 1912 there were many similar families to the Birling's who were trying to raise their social standing and look down on those they considered to be of a lower class.

This attitude to class structure of selfishness, greed and the rich looking and pushing down on the poor is illustrated throughout the play and fits in with the mood of the times in 1945 when social change was being called for by many people. Although, The Royal National Theatre Production transports the set to the post-Blitz period, with a dark and powerful opening scene of children playing on a bombsite and the actors can be heard rather than seen.

The main themes that J. B. Priestley explored in the play are; the hierarchy of social classes and how this was based on hypocrisy and selfishness, the conflict between generations and that people should take responsibility. The play is based on the theme of a morality play, as it tries to teach people how they should behave responsibly and illustrates what happens if they do not. As well as being a morality play it is also a political play illustrating left-wing ideas of social responsibility.

To bring out the key themes and ideas of the play so that the audience understands and perhaps even changes their attitude to these concepts it is necessary to have each character clearly illustrated to portray their part, to emphasise the message of the play; Arthur Birling needs to be illustrated as rather pompous and heavy set; Sybil Birling is shown as a rather cold

character obsessed with etiquette and her status in society; Sheila Birling is quite attractive but rather spoilt; Eric Birling is quite nervous and paranoid whilst Gerald Croft is handsome, very rich and confident.

To add to the drama it is also vital that costumes, props, physicality, music, special effects and lighting are used to greatest effect. Although, the Royal National Theatre performance does put the characters straight into context by using audio cues, rather than visual ones. Nevertheless, this sharp and harsh atmosphere still exudes Priestley's powerful message of social responsibility.

Lighting is also powerful in illustrating this powerful message with at the start of the play the lighting being intimate and pink to reflect the mood then as the Inspector enters with his moral message the lighting gets harsher and harder reflecting the darkening mood. This work will cover how the play illustrates the themes of social responsibility, judging others, guilt and responsibility and the effects of social division and the message that J. B Priestley wanted to achieve that we must all take responsibility, and consider that our actions can have very significant effects.

An example of social responsibility is where Sybil Birling turns Eva Smith away from the charity " I did nothing I'm ashamed of that won't bear investigation. The girl asked for assistance. We were asked to look carefully into the claims made upon us" I wasn't satisfied with the girls claim. " When Mrs Birling delivers these lines she would be standing very upright, head held up high, she would speak these lines very clearly with a certain

arrogance in her voice. This would achieve a feeling of anger towards her because she doesn't feel sorry for what she has done.

By the use of her delivery and tone it illustrates the message that people like Mrs Birling will never change or regret their actions. At this point in the Royal National Theatre Production the Inspector's departing line is dramatically portrayed to coldly and calmly warn of social responsibility and the need to change attitudes. This is achieved by the power and depth of the Inspector's delivery. The Inspector has already established the judgement of the Birlings. He believes that Sheila Birling is very jealous and that Mrs Birling is very arrogant. They all had a judgement on Eva Smith before they knew her.

They all believe they have the right to abuse her rights. The Inspector would not show any sympathy towards the Birlings because he already knows them and what they are like. You can show his judgement of the Birlings by how he is sharp and does not give them a chance to get themselves out of it this will build an understanding for the audience about the Birlings and help them see that. To further demonstrate the Inspector's opinion his method of speech needs to be precise and purposeful and also using his facial expressions to add impact by looking hard at each person he talks to.

To further illustrate the Inspector's moral inquisition all the characters are illustrated in the way that they react. Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald are cowards and act selfishly this is shown by how they make fun of Sheila and Eric who are shown to have more of a conscience and have learnt an important lesson, " If it didn't end tragically, then that's lucky for us. But it

might have done. " This learning is one of the main messages that J. B. Priestley wanted to show the audience.

The Inspector puts a lot of guilt (when he says his line) on Sheila Birling by saying " it's all your fault that you are to blame for this girls death. " Eric has a lot of guilt because he got her pregnant. Eric and Sheila feel a lot more guilt than Mr and Mrs Birling they feel a lot more responsible for the death of Eva Smith. I would have Eric keep filling his drink up and he takes off his tie and undoes his top two buttons and takes his blazer off, Sheila could untie her hair and can't stand still, keeps moving around the room.

But Mr and Mrs Birling would still be very calm and not moved because they feel no sympathy towards her and this would show the audience that Mr and Mrs Birling are pretty heartless. There is a different class between Mr Croft and Mr Birling. Throughout the play all the Birlings and Mr Croft treat Eva Smith as if they are of a higher class. With Mr Croft he believes that he can just use her and then get rid of her. As if she is a lower class individual. To show this I might have Mr Croft on a higher piece of the stage and Eva Smith looking up to him this will give the feeling of sympathy for Eva Smith.

Sybil is obsessed with social status; this is best illustrated with the way she talks of Eva by saying a " girl of that sort" does not have " fine feelings and scruples. " This would be said in an icily cold manner to show her disdain for those she considers to be of a lower class. There is a great feeling of different classes when the Inspector comes in; Mr Birling automatically feels as though he has power and that he better and the Inspector is lower than

him. He considers that the Inspector has no power to affect him. When he says, " I thought you must be.

I was an alderman for years and Lord Mayor two years ago and I'm still on the Bench. So I know the Brumley police officers pretty well and I thought I'd never seen you before. " At this point I would have Mr Birling standing up and making himself look very tall and he would have his chest pushed out. A stance of look at me, I am very powerful. But I would also have the Inspector standing tall not affected by any of it. Hopefully this would evoke a feeling illustrating how arrogant Mr Birling is and how he considers he is better than everyone else.

This arrogant impression of class would also be further demonstrated by the disdain in Mr Birling's voice especially when he says he was " probably a Socialist. " In the play the Inspector represents morality, he tries to make everyone equal. To illustrate this social hierarchy at the start of the play all the characters would be placed in order from Mr Birling to Eva then the effect of the Inspector at the end of the play they would all stand next to each other to show they are all the same.

This key theme of social class would be clearly shown by the clothes and jewellery that the characters are wearing, their manners and social etiquette, by the food and drink they have. Everyone is thinking about and judging Eric for stealing money from his father, but then Sheila says " But that won't bring Eva Smith back to life will it? " Next everyone would go quiet and stop shouting. When Sheila delivers this line she would be crying and look very

distraught, and when she says it Mr Birling's head could suddenly drop and he would go very quiet.

This would achieve a feeling of anger towards Mr Birling that he cares more about getting his money back than the situation in hand about Eva Smith. It would also achieve a feeling of sympathy towards Sheila and Eric that they do really feel sorry for what they have done, plus they want their family and Gerald Croft to have sympathy for her as well. Although as Sybil has no remorse her facial expressions and body language need to illustrate this by being very still and cold and not showing any emotion.

I would by the end of this showing of "An Inspector Calls" like to get across the key themes and ideas through the characters; acting, speaking, the clothes they wear. And hopefully get Priestley's message across to the audience of if you have a chance to change your ways you must or there will be a consequence, additionally how not to judge people before you know them, do your social responsibility to the people who need it most, never think you are better than someone else just because of your social status.

In the play it is only Sheila who really understands what has happened and the need for change. To show this to the audience Sheila's actions and character are illustrated with her using her power and wealth to having Eva sacked to at the end where she shows she has changed this is powerfully shown as she hands back the ring and says, "You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner here."

This message of change and that everyone should have equal status is one of the key messages that Priestley wanted to encourage. The final exit of the <https://assignbuster.com/how-would-you-bring-out-the-key-themes-and-ideas-of-an-inspector-calls-in-a-performance-essay-sample/>

Inspector needs to be dramatic and final to add visual atmosphere to illustrate Priestley's message of social responsibility that "if men will not learn that lesson then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish" this needs to be spoken very powerfully.

In the final part of the play I would try to illustrate Sheila's fears and that she and Eric have changed and by the tones in their voices being tense and nervous and the movement of their bodies towards leaving the room illustrating their uncertainty and fear of how Mr and Mrs Birling haven't changed or learnt from the experience. Thus illustrating the children have rebelled and the family as a unit have collapsed. Whilst in the Royal National Theatre production this breaking up is illustrated by the Birling's house actually collapsing and throwing debris everywhere.

This final act needs to have dramatic lighting and tension portrayed in Mr Birling's voice when he says "a police inspector is on his way..." The dramatic act of the curtain falling leaves the audience to contemplate the moral theme of the play. With the strong message of if you have a chance to repair what you have done wrong do it, don't try to hide it or forget it; acknowledge responsibility for your actions. This message is as strong now, as it was in 1945.