

Mrs birling speech essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Priestly uses the Birling family to show how upper-class men and women behave towards the lower-classes during the early years of the 20th century. Priestly uses the Inspector to show us more than just one problem in society during this time. A good example of upper-class peoples behaviour towards lower classes is shown in Mrs Birling. Mrs Birling is even more hard-faced and arrogant than her husband. She is introduced as his social superior and her manner indicates that she is very conscious of social position, especially her own.

She is extremely snobbish, and expects others to show her respect and to defer to her opinions. She resents being contradicted, even when caught out telling outright lies by the Inspector. Mrs Birling seems genuinely shocked to hear about her sons drinking problem, although the information does not surprise Sheila and Gerald. Her concern – shared by her husband – that Sheila should not be exposed to ‘unpleasant’ things suggests that she regards her daughter as a child. Is Mrs Birling genuinely unaware of what is going on around her, or is she deliberately blind to anything she does not wish to see?

Consider how she dismisses the news of Eva’s suicide: she cannot see how the death of a ‘lower-class’ person could be of any interest to the Birling’s. Mrs Birling sends Eva away not because she did anything wrong but because she could. She judged Eva within five minutes and used her superiority to turn her away. But when she is exposed to criticism, Mrs Birling retreats behind words like ‘respectable’, ‘duty’ and ‘deserving’. She seems to feel that she is qualified to judge what such words mean.

If she feels her own status has been suitably acknowledged, she will be condescendingly generous, but, if not, she will take offence at what she sees as ‘impertinence’. She thinks that people from the ‘lower-classes’ have different feelings from her own: they are almost a different species. Eva Smith’s pleas for help offend Mrs Birling, because the girl was ‘giving herself ridiculous airs’ and ‘claiming elaborate fine feelings’. Her vindictive attitude towards the father of the girl’s child changes dramatically when she learns that he is her own son, clearly illustrating her extreme hypocrisy.

Mrs Birling seems to be divided not just upper and lower classes but her family as well. Sheila and Eric understand about what happened, respect their mistakes and are willing to change, but Mr and Mrs Birling cannot accept it. Priestly is showing us that the younger generation are capable of change but the older generation are not. This is probably because the older generation have been living like that for fifty years so do not want or see the need for change. Priestly shows us that older upper-class people do not just look down their nose at lower-classes but at their own children.

Mrs Birling treats Sheila and Eric like children ‘way you children talk’ and ‘they’re over-tired’ are two phrases she uses. Mrs Birling tries to use her husband’s social position to intimidate the Inspector, and is confused when this tactic fails. When the Inspector has left, Mrs Birling forcefully criticises the others for not standing firm against someone who is their social inferior. She argues that if she had been present when the Inspector first arrived, she would have dealt with his impertinence severely.

At the end of the play, has Mrs Birling learned to behave in a compassionate or caring way in the future? Perhaps the Inspector's call has only served to harden their attitudes. In conclusion I think that Mrs Birling has not learnt anything from the Inspectors visit. She brushes aside the fact that her family is falling to pieces, she is only concerned about her reputation and that it is intact. You could say that Mrs Birling's attitude changes like a graph. She starts of very high and confident. Once the Inspector arrives and exposes the family she gets less confident.

On page 54 and 55 we see this where we are told she is 'shocked' at finding out that Eric is stealing and that she gets more and more distressed as she finds out more. Once the Inspector leaves and she thinks that Eva wasn't really dead she tries to pull her self back together and look arrogant and confident again, like she was at the beginning. I think Mrs Birling uses her power so much because she hasn't inherited it like others would where money has been in their family for three generations. Mr Birling is fairly new to power to he and his family see the need to show it.