

# Eric and mr birling comparison essay sample



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Eric is quite an awkward and embarrassed character at the beginning who has no significance in the family engagement party, but by the end he makes the biggest change and wants to educate his parents on their actions. Mr Birling, who is a pompous capitalist, starts off as a selfish and money minded character and although he temporarily feels remorse towards Eva he comes back in full circle and returns to his self-obsessed character towards the end. Priestley has portrayed these characters in such contrasting ways to present to the audience the society we live in now and the potential society they could live in if they make a change.

Eric, who often finds himself as an outsider within his family, is presented as an alcoholic which later results in his incapability to control himself. Eric is awkward and uncomfortable in the engagement party shown by the stage directions "not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive" and his minor role in the engagement party but is later more outspoken when "he turned nasty... and threatened to make a row." He relies on alcohol to speak up and this highlights his weak and insecure character, which is not helped by the absence of a father and consequently he fills this void with alcohol.

Mr Birling has a love for money which is why he took shortcuts in his business - to maximise profits but this was later revealed to be a pivotal role in Eva's suicide. At the start of the engagement, Mr Birling wants to treat "Gerald like one of the family" and "it's one of the best nights of my life" but later it is revealed he only cares about how the merging of the two businesses because it will result in "lower costs and higher prices" which shows how his world revolves around money.

Priestley has done this to show lurking under his good intentions are greed and self-interest and symbolically he shows how capitalists who have the power to change millions of lives don't, simply because of their selfish money desires. Eric has a bad relationship with Mr Birling because Eric doesn't trust or feel comfortable in confiding with his father.

Eric didn't tell his father or family about the girl, the alcohol addiction or the stolen money because he's "not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble" This shows that Eric has never had a supportive father and Mr Birling was too naive to know about his addiction or the girl and Priestley has done this to show that since they have different values, they find it hard to compromise; they have an out of touch relationship which shows the divide between the two generations. Mr Birling however, seems to have a great relationship with Gerald who never questions any of Mr Birling's decisions and supports him throughout the play.

When Mr Birling explains that he was justified in firing the girl, Gerald agrees claiming "I know we'd have done the same thing." This shows how Gerald is more of an ideal son for Mr Birling, because Eric challenges his decisions, whereas Gerald agrees with every decision he makes and compliments Mr Birling which shows how Mr Birling likes to be superior to everyone else and this is why he doesn't want to be associated with the lower class. Eric makes the biggest transformation from a childish character to a matured man who is able to understand the consequences of his actions.

At the beginning he is quite hysterical and suddenly "felt like I just had to laugh" but by the end he repeatedly reminded the family that "the girls

dead and we all helped to kill her” and when Mr Birling threatens Eric he remarks that he “ doesn’t give a damn. ” This is the first time Eric stands up to Mr Birling and so Priestley uses Eric to show that the young are mouldable and that conflict can lead to a positive change which therefore presents his socialistic views. Mr Birling however, when it’s revealed that the whole situation was a hoax, is happy to go back to how things were at the beginning.

The fact that a girl has killed herself briefly affects when he was prepared to “ offer thousands” but only because of the public scandal which shows his selfish character. Mr Birling’s pompous and arrogant character is emphasized throughout the play to highlight Priestley’s message of how capitalism without conscience lead to world wars, revolutions and economic catastrophes that occurred in 1945. By highlighting, these characters failures, Priestley educates the audience on his message that we should look out for each other, take responsibility and understand that our actions has consequences.

Priestley portrays a negative aura around both Eric and Mr Birling, however Eric is able to see the need for change whereas Mr Birling wants everything to go back to how it was at the start of the play, which helps the audience warm to Eric towards the end. Priestley almost uses Eric to show the change that every single one of us has to make to become good people. Priestley has done this to show that the direction society will be heading in will not be changed by the older generation because they are set in their ways and unable to adapt to change.