

# Tension in an inspector calls essay sample



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In the play 'An Inspector Calls', J. B Priestly successfully maintains tension. I intend to show how he has done this by using quotes and stage directions from the play as well as relating the play to similar texts and political and social backgrounds of the time. Priestly uses his characters to keep the audience captivated. Arthur Birling is a prosperous manufacturer. He is a pompous and solemn man. He's in his mid-fifties. Sybil Birling is also about fifty years old and seems to have come from a family with a higher social position than her husband. She is austere and cold.

Their daughter Sheila Birling is pretty and in her twenties and she is pleased with her life. Eric Birling isn't very sure of himself. He's in his twenties. Gerald Croft, a very confident man, has just become engaged to Sheila. As soon as Inspector Goole a purposeful and impressive character enters he makes a big impression on the audience and the family. The level of conflict alters as the play goes on. It starts off with low levels where, Eric questions some of the points raised by Arthur but is overpowered by him. The older generation feel it's their duty to advise the children.

When the inspector is interviewing Arthur, Eric sides with the workers. He doesn't understand why they couldn't have more money. Eric doesn't realise how much he has benefited from the workers having a low wage, but he is more humane than his father. After the inspector leaves the children are affected by what the inspector has shown them. The parents, on the other hand, are too set in their ways and are more affected by the fact that it could have been a scandal rather than the principle of the affair. The inspector keeps very mysterious throughout the play. By doing this he keeps the characters and the audience guessing.

He always seems to have control. A policeman would normally have treated Arthur Birling with great respect but when he tries to influence the inspector saying that he plays golf with his superiors the Inspector is not phased. It makes the audience realise this is someone different. He also seems to know the answers before he asks the questions. The audience realise that the family is involved with the girls' death before the family does and so they want to see how they are linked. "The girl" is a victim of other people's selfishness. She is not seen as being killed by any one character. Also her problems are pushed aside.

Socialism plays a large part, in fact in the play it is the basis of the play - without the lower-middle class gap the play wouldn't have been written. The Birlings represent the ways in which the powerful and rich don't care about anybody apart from themselves, it is completely the opposite to socialism. The inspector thinks the Birlings are to blame because they do not contribute in any real way apart from those that increase their power and wealth. The Inspector's socialism will work on the children, hence the way they are swayed by him. The older generation though are too set in their ways to accept what he is trying to teach them.

Businessmen like Mr. Birling have too much sway, can exert too much power on our society and this is something Priestly was unhappy about. Birling - "By the way these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive - community and all that nonsense" It shows his views on socialism and how he dismisses it. Mr. Birling thinks to himself that he is "the bee's knees" this annoys the audience, but he is made to look like a fool by the two

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comments of dramatic irony made at the beginning of the play about the Titanic being unsinkable “.

She sails next week - forty six thousand eight hundred tons and unsinkable” This is a motif it is explaining how the middle class was so solid, like steel and how the expectations were so high. And then all of a sudden it sank. He also comments on the political issues of the Britain - Germany conflict “ The Germans won't go to war” and “ There'll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere. ” (Pg 7) His character is made worse by showing his values, by saying to Gerald “ You're just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted. (Pg 4)

He shows how important money and class are to him. “ There'll be a public scandal” showing how Birling is very worried about his position in society. At the beginning of the play the Inspector calls when they are all in a safe environment, they have just eaten so they feel happy and content, they are familiar with their surroundings. By entering here it is easy to interview each character because the setting doesn't have to be thought of and so isn't distracting, when the Inspector rings the doorbell they are unsettled.

The ring on the doorbell could also be seen as a motif from Jon Donne in Meditation XVII “ I am involved in mankind, and therefore never know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for me. ” Saying that the death of “ the girl” is like a piece being taken out of the whole picture, whoever dies I die with them. The beginning part is contradictory to a quote from Birling “ You'd think everybody had to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together . . . - community and all that nonsense. ” - “ I am involved in

mankind, . ." " They have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing" - Horace, this is what the adults do.

They knew what they were doing is wrong its just that they had suppressed those feelings and because of personal gain carry on living the way they did. The more that changes the more it becomes the same thing"- Horace, this works on two accounts - first, Priestly has used the name Smith which is the most common name in Britain, showing that it is just an average girl doing an average job etc - this technique is also used in the book 1984 by George Orwell who was making his feelings known about the class difference and the way he thought people would be treated- this book was written around the same time as Priestly wrote his.

Then as the play progresses he introduces different names and aliases also by only showing one person the photo at any one time " the girl" could be two different girls showing it could have been many different girls who had their lives wrecked by the Birlings. Laws are based on the seven commandments and through the play each one is broken by different characters so it is easier for the audience to side with Priestly and agree with the main concept. - Pride - the whole family posses pride - their whole society and manor of living is almost solely based on this.

Though out of the characters the adults have the most pride. 2 - Sloth - this is portrayed by Eric who is the " silly boy" he is totally cared for just spending his fathers money as he wishes almost. 3 - Gluttony - this again is a combined effort of the whole class but by the figure of Birling and the fact he is mean with his wages he would be the main culprit of this.