

# The ways jb priestley uses the character of sheila to develop his themes essay sa...

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J. B. Priestley is the author of the play titled "An Inspector Calls." The play was originally written in 1944, during the World War II but it was only performed from 1946 when the war ended. The end of a major war causes a lot of changes in a country and is often considered as a fresh start. People might start thinking about what their life is going to be like when the war has ended. Priestley's main purpose is to show that the end of World War II was a good time to make a difference and to change the attitudes of pre-war Britain. This is because it is easier to create some new ideas when things have started to change already.

One of the main characters called Sheila is used as a device to put forward Priestley's points. She represents what England could be like after the war and how it is possible to change attitudes. Priestley's points are mainly reinforced through the dialogues spoken by Sheila. She is also used as a dramatic device and he moves forward the story by using this character. The reaction and ideas of the audience are manipulated as they first think that the play is a mystery about the death of a young woman but later it is revealed that the mystery lies in who the Inspector (one of the most important characters) is.

Priestley uses Mr Birling and Sheila as metaphors for the change he wants to see in Britain. Mr Birling represents the attitudes the attitude of Britain prior to the war, whereas Sheila represents the attitude that Priestley believes Britain should have after the war. Speaking of the death of Eva Smith (who was a former employee in his business); he classes the situation as a "public scandal." A "scandal" is disgraceful gossip that will ruin the reputation of

someone or something. This means that the news will bring a bad name to the family and everyone will know about it.

Mr Birling is worried that the connection between the death of Eva Smith and the Birling family will bring disgrace on the family more than the fact that a young woman has possibly committed suicide because of them. This character represents the attitudes of “self help” in the Nineteenth Century. The idea was that men were responsible for the reputation and welfare of their own families and no-one else’s and they had to work hard to survive. People also thought that if you were poor, it was your own fault. Priestley isn’t trying to portray Birling as a bad person, but he just represents the majority of the people in Britain at that time.

People self-helped instead of thinking of others, just as Birling tries to help his family’s reputation. Priestley challenges this idea and reinforces that this attitude should change by using Sheila to represent help to others. In contrast to Mr Birling, Sheila “began to learn something” from the situation. This means that Sheila was concerned about the mistakes the family made and she began to learn that they should change. Both Mr Birling and Sheila just did what typical people in their positions would do, but Sheila realises that this attitude is wrong.

This reinforces the point that Britain should change from focusing on self-help and become a place where people are also concerned about other people’s welfare, like Sheila. Priestley develops the metaphor of Sheila to demonstrate that change is possible. Sheila’s attitude changes after the

encounter with the Inspector, which represents that the change in Britain is possible. At the beginning, Sheila was portrayed as a typical young woman of the middle-class and she uses her power as the daughter of an important man to get things her way.

She threatened Milwards that if Eva wasn't fired, she'd "close our account with them," forcing the business to get rid of Eva Smith. Sheila knew that she was a very important customer and if the business lost her, they would make loss. This is why she used her power to fire Eva, a powerless young woman, not regarding how this might affect her future or her life. However, later on in the play when the Inspector talks about what happened to Eva Smith, Sheila immediately seems to regret what she's done and she's willing to change.

She admits that "it was my own fault" and that if she "could help her now, I would." This shows that she regrets that she acted that way and that if possible; she was willing to change things. Sheila changes from a person who does anything to get things her way to a person who admits what she's done wrong and cares for others who are less fortunate. Priestley is illustrating that it is possible for Britain to learn from its mistakes and become a nation where people care about each other, no matter what class they are.

Sheila is used to show that if one person in Britain can change, so can the rest. Priestley uses Sheila to state some of his important ideas about how Britain should be. In some key places in the play, Sheila tells the audience what Priestley wants them to know. He puts forth the point that poor aren't

to be used for cheap work, but that they are humans with feelings. In one of her speeches, Sheila says that, "these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people" when she argues with Mr Birling about the firing of Eva Smith. She is making a contrast between the two attitudes that Priestley wants to portray.

The people of the Nineteenth Century used poor vulnerable women to their advantage for "cheap labour," meaning to work for very low wages. These women had no alternative but to do these jobs because they'd do anything to get just enough money to survive. Instead of helping these women, people like Birling exploited their need to work and used them as much as possible in their businesses. However, Sheila describes them as "people," showing that just like them, they are humans. This represents the idea that Priestley wants to convey: that people have feelings and they have the ability to get hurt.

Also, they can get tired and hungry. Sheila thinks it's wrong that Eva Smith and the other girls can also be fazed with these problems but they have no help whatsoever. This implies that employers have to think of their employees as humans and not a necessary thing for their businesses, as it is morally wrong. It could be argued that Priestley makes Sheila's character more likeable as she is prepared to see other people's points of view and how they feel as well. As well as a metaphor, Sheila is used as a dramatic device.

In key moments in the play, this character is used to move the story forward. At the end of the supposed investigation of the death of Eva Smith, Sheila

asks the most important question which changes the message of the story. She asks, "was he really a police inspector" referring to Inspector Goole. This changes the audience's ideas about the mystery. At first the audience think the play is a straightforward mystery, but later they learn that it is in fact a suicide. This leads them on to try and work out the connection between the so-called respectable Birlings and the suicide.

As the story goes on, the audience's ideas are changed again as they think that the mystery is about how each of the Birlings were connected to the dead girl. However, Sheila's dialogue in Act III makes it clear that the mystery is not about the suicide or how the Birlings were involved in it. In fact, the mystery is who Inspector Goole is and how he knew so much about the Birlings. Moving the story forward in this manner is a very important role as some audience might have already suspected something "queer" about the Inspector.

This is because he isn't really a policeman and Mr Birling doesn't know him even though he has contacts in the police station. Also, he was rude to the Birlings even though they were rich and powerful people. He seemed to know everything that they did but he just wanted to hear it from him. He was also investigating a suicide, which used to be considered as a crime at that time and the criminal was the person who commits the suicide, so there was nothing to investigate. Although the ideas of the audience are changed continuously throughout the play, at the end they are left with the same question as Sheila asked: who the inspector really is.

While the audience might have thought that this is a mystery/detective play which unveils crimes and who were behind these crimes, it turns out to be a mystery where the audience are left to work out who one of the characters are. Throughout the play, Sheila is used in many ways to both reinforce Priestley's main themes and also to move the story forward. She is one of the most important characters as she is given the main role and she is conveying the most important themes.

Priestley creates a contrast between the characters of Mr Birling and Sheila to use them as metaphors. Birling represents the attitudes people in Nineteenth Century Britain had, whereas Sheila represents the attitudes he believes Britain should have after the war. Sheila's metaphor is also used to reinforce that change is possible. Just as Sheila changed from being a person who was selfish to a caring person after learning about Eva's death, Priestley implies that it is possible for Britain to change and become a caring community after the war.

Furthermore, Sheila's dialogues are used to reinforce some of Priestley's most important points. He shows that employers should treat their employees like humans, regardless of their class. He also uses Sheila as a dramatic device to move forward the story in key points of the play. One example is when Sheila points out that the mystery is not yet over; that the real mystery is based on who the Inspector really is. Overall, the character of Sheila has a lot of importance to the play as she is used continuously for various purposes.