

How J.B. Priestley
builds up dramatic
tension in "An
Inspector Calls"



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The play "An Inspector Calls" was written by J.B. Priestley within a week of World War 2 ending in 1945, but set in 1912, when Britain still had its Empire and was a wealthy country. Priestley believed that the time span between these dates is to make us aware of what has happened and learn from the mistakes made. Mr Birling like many other industrialists of the time was blind to the consequences of his actions as well as events happening around him, he was certain that there would be no war and that the Titanic was invincible and could never sink. He believed in every man for himself, and to ignore those who think that we should look after others. He is unable to see why nations go to war.

It never occurs to him that people may value other things more greatly. He is a prosperous factory owner, whose first priority's in life is to make money. The play commences in a very comforting room, the mood is very relaxed and comforting, as the lighting is "pink and intimate", and is very soft. The characters are all in good moods and everyone is having a good time.

It is so good in fact that Mr Birling decides to make a speech. Mr Birling babbles on and on about certain things that aren't really appropriate, and says this, "it is that how a man has to make his own way - has to look after himself - and his family too, of course" he carries on for quite a bit, and then...

"RING!!" This is a dramatic part of the scene because; the door bell has in fact interrupted Mr Birling's speech, leaving the audience to see if he is annoyed by this. At this point the audience are curious to see who is at the door. This is how tension is created in the play, as you don't know who is

actually behind the door, for all the audience know at this moment it could be a murderer or a thief. There is a big pause for drama, as if they were waiting for something, then the door is answered and the Inspector enters. As soon as the Inspector enters the room the mood is changed, as if he had just built a brick wall right in front of the happiness in the room.

The Inspector asks for Mr Birling and straight away starts to look at Mr Birling very suspiciously. Mr Birling wonders what on earth this inspector is doing in his home, and wonders what he has done to receive an Inspector at his door. The Inspector then starts to ask the intense questions, where he tells the story of a young lady named Eva Smith. He then carries on to say that she had died in an Infirmary after taking a dose of disinfectant. Mr Birling wonders what he has to do with all of this as the Inspector goes on about her saying " Yes, she was in great agony, they did everything they could for her", this part was very clever as this adds emotion to the faces of all the character in the room, including the audience, also giving drama to the play.

Despite all this, the characters and audience are still confused, because of why the Inspector is here. It was a suicide, not a murder, so why is it that the Birling family are at the receiving end of all this. This is all explained as the Inspector goes into more detail about the suicide; he explains that Eva Smith was a lonely girl, sort of a loner, who tried her best to keep up with her life, but couldn't do it because of this family, the Birlings. The Inspector then shows a picture of Eva Smith to Sheila only; this is a dramatic part of the scene because he only shows it to her, and only her.

Even if he did show the picture to the rest of the family, it would be one at a time and not as a group, which makes a huge difference, as Sheila goes rushing out the door crying her eyes out, as she recognizes the person in the photo. It is at this time where you can see the reactions on everybody's face, just to see what parts they played in the suicide. Which is when Sheila comes back and realizes that there's more than meets the eye about this Inspector, he knows a lot more than we originally think. Sheila sort of takes the part of the audience, as she asks questions, and tells people not to say things, because she knows exactly what the Inspector is trying to do, along with the audience, it's as if she feels the same tension, as Mrs Birling is just trying to tell the Inspector things that may get herself into more and more trouble. The first scene then ends with the Inspector going "well", and the audience are just dying to know what is going to be said, this is very well done for tension and drama even.

Then after the everlasting wait on suspense, the curtain comes back up and it is continued, and nothing is missed, as the Inspector is still saying "well". Then Gerald asks for Sheila to be excused, which gives the indication that Gerald has done something wrong that he doesn't want Sheila to know about. This gives a big impression on the audience, because they are all now waiting to find out what he has done. The Inspector then asks Sheila to stay, as he feels it is something she ought to know, and so Gerald says what he has to say and he is in deeper trouble still. The Inspector is very good at breaking down into the defensive attitudes of the characters, by asking his disturbing questions as both Sheila and the audience both know, giving

Sheila's the part of the audience, by answering questions that run through their heads.

At this time in the play almost every character has changed their ways, and started to think seriously about what parts they played in the suicidal death of Eva Smith, who now we find that had yet another name, Daisy Renton.

Now in Act 3 the characters start to argue as Eric enters the room, they get frantic, and Eric accuses Mrs Birling of killing Eva Smith, "then - you killed her. She came to you to protect me - and you turned her away - yes, and you killed her". Eric gets very impatient, and just keeps having massive outbursts, saying "you killed her...

you killed them both... damn you. The Inspector then looks at his watch, and says "I haven't much time", and minutes later he abandons the stage. The characters all blame each other, like they should, because in actual fact, it was all of them who killed this girl, not intentionally, but they still killed this girl.

It was all linked together, as I see when I look at where Eva Smith had been. First of all, in September 1910, Eva was working at Birling & Co., where she was sacked, for slacking on the job. Then Sheila had actually got this woman sacked again back in December 1910 from a Milwards clothes shop, as Eva was smiling, making Sheila think that she was smiling at her.

This day Sheila was in a bad mood and consequently got the woman sacked, all because the company was scared Sheila would take the company down and out of business, showing just how powerful Sheila was. With this Eva Smith was sacked and became a prostitute. She then in March 1911 met <https://assignbuster.com/how-jb-priestley-builds-up-dramatic-tension-in-an-inspector-calls/>

Gerald and became his mistress, which is a huge aspect of the play, because this means Gerald is now involved in the suicide, because in early September 1911 Gerald broke off the affair, leaving Eva distressed, upset and all alone with no job and no one to take care of her. Then for about two months Eva left Brumley and came back to meet Eric in November. Eva then finds that she is pregnant, this is very important, because this is what links her to Mrs Birling as in late March 1912 she goes to Mrs Birling's organization for help.

Although this help is refused by Mrs Birling meaning that she is now in the chain of events that lead to Eva Smith's death. By this time, she just doesn't feel wanted or needed, and decides that her life is no longer worth living, and commits suicide. After all this an Inspector calls at Birling's home and asks some questions, then he leaves and there is a phone call, there wasn't an Inspector Goole in the police, meaning that this man was an impostor. This has a dramatic effect on the audience, because they are stunned, but the story of Eva Smith was completely true, as the police officer on the phone explained, " we have sent over an Inspector, he will arrive soon".