

character analysis eric birling essay sample

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Character Analysis

Eric Birling

I think that J B Priestly put Eric Birling in the play ' An Inspector Calls' because he is an interesting character, and is not quite like the rest of his family. Eric is a young man living at home with his parents (Arthur and Sybil Birling) and his sister (Sheila Birling). He is the son of a prosperous manufacturer living in a large suburban house. Eric comes from an upper class family. His mother is a prominent member of the Brumley Woman's Charity Organization and his father has his own business.

The Birling family have a maid, Edna and are also able to enjoy a life of great comfort and leisure. An example of this is when Mr Birling says ' You ought to like this port, Gerald. As a matter of fact, Finchley told me it's exactly the same port your father gets from him.' This shows that the family were upper class because they are talking about port, which not all of the lower class people would know much about. One of the main features that make Eric is an interesting character is that he is quite secretive about his life, so that when the inspector questions Eric the Birling's are in for a huge surprise. They learn that he is an alcoholic, has stolen money from his father and has gotten a lower class girl pregnant. During this time period the rich didn't really associate with the poor; so his family, especially his mother, are shocked when he reveals the news. Eric's personality doesn't really change throughout the play, though his feelings and emotions do. At the beginning of the play, Eric is in the dining room with his family. They are celebrating the engagement of his sister and her fiancé (Gerald Croft). Eric seems quite happy, as he is slightly drunk. Inspector Goole arrives at the Birling's house.

He questions each character until they confess that they each had a part in causing Eva Smith's death; starting with Mr Birling and finishing with Eric. Eric's emotions change from happiness to guilt when he realizes that he helped push Eva into committing suicide.

Although he already knew that she was pregnant, I think it shocked him even more when he realized that she was dead. He probably felt a lot more responsible as he hadn't been there through her pregnancy, and that she wouldn't accept any more of the money that Eric stole from his father after being refused a pay rise. An example of this is when he says ' You haven't made it any easier for me, have you, mother?' after he is told that his mother had been blaming him for Eva's death, and saying that he shouldn't escape and should be made an example of. Another example is when he asks the inspector ' Could I have a drink first' before he explains what happened between him and Eva. I think this is an example because he is an alcoholic, and in most cases, alcohol resolves a lot of problems. Eric's emotions change to anger when he learns that his mother had refused Eva's claim when she pleaded for help at Mrs Birling's charity. An example is when he begins yelling at his mother ' Then- you killed her. She came to you to protect me - and you turned her away - yes, and you killed her - and the child she'd have had too - my child - your own grandchild - you killed them both - damn you, damn you -'

Eric Birling is the type of person to stand up for himself. He shows this by stealing the money from his Father and by telling his father ' Because you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble', when Mr Birling asked Eric why he didn't come to him for help when he found out he

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was going to be a father. Another example is when he shouted at his mother, ' Then- you killed her. She came to you to protect me - and you turned her away - yes, and you killed her - and the child she'd have had too - my child - your own grandchild - you killed them both - damn you, damn you - '

When sober, Eric can handle situations and take on responsibility. An example of this is when he stole the money from his father's work to support Eva and his baby, after realising that she was pregnant. When drunk, Eric doesn't really think about what he is doing, and how his actions could affect his future.

In conclusion, I think that J B Priestley put Eric in ' An Inspector Calls because he isn't like the others in his family, as he isn't so strict about life and social class like the rest of his family.