

# An inspector calls study



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“ An inspector calls” is a play written by J.

B. Priestly in 1946, but is set in 1912. These two dates contrast quite well for a number of reasons. The economy in 1912 was very different because everyone cared about themselves before other people and there was a lot more money in circulation.

This made the divide between upper and lower class very poignant. Also social etiquette was quite different in 1912. Although Mrs Birling is seen as having a higher social standing than her husband, as she was born into money and money has always been in her family (“ Old Money”) whereas Mr Birling made his money in his life (“ New Money”), she still obeys him as back then men were seen as superior to women. This view changed by 1946 as women got the power to vote which signified them being equal to men. The main plot of this play is about a family, the Birlings, and how each of them impacted a young woman’s life in a cruel way which led to her eventual suicide. It is set in Brumly London and all scenes are played out in the Birlings family home.

In the whole play there are only 7 on screen characters; Arthur Birling, Sybil Birling his wife, Sheila and Eric Birling his children, Gerald Croft Sheila’s fianci?? e, Edna the maid and Inspector Goole. Another main character who is not seen on screen is Eva smith or Daisy Renton. She is the young girl who recently killed herself after getting cruelly treated by all the Birling’s. Mr Birling reflects the attitude of Britain in 1912. They were a dominant country in the world and confident about their affairs.

This is shown during Mr Birling's speech to his family about the future. " I'm talking as a hard-headed, practical man of business. And I say there isn't a chance of war. " This shows not only his own pompous attitude but also the attitude of Britain at the time.

We can tell from the stage directions the " Tone" of the characters. The writer shows how he wants the set and family to look. He writes " Edna... is just clearing the tables ... of desert plates and champagne glasses and replacing them with decanter of port, cigar box and cigarettes. This was very good at showing the wealth of the family especially as the show was being shown in 1946 so rationing and lack of luxuries would have taken such goods away. Mr Birling would be seen by the audience as a " rather portentous man in his middle fifties with fairly easy manners but rather provincial in his speech".

This means that although he is an important man he still speaks in a local dialect which shows that he was probably brought up in a normal environment not a posh one. He seems to want to impress Gerald Croft because his father is Mr Birling's business rival. Because of this he takes every opportunity to try and impress Gerald. " You ought to like this port, Gerald...

It's exactly the same port your father gets. " This helps to show how he tries to influence and impress Gerald. His want to impress Gerald is possibly one of the reasons he is so proud of his daughter, as she is marrying into the croft family. The audience would see Arthur Birling at this stage as a Rich man but one who still wants to impress. Mr Birling appears to be out to gain

a profit wherever and whenever he can. He even manages to make a speech about his daughters engagement into one centred on his and his competitors businesses, much to the dismay of his daughter.

“ Perhaps we may look forward to a time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing, but working together- For lower costs and higher prices! ”

This shows that money is easily the most important thing to him as he is willing to try and get a business proposition into a speech about his own daughter. He is obviously a very hard-headed businessman as he was willing to fire good workers just because they wanted a small pay rise. He is very pleased that his daughter is marrying into the Croft family for a number of reasons. First off it means he will be closer to the Crofts, who are his main business competitors, so he believes one day they may join together.

Another is that the crofts have more of a social standing compared to him so he thinks if he's associated with them then he too will gain a higher social reputation. Again, the audience would view Mr Birling in the same way they did in the first section- A rich man but one who still wants to impress. They would also probably see him as a man who has worked hard to get to where he is in life. Mr Birling obviously doesn't know what will happen in the future (World war 1 and 2) so when he makes a speech about war he makes it almost jokingly.

” Just because the Kaiser makes a speech or two, or a few German officers have too much to drink and begin talking nonsense, you'll hear some people say that wars inevitable....

I say- Fiddlesticks! ” He goes on to say that nobody wants war except “ Some half-civilized folk in the Balkans” This shows his ignorance and opinion about the possibility of war. He also thinks “ There’s too much at stake these days. Everything to lose and nothing to gain by war. ” This part of his speech was right and shows that there is a less opinionated, more thoughtful part of him. His attitude would make him disliked when the play was produced, as the audience had just lived through 2 world wars so they would not like the fact that he was brushing the possibilities away un-thoughtfully.

Continuing in that speech, he says that men in there 20’s have nothing to worry about. This was written ironically as the men Mr Birling was talking about would have been made to enrol in the army. This is a good example of dramatic irony as the audience knows certain things that the characters don’t yet know. More dramatic irony is used when Mr. Birling, still on his speech, says “ The Titanic.

.. New York in 5 days... Unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable.

” This helps to show the opinions of Mr Birling as the audience know that the Titanic did sink and so was not “ Absolutely unsinkable”. This shows that Mr. Birling is quite trusting as he believes that, because someone told him, the Titanic was unsinkable. Mr Birling is quite opinionated when it comes to other countries. He calls the people in the Balkans “ Half-civilised folk” and says that “ Russia..

. will always be behindhand naturally. But later when the war was in progress, Britain fought with Russia so insulting them was quite unkind. By this time I believe the audience’s opinion of Mr. Birling would have changed.

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By now they would see him as someone who is quite naïve as he believes whole-heartedly in things he has heard (“The Titanic... Unsinkable”) and also very opinionated because of his opinions on other countries such as Germany and Russia. After Mr.

Birling has finished his speech he talks confidentially to Gerald Croft. He tells him that “I have an idea that your mother...

feels you might have done better for yourself socially” but then adds to this, “I might just find my way onto the next honours list... A Knighthood”.

This is very good at showing that he is trying very hard to impress Gerald as he told him confidentially, because he wanted Gerald to know before his family. This may also be to try and show Gerald that he trusts him to keep the secret. Another good example of how Mr. Birling is trying to impress Gerald is the way he tells Gerald proudly that “You see, I was Lord Mayor Here.

.. when Royalty visited”. Mr. Birling is sounding quite pompous by this stage as he has only been talking about himself to Gerald and is still trying to make his family name seem worthy to join the Crofts family.

This is because Gerald’s parents are Lord and Lady Croft, so of a higher social ranking than his own family. Mr. Birling has a very traditional view of women, E. g.

that they should stay at home and be housewives. This is obvious in one particular scene when he is talking about the death of Eva Smith and says “yes, yes. But I see no point mentioning the subject. Especially..

. (Indicates at Shelia)". This shows that he thinks women are too fragile to deal with such things as suicides ect. This was a very normal view of how men viewed women at the time in England. But when this production was played in 1946 it would seem rather silly because women had now got given the right to vote which meant they were now equal to men.

Mr. Birling treats his wife and his daughter in the way that men normally treated women in that time. He convinces his wife to drink some port even though she did not want to and he stops his daughter admiring her new wedding ring so that she listens to him. This is showing that he is very self-important and that he still believes his needs and wants are more important than the needs of his wife or daughter.

During his talk with Eric and Gerald, Mr. Birling talks about community and his opinion on it. " Community and all that nonsense...

A man has to mind his own business and look after himself". This is very good at showing how selfish Mr Birling actually is, as he says everyone should care only about themselves. This wouldn't have been taken nicely in 1946 as everyone was working as a community to repair the damage made from the war. So through this statement, Mr Birling would be made to look very self-centred. By the end of this small part of the play, the audience would already have a very clear view of how Mr Birling is personally.

They would most probably see him as a rich self-centred businessman who still wants to impress people of a higher social standing than himself and who still has very traditional views on a number of things including work, the role of women and stereotypes about other countries.