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| **GCSE English Literature** **‘An Inspector Calls’ J.B. Priestley (1945)** |
| **Plot** |
| *The play is set in April 1912, which is two years prior to the start of WW1. The family live in Brumley, an industrial town in the Midlands, UK. The family is presented as Edwardian and being of the middle- upper class. All of the action takes place in the dining room over one evening.*  |
| **Act One** | The Birling family and Gerald Croft are celebrating Sheila Birling’s engagement to Gerald with an evening meal. Sheila is extremely excited about her engagement ring which suggests her materialistic nature. Eric seems a little uneasy. Mr Birling is in a very good mood about the engagement and the possibility of his upcoming knighthood. He dominates the conversation and shares his political views; he appears to be extremely narrow-minded. At the end of the meal, Mrs Birling, Sheila and Eric leave the dining room. However, Eric returns soon after complaining that they were talking about women’s clothes. Mr Birling lectures his son, Eric Birling and Gerald about the importance of every man looking out for himself and his family if he wants to get on in life. He dismisses the concept of community as nonsense. During this speech, Mr Birling is interrupted by the sound of the doorbell.Edna (the maid) announces that an inspector has arrived. Inspector Goole says that he is investigating the death of a young woman who committed suicide. She is called Eva Smith. Mr Birling is shown a photograph of Eva. After initially denying recognising the woman in the photo, he remembers firing her in 1910 for organising a strike over workers’ pay. She asked for higher wages which Mr Birling thought was completely unreasonable. Gerald expresses his agreement with Mr Birling’s actions whereas Eric and Sheila express concern about their father’s treatment of Eva. The Inspector then turns his action to Sheila who has returned to the dining room. The Inspector shows Sheila the photograph of the girl and she rushes out upset. When Sheila returns, she confesses to having Eva sacked about her manner when served by her in an upmarket department store. The Inspector ensures Sheila understands the consequences of her actions and as a result, Sheila feels guilt and remorse for her behaviour. At the end of the first Act, the Inspector reveals that Eva Smith changed her name to Daisy Renton. Gerald reveals to Sheila he had an affair with Daisy Renton. The Act ends with the Inspector opening the door to the dining room and expecting Gerald to explain his part in the tragedy. |
| **STOP-CHECK!**Copy and complete the questions. They are in chronological order.1. Why does Priestley use the engagement ring at the start of the play?
2. What topics of conversation does Mr Birling talk about?
3. What dramatic device is used to interrupt Mr Birling?
4. For what two reasons did Mr Birling sack Eva Smith from his factory?
5. On which point do Eric and Sheila disagree with their father?
6. How does Sheila feel about her behaviour towards Eva?
7. How does Priestley ensure Act 1 ends on a point of high tension?
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| **Act Two** | At the start of the scene, Gerald says he wants Sheila to leave in order so that she can be ‘shielded’ from the upsetting details. However, Sheila insists on staying. Gerald explains to the inspector that he had an affair with Daisy in the spring of the previous year. They had met at the Palace music Hall in Brumley and that he had helped Daisy after finding out that she had no money or home. Gerald explained that he had broken things off with Daisy at the end of summer 1911, and hadn’t seen her since then. Throughout Gerald’s confession, the tension between him and Sheila rises. The two characters make emotive statements to each other. Priestley uses the dramatic device of a diary to fill in events as the Inspector reveals that Daisy had kept a diary which told of how happy she had been and how she had wanted to go away for a while in order to try to keep hold of her happiness for a little longer. After being brought up to date, Gerald decides to leave to go out for a walk as he is feeling upset. Sheila gives her engagement ring back to Gerald despite her father’s remonstrations.Mrs Birling re-enters the room and attempts to intimidate the Inspector by reminding him of her husband’s social standing. The Inspector reveals the extent of Eric’s drinking to which Mrs Birling is shocked. The Inspector shows Mrs Birling a photograph of the girl and claims not to know her. The Inspector accuses her of lying and Mrs Birling demands an apology. The Inspector refuses and Sheila tells her mother to tell the truth. The front door slams and Mr Birling returns to say Eric has left. The Inspector hints that Eric is needed. Mrs Birling finally confesses that she also had contact with Eva only two weeks earlier but Eva gave herself a different name to Mrs Birling. Eva approached a charity chaired by Mrs Birling to ask for help. Eva was desperate and pregnant but help was refused by Mrs Birling because she was offended by the girl calling herself ‘Mrs Birling’. She had told Eva that the baby’s father should be made entirely responsible. She also tells the inspector that the father should be held entirely responsible and held to account. Sheila tries to warn her mother to stop talking because she (and the audience) can see that the man Mrs Birling is referring to is in fact Eric. During the last moments of the Act, Mr and Mrs Birling finally realise that Eric is implicated. At this crucial moment, Priestley uses the dramatic device of the front door slamming to heighten suspense as the character sand audience look expectantly towards the door, expecting Eric, who then enters. |
| **STOP-CHECK!**Copy and complete the questions. They are in chronological order.1. How is the lifestyle of a lower class young woman (such as Eva) different to a middle-upper class young woman (such as Sheila)? Think about why Gerald doesn’t want Sheila to stay to hear his confession.
2. Why is the diary used?
3. How does Mrs Birling behave to begin with around the Inspector? Why?
4. How does Priestley ensure Act 2 ends with great suspense and tension?
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| **Act Three** | Eric is revealed as the father. He confesses that he met Eva at the Palace Bar where he got drunk, insisted on accompanying her home and then forced himself upon her. Mrs Birling is so shocked and upset that Sheila has to take her out of the room. Eric continues his story and explains how he continued to see Eva. He made her pregnant and after offering to marry her, he had stolen money from Mr Birling’s office to provide money to Eva. Eva had refused to marry Eric and refused to take any more money when she suspected it was stolen. Sheila and Mrs Birling return and Mr Birling fills his wife in on developments. Mr Birling is concerned about Eric’s theft being discovered and Eric finds out that his mother refused Eva help. The inspector delivers his final speech and leaves. Almost immediately after the Inspector leaves, Mr Birling starts to criticise Eric. This causes all family members to argue and Mr Birling, stuck in his traditional ways, worries about his knighthood and respectability in Brumley. Sheila starts to wonder about the Inspector’s arrival and whether he was a real policeman. The others think they can avoid scandal if he is found out not to be a real policeman. Gerald returns and tells them that Inspector Goole does not exist. A phone call to the Chief Constable confirms this. Next Gerald phones the infirmary to be informed that no suicide case has been brought in and there haven’t been any suicides for months. Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald congratulate themselves that is was all a hoax and they can continue as before. This attitude upsets Sheila and Eric. They believe that they should all still be accountable for the way they treated Eva/Daisy. Gerald offers Sheila her engagement ring back. The phone rings. Mr Birling announces to the family that a girl has just died on her way to the infirmary and a police inspector is coming to question them. |
| **STOP-CHECK!**Copy and complete the questions. They are in chronological order.1. How does Priestley show Eric’s poor moral standards in paragraph 1?
2. How do Eric’s poor moral stands contrast to Eva’s in paragraph 1?
3. How do we know that Mr Birling hasn’t learnt anything and is still stuck in traditional beliefs?
4. In paragraph 2, how does Sheila and Eric’s attitude differ to Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald’s?
5. How is heightened tension created at the end of Act 3/ the play?
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| **Characters** | **Description** | **Key words** |
| **Mr. Arthur Birling** | The head of a family, and is arguably the main subject of Priestley’s social critique. Dominant, arrogant, self-centred and morally blind, he is insistent throughout about his lack of responsibility for Eva/ Daisy’s death. He is representative of the older generation/ traditional outdated beliefs who are unwilling to change. | Capitalist, arrogant, foolish, prejudiced, ignorant, selfish, stubborn, vain glorious, bombast language, pompous, social climber, self-made business man, industrialist, heartless, unchanging (static) |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotation*** | ***Key techniques*** |
| *1* | *‘one of the* ***happiest*** *nights of my life…’* | *Superlative* |
| *1* | *‘(Your father and I have been)* ***friendly rivals*** *in business.* | *Oxymoron* |
| *1* | *‘I’m talking as a* ***hard-headed****,* ***practical man*** *of* ***business****.’* | *Alliteration, adjectives* |
| *1* | ***‘as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive’*** | *Simile* |
| *1* | ***‘horrid business’*** | *Euphemism*  |
| *2* | *‘The Press might* ***easily*** *take it up.’* | *Adverb* |
| *2* | *‘(****terrified now****)…my boy- is* ***mixed up*** *in this-?’* | *Stage directions, verb* |
| *3* | *‘…****they’re*** *so damned exasperating’* | *Plural pronoun* |
| *3* | *‘…Nothing but an* ***elaborate sell****!’* | *Exclamatory sentence and noun phrase* |
| **Mrs. Sybil Birling** | She is originally from a higher class than her husband and is therefore her husband’s social superior. She is insistent upon maintaining standards of correct etiquette. As a leader of a women’s charitable organisation, she assumes a social and moral superiority over Inspector Goole. Priestley uses Mrs Birling to epitomize all that is wrong with society. She represents the social snobbery and hypocrisy of the upper classes and shows no remorse for her cruel treatment of Eva Smith. Priestley could be suggesting that we should not trust the wealthy members of society to tell the truth. | Cold, supercilious, upper-class, prejudiced, snobbish, cold-hearted, capitalist, abrupt, dismissive, aloof, dogmatic, callous, hypocritical, condemning, unchanging (static) |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotations*** | ***Key techniques*** |
| *1* | *‘A rather cold woman.’* | *Stage directions**Connotations of the adjective* |
| *1* | ‘You seem to have made a great impression on this **child.’** | *Noun and its connotations (when used to describe Sheila).* |
| *2* | ‘…forget about this **absurd business**.’ | *Euphemism*  |
| ***2*** | ‘She was **claiming** elaborate **fine feelings** and scruples that were **simply** absurd in a girl in her position.’ | *Verb, fricative- how would this affect the tone?, adverb* |
| ***3*** | *‘Mrs Birling has* ***collapsed*** *into a chair.’* | *Stage directions, verb* |
| ***3*** | “…**In the morning** **they’ll** be as **amused** as **we** are.” | *Reference to time (Ouspensky’s A New Model of the Universe’), contrast created through the use of pronouns and verb.* |
| **Gerald** **Croft** | He is a member of the aristocracy and as a result enjoys a privileged position in society. His family are a competitor of Birling and Company. Gerald has a natural confidence and an authoritative manner which makes that of Mr Birling seem rather forced and artificial. He shares the same conservative attitudes and values of the elder Birlings and has had experience in business. Mr Birling regards Gerald as an ideal son-in-law; in fact Priestley uses Gerald as a strong contrast to Eric and therefore uses him to expose the tensions between Eric and Mr Birling. Although he helped Eva out of genuine concern for her situation, he is still shown as cowardly and thoughtless for taking advantage of a vulnerable woman. At the start of Act 2 he appears to be upset, but by the middle of Act 3 he is more concerned with proving their wasn’t an inspector and has not changed. | Polite, tactful, traditionalist, dishonest, immoral, self-assured, deceptive, dogmatic, unchanging (static), Capitalist, aristocratic, disingenuous |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotations*** | ***Key techniques*** |
| 1 | ‘After all, y’know, we’re **respectable citizens** and not **criminals.**’ | *Adjective, nouns* |
| *2* | *‘In that case- as I’m rather more-* ***upset****- by this* ***business*** *than I appear to be-‘* | *Euphemism* |
| *3* | ‘Everything’s all right now, Sheila ***(Holds up the ring.)*** What about this **ring**?’ | *Stage direction, dramatic device/symbolism* |
| **Sheila** **Birling** | Young woman who begins the play as materialistic and dependent upon her parents. At the start of the play the audience view her as over-indulged and living a comfortable life; Priestley uses her as a direct contrast to Eva. Sheila had Eva fired due to jealously and spitefulness. At the end of the play she feels regretful and remorseful. Out of all of the characters, she is the most responsive to Goole’s Socialist views about moral responsibility towards others. She understands that she can’t disconnect her actions from the effects these have on others. Her parents accuse her of a lack of loyalty. However, Sheila lacks the coldness of her parents and recognises that honesty and truth have a value that surpasses appearances. She is representative of the willingness of the young to change. When Sheila rejects Gerald’s proposal at the end of the play, it represents the growing power of women. | Naïve, superficial, transformative, remorseful, socialist, pseudo-inspector, sensitive, astute, strong-minded, empowered, compassionate, becomes wiser, voice/ representative of the audience, dynamic character |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotations*** | ***Key techniques*** |
| *1* | **‘Oh-it’s wonderful!** Look-mummy- isn’t it a **beauty?’** | *Exclamatory sentence, noun* |
| *1* | “(rather distressed)…I’ve been so happy tonight. Oh I wish you hadn’t told me.” | *Stage directions* |
| *1* | *‘But these girls aren’t cheap labour- they’re people.’* | *Metaphor* |
| *3* | *“…It* ***frightens******me*** *the way* ***you*** *talk.”* | *Connotations of the verb, contrast in pronouns* |
| **Eric** **Birling** | At the start of the play, it is evident that Eric doesn’t quite fit in and can be immature. Priestley uses Eric’s uneasiness to foreshadow the crime he has committed.Eric and Mr Birling don’t have a good relationship. Although Eric has attended public school and university and is therefore well-educated, Mr Birling views Eric as a boy who has a lot to learn. During Act One Eric disagrees with his father’s opinion on many occasions. He also supports the Inspector’s views over his own father’s. Through Eric’s treatment of Eva, an abhorrent picture of the middle- upper class emerges. He is a habitual drinker and this caused him to behave in a thoughtless and brutish way towards Eva. However, Eric illustrates the capacity to change as he is full of remorse for his behaviour.Towards the end of the play, he blames his mother for Eva’s death. This makes his transformation more realistic. By the end of the play Eric takes full responsibility, shows remorse and his acceptance is evidence of his moral fibre.Eric consistently echoes the message of the inspector from the start of the play. This is Priestley’s way of demonstrating that there is hope for the future.  | Realistic, believable character, reckless, rebellious, immature, insubordinate, compulsive, desperate, disgraced, irresponsible, frustrated, challenging, holds others to account therefore his purpose his dualistic, repentant  |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotations*** | ***Key techniques*** |
| ***1*** | *‘who is* ***uneasy, sharply’*** | ***Stage directions, verb, adverb*** |
| ***1*** | *‘…I mean about this* ***girl-*** *Eva Smith.**Why shouldn’t* ***they*** *try for* ***higher*** *wages?* ***We*** *try for the* ***highest*** *possible prices’* | ***Connotations of noun, pronoun******Comparative, pronoun, superlative*** |
| ***3*** | *‘I was in a state when* ***a chap******easily*** *turns nasty- and I* ***threatened*** *to make a row.’*  | ***Noun, adverb, verb*** |
| ***3*** | *‘(Shouting)…****we*** *all* ***helped*** *to kill her…’* | ***Stage directions, pronoun, verb*** |
| **Inspector Goole**  | The purpose of the inspector is to criticise the selfishness of capitalism and to promote a fairer, socialist future after the horrors of two world wars. He also highlights the corruption and the selfish attitudes of the twentieth century society.He presents himself to the characters and audience as there to investigate the suicide of a lower class woman (Eva Smith). He immediately assumes control, which is a disturbing shift for Mr Birling who immediately tries to regain it. He is presented as someone who sees it as his duty to conduct an investigation and he does this thoroughly. The Inspector is able to manipulate characters into revealing things about themselves which they would rather not reveal, or have actually tried to conceal. He acts as a catalyst. There is also an air of menace about his manner which intimidates the others.The Inspector’s dramatic power lies in the fact that his real identity is mysterious, unresolved and somehow other-worldly. The Inspector has an air of omniscience which means while he is on stage, none of the characters challenge his explanation of events.The Inspector has several functions in the play. He acts as a storyteller, linking all of the separate incidents together into one coherent story. He also behaves like a priest, someone to whom characters confess their sins, helping them to see the extent of their involvement in the downfall of Eva Smith and encouraging them to acknowledge their guilt and repent. He can also be viewed in a similar way to the Ghosts from the novella ‘A Christmas Carol’ he is there to provide enlightenment to the family and teach them a moral lesson. In combination with this, he is also prophetic as he warns the characters of the terrible consequences if they do not change. | Socialist, mysterious, systematic, advocate for social justice, moralistic, righteous, powerful, intimidating, imposing, **omnipotent, omniscient,** prophetic, interrogator, authoritative, blunt, controlling, story-teller, priest, ‘spirit’ or ‘portent’ of the future. |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotations*** | ***Key techniques*** |
| *1* | *Inspector* ***Goole*** | *Pun*  |
| *1* | *‘…great agony’**‘Burnt her inside out’* | *Dysphemism*  |
| *1* | *‘…creates an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness’* | *Stage directions, list of three* |
| *1-3* | ***‘cutting*** *through* ***massively’****‘looking* ***hard****…’ ‘****watching****’**‘****interposes’*** | *Stage directions, verbs and adverbs* |
| *1* | *‘A chain of events’* | *Metaphor* |
| *1 and 2* | *‘duty’* | *Connotations of the noun ‘duty’ and contrast to the ‘lack’ of duty from other characters.* |
| *3* | *‘members of one body’* | *Metaphor* |
| *3* | *‘taught in fire and blood and anguish’* | *Metaphor and contextual ref.* |
| **Edna** | Edna is another example of the invisible working class and she adds to the impression of the Birlings’ wealthy lifestyle.Edna refers to Mr Birling as ‘Sir’. This is a clear reminder of the class divide at the beginning of the 20th century. He calls her by her first name but this is not done out of friendliness but as a way of reinforcing that he is the head of the household. When Edna announces the arrival of the Inspector, this may have been done to herald an opportunity for change. Priestley gives her one moment in which she speaks and actually stops the Birlings from finishing their conversation. | Voiceless, servant, submissive, obedient, invisible lower class, reliant upon the Birlings, powerless |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotations*** | ***Key techniques*** |
| *1* | *'A police inspector. He says his name's Inspector Goole.'* | *Why does Priestley use Edna to introduce the Inspector?* |
| **Eva Smith/ Daisy Rention** | Eva Smith is introduced to the other characters and audience through the Inspector. This is reflective of the fact that the lower class were supported by very few people. Eva, like the inspector, is a symbolic character and is used as a symbol of the common man or woman and reminds us of our need to take responsibility for our actions and the impact they can have on others.She also represents ordinary people who can be destroyed by indifference when society fails to grant them the right of basic human dignity. Her connection to the characters in the play is what prompts their confessions. Therefore, she promotes the idea of collective responsibility.During the play her attractive appearance is commented upon by several characters. However, the characters, at first, use this as an excuse for their behaviour and treatment of her. Sheila was jealous of her beauty and Gerald and Eric were both attracted to her. She is also the victim of unwanted lecherous behaviour from other powerful figures in Brumley society such as Alderman (someone who is beneath the Mayor in rank) Meggarty The inspector draws attention to the way in which Eva was treated like an object. She becomes emblematic of all victims of social injustice.Unlike the other characters, Eva/Daisy is presented as having strong morals (understanding right from wrong) as she refuses to take any further money from Eric when she suspects it is stolen and she stands up for her own and others’ rights when she asked Mr Birling for a pay rise. | Victim, emblematic (embodiment), vulnerable, desperate, moralistic, principled, powerless |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotation*** | ***Key techniques*** |
| *1* | ***Eva Smith*** | *Connotations of proper nouns* |
| *1* | **Mr Birling: ‘**She was a **lively good-looking girl- country-bred…a good** worker**…**ready to promote her**…’** | *Adjectives* |
| *1* | ***Mr Birling:*** *‘She’d had a lot to say- far too much- so she had to go.’* | *Representation of gender and lower class* |
| *1* | ***Inspector: ‘…young women counting*** *their* ***pennies*** *in their* ***dingy little*** *back bedrooms****.’*** | *Adjectives, nouns and verb* |
| *1* | ***Daisy Renton*** | *Connotations of proper nouns* |
| ***2*** | *Gerald: ‘But then I noticed a* ***girl*** *who looked quite different. She was* ***very pretty*** *–* ***soft brown hair*** *and* ***big dark eyes’*** | *Noun, adjectives* |
| ***2*** | *Mrs Birling: (rather cowed) she said that the father was only a youngster –* ***silly and wild*** *and drinking too much. There couldn't be any question of marrying him – it would be wrong for them both. He had given her money* ***but she didn't want to take any more money from him.*** | *Adjectives**What moral standard is presented here?* |
| ***3*** | *Inspector to Eric: ‘…****as if she an animal****, a thing, not a person.’* | *Simile* |
| **STOP-CHECK!**1. Create spider diagrams for each character.
2. Copy out and learn the key quotations for each character.
3. Copy out and identify the key techniques used in each quotation. Then annotate explaining how meanings and effects have been created.

CHALLENGE: Use the key words to create sentences and paragraphs about each character. |
| **General terms** |
| Hierarchy | A system in which members of an organization or society are ranked according to relative status or authority. |
| Conscience | A sense of right and wrong. |
| Microcosm | A community, place, or situation regarded as encapsulating in miniature the characteristics of something much larger. In the play, this is the Birlings’ dining room. |
| Patriarchy | Male dominated or powered society. |
| Misogyny  | A dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women. |
| Social responsibility | The idea that we, as a community/society, are responsible for the more vulnerable and less fortunate members of society. |
| Didactic | Speech or writing which contains a moral message or lesson for the audience. For example the Inspector’s speech in Act 3. |
| Individual responsibility | The idea that each individual should consider the impact of their actions on others. |
| Dichotomy  | A division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different. In the play the two generations create a dichotomy between the selfish attitudes of Edwardian Britain and the social conscience of the post-war generation. |
| Characterisation and contrasts | Characterisation is a term to describe how characters are presented throughout a text. In ‘AIC’, there is a distinction between characters who change and develop (dynamic characters) and characters who stay the same (static characters). |
| Materialistic  | Excessively concerned with material possessions; money-oriented. |
| **STOP-CHECK!**1. Learn and revise the terms and their definitions by writing them out.
 |
|  **Language Terms**  |
| **Term** | **Definition** | **Which character(s)?** |
| Euphemism  | This is a way of avoiding saying something by using other, often more vague or pleasant, words. | Mr Birling, Mrs Birling Gerald, Eric |
| Dysphemism  | A derogatory or unpleasant term used instead of a pleasant or neutral one. | Inspector Goole |
| Bombast  | Over-inflated language, which has little to no meaning. | Mr Birling |
| Allusion | An expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly; an indirect or passing reference. In the play, this is when the Inspector makes a reference to the world wars in his last speech. | Inspector Goole |
| Imagery | This is where writers create strong visual images through their use of vocabulary and language techniques. | Inspector Goole |
| Understatement | The presentation of something as being smaller or less good or important than it really is. | Mr and Mrs Birling |
| Metaphor | A direct comparison (where you say something is something else). | Inspector Goole, Sheila |
| Repetition | This is where a word or phrase is repeated in order to emphasise a point or opinion. | Mr Birling, Inspector Goole |
| Modal verbs | An auxiliary verb that expresses necessity or possibility. | Inspector Goole |
| Inclusive personal pronoun ‘we’ | The word ‘we’ is used to reinforce the Inspector’s message that all of the characters and the audience have a responsibility to help the less fortunate. | Inspector Goole |
| Imperative | Commanding, authoritative sentences | Mr Birling, Inspector Goole |
| Objectification | The action of degrading someone to the status of a mere object. | Eva Smith |
| Adjective | Words used to describe the colour, shape, size and texture of a noun. | Sheila, Inspector Goole etc |
| Comparative | These are used to compare differences between the two objects they modify (larger, smaller, faster, higher) | Eric |
| Superlative | These compare three or more nouns. This takes the comparison of nouns to the highest degree. (Best, worst, least, most) | Eric Sheila |
| Second person personal pronoun ‘you’ | The word ‘you’ create the sense that the characters and audience are each being addressed individually. This helps to create the sense of personal responsibility. | Inspector Goole |
| **STOP-CHECK!**CHALLENGE: Can you find examples in the play where characters use the specific techniques? Then can you work out why they have used the techniques? |
| **Dramatic devices and structure** |
| Dramatic irony | This term refers to situations on stage where the audience have knowledge that one or more characters on stage do not. |
| ‘Well-made play’ | This means a style of play in which there is:1. Progression from ignorance to understanding.
2. Real time, one setting, one storyline

The effect is that it feels like you are watching real life unfold in real time. However, Priestley breaks the conventions at the end. |
| Morality play | These type of plays sought to teach the audience about the need for goodness and the temptations of evil. They featured unrealistic characters: characters who embody generic character types (e.g. Everyman) and personifications (e.g. the Seven Deadly Sins).  |
| Stage directions | An instruction in the text of a play indicating the movement, position, or tone of an actor, or the sound effects and lighting. |
| Lighting | Lighting is used to create different moods. The reference to the lighting, which goes from ‘pink and intimate’ to harsh and bright symbolises the light of truth: there will be nowhere for the Birlings to hide. |
| Sounds e.g. doors closing, the door bell ringing and the telephone | The use of doors closing, ringing of the doorbell and telephone all mark a change in direction or are used for emphasis. They are all used to create dramatic tension and intrigue. |
| Cyclical structure | At the end of the play, it has come full circle. The Birlings and Gerald have reverted back to their complacent and selfish ways. Then once again, we are told an inspector is going to call. The circular structure is used to make the audience consider their own thoughts at the end of the play. The circular structure suggests that if we don’t change our ways, we’re doomed to make the same mistakes as the Birlings. It also links to Ouspensky’s theory that when we die we are reborn to the same parents and same circumstances. He suggests that our lives repeat exactly as before time and again, unless we achieve some sort of spiritual enlightenment in our lives which allows us to escape this cycle of repetition and enter a new life, where we do not make the same errors. |
| The 4th Wall | The inspector’s final speech is addressed directly to the audience. |
| Monologue | Lengthy speech by one person. |
| **STOP-CHECK!**1. Learn and/or revise dramatic devices and structure by writing out definitions or examples.
 |
| **Contextual details** |
| 1912 (The play’s setting) | Priestley set the play at this time (just before WW1 and the sinking of the Titanic) to remind audiences in 1946 of the problems in society at this time before the wars (such as a class system, Capitalism, inequality) and to act as a warning for us not to return to a system like that. At this time, there was a clear patriarchal system in place. Women were paid less than men for the same work. There was no benefit system or help with housing or unemployment.  |
| 1945 | The play was written in 1945 and performed in Russia in 1946. This is because there wasn’t any space in London theatres to begin. After WW2, Priestley believed society had changed for the better. The benefit system started to be introduced (based on the Beveridge Report 1942) and the Labour Party introduced the concept of care from the ‘cradle to the grave’. Due to the wars, society had experienced the merging of classes and women working. Priestley supported these changes and wanted to make sure he promoted them in his play by making Capitalists like the older Birlings appear ignorant and selfish. |
| The Titanic | The Titanic sailed from Southampton and sank in the early hours of 15th April 1912. The initial ignorance by Birling would make the audience mistrust him and his views. The use of the Titanic is also symbolic in that it was an arrogant symbol of grandeur that no-one thought would sink. This is just like Birling- he sees himself as indestructible but is challenged in the play. |
| Russia | The irony is that by the 1940s Russia had progressed further than other European countries. |
| Bernard Shaws and H.G. Wellses | (George) Bernard Shaw was a playwright and H.G. Wells was a science-fiction writer. They were both well-known and outspoken socialists. |
| Beveridge Report (1942) | The Beveridge Report called for a Nationalised Health Service, benefits for those poor who needed it and good housing for all as a basis for a moral society. It stated that “Everyone regardless of class should be looked after by the state from the cradle to the grave.” |
| Socialism | The concept that as a society we are all responsible for each other. Its focus is upon public rather than private ownership. Benefit for the majority not the individual. |
| Capitalism | The key objective of business it to make money and profit. Responsibility and reward lies with the individual. |
| **STOP-CHECK!**1. Learn and/or revise the contextual details.
2. Look back at the contextual references in the play. You will find them in Act 1. Explain what they show about Mr Birling and the lower classes.
 |
| **Themes** |
| Generational differences | The older generation are a symbol of Capitalism. The younger generation become a symbol of Socialism as the play progresses.  |
| **Act** | **Key quotations** |
| 2 | *Mrs Birling: ‘You seem to have made a great impression on this child, Inspector.’* |
| 3 | *Mr Birling: ‘(heartily) Nonsense! You’ll have a good laugh over it yet. Look, you’d better ask Gerald for that ring you gave back to him, hadn’t you? Then you’ll feel better.’**Sheila: ‘(passionately) You’re pretending everything’s just as it was before.**Mr Birling: ‘Well, isn’t it?’**Sheila: ‘…We can all go on behaving just as we did.’**Mrs Birling: ‘Well, why shouldn’t we?’* |
| 3 | *Mr Birling: (pointing to Eric and Sheila): ‘…the famous younger generation who knows it all. And can’t even take a joke-‘* *The telephone rings sharply.* |
| Responsibility/ justice/ blame | *The inspector’s purpose or duty is to teach the Birling family, Gerald and the audience about the importance of responsibility and community. The Inspector serves as Priestley’s mouthpiece, voicing his views about social responsibility. Sheila and Eric are used as the communal conscience for the others.* |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotations*** |
| *1* | *Mr Birling: ‘If we were all responsible for everything that had happened to everybody we’d had anything to do with, it would be very awkward, wouldn’t it?’* |
| *2* | *Inspector: ‘(massively) Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.’* |
| *2* | *Mrs Birling: ‘I’m sorry she should have come to such a horrible end. But I accept no blame for it at all.’* |
| *3* | *‘We don’t live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other.’* |
| Gender inequality | Priestley presents a patriarchal system which has at its heart misogynistic views. It is acceptable for middle upper class and upper class men to use women for their own sexual satisfaction. All women are expected to listen and not challenge male views. Middle upper class younger women (such as Sheila) are viewed as needed to be protected and live a sheltered life whereas middle-upper class women are viewed as discriminatory against younger lower class women. This is despite the fact that middle-upper class women were supposed to provide help for them. A prejudiced view is portrayed in the play against lower class younger women as lacking in moral standards. |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotations*** |
| *1* | *Mrs Birling: ‘…When you’re married, you’ll realise that men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on their business.’* |
|  *2* | *Gerald: ‘…Old Joe Meggarty, half-drunk and goggle-eyed, had wedged her into a corner with that obscene fat carcass of his-‘* |
| *2* | *Mrs Birling: ‘Oh- she had some fancy reason. As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!’* |
| Class, status and power | This theme encapsulates the concepts of wealth, power and influence. The Birlings are representative of the middle upper class who are ‘self-made business men’. This means that Mr Birling has worked very hard to build up his business and was very concerned with respectability and their appearance in society. The Crofts represent the aristocracy and are extremely wealthy. Their wealth comes from inherited money. They all misuse their social influence and power to benefit themselves. Their actions negatively affect the vulnerable people in society. The upper and middle classes prejudices against the lower classes are also portrayed through this theme. |
| **Act** | **Key quotations** |
| 1 | *Mr Birling: ‘…there’s a fair chance that I might find my way into the next Honours List. Just a knighthood, of course.’* |
| 1 | *Inspector: ‘…you used the power you had, as a daughter of a good customer and also of a man well known in the town to punish the girl…’* |
| 2 | *The Inspector to Mrs Birling ‘Was is owing to your influence, as the most prominent member of the committee, that help was refused to the girl?’…**Mrs Birling ‘Yes, it was.’* |
| 3 | *Mr Birling: ‘They just won’t try to understand our position or to see the difference between a lot of stuff like this coming out in private and a downright public scandal.’* |
| Morality and legality | In the play, Priestley explores the different ways in which characters construct, construe and apply their moral values especially linked to the concept of legality. The difference between the law and morality is explored in the play and the Inspector blurs the lines between the two. Priestley’s point is that although the elder Birlings, Sheila and Gerald may not have committed illegal acts, they have acted immorally and should therefore be held to account. At the end of the play, Sheila and Eric still take responsibility for their actions despite the revelations about the Inspector whereas the other Birlings and Gerald do not. |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotations*** |
| 1 | *Gerald ‘We’re respectable citizens and not criminals.’**Inspector ‘Sometimes, there isn’t as much difference as you think. Often if it was left to me, I wouldn’t know where to draw the line.’*  |
| 3 | *Mr Birling ‘…Look, Inspector- I’d give thousands- yes thousands-‘* |
| 3 | *Mr Birling ‘…There’s every excuse for what both your mother, and I did- it turned out unfortunately, that’s all-‘* |
| Money | The power that money has in the play is evident. Mr Birling places a huge significance upon money. He operates his factory to try to ensure that he gains maximum profit. His workers strike and try to gain higher wages but they are refused. Eva Smith even loses her job. Eric and Sheila recognise how unfairly Mr Birling’s workers are treated. Sheila uses the fact that her family hold an account at Milwards to influence Eva Smith’s fate. Gerald is able to give Daisy happiness for a short while as he provides money. Eric steals money in order to help Eva once he realises she is pregnant. Mrs Birling uses her power has head of the charity committee to stop Eva being provided with any financial aid. Priestley asks us to question the value placed on money and to replace it with a more worthy currency- spiritual enlightenment. |
| ***Act*** | ***Key quotations*** |
| ***3*** | *Inspector to Mr Birling ‘She wanted twenty-five shillings a week instead of twenty-two and sixpence. You made her pay a heavy price for that…’**Mr Birling ‘…Look, Inspector- I’d give thousands- yes thousands-‘**Inspector ‘You’re offering the money at the wrong time.’* |
| **STOP-CHECK!**1. Create spider diagrams of each specific theme.2. Quotation work- work on each theme and its group of related quotations. Complete the following tasks: learn the quotations, identify and explain how the specific theme is being shown in each quotation and identify and explain how key techniques have been used in each quotation. |
| **Useful You Tube videos**MR Bruff AIC.Stacye Reay An Inspector calls |
| **Example Exam Questions** |
| How and why does Priestley present Inspector Goole in *An Inspector Calls*?Write about:* how the Inspector treats and deals with the other characters
* how Priestley presents the Inspector by the ways he writes.

How does Priestley explore the role of women in *An Inspector Calls*?Write about:* the ideas about women presented in *An Inspector Calls*
* how Priestley presents these ideas by the ways he writes.
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