Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

THEMES, CHARACTERS & INTERPRETATIONS

GRADES 7–9



Name: _____

Class: _____



Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: CONTENTS

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

THEMES

	PAGE
RESPONSIBILITY	3
CLASS AND PRIVILEGE	4
CAPITALISM VS SOCIALISM	5
MASCULINE POWER	6
GENERATIONAL DIVIDE	7
SELF-PRESERVATION	8

CHARACTERS

	PAGE
MR BIRLING	9
MRS BIRLING	10
SHEILA BIRLING	11
ERIC BIRLING	12
GERALD CROFT	13
INSPECTOR GOOLE	14
EVA SMITH	15

THEMES • CHARACTERS • INTERPRETATIONS

Use the page numbers to find each revision sheet.

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: RESPONSIBILITY

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

INDIVIDUALISM:

BIRLING'S SELF-INTEREST

Birling believes individuals should look after themselves and their own, rejecting responsibility for others and prioritising profit, status and the business community.

COLLECTIVE DUTY:

THE INSPECTOR'S MESSAGE

The Inspector challenges individualism, arguing that we are all connected. We have a moral responsibility to each other and must consider the wider impact of our actions.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

SHEILA AND ERIC CHANGE

Sheila and Eric move from denial to accepting responsibility, showing that genuine accountability requires self-reflection, remorse and a willingness to change.

1 THE BIG IDEA: WHAT IS RESPONSIBILITY?

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents responsibility as a moral obligation extending beyond class and self-interest.
- **Develop:** Individual actions form a chain of consequences, showing that we all have a duty to consider the impact of our choices on others.
- **Qualify:** Genuine responsibility requires more than recognising wrongdoing – it demands self-reflection and a willingness to change.
- **Context:** Written in 1945 but set in 1912, Priestley uses the play to argue for a fairer, more compassionate society.

HOW THE THEME DEVELOPS

- **Act 1:** Birling rejects responsibility and defends individualism. The Inspector introduces the idea of collective responsibility.
- **Act 2:** Each character's involvement is revealed, showing how individual actions contribute to Eva's death. The Inspector emphasises that we are all connected.
- **Act 3:** The characters are forced to confront their guilt. Sheila and Eric accept responsibility, while Birling and Mrs Birling continue to deny it. The ending leaves the audience questioning whether real change will follow.

ESSAY ROUTE: FROM TEXT TO OTHERS

1. **Establish responsibility:** explore how Priestley presents responsibility through character, language and dramatic form.
2. **Analyse methods:** consider how Priestley uses structure, dramatic irony and the Inspector's speeches to develop the theme.
3. **Broader context:** link to 1912 class divisions, 1945 post-war socialism and Priestley's wider message about the need for a more equal and compassionate society.

KEY QUOTATION STUDIES

1 BIRLING: SELF-INTEREST FIRST

'a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own'

- Shows Birling's belief in individualism and self-interest.
- Reflects capitalist values and the business community.
- Highlights his refusal to accept a wider moral responsibility.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Priestley presents Birling's view as selfish and short-sighted, showing how an individualistic mindset enables exploitation and ignores the needs of the wider community.

2 BIRLING: DENIAL OF RESPONSIBILITY

'Still, I can't accept any responsibility'

- Shows Birling's continued denial, even when confronted with the evidence.
- Reveals his inability to recognise moral guilt, prioritising his reputation over justice.
- Highlights the generational and ideological divide between Birling and the Inspector.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Birling's refusal to accept responsibility suggests that power and class can insulate people from accountability, a key target for Priestley's criticism of the upper classes.

3 INSPECTOR: THE CHAIN OF EVENTS

'A chain of events'

- Emphasises how individual actions are interconnected.
- Shows that no one can operate in isolation – everyone's choices have consequences.
- Reinforces the Inspector's socialist message about collective responsibility.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The metaphor of a chain suggests inevitability and shared culpability, challenging the characters – and the audience – to recognise how easily harm can spread through society.

4 SHEILA: RECOGNISING HUMANITY

'But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people'

- Shows Sheila's growing sense of responsibility and empathy.
- Contrasts with Birling's dehumanising attitudes towards workers.
- Demonstrates Sheila's moral development and recognition of others' humanity.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Sheila's use of the inclusive term **'people'** marks a significant shift towards a more compassionate and socially responsible worldview, aligning with Priestley's call for respect and equality.

5 INSPECTOR: COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

'We are members of one body'

- Summarises the Inspector's message that we are all connected and interdependent.
- Challenges both individualism and the class system.
- Presents responsibility as a shared moral duty to support and care for others.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The metaphor of a **body** suggests that society only functions if everyone takes responsibility for each other, reinforcing Priestley's vision of a fairer, more unified community.

6 INSPECTOR: SHARED CULPABILITY

'Each of you helped to kill her'

- Directly implicates all the characters, highlighting their collective responsibility.
- Shows how different forms of exploitation and mistreatment contribute to Eva's death.
- Creates a powerful sense of accusation and inevitability.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Priestley deliberately uses the inclusive **'Each of you'** to break down distinctions between class, age and gender, showing that responsibility is shared across the whole of society.

7 ERIC: ACCEPTING GUILT

'the fact remains that I did what I did'

- Shows Eric's acceptance of responsibility without defence or excuse.
- Reflects genuine remorse and a recognition of the harm caused.
- Contrasts with Birling's denial, highlighting Eric's potential for change.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Eric's direct and unembellished admission suggests true moral accountability, showing that recognsiing and owning our actions is the first step towards meaningful change.

8 INSPECTOR: THE CONSEQUENCES

'fire and blood and anguish'

- Presents a bleak vision of the consequences if society refuses to take responsibility.
- Creates a sense of urgency and moral warning.
- Links the play to the threats of war and social unrest in 1945, emphasising the need for change.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The vivid, **tricolon** imagery suggests that a failure to accept responsibility will lead to widespread suffering, linking personal accountability to broader social and political consequences in the post-war world.

AQA: BUILD AN INTERPRETATION

- **AO1:** present a clear and coherent argument about responsibility in the play.
- **AO2:** analyse Priestley's use of language, structure and dramatic form.
- **AO3:** link the play to its historical context (1912 and 1945) and Priestley's wider social and political message.

What matters more: Does responsibility depend on being caught, or on recognising the harm we cause?

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: PRIVILEGE

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

★ = key quotation

○ = key moment

ENTITLEMENT:
A WORLD BUILT FOR THEM.

The Birlings' class, wealth, age and gender give them power, protection and opportunities that most people do not have.

DISTANCE:
PRIVILEGE CREATES BLIND SPOTS.

Their elevated position allows them to ignore or minimise the lives and suffering of working-class people.

EXPLOITATION:
A SYSTEM THAT ENABLES HARM.

Each character uses their form of privilege (class, gender, age or wealth) to gain an advantage over Eva Smith, contributing to her exploitation and death.

1 THE BIG IDEA: UNEQUAL POWER

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents the Birlings as a privileged family whose social, economic and gender status enable them to act without considering the human cost.
- **Develop:** each character benefits from a different form of privilege, which shapes their attitudes, choices and treatment of Eva Smith.
- **Qualify:** privilege creates a moral distance that allows the family to justify their behaviour and avoid guilt, but the Inspector challenges this.
- **Context:** written in 1945, the play criticises the inequalities of 1912 and calls for a fairer, more collective society where responsibility replaces privilege.

HOW THE THEME DEVELOPS

- **Act 1:** the family confidently display their privilege and dismiss the needs of others.
- **Act 2:** each character's privilege is exposed through their treatment of Eva Smith, revealing the human cost of their advantages.
- **Act 3:** the family attempt to defend their privileged position and avoid responsibility, but the Inspector condemns a society where privilege silences compassion and calls for fundamental change.

ESSAY ROUTE: FROM TEXT TO OTHERS

1. **Establish:** explore how Priestley presents different forms of privilege (class, gender, age, wealth) and the effects on the characters' behaviour.
2. **Analyse:** track how each character's privilege is exposed across the acts and begins to unravel.
3. **Evaluate:** consider Priestley's message about 1912 class inequality and his post-war call for a more equal and responsible society, linking to the play's continued relevance today.

KEY QUOTATION STUDIES

2 BIRLING: ECONOMIC PRIVILEGE

★ *'A man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own.'*
— Birling, Act 1

- **Method:** dismissive, prosaic language reflects capitalist beliefs and self-interest.
- **Explore:** Birling's economic privilege allows him to ignore the needs of others and prioritise profit over people.
- **Structure:** early in the play, this establishes the family's worldview and justifies their later behaviour.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
Birling's privilege creates a belief that success is earned through individual effort, revealing how wealth can distort morality and empathy.

3 SHEILA: CLASS PRIVILEGE

★ *'It didn't seem to be anything very terrible at the time.'*
— Sheila, Act 1

- **Method:** conversational, regretful tone reveals her initial naivety and lack of awareness.
- **Explore:** Sheila's privileged upbringing allows her to treat Eva as a disposable employee without considering the consequences.
- **Structure:** in Act 1, this highlights her early immaturity but also sets up her later transformation.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
Her privilege creates a blind spot, showing how easy it is to cause harm when others' lives are not considered as valuable or equal.

4 MRS BIRLING: GENDER AND CLASS PRIVILEGE

★ *'I used my influence to have it refused.'*
— Mrs Birling, Act 2

- **Method:** formal, self-justifying language shows her sense of authority and entitlement.
- **Explore:** Mrs Birling's social and gender privilege allows her to act as a gatekeeper of charity, deciding who is deserving of help, based on class prejudice.
- **Structure:** in Act 2, this reveals her willingness to use her position to maintain class boundaries and reject vulnerable people.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
Her privilege not only denies Eva support, but unwittingly condemns her own grandchild to death, as Eva's pregnancy could a bridge between classes that threatened Mrs Birling's way of life.

5 ERIC: MALE PRIVILEGE

★ *'She was pretty and a good sport.'*
— Eric, Act 3

- **Method:** casual, objectifying language reveals his sense of entitlement.
- **Explore:** Eric's male privilege allows him to exploit Eva sexually, without considering her feelings or the potential consequences.
- **Structure:** in Act 3, his admission shows how his privilege enabled reckless behaviour but also marks the beginning of his guilt and change.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
Eric's privilege gives him freedom to behave irresponsibly, with no immediate repercussions. It exposes how male entitlement can devalue women's lives and lead to harm.

6 GERALD: SOCIAL PRIVILEGE

★ *'She was very pretty – soft brown hair and big dark eyes.'*
— Gerald, Act 2

- **Method:** polite, understated language masks his exploitation and sense of entitlement.
- **Explore:** Gerald's upper-class privilege gives him access to Eva and the freedom to end the relationship when it becomes inconvenient.
- **Structure:** in Act 2, this reveals how privilege enables him to enjoy Eva's company without commitment, reinforcing a culture where men can exploit others without serious repercussions.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
Gerald's privilege allows him to move between social worlds with ease, enjoying the benefits of romance without responsibility. His status and connections make exploitation easier to hide.

7 THE INSPECTOR: CHALLENGING PRIVILEGE

★ *'We are members of one body.'*
— Inspector, Act 3

- **Method:** inclusive language contrasts with the family's individualism, emphasising shared responsibility.
- **Explore:** the Inspector rejects a society where the privileged ignore the suffering of others, arguing that a fair society depends on people recognising the human cost of their actions.
- **Structure:** in Act 3, this forms part of his final speech, challenging the family's worldview and calling for a society based on compassion and accountability.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
The Inspector exposes the moral cost of privilege, insisting that a fair society requires people to look beyond their own interests and accept responsibility for the impact of their actions on others.

8 THE ENDING: PRIVILEGE UNDER THREAT

- **Structure:** the final telephone call abruptly interrupts the family's relief, reversing their apparent escape from accountability.
- **Dramatic irony:** just as Birling believes his reputation is safe, the announcement of a real investigation threatens their social standing once again.
- **Develop:** Priestley exposes the fragility of privilege: wealth and status cannot necessarily protect individuals from the consequences of their actions.
- **Qualify:** the ending does not guarantee immediate punishment, but it destabilises the family's assumed immunity, leaving the audience to question whether real change is possible.

Can privilege ever provide genuine security when it depends upon escaping responsibility?

AQA: BUILD AN INTERPRETATION

- **AO1:** respond to the text, using precise references to the play (Acts 1–3).
- **AO2:** analyse language, structure and dramatic methods.
- **AO3:** explore context (1912 class inequality and 1945 message) and link to Priestley's purpose.

Grades 7–9: explore how Priestley presents different forms of privilege (class, gender, age, wealth); trace how they are exposed across Acts 1–3; and consider the play's message about the need for a fairer, more equal and responsible society.

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: CAPITALISM VS SOCIALISM

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

★ = key quotation

○ = key moment

CAPITALISM:

PROFIT, INDIVIDUALISM, SELF-INTEREST.

The Birlings represent a capitalist worldview that prioritises profit, competition and individual success. They believe in limited state intervention and see workers as a means to an end.

SOCIALISM:

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY.

The Inspector presents a socialist view, arguing that society should be organised to meet the needs of all, not just the privileged few. He calls for a more equal and compassionate society where people accept responsibility for one another.

CONFLICT:

TWO IDEOLOGIES, ONE SOCIETY.

The play explores the clash between the Birlings' capitalist attitudes and the Inspector's socialist message, questioning whether people will choose self-interest or collective responsibility.

1 THE BIG IDEA: A FAIRER SOCIETY?

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents a clear conflict between capitalism and socialism, using the Birlings' selfish attitudes to criticise a system that prioritises profit over people, while the Inspector offers a vision of a fairer, more humane society.
- **Develop:** the contrasting viewpoints are shown through language, attitudes and reactions to the Inspector's message.
- **Qualify:** although the play shows the potential for change in the younger generation, it suggests that real change will only happen if people reject outdated capitalist values and accept collective responsibility.
- **Context:** written in 1945, the play reflects post-war calls for a welfare state and a fairer society, influenced by the creation of the NHS and a belief in greater equality and social reform.

HOW THE THEME DEVELOPS

Act 1: the Birlings present their capitalist views, prioritising profit, status and self-interest, while Eric and Sheila show early signs of questioning these attitudes.

Act 2: the Inspector challenges the Birlings, exposing the human consequences of their actions and introducing the idea of collective responsibility.

Act 3: the Inspector's final speech summarises his socialist message, urging people to recognise their interdependence and build a fairer, more compassionate society.

ESSAY ROUTE: FROM TEXT TO OTHERS

1. **Establish:** explore how Priestley presents capitalism and socialism through language, character and structure.
2. **Analyse:** consider the effects of these contrasting viewpoints on the audience and how they shape the play's message.
3. **Evaluate:** link to the play's context and to other texts or real-world examples, considering how far Priestley's message remains relevant today.

KEY QUOTATION STUDIES

2 MR BIRLING: INDIVIDUALISM

★ *"a man has to make his own way – has to look after himself"*
— Mr Birling, Act 1

- Shows Birling's belief in self-reliance and individual success.
- Reflects a capitalist mindset where people are responsible only for themselves.
- Uses confident, assertive language to dismiss the needs of others.
- Reveals his lack of concern for workers and social responsibility.

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
Birling's statement exposes the danger of unregulated capitalism, where personal profit is valued above human welfare and the experiences of the working class are ignored.

3 MRS BIRLING: DEFENDING THE SYSTEM

★ *"I accept no blame for it at all."*
— Mrs Birling, Act 2

- Refuses to accept responsibility for her actions.
- Represents the older generation's commitment to maintaining the class system.
- Uses formal, self-righteous language to protect her position.
- Shows how capitalist attitudes can prevent people from acknowledging

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
Mrs Birling's refusal to accept blame highlights how the privileged can protect themselves within a capitalist system, using social status and moral superiority to avoid accountability and maintain inequality.

4 THE INSPECTOR: A FAIRER ALTERNATIVE

★ *"They might. But after all it's better to ask for the earth than to take it."*
— Inspector Goole, Act 1

- Challenges Birling's view that workers are greedy for seeking higher wages.
- Suggests that wanting a fairer share of resources is reasonable and justified.
- Uses a memorable, idealistic metaphor to present socialist ideas.
- Positions the Inspector as a voice for social justice and economic equality.

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
The Inspector's response undermines the capitalist accusation of greed, suggesting that demanding a better world is not only justified but morally right in a society where resources are unfairly distributed.

5 ERIC BIRLING: QUESTIONING CAPITALISM

★ *"Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?"*
— Eric Birling, Act 1

- Challenges his father's capitalist views.
- Shows sympathy for workers and an awareness of social inequality.
- Uses a rhetorical question to question the fairness of the system.
- Highlights the younger generation's more progressive and empathetic attitude.

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
Eric's question shows the potential for change, as the younger generation are more willing to question capitalist attitudes and consider the needs of others, suggesting a move towards a more equal society.

6 SHEILA BIRLING: PEOPLE BEFORE STATUS

★ *"But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people."*
— Sheila Birling, Act 1

- Rejects the dehumanising attitudes towards workers.
- Shows her growing awareness of social injustice.
- Uses an emphatic statement to challenge the capitalist treatment of working-class people.
- Represents a shift from naive acceptance to a more compassionate and socialist outlook.

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
Sheila's statement highlights the human cost of capitalism, challenging the idea that workers are simply a commodity and suggesting a belief in dignity, equality and collective responsibility.

7 THE INSPECTOR: COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

★ *"We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other."*
— Inspector Goole, Act 3

- Summarises the Inspector's socialist message.
- Uses inclusive language to emphasise interdependence.
- Contrasts sharply with the Birlings' self-interest and individualism.
- Presents a clear vision of a society based on shared responsibility, not personal gain.

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
The Inspector's final statement makes Priestley's socialist message explicit, arguing that a fair society must be built on collective responsibility rather than capitalist self-interest.

8 THE ENDING: PRIESTLEY'S MESSAGE

- The Inspector leaves a final warning, suggesting that society can and must change.
- Priestley clearly favours collective responsibility over capitalist self-interest.
- The uncertainty is whether society will listen and change, NOT which ideology he endorses.
- The final telephone call reminds us that real change depends on people's willingness to accept responsibility, not just on political systems.

How does Priestley expose the failures of capitalism and present socialism as a necessary alternative?

AQA: BUILD AN INTERPRETATION

- **AO1:** develop a clear, focused argument about capitalism vs socialism.
- **AO2:** analyse Priestley's use of language, structure and dramatic methods.
- **AO3:** link to context, exploring post-war society, the welfare state, and to other texts or real-world examples.

Grades 7–9: explore how Priestley presents and contrasts capitalism and socialism, analyse the effects of his message, and evaluate its relevance, making links to context and to other texts or real-world examples.

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: MASCULINE POWER

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

PATRIARCHY:

MEN CONTROL FAMILY AND SOCIETY.

The Birling men dominate the family and expect obedience, using their authority to protect their wealth, status and freedom from responsibility.

CLASS AND ECONOMIC POWER:

WEALTH GIVES MEN INFLUENCE.

Money and status allow men to exploit and control others, particularly working-class women, who have fewer choices and less protection.

VULNERABILITY:

WOMEN RISK EXPLOITATION.

Eva's limited options and financial insecurity make her particularly vulnerable to male power. The play exposes how some men use their position to take advantage.

1 THE BIG IDEA: HOW DOES PRIESTLEY PRESENT MASCULINE POWER?

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents masculine power as a force that enables men to dominate, exploit and avoid responsibility, particularly over women and the working class.
- **Develop:** Birling, Gerald and Eric each use different forms of power – economic, social and physical – to control others.
- **Qualify:** However, through Sheila and the Inspector, Priestley suggests that this power is increasingly being challenged.
- **Context:** 1912 patriarchal attitudes and rigid class divisions contrast with postwar calls for equality and a more responsible society.

HOW THE THEME DEVELOPS

Act 1: Birling establishes his authority through wealth and capitalist ideology, dismissing social responsibility.

Act 2: Gerald reveals how his status enables him to exploit Eva, while Sheila begins to challenge male authority.

Act 3: Eric's aggression and sense of entitlement are exposed, and the Inspector condemns the men's behaviour, presenting an alternative vision of a more equal society.

ESSAY ROUTE: FROM TEXT TO OTHERS

1. **Establish masculine power:** explore how Priestley presents patriarchy, class and economic power through key characters.
2. **Explore its effects:** analyse how male power leads to the exploitation and harm of women, particularly Eva, and enables men to avoid responsibility.
3. **Consider change:** evaluate how Sheila and the Inspector challenge male dominance and what Priestley suggests about the need for a more equal society.

KEY QUOTATION STUDIES

2 BIRLING: PATRIARCHAL AUTHORITY

'A man has to make his own way' *(Arthur Birling, Act 1)*

- Shows Birling's belief in self-reliance, individualism and capitalist values.
- Justifies ignoring the needs of others, especially the working class.
- Reinforces traditional male roles as decision-maker and provider.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Birling's language normalises a competitive, male-dominated society where success is prioritised over empathy and responsibility.

3 BIRLING: MARRIAGE AS BUSINESS

'for lower costs and higher prices' *(Arthur Birling, Act 1)*

- Reveals how Birling views marriage in commercial terms.
- Reduces Sheila to a financial asset, showing how women's futures can be controlled by men for economic gain.
- Highlights the transactional mindset that connects class, wealth and masculine power.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The language of business exposes how patriarchy and capitalism work together, allowing men to treat women as assets within a system designed for male benefit.

4 GERALD: JUDGING WOMEN

'hard-eyed dough-faced women' *(Gerald Croft, Act 2)*

'soft brown hair and big dark eyes' *(Gerald Croft, Act 2)*

- Highlights Gerald's contempt for older, experienced women, suggesting they are less attractive and less easy to influence.
- **Contrasts** with his idealised description of Eva, presenting her as youthful, innocent and vulnerable.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The contrast suggests Gerald is drawn to women who seem inexperienced and less able to challenge him, revealing how male power relies on exploiting female vulnerability.

5 GERALD: EVA AS AN EASY TARGET

'I didn't feel about her as she felt about me' *(Gerald Croft, Act 2)*

- Admits an unequal relationship, with Gerald holding the power.
- Suggests he used Eva's feelings to his advantage without genuine commitment.
- Reveals a lack of responsibility and willingness to accept the consequences of his actions.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Gerald's reflective **language** shows self-interest rather than remorse, highlighting how male privilege enables him to exploit Eva and then distance himself from the harm he has caused.

6 ERIC: POWER AND COERCION

'I threatened to make a row' *(Eric Birling, Act 3)*

- Reveals Eric's use of intimidation and aggression to get what he wants.
- Shows a sense of entitlement and a belief that he can act without consequence.
- Highlights a more violent and irresponsible form of masculine power, contrasting with Gerald's more calculated exploitation.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Eric's threat demonstrates how some men rely on fear and aggression to assert control, revealing the darker, more destructive potential of unquestioned male entitlement.

7 SHEILA: RESISTING MALE CONTROL

'I'm not a child, don't forget' *(Sheila Birling, Act 2)*

- Challenges her father's attempt to dismiss her and asserts her independence.
- Rejects the idea that women should be passive or obedient.
- Represents a new generation of women who are willing to question male authority and accept responsibility.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Sheila's statement shows the beginning of a shift in gender attitudes, suggesting hope for a future where women are no longer willing to accept male control or make the same mistakes.

8 THE ENDING: CAN MASCULINE POWER CHANGE?

- The Inspector challenges the men's behaviour, exposing their selfishness and lack of empathy.
- Sheila and Eric accept responsibility, suggesting a move away from traditional masculinity.
- Birling and Gerald resist change, showing how deeply entrenched male privilege remains.
- Priestley leaves the audience to decide whether the next generation can create a more equal and responsible society.

Can men ever be truly 'good' within a patriarchal system, or is male power inherently exploitative?

AQA: BUILD AN INTERPRETATION

- **AO1:** develop a clear and focused argument about how the play presents masculine power.
- **AO2:** analyse Priestley's use of language, structure and dramatic method.
- **AO3:** explore the context of 1912 and postwar society, and Priestley's message about the need for change.

Grades 7–9: show how masculine power sustains inequality and harms individuals, and explore Priestley's message about the need for a more equal and compassionate society.

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

★ = key quotation

○ = key moment

CONFLICT:

DIFFERENT VALUES AND ATTITUDES.

The play shows a clear divide between the older and younger generations, with contrasting views on responsibility, social change and how to treat others.

CHANGE:

YOUNGER GENERATION MORE OPEN.

Sheila and Eric are more willing to accept responsibility and learn from the Inspector, showing hope for a fairer, more caring society.

RESISTANCE:

OLDER GENERATION DEFEND TRADITION.

Mr and Mrs Birling cling to outdated beliefs about class, authority and personal responsibility, rejecting the need for change.

1 THE BIG IDEA: A DIVIDED GENERATION?

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents a clear generational divide, with the older generation represented as selfish, complacent and resistant to change, while the younger generation is more open to new ideas and willing to accept responsibility.
- **Develop:** this divide is shown through differences in language, attitudes and reactions to the Inspector's message.
- **Qualify:** however, Gerald complicates the divide; although younger, he shares many of the older generation's beliefs and ultimately prioritises his own reputation.
- **Context:** written in 1945, the play reflects Priestley's belief that a younger, post-war generation could build a more equal and compassionate society.

HOW THE THEME DEVELOPS

Act 1: the Birlings present their confidence, traditional views and dismiss the opinions of the younger generation, particularly Eric.

Act 2: Sheila and Eric begin to challenge the older generation's attitudes, showing greater honesty and a willingness to accept responsibility.

Act 3: the divide becomes clearer as the older generation refuse to change, while Sheila and Eric embrace the Inspector's message and suggest hope for the future.

ESSAY ROUTE: FROM TEXT TO OTHERS

1. **Establish the divide:** explore how Priestley presents the contrasting attitudes of the older and younger generations through language, character and structure.
2. **Analyse its effects:** consider how the generational divide shapes the play's message about responsibility, social change and hope for the future.
3. **Link to context:** explore how the divide reflects Priestley's post-war hopes and the need for a fairer, more equal and compassionate society.

KEY QUOTATION STUDIES

2 MR BIRLING: SILENCING ERIC

★ *'Just let me finish, Eric. You've a lot to learn yet.'*
— Mr Birling, Act 1

- Interrupts Eric's attempt to challenge his views about war and responsibility.
- Uses a patronising, authoritative tone, assuming age equals wisdom.
- Shows how the older generation dismiss younger voices and refuses to listen to alternative perspectives.

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
Priestley exposes the danger of silencing young people merely because older people hold social and parental authority, suggesting this prevents progress and real change.

3 SHEILA: GROWTH AND CHANGE

★ *'I'm not a child, don't forget'*
— Sheila Birling, Act 2

- Challenges her father's attempt to dismiss her.
- Shows a shift from naivety to maturity and confidence.
- Demonstrates her willingness to question authority and accept responsibility.

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
Sheila's statement marks a turning point, showing her rejection of traditional gender roles and her growing moral awareness, suggesting the younger generation is more open to change and willing to accept responsibility.

4 MRS BIRLING: DEFENDING TRADITION

★ *'I accept no blame for it at all'*
— Mrs Birling, Act 2

- Refuses to accept responsibility for her actions.
- Represents the older generation's inflexible attitudes.
- Uses formal, self-righteous language to maintain authority.
- Shows her unwillingness to engage with the Inspector's message.

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
Mrs Birling's denial reveals how the older generation protect their own social position and refuse to adapt or accept new ideas, even when faced with clear evidence of harm, highlighting the generational divide and the need for change.

5 ERIC: ABUSE OF POWER AND CHANGE

★ *'I threatened to make a row'*
— Eric Birling, Act 3

- Shows Eric's earlier use of intimidation and aggression to get what he wants.
- Reflects his sense of entitlement and abuse of his privilege.
- However, his later remorse shows that he is capable of realising his mistakes and changing.

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
Eric's admission demonstrates how the younger generation are not automatically 'good', but it also shows their potential for moral growth and change, contrasting with the older generation's refusal to accept blame.

6 GERALD: A BRIDGE BETWEEN GENERATIONS

★ *'I didn't feel about her as she felt about me'*
— Gerald Croft, Act 2

- Reveals Gerald's emotional distance and sense of superiority.
- Shows how he exploits Eva for his own pleasure.
- Although younger, he shares many of the older generation's attitudes, prioritising his reputation over responsibility.

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
Gerald complicates the generational divide: despite being younger, his privilege and self-interest align him with the older generation, showing that age alone does not determine moral values or behaviour.

7 THE INSPECTOR: A MESSAGE TO THE YOUNG

★ *'We often do on the young ones. They're more impressionable.'*
— Inspector Goole, Act 2

- Suggests the younger generation may be more receptive to change.
- Contrasts with the older generation's inflexibility and refusal to accept responsibility.
- Positions the younger generation as key to creating a fairer, more compassionate future.

★ **GRADE 9 NUANCE**
The Inspector's comment implies that the younger generation are more impressionable, which can be positive – open to learning and change – but it also suggests they are more vulnerable to influence, meaning they are not automatically virtuous.

8 THE ENDING: A HOPEFUL FUTURE?

- Sheila and Eric accept responsibility and suggest they have learned from the experience.
- The older generation remain resistant, showing little sign of change.
- Priestley leaves the ending open, allowing the audience to decide whether the younger generation will create a fairer, more responsible society.
- The generational divide reflects Priestley's belief in the potential of post-war youth.

? **Which generation do you think Priestley is more hopeful about – and why? Can real change only come from the younger generation?**

AQA: BUILD AN INTERPRETATION

- **AO1:** develop a clear, focused argument about the generational divide.
- **AO2:** analyse Priestley's use of language, structure and dramatic methods.
- **AO3:** link to context, exploring Priestley's post-war message about social change and hope for the future.

Grades 7–9: explore how Priestley presents the generational divide, analyse its effects, and evaluate which generation offers the greater hope for a more equal and responsible society.

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: SELF-PRESERVATION

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

REPUTATION:

APPEARANCE ABOVE MORALITY

The Birlings protect their public standing and social image rather than Eva's wellbeing or life.

PRIVILEGE:

WEALTH INSULATES THE POWERFUL

Class, money and status shield the Birlings from the consequences of their actions.

DENIAL:

ESCAPING BLAME IS NOT INNOCENCE

The family mistakes avoiding scandal for moral absolution, refusing to accept responsibility.

1 THE BIG IDEA: WHO IS REALLY BEING PROTECTED?

- **Thesis:** Priestley exposes self-preservation as the instinct to defend status, wealth and comfort at others' expense.
- **Develop:** moral responsibility threatens the Birlings' constructed identities, so they protect their reputation rather than accept guilt.
- **Qualify:** Sheila and Eric begin to abandon defensiveness and move towards accountability.
- **Context:** 1912 – rigid class divisions and individualism; 1945 – a call for collective responsibility and a fairer society.

HOW THE THEME DEVELOPS

- **Act 1:** Birling defends his profits and dismisses social responsibility. Sheila begins to admit fault.
- **Act 2:** Gerald protects his image and reputation. Sybil defends her position and uses her status to avoid blame.
- **Act 3:** The parents pursue an escape, focusing on the family's reputation. Sheila and Eric demand accountability, insisting that the harm matters regardless of the Inspector's identity.

ESSAY ROUTE: FROM TEXT TO OTHERS

1. **Establish privilege:** explore how status, wealth and reputation shape the characters' actions and attitudes.
2. **Expose its human cost:** show how self-preservation harms Eva and prevents the Birlings from accepting responsibility.
3. **Contrast remorse with denial:** compare Sheila and Eric's moral transformation with the parents' continued refusal to accept guilt.

KEY QUOTATION STUDIES

2 BIRLING: PROFIT BEFORE PEOPLE

'a man has to mind his own business and look after himself'

- Shows Birling's belief in individualism and self-interest.
- Presents capitalism as a justification for ignoring the needs of others.
- Disguises exploitation as common sense and good business.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
Birling turns economic self-interest into a moral creed, revealing how wealth distorts his sense of responsibility.

3 BIRLING: FEAR OF SCANDAL

'There'll be a public scandal'

- Shows that reputation matters more to Birling than Eva's death.
- Reveals his fear of social exposure and the loss of status.
- Highlights how the Birlings are more concerned with what people think than with what is right.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
Social exposure terrifies Birling more than moral guilt, showing how protecting his image is his true priority.

4 SYBIL: THE CHARITY GATEKEEPER

'I used my influence to have it refused'

- Shows how Sybil uses her status and influence to control who receives help.
- Presents charity as a tool for maintaining class hierarchy rather than genuine care.
- Reveals her belief that some people are not deserving of help.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
Sybil's respectability enables her cruelty; her social position gives her the power to decide who is worthy of support.

5 SYBIL: HER UNBORN GRANDCHILD

'He should be made an example of'

- **Dramatic irony:** Sybil unknowingly condemns Eric, the father of Eva's unborn baby.
- Her rejection of Eva and the pregnancy helps destroy a child who could have bridged class divisions.
- Her obsession with protecting her class and way of life defeats even her own family loyalty.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
Her own grandchild symbolises a possible union across classes, extinguished before birth.

6 GERALD: RESTORING NORMALITY

'Everything's all right now, Sheila'

- Gerald tries to reset their engagement and return to the comfort of the past.
- Shows his desire to avoid further blame and moral reckoning.
- The ring symbolises a return to the old hierarchy and a rejection of real change.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
The ring restores the old social hierarchy, suggesting that Gerald wants to return to a world without consequences.

7 SHEILA: REFUSING THE ESCAPE

'It frightens me the way you talk'

- Shows Sheila's moral transformation and rejection of her parents' attitudes.
- Highlights her recognition that avoiding blame is not the same as innocence.
- Represents a new, more responsible generation willing to face uncomfortable truths.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
Sheila shows that youth can break the cycle of self-preservation, offering hope for a fairer and more responsible society.

8 THE ENDING: EXPOSURE OR CHANGE?

- The parents celebrate the possible hoax, focusing on their relief and the protection of their reputation.
- Sheila and Eric insist that the harm to Eva still matters, regardless of the Inspector's identity.
- The final phone call destroys their illusion of safety, suggesting that the consequences of their actions cannot be easily escaped.
- Priestley leaves the audience with a clear message: whether or not the Inspector is real, the Birlings' refusal to take responsibility remains a moral failure.

What matters more: being innocent, or appearing innocent?

AQA: BUILD AN INTERPRETATION

- **AO1:** present a clear and coherent argument about self-preservation in the play.
- **AO2:** analyse Priestley's use of dramatic irony, character contrast and structure.
- **AO3:** link to 1912 class hierarchy and 1945 collectivism, exploring Priestley's purpose and message.

Grades 7–9: show how self-preservation sustains inequality and prevents moral responsibility, and explore Priestley's message about the need for a more compassionate society.

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: MR BIRLING

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

'a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own'

CAPITALIST INDIVIDUALISM

Birling prioritises profit, status and his own interests, rejecting collective responsibility and social change.

STATUS AND RESPECTABILITY

He is concerned with appearance, social standing and being seen as a successful, influential man, using his position to dominate conversations.

PATRIARCHAL AUTHORITY

Birling expects obedience from his family and regards himself as the voice of reason, undermining Sheila and Eric and controlling the dinner table.

REFUSAL TO CHANGE

Even after the Inspector's warnings and the final telephone call, Birling refuses to accept responsibility and remains committed to his own worldview.

1 THE BIG IDEA: WHAT DOES BIRLING REPRESENT?

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents Mr Birling as a short-sighted, selfish and hypocritical capitalist whose refusal to accept responsibility highlights the need for a more equal, compassionate society.
- **Develop:** Through his language, dismissive attitudes and unwavering focus on reputation and profit, Birling is shown to prioritise his own interests over the wellbeing of others.
- **Qualify:** While he can appear confident and respectable, Birling is also presented critically, exposing the dangers of a worldview that values business success over human lives.
- **Context:** Priestley writes in 1945, using Birling to criticise the individualism of 1912 and to argue for a fairer, more socially responsible society in the post-war world.

HOW BIRLING DEVELOPS

Act 1: Confident and self-assured. Dominates the dinner table, promotes individualist views and dismisses responsibility.

Act 2: Becomes more defensive as his involvement is revealed. Tries to justify his actions and blames others, but his concern for reputation grows.

Act 3: Birling welcomes the possibility of a hoax and remains concerned about scandal. The final telephone call interrupts his relief; his response is unknown.

IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN A CHARACTER ESSAY

1. **How is Birling presented?** Explore Priestley's use of language, structure and dramatic form.
2. **How does Birling interact with other characters?** Consider power, control and attitudes towards Sheila and Eric.
3. **How does Birling change (or not)?** Track his attitudes across the play.
4. **What is Priestley's purpose?** Link Birling to 1912 individualism, 1945 socialist ideas and the need for a more equal and compassionate society.

FIVE KEY QUOTATIONS

1 'a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own' (Act 1)

- **Method:** declarative statement; modal verb; individualistic language.
- **Context:** reflects capitalist attitudes in 1912, where personal success and profit were prioritised over social responsibility.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
The repetition of 'his own' emphasises Birling's narrow, self-centred worldview, revealing how he ignores the needs of others and reduces society to individual gain.

2 'unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable' (Act 1)

- **Method:** repetition; exclamatory phrase; dramatic irony.
- **Context:** said in reference to the Titanic, foreshadowing his catastrophic misjudgement and the danger of his overconfidence in the stability of the social and economic system.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
The repetition highlights Birling's arrogance and complacency, suggesting he is out of touch with reality. Priestley uses dramatic irony to hint at the inevitable collapse of such a mindset.

3 'I refused, of course.' (Act 1)

- **Method:** short, curt sentence; adverb of dismissal.
- **Context:** Birling refuses to give Eva a pay rise, revealing his lack of concern for her welfare and his prioritisation of profit over people.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
The adverb 'of course' shows Birling sees his decision as obvious and justified, revealing a deep entitlement and lack of empathy for working-class people.

4 'Still, I can't accept any responsibility.' (Act 1)

- **Method:** adverb 'Still'; negative modal construction; declarative sentence.
- **Context:** despite the Inspector's evidence, Birling refuses to acknowledge his role, highlighting his stubbornness and inability to reflect or accept blame.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
The adverb 'Still' suggests a continued, deliberate refusal to accept responsibility, showing Birling's moral blindness and determination to protect his own reputation, even when faced with clear evidence.

5 'There'll be a public scandal.' (Act 3)

- **Method:** future tense; noun phrase; focus on reputation.
- **Context:** Birling's main concern at this point is the damage to his public image rather than the suffering of Eva, showing that his priorities remain unchanged.

GRADE 9 NUANCE
The phrase shows that Birling is still focused on self-preservation and social status, revealing his refusal to learn from the events of the play and his continued hypocrisy.

HOW BIRLING'S ATTITUDE CHANGES (OR DOESN'T)

ACT 1: CONFIDENT

- Dominates the dinner table.
- Presents himself as a successful, respectable businessman.
- Dismisses responsibility and promotes individualism.
- Believes in the existing social order.

ACT 2: DEFENSIVE

- Becomes uneasy as his involvement is revealed.
- Tries to justify his actions and blames Eva and others.
- Focuses on protecting his reputation.
- His authority begins to unravel, but he does not accept responsibility.

ACT 3: UNREPENTANT BEFORE THE FINAL CALL

- Celebrates the possibility of a hoax.
- Still fears public scandal.
- Shows little genuine remorse.
- The final call leaves his response unknown.

CONCLUSION IDEAS

- Birling remains fundamentally unchanged throughout the play – circumstances shift, but his moral outlook does not.
- He is a powerful warning about the dangers of unchecked capitalism, individualism and self-interest.
- Birling shows no genuine moral change before the final call; Priestley leaves his subsequent response unseen.

To what extent does Priestley present Mr Birling as a man who cares more about his reputation than about other people?

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: MRS BIRLING

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

CLASS PREJUDICE

Her social confidence becomes a barrier to compassion. She judges need through status and respectability.

DISTANT MOTHERHOOD

She polices Sheila's manners but misunderstands her children's lives. Maternal authority exceeds maternal understanding.

SELF-PRESERVATION

She protects her name and innocence. Her resistance exposes the cruelty concealed within respectable institutions.

A BROKEN BRIDGE

Eva's baby could symbolise kinship across class boundaries. Her refusal of help contributes to the loss of her own grandchild.

1 THE BIG IDEA: WHAT DOES MRS BIRLING REPRESENT?

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents Mrs Birling as a guardian of class boundaries whose failure of compassion undermines her authority as both mother and charity worker.
- **Develop:** Her concern with appearances replaces attentive care: the family becomes a miniature version of an unequal society.
- **Qualify:** She shows distress when Eric is implicated, so she is not wholly without feeling. Yet selective concern falls short of lasting moral change.
- **Context:** Set in 1912 and written in 1945, the play challenges inherited privilege and asks whether welfare should depend on the judgements of the wealthy.

HOW SHE DEVELOPS

Act 1: Corrects manners. Assumes she understands family life and teaches Sheila to accommodate male priorities.

Act 2: Judges and condemns. Rejects Eva's appeal and demands punishment for the father, unknowingly condemning Eric.

Act 3: Distress, then relief. Family revelations unsettle her, but the possible hoax restores her confidence. Her response after the final call is unseen.

IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN A CHARACTER ESSAY

1. How does Priestley undermine her maternal authority?
2. How does class prejudice distort her charitable role?
3. How does dramatic irony expose her limited understanding?
4. Does protecting the family's reputation ultimately damage the family?

FIVE KEY QUOTATIONS

1 'a rather cold woman' (Stage direction, Act 1)

- **Method:** adjective; characterisation.
- **Focus:** Emotional distance is established before she speaks.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Coldness unsettles the expectation of maternal warmth. Priestley makes the respectable home a place where social discipline can flourish while emotional understanding fails.

2 'What an expression, Sheila!' (Act 1)

- **Method:** exclamation; direct address.
- **Focus:** Sheila recognises Eric's drunkenness; her mother objects to the language used to describe it.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

She notices a breach of etiquette more readily than a sign of distress. The contrast suggests that maintaining appearances can obstruct a parent's ability to recognise uncomfortable truths.

3 'He's only a boy.' (Act 2)

- **Method:** minimising adverb; infantilisation.
- **Focus:** She dismisses the suggestion that Eric is accustomed to drinking.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Her protective image of Eric prevents her from recognising the adult before her. Sheila's greater awareness reverses the expected hierarchy: the daughter understands what the mother denies.

4 'I used my influence to have it refused' (Act 2)

- **Method:** first-person agency; verb of rejection.
- **Focus:** She actively directs the committee's refusal of assistance.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Defending the family name unwittingly harms the family's future. Her grandchild could be read as a living bridge between classes; its death symbolically destroys that possibility. Her refusal contributes to the tragedy rather than acting as its sole cause.

5 'I accept no blame' (Act 2)

- **Method:** declarative; absolute negation.
- **Focus:** She separates her respectable self-image from the consequences of her decision.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Her certainty becomes a trap: shifting responsibility to the father leads her to condemn her own son. Dramatic irony reveals that class boundaries cannot insulate one family from another's suffering.

HOW HER ATTITUDE CHANGES (OR DOESN'T)

ACT 1: AUTHORITY

- Corrects Sheila's speech.
- Prioritises social conventions.
- Assumes parental knowledge.

ACT 2: BLINDNESS

- Rejects Eva's claim.
- Denies Eric's drinking problem.
- Unwittingly condemns her son.

ACT 3: RETREAT

- Distressed by revelations.
- Welcomes the possible hoax.
- No sustained acceptance of responsibility before the final call.

CONCLUSION IDEAS

- Failed care links the home to the charity committee.
- Self-preservation damages the family she seeks to protect.
- The lost child can symbolise a lost chance for solidarity across classes.
- Priestley challenges respectability unsupported by compassion.

Is Mrs Birling's failure as a mother inseparable from her commitment to class hierarchy?

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: SHEILA BIRLING

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

PRIVILEGE AND JEALOUSY

Sheila initially enjoys wealth and uses her power as a customer to punish Eva. Her transformation begins with real wrongdoing.

GROWING RESPONSIBILITY

She recognises her part in Eva's suffering. Unlike her parents, she treats guilt as a reason to change rather than protect appearances.

THE RING'S REVERSAL

She moves from treasuring the ring to actively handing it back. Moral judgement begins to outweigh possessions and social security.

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE

She questions Gerald and challenges her parents. By the ending, she insists on thinking for herself rather than accepting reassurance.

1 THE BIG IDEA: WHAT DOES SHEILA REPRESENT?

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents Sheila as evidence that privilege need not prevent moral growth: she learns to question the values from which she has benefited.
- **Develop:** Her changing relationship with the ring dramatises a shift from material reassurance towards independent judgement and responsibility.
- **Qualify:** Her change matters because she is culpable, not innocent. The play offers hope through her willingness to confront wrongdoing, rather than through moral perfection.
- **Context:** Writing in 1945 about 1912, Priestley invites a younger generation to challenge inherited class attitudes and imagine a more responsible society.

HOW SHEILA DEVELOPS

Act 1: Privileged but receptive. Delights in the ring, recognises workers' humanity and admits her vindictive treatment of Eva.

Act 2: Questions and acts. Detects evasions, challenges Gerald and hands back the ring rather than simply preserving the engagement.

Act 3: Maintains her judgement. Rejects the family's relief at the possible hoax and delays accepting the ring again. Reconciliation remains unresolved.

IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN A CHARACTER ESSAY

1. Why must we remember Sheila's cruelty as well as her remorse?
2. How does the ring make her moral development visible?
3. How does her voice challenge parental and male authority?
4. How far does her transformation offer hope for society?

FIVE KEY QUOTATIONS

1 'I'll never let it go out of my sight for an instant.' (Sheila, Act 1)

- **Method:** absolute adverb; symbolic prop.
- **Focus:** She treats the ring as an object of lasting emotional and material value.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Her certainty makes the later return striking. The ring links romance with wealth and a marriage that benefits two businesses. Relinquishing it can therefore suggest resistance to materialism as well as betrayal.

2 'they're people' (Sheila, Act 1)

- **Method:** declarative; assertion of humanity.
- **Focus:** She challenges her father's reduction of female workers to an economic resource.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

She begins to recognise a shared humanity that crosses class boundaries. Yet her earlier abuse of Eva reveals a gap between compassionate principles and conduct: moral growth requires confronting that contradiction.

3 'my own fault' (Sheila, Act 1)

- **Method:** possessive determiner; emphatic ownership.
- **Focus:** She acknowledges that her jealousy, rather than Eva's behaviour, caused her complaint.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Accepting guilt gives Sheila the possibility of change. Priestley contrasts her self-scrutiny with her parents' defensive certainty, suggesting that moral authority can emerge from admitting failure.

4 'she hands him the ring' (Stage direction, Act 2)

- **Method:** stage action; symbolic reversal.
- **Focus:** Sheila actively returns the object she previously promised to keep constantly in sight.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Her physical action makes changing values visible. Returning the ring can challenge Gerald's materialistic, capitalist world: status cannot substitute for honesty. It signals resistance, not proof that she rejects all wealth or permanently ends the relationship.

5 'I must think.' (Sheila, Act 3)

- **Method:** modal verb; first-person declaration.
- **Focus:** She delays accepting the ring again despite Gerald's reassurance.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The duty she asserts is to exercise her own judgement. The ring cannot automatically restore trust or erase the evening's lessons. Her hesitation preserves independence while leaving open the possibility of a different future.

HOW HER VALUES DEVELOP

ACT 1: POSSESSION

- Delights in the engagement ring.
- Exposes her misuse of privilege.
- Begins to accept responsibility.

ACT 2: REASSESSMENT

- Questions Gerald's account.
- Recognises unequal relationships.
- Actively hands back the ring.

ACT 3: INDEPENDENCE

- Challenges the family's denial.
- Retains the Inspector's lesson.
- Insists on time to think.

CONCLUSION IDEAS

- Sheila's guilt makes her growth convincing.
- The ring traces a movement from possession towards judgement.
- Her development challenges both class entitlement and female obedience.
- Hope rests on continued responsibility, not an uncomplicated happy ending.

Does returning the ring reject Gerald alone, or the values his world represents?

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: ERIC BIRLING

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

A SILENCED SON

Birling interrupts and belittles Eric. He expects obedience while denying the open conversation that responsible fatherhood requires.

PRIVILEGE AND HARM

Eric's insecurity does not remove his power over Eva. His account exposes coercion, sexual exploitation and the dangers of male entitlement.

MASCULINE ASSUMPTIONS

He describes Eva through the language of appearance and male camaraderie, overlooking the unequal risks she faces.

GUILT AND POSSIBILITY

He eventually accepts shared responsibility. Priestley offers hope through his willingness to learn, without erasing his wrongdoing.

1 THE BIG IDEA: WHAT DOES ERIC REPRESENT?

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents Eric as both a product of a damaged family culture and a perpetrator of serious harm, whose remorse creates the possibility of change.
- **Develop:** His conflict with Birling exposes authority without emotional support. His treatment of Eva reveals how a man silenced at home can still exercise destructive power elsewhere.
- **Qualify:** A strained upbringing helps explain Eric's difficulties; it does not excuse his coercion. His later guilt matters because he begins to acknowledge the harm he has caused.
- **Context:** Set in 1912 and written in 1945, the play challenges class privilege and patriarchal authority while asking whether the next generation can act more responsibly.

HOW ERIC DEVELOPS

Act 1: Uneasy and interrupted. Questions his father's views, shows sympathy for workers and struggles to make himself heard.

Act 2: Absent but implicated. His drinking is exposed while Mrs Birling unknowingly condemns the father of Eva's child. His return ends the act.

Act 3: Confesses and challenges. Admits his actions and theft, confronts his parents and refuses to treat the possible hoax as moral absolution.

IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN A CHARACTER ESSAY

1. How does Birling deny Eric a voice?
2. How can Eric be vulnerable at home yet powerful over Eva?
3. What does his language reveal about masculinity?
4. How far does his remorse offer hope for change?

FIVE KEY QUOTATIONS

1 'half shy, half assertive' (Stage direction, Act 1)

- **Method:** balanced phrasing; contrasting adjectives.
- **Focus:** Eric's unsettled identity is established before he speaks.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The repeated halves suggest a young man caught between submission and self-assertion. His discomfort unsettles the image of a successful family: material security has not created emotional confidence or belonging.

2 'Just let me finish, Eric.' (Birling to Eric, Act 1)

- **Method:** imperative; control of dialogue.
- **Focus:** Birling shuts down Eric's questioning and insists on the right to speak.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Birling treats age as a guarantee of wisdom, yet his confident predictions are wrong. Denying Eric a voice protects paternal authority from scrutiny and makes the home a poor place for honest discussion.

3 'pretty and a good sport' (Eric about Eva, Act 3)

- **Method:** colloquial idiom; masculine associations.
- **Focus:** Eric combines physical attraction with the language of male camaraderie.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

He projects the terms of his own masculine world onto Eva, as though she were a willing companion in shared amusement. This makes the relationship sound mutual while obscuring her vulnerability and his coercive behaviour.

4 'not the kind of father' (Eric to Birling, Act 3)

- **Method:** direct criticism; negative construction.
- **Focus:** Eric explains why he could not turn to his father for help.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The accusation separates fatherhood as a position of authority from fatherhood as a relationship of trust. Birling demands accountability but has failed to make himself approachable. Eric exposes that failure without escaping responsibility for his own actions.

5 'we all helped to kill her' (Eric, Act 3)

- **Method:** inclusive pronoun; collective responsibility.
- **Focus:** He insists that their actions matter despite doubts about the Inspector's identity.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The inclusive pronoun brings Eric within the accusation rather than placing all guilt on his parents. His movement from evasions towards shared responsibility suggests potential growth, though remorse cannot undo Eva's suffering.

HOW HIS VOICE DEVELOPS

ACT 1: INTERRUPTED

- Uneasy within the family.
- Challenges his father's views.
- Is dismissed as inexperienced.

ACT 2: IMPLICATED

- His drinking is revealed.
- His mother condemns him unknowingly.
- His return creates a dramatic climax.

ACT 3: INSISTENT

- Confesses wrongdoing.
- Challenges his parents' priorities.
- Maintains shared responsibility.

CONCLUSION IDEAS

- The family's wealth conceals emotional distance.
- Eric suffers under paternal authority but also abuses male power.
- His change begins when he accepts guilt rather than merely blaming others.
- Priestley offers the possibility of reform, not automatic redemption.

How far does Eric challenge his father's values while repeating his abuse of power?

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: GERALD CROFT

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

CHARM AND PRIVILEGE

Gerald's polish makes him attractive and socially desirable. Priestley asks whether good manners guarantee moral goodness.

CAPITALIST ALLIANCE

He sides with Birling over Eva's dismissal. Shared class interests outweigh the younger generation's sympathy.

KINDNESS AND POWER

He rescues Eva from immediate danger, but the affair leaves her dependent on his money, accommodation and decisions.

A RETURN TO NORMAL

He challenges the Inspector's identity and seeks to restore the engagement. Relief displaces the need for deeper change.

1 THE BIG IDEA: WHAT DOES GERALD REPRESENT?

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents Gerald as morally complex: capable of genuine compassion, yet unwilling to challenge the privileges that make his kindness unequal.
- **Develop:** His treatment of Eva complicates a simple villain reading. Nevertheless, his business loyalties and final return to the ring expose the limits of his sympathy.
- **Qualify:** Affection and exploitation can coexist. Recognising his initial generosity does not erase his deception of Sheila or his greater power within the affair.
- **Context:** In the 1912 setting, wealth and gender give Gerald freedoms denied to Eva. Writing in 1945, Priestley invites audiences to question charity without structural change.

HOW GERALD DEVELOPS

Act 1: Polished ally. Celebrates the engagement, supports Birling's treatment of workers and initially tries to conceal the affair.

Act 2: More sympathetic. Admits the relationship and shows grief. Sheila recognises his honesty without simply restoring their engagement.

Act 3: Restores certainty. Investigates the apparent hoax and offers the ring again. His response after the final telephone call remains unseen.

IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN A CHARACTER ESSAY

1. How far should we trust Gerald's charm?
2. Does helping Eva challenge or reinforce his power?
3. How does Sheila shape our judgement of him?
4. Why does Priestley end with Gerald offering the ring again?

FIVE KEY QUOTATIONS

1 'well-bred' (Stage direction, Act 1)

- **Method:** evaluative adjective; social characterisation.
- **Focus:** Gerald arrives with the polish associated with upper-class status.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Breeding suggests inherited social approval rather than earned moral worth. His charm can make privilege appear deserved, encouraging audiences to examine the difference between refinement and responsibility.

2 'we'd have done the same thing' (Gerald, Act 1)

- **Method:** first-person plural; conditional construction.
- **Focus:** He endorses Birling's dismissal of Eva after the strike.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The plural aligns Gerald with his family firm and the employing class. Age does not guarantee progress: his solidarity with Birling complicates any simple division between selfish elders and compassionate youth.

3 'I didn't ask for anything in return.' (Gerald, Act 2)

- **Method:** negative declarative; language of exchange.
- **Focus:** He insists that his initial help was not conditional on a sexual relationship.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Sheila accepts his initial pity, allowing sympathy for him. Yet the audience hears Eva's story through his account: genuine generosity must be weighed alongside the dependence created by his wealth.

4 'fairy prince' (Sheila about Gerald, Act 2)

- **Method:** fairy-tale allusion; sarcasm.
- **Focus:** Sheila exposes the flattering role Gerald enjoys as Eva's rescuer.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The rescue story centres the powerful man, while Eva's security depends on his continued favour. A romantic appearance can conceal unequal freedom: Gerald can leave the relationship more safely than Eva can.

5 'Everything's all right now, Sheila.' (Gerald, Act 3)

- **Method:** sweeping declarative; temporal adverb.
- **Focus:** He holds up the ring after the apparent exposure of the hoax.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Everything reduces moral damage to a problem apparently solved by avoiding scandal. The ring can symbolise a return to the old social order; Sheila's hesitation challenges his assumption that the past can be restored.

HOW HIS ATTITUDE CHANGES (OR DOESN'T)

ACT 1: CONFIDENT

- Charming and socially assured.
- Defends Birling's business decision.
- Tries to hide the affair.

ACT 2: EXPOSED

- Admits affection and inequality.
- Shows distress at Eva's fate.
- Gains some respect through honesty.

ACT 3: REASSURED

- Questions the Inspector's identity.
- Helps dismantle the suicide story.
- Offers the engagement ring again.

CONCLUSION IDEAS

- Gerald invites mixed judgement rather than simple condemnation.
- Personal kindness does not necessarily challenge social inequality.
- His loyalties reveal the strength of class over age.
- Sheila's hesitation leaves reconciliation unresolved.

Does Gerald's genuine kindness excuse his failure to change?



Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: INSPECTOR GOOLE

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

'We are members of one body.'

MORAL AUTHORITY

The Inspector speaks with confidence and conviction, presenting a clear moral viewpoint that challenges the complacency and self-interest of the Birling family.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

He emphasises that individual actions have consequences for others, arguing that society is interconnected and that we all have a duty of care.

CHALLENGING PRIVILEGE

The Inspector questions the attitudes of the upper classes, exposing how wealth, status and power can lead to exploitation, indifference and a lack of moral responsibility.

AMBIGUOUS IDENTITY

His true identity is never confirmed, which allows Priestley to present him as a symbolic figure whose message matters more than whether he is a real police inspector.

1 THE BIG IDEA: WHAT DOES THE INSPECTOR REPRESENT?

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents the Inspector as a powerful moral catalyst who challenges the selfishness and hypocrisy of the Birling family, advocating for a more equal and compassionate society.
- **Develop:** Through his language, dramatic presence and influential role, the Inspector exposes the consequences of individual actions and insists on collective responsibility.
- **Qualify:** While he is presented as a voice of truth and social conscience, his ambiguous identity means that his authority can be read in different ways, allowing Priestley to engage the audience's own sense of judgement.
- **Context:** Written in 1945, the play reflects Priestley's socialist beliefs and his desire to critique the individualism of 1912, and to encourage a fairer, more compassionate society in the post-war world.

HOW HIS INFLUENCE DEVELOPS

Act 1: Disrupts and questions.
Arrives with an air of authority, challenges Birling's views and establishes the idea of a chain of events, immediately unsettling the family.

Act 2: Exposes and challenges.
Reveals the family's involvement with Eva, confronts their attitudes and undermines their attempts to justify their actions.

Act 3: Warns and unifies.
Brings the family together, emphasises their collective culpability and delivers a final warning about the consequences of their actions.

IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN A CHARACTER ESSAY

1. **How is the Inspector presented?**
   Explore his language, dramatic presence and the significance of his entrance.
2. **How does he interact with other characters?**
   Consider how he challenges, questions and responds to each member of the family.
3. **What is his purpose?**
   Explore what he represents and how his message links to the play's social and historical context.
4. **How does his ambiguous identity affect the play?**
   Consider why Priestley never confirms who he is and what this suggests about the importance of his message.

FIVE KEY QUOTATIONS

1 'massiveness, solidity and purposefulness' (Act 1)

- **Method:** tricolon of abstract nouns (stage direction).
- **Context:** presents the Inspector as an authoritative and formidable figure from his entrance, suggesting strength of character and moral purpose.



GRADE 9 NUANCE
The tricolon creates a sense of overwhelming authority, suggesting that the Inspector's power is not based on physical threat but on moral weight and conviction, establishing him as a significant and potentially transformative presence.

2 'A chain of events.' (Act 1)

- **Method:** metaphor; fragmented statement.
- **Context:** introduces the idea that individual actions are interconnected, challenging the family's belief that they can act without consequence.



GRADE 9 NUANCE
The simple, declarative phrase powerfully conveys Priestley's socialist message that society is a network of responsibilities. The metaphor suggests inevitability, implying that actions cannot be isolated from their wider social consequences.

3 'Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.' (Act 2)

- **Method:** balanced antithesis; modal verb 'have'; formal address.
- **Context:** challenges Birling's capitalist views, arguing that those in positions of power must consider the welfare of others, not just their own interests.



GRADE 9 NUANCE
The balanced structure highlights the inequality between privilege and responsibility, directly contradicting Birling's self-interest. Priestley uses the Inspector to articulate his belief that social power carries a moral obligation.

4 'But each of you helped to kill her.' (Act 3)

- **Method:** collective pronoun 'each of you'; direct address; condemnatory statement.
- **Context:** moves from individual blame to collective culpability, forcing the family to recognise their shared responsibility for Eva's death.



GRADE 9 NUANCE
The direct address breaks down the family's attempts to shift blame, emphasising that all of their actions contributed to Eva's death. The verb 'kill' highlights the moral seriousness of their behaviour, even if they are not legally guilty.

5 'We are members of one body.' (Act 3)

- **Method:** metaphor; collective pronoun; universal statement.
- **Context:** presents society as an interconnected whole, reflecting Priestley's socialist beliefs and Christian teachings about charity and compassion.



GRADE 9 NUANCE
The metaphor suggests that society functions as a single organism, where the suffering of one person affects us all. Priestley uses the Inspector to present a vision of a more compassionate world based on collective responsibility and mutual care.

HOW THE INSPECTOR'S INFLUENCE DEVELOPS

ACT 1: DISRUPTS

- Arrives with authority.
- Challenges Birling's views and questions the family.
- Introduces the idea of a chain of events.
- Immediately unsettles their confidence.

ACT 2: EXPOSES

- Reveals the family's involvement with Eva.
- Confronts their justifications and excuses.
- Undermines their sense of superiority and privilege.
- Forces them to face the consequences of their actions.

ACT 3: WARNS

- Brings the family together.
- Emphasises their collective culpability.
- Delivers a final warning about the need for change.
- His final message leaves a lasting impression, even though his true identity remains unknown.

CONCLUSION IDEAS

- The Inspector acts as a moral catalyst, exposing the family's selfishness and challenging their worldview.
- He represents Priestley's vision of a more equal and compassionate society, based on collective responsibility.
- His ambiguous identity allows Priestley to focus on the power of his message rather than his credentials.
- Whether he is a real police inspector is less important than the truth of what he says and the questions he leaves the audience with.

Does the Inspector's moral authority depend on whether he is a real police officer?

Mr Pryke's Revision Notes

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: EVA SMITH

J. B. Priestley

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE

GRADES 7–9

ABSENT BUT CENTRAL

Eva never appears on stage, yet her suffering drives the action. Her story exposes the hidden costs of the family's comfortable lives.

CLASS AND GENDER

As a working-class woman, she faces insecure employment, sexual exploitation and judgement from those who control money and assistance.

DIGNITY AND RESISTANCE

She joins the struggle for better wages and refuses further stolen money. Poverty does not erase her agency or moral principles.

ONE LIFE, MANY LIVES

Her individual story becomes representative of wider suffering. Priestley connects personal cruelty with failures across society.

1 THE BIG IDEA: WHAT DOES EVA REPRESENT?

- **Thesis:** Priestley presents Eva as a vulnerable but morally significant figure whose treatment exposes the human cost of class privilege and self-interest.
- **Develop:** Her experiences link the factory, the shop, unequal relationships and organised charity, revealing how different forms of power reinforce one another.
- **Qualify:** She is not merely passive: resistance and ethical choices survive within restricted circumstances. However, her story reaches us through other people's accounts.
- **Context:** Set in 1912 and written in 1945, the play challenges a society in which basic security depends on employers, wealthy men and selective charity.

HOW HER STORY IS REVEALED

Act 1: Economic vulnerability. We learn about the strike, dismissal and Sheila's complaint. Effort and ability cannot protect Eva from others' power.

Act 2: Unequal dependence. Gerald's account and Mrs Birling's testimony expose the limits of private kindness and charitable judgement.

Act 3: Collective significance. Eric's revelations expose further harm. The Inspector extends Eva's story to countless others; the final call renews the warning.

IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN A CHARACTER ESSAY

1. **Why does Priestley keep Eva off stage?**
2. **How do class and gender combine to restrict her choices?**
3. **How does her moral conduct challenge assumptions about poverty?**
4. **How does one woman's story become a social argument?**

FIVE KEY QUOTATIONS

1 'A good worker too.' (Birling about Eva, Act 1)

- **Method:** positive evaluation; revealing admission.
- **Focus:** Even her employer acknowledges her competence.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Her dismissal undermines the idea that hard work necessarily brings security. Qualities valued in a worker become threatening when used to organise resistance: capitalism rewards obedience more readily than independence.

2 'very pretty' (Inspector about Eva, Act 1)

- **Method:** intensifier; description through others.
- **Focus:** Eva's appearance repeatedly shapes how people respond to her.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Beauty brings neither safety nor lasting power. Sheila experiences it as a threat; Gerald finds it attractive. Her treatment reveals a world that values women's appearance while failing to protect their humanity.

3 'She came to you to protect me' (Eric to Mrs Birling, Act 3)

- **Method:** verb of protection; reversal of dependence.
- **Focus:** Eva seeks assistance after refusing further stolen money.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

The financially vulnerable woman attempts to protect a privileged man from further wrongdoing. Her scruples challenge Mrs Birling's assumptions and expose the difference between social respectability and ethical conduct.

4 'strong disinfectant' (Inspector, Act 1)

- **Method:** disturbing imagery; possible symbolism.
- **Focus:** A substance associated with cleaning becomes an instrument of destruction.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Disinfectant normally cleans. Here, it could symbolise Eva trying to cleanse herself of the harm inflicted by capitalism and the Birlings. The tragic irony is that she is destroyed while the society responsible remains unchanged.

5 'millions and millions and millions' (Inspector, Act 3)

- **Method:** repetition; amplification.
- **Focus:** The Inspector extends Eva's story beyond a single victim.

GRADE 9 NUANCE

Her common surname supports a representative reading, but the repeated scale should not erase her individuality. Priestley makes one life emotionally concrete before demanding responsibility for countless unseen lives.

HOW EVA'S SIGNIFICANCE DEVELOPS

ACT 1: WORKER

- Capable and willing to resist.
- Punished through dismissal.
- Vulnerable to consumer power.

ACT 2: DEPENDENT

- Receives conditional security.
- Faces class prejudice.
- Is refused vital assistance.

ACT 3: SOCIAL WARNING

- Moral principles become clearer.
- Pregnancy reveals shared ties.
- Her story demands collective change.

CONCLUSION IDEAS

- Eva exposes the distance between privilege and moral worth.
- Her absence can reflect the exclusion of working-class voices.
- Her unborn child could symbolise a lost bridge between classes.
- Her suffering demands social reform, not pity alone.

Does Eva's absence from the stage strengthen Priestley's message, or limit her voice?