AN INSPECTOR CALLS

Context

1912 – when the play was set. Just before WW1 and the sinking of the Titanic. JBP wanted to make sure audiences in 1945 recognised the problems in society in 1912 before the wars (class system, Capitalism, sexism) and weren't tempted to go back to living like that. He wrote the play to highlight the dangers of the Capitalist lifestyle.

1945 – when the play was written and performed. After WW2, society changed for the better. The benefit system started to be introduced, and we had more equality for women and less of a class divide because of different classes and different genders mixing in the war effort. JBP supported and encouraged these changes and wanted to make sure he promoted them in his play by making Capitalists like the older Birlings appear ignorant and selfish.

Socialism – JBP was a keen socialist. This meant that he wanted everyone to look after each other rather than just caring about themselves. He was trying to promote this with the play, by making the Socialist characters like the Inspector much more respectable than the Capitalist ones.

Capitalism – JBP hated Capitalists – those who thought that everyone should only care about themselves and that making money was more important than human rights. He created Mr and Mrs Birling as Capitalists, in order to make Capitalism seem out-dated and selfish. Mr and Mrs B are portrayed in a negative way by JBP for this reason.

Outdated ideas – In 1912, the social classes were segregated, women got paid less than men for the same work, there was no benefit system or help with unemployment or housing. Society was patriarchal (men ruled).

Plot

ACT 1	The family are celebrating Sheila and Gerald's engagement. Birling makes speeches saying there will be no war, and the Titanic is unsinkable. An Inspector arrives and tells them Eva Smith has committed suicide. He gets Mr B to admit sacking her. He doesn't take blame. Inspector gets Sheila to admit getting her sacked for laughing. She feels guilty and ashamed of herself.
ACT 2	Inspector gets Gerald to admit having an affair with Eva Smith (now called Daisy Renton after a name change). Sheila is upset and questions her relationship with Gerald. Inspector gets Mrs B to admit not helping Eva when she came to Mrs B's charity for help when she became pregnant. Mrs B says it should be the father's responsibility. At the end of the Act, we realise that the father of Eva's baby was Eric.
ACT 3	Eric's involvement with Eva is revealed and a possible rape is hinted at, as he says he forced Eva. The Inspector gives his final speech about fire, blood and anguish. He is warning the family that if they don't start to take responsibility for others, they will live to regret it. Inspector then leaves. Gerald finds out that the Inspector wasn't a real inspector. Mr B rings to check and there is no Inspector Goole. Also, there is no dead girl! Mr and Mrs B (and Gerald) celebrate and act like nothing has happened. Sheila and Eric still feel guilty and can't go back to how they were before. Right at the end, the telephone rings and they are told that a girl has just committed suicide and an inspector is on his way over to ask some questions.

Key themes

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES
The older generation (Mr and Mrs Birling) are a symbol of Capitalism, so they do not change their ways and they are reluctant to accept blame for their role in Eva's demise. The younger generation, on the other hand (Sheila and Eric) become a symbol of Socialism as the play progresses. They accept blame and want to change; they change throughout the play, for the better.

RESPONSIBILITY / JUSTICE
The Inspector, as Priestley's mouthpiece, is a symbol of Socialism – he wants everyone to look after each other and to view community as very important. He is sent to uncover the family's wrongdoings and to make them see that they should take responsibility for others. Sheila and Eric realise this, but Mr and Mrs B do not.

GENDER INEQUALITY
Priestley wanted to show his audience that there was a lot of inequality back in 1912 when it came to how women were treated. By making certain characters out to be sexist, he highlighted this problem and tried to shame audiences into changing their own views about gender equality too. This is perhaps why the victim of their actions is a woman, and why she is working class (working class women were at the bottom of the pile in those times).

Characters

Mr Birling	Arrogant and Capitalist businessman who hates social equality and loves money. Sacks Eva from his factory when she asks for equal pay for women and threatens a strike.
Mrs Birling	Snobbish and cold-hearted Capitalist who believes everyone is responsible for themselves. Doesn't help Eva when she comes to the charity for help.
Inspector	Priestley's mouthpiece (represents JBP's ideals), keen Socialist who fights for community responsibility and gets the Birlings to face up to what they have done.
Sheila	The daughter. Gets Eva sacked from the shop for smirking at her. Starts off as a spoilt rich girl but quickly changes her views, feels sorry for Eva Smith and starts to become Socialist as the play progresses. Is ashamed of her parents at the end.
Eric	The son. Typical young man – drinks too much and has a one-night stand with Eva. Ends up getting her pregnant and steals from his dad to give Eva money. Regrets his actions and changes his ways. Ashamed of his parents at the end.
Gerald	Sheila's fiancé. Businessman who has Capitalist ideals and is similar to Mr Birling politically. Shows some regret for his affair with Eva, but happy to act like nothing has happened when it suits him.

Assessment Objectives

AO1 (40%)	Make an informed personal response using a critical style. Use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
AO2 (40%)	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
AO3 (20%)	Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.
AO4 (4 marks)	*Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.*

The Exam

- ❑ Choose **one** of the 2 questions – they could be on a theme or a character
- ❑ Firstly, **highlight** the key words in the question
- ❑ Now, decide on **4-5 suitable quotations** which will support your answer well
- ❑ **Write response:**
  - ❑ Intro: summarise character or theme (5 mins)
  - ❑ Write **4 – 5 detailed PEELs** (30 mins)
  - ❑ **Sum up** how the writer presents…whatever the question asks. (5 mins)

❑*Note: If you're struggling with one of the bullet points, spend <u>some</u> more time on the bullet point you're happy with.*

- ❑ **Check** spellings, punctuation and vocab (5 mins)

Sample response

How does Priestley present generational differences in the play?

Priestley centres the moral of the play around generational differences and how they affect different characters' reactions to the news that they have contributed to a young girl's demise. In the play, Priestley presents the older generation, Mr and Mrs Birling, as arrogant and snobbish characters who are keen to shift blame onto others and are reluctant to change their ways. This is most evident, perhaps, in Mr Birling's monologue, when he speaks of, 'community and all that nonsense', which emphasises to us his strongly Capitalist views; he finds the idea that he should look after those around him instead of himself completely absurd , and he dismisses the idea with the highly opinionated noun 'nonsense'. Here, Priestley cleverly illustrates Birling's complete lack of self-awareness . He is oblivious to the fact that he appears selfish to the Inspector, as he would to Priestley himself, and indeed the audience.

Conversely, when accused by the Inspector of contributing to the young girl's demise, Birling's young daughter Sheila is presented in the opposite way entirely. Sheila's character is given the line, 'If I could help her now, I would', which emphasises her acceptance of blame and also regret. The modal verbs here illustrate her feelings of helplessness. Interestingly, Sheila takes on the role of the Inspector in Act 3, as she starts to question her parents and is shocked at their ignorance. Priestley's aim here was to try to influence post-war audiences by warning them of the dangers of Capitalism and the benefits of living a Socialist lifestyle.

Key Terms

- Dramatic Irony
- Real time
- Tension / suspense
- Monologue
- Capitalist
- Socialist
- Modal verbs
- Imperative verbs
- Interruptions
- Metaphor
- Triadic structure
- Stage directions
- Patriarchal
- Contrast
- End of act
- Pause
- Priestley's mouthpiece
- Repetition
- Character
- Playwright
- Audience

Stretch yourself

- ➢ Research original contextual detail to develop your own personal response.
- ➢ Watch <u>different</u> performances of key scenes to provide you with 'ammunition' when discussing form.