

Edexcel English Literature GCSE

An Inspector Calls: Character Profile

Mr Birling

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First Impressions

Character in context

It's important to have a sense of the character Mr Birling as a whole, in order to have a greater understanding of the play. Arthur Birling is firmly entrenched within 1912 **ante-bellum** (means before the war) English social elite.



The play is set just before the outbreak of World War One and within the extravagant Birling household. Mr Birling's dominant position within a **static society** (poor stay poor and rich stay rich) is portrayed through:

- His **patriarchal** (male dominated society) role as owner of Birling and Co. which only employs young women at extortionately low wages.
- His marriage to Mrs Birling (Sybil), who accepts her own **domination** by Mr Birling. This is a reflection of Mr Birling's control over his household; she is often ordered to sit in the "drawing room", while men talk.
- His indifference to his daughter's (Sheila) concerns regarding Gerald's alleged affair as this could **compromise the economic relationship** between the Croft business and his own.

Capitalism personified

Priestley exhibits Mr Birling as the living embodiment of the **capitalist ideology** (everything revolves around profit at all costs). His physical appearance is a reflection of capitalism; he wears formal clothes; he is "**heavy looking**" (symbolises greed) and frequently displays his "**portentous**" attitude (he tries really hard to impress people).

- Birling's clearly **pompous perspective** (self-absorbed) is evidenced through his immediate reclamation of the spotlight after Sheila and Gerald's engagement is announced. It is "**one of the happiest nights of my life**" and toasts to "**lower costs and higher prices**" rather than to his daughter's health.
 - Mr Birling values Sheila on her **capacity to further the family company** and thereby objectifies her as a bargaining chip; "**she'll make you (Gerald) happy**", yet more significantly Mr Birling will have direct connections with an "**older and bigger**" business. Here it's clear that Mr Birling values the **prospect of increased profit** over his daughter's joy in engagement.
- His business is of greater importance than his own family – this **foreshadows** Mr Birling's indifference to Eva Smith's suicide, which is initiated through his refusal to grant her a pay rise.
 - Moreover, he attempts to **bribe** the Inspector "**(unhappily) Look, Inspector - I'd give thousands - yes, thousands -**", to prevent losing wealth and social status through a criminal record. This epitomises the **individualistic** nature of **capitalism**.



Insecure in his own social position

Despite Mr Birling's success in the world of business, his humble beginnings are evident from the stage directions as his tendency to be **“provincial in speech”** (he speaks with a noticeable accent) reveals his **lower-class origins**. This insecurity causes Mr Birling to constantly **remind people of his status in society**, through bringing up former roles as **“Lord Mayor”** and suggesting **“there's a very good chance of a knighthood”** to convince Gerald of his great social status. This **“provincial”** speech indicates a **lack of sophistication**.

This relative **uncouthness** (Mr Birling's mannerisms, etiquette and pronunciation are not aligned to the middle-class norms) is preyed upon by Mrs Birling, who is his natural **“social superior”**. Mrs Birling was, contrastingly, brought up within a **wealthy household** and thus her social etiquette has been **refined**; she is embarrassed by Mr Birling acknowledging his staff.

- Priestley introduces this insecurity immediately in the play; thus, this insecurity becomes **synonymous** (closely associated) with the **character** of Mr Birling. Insecurity in **middle-class social position** reveals the **far-reaching nature of the suffering** caused by large differences in wealth and clear **social divisions**; it's not simply the lower-classes who suffer, although their hardship is to a greater extent.

Seeming superficiality of wealth

The Birling's wealth seems unnatural as Mr Birling is not from a traditionally wealthy background and instead made his own money. Therefore, it is important to consider how this affects Mr Birling, as he lacks the reputation of a well-known family name.

- Priestley's opening description of the Birling household through stage directions as **“substantial and heavily comfortable but not cosy or homelike”** immediately indicates the great wealth of the Birlings, yet the lack of feeling like home reinforces the **cosmetic** nature of their comfort in their own wealth; Mr Birling's **lower-class roots** means his higher-class lifestyle can never seem **“homelike”**.
- Birling compensates for his **“provincial”** speech and **unrefined etiquette**, through his **“substantial”** house as a clear indicator of his high social status. This desire to ensure his status as belonging to the **upper echelons of society** (higher status) is derived from his **initial social inferiority**, before he started his business.

Nouveau riche (acquired wealth rather than inherited)

Mr Birling's character is **condemned** and looked down upon by higher-class men and those from respected families due to his lack of an **aristocratic** (noble) background. Social divisions existed even in the higher classes, and the audience can see how these affect Mr Birling, who is seen as a class imposter by many above him in the societal rankings.

Priestley uses the character of Mr Birling, not only as a method to **critique capitalism**, but to reveal the **cycle of oppression** caused by social divisions and **classism**. Mr Birling attains **validation** of his superiority in an almost **sadistic** manner (pleasure in inflicting pain), through denying pay rises and maintaining poor working conditions and hours - essentially exercising **complete control** over these lower-class

Exam tip -

Using terminology, which you may be unfamiliar with can be scary at first but once you get the hang of it, this can greatly benefit AO2 for subject terminology.



women. The excessively self-centred nature of Mr Birling is, in essence, driven by his determination to uphold an **appearance of affluence** - ultimately and inevitably at the expense of his employees, causing the **firing of Eva Smith**. Priestley focuses on the insecurities of Mr Birling and the middle-class, as this is necessary to **establish a connection with the middle-class contemporary audience**, through exploiting the genuine insecurities they faced.

Final impression

Dismissive of the Inspector's message

The suicide of Eva Smith is **partly blamed** on Mr Birling by the Inspector, to which Birling eagerly trivialises (plays-down) and **rejects all claims** that his actions began the **"chain of events"**, which led to Eva's suicide. It is important to consider why Mr Birling is so dismissive of the Inspector.

- Mr Birling has worked for his high social status and sees himself as proof that if the lower classes work hard enough they too can succeed like he did: **"a man has to make his own way - has to look after himself"**
- His desire to dismiss Eva's suicide is **catalysed** by the pressure of maintaining his **public image** and ensuring that he is not rejected from the society he worked so hard to enter.
- His determination to reject the Inspector's message of social responsibility is portrayed through his **dismissive response** to Eva's death, with his **"impatiently"** forced **"Yes, yes"**.

Exam tip -

When talking about the Inspector's message, this is a great opportunity to include some context about post-WW2 and calls for a welfare state.

Resistant to change and reluctant to accept responsibility

The **older generation** within An Inspector Calls are especially **opposed to societal changes** which would lessen the divisions in classes. This is largely due to the current capitalist society benefitting the Birling family greatly in a financial sense. Birling's **"provincial"** speech bears connotations of **conservatism** and an unwillingness to change, which is reflected in his rejection of **socialism** (a concept of community and equality in society) as **"nonsense"**.

- Gerald's theory of the Inspector not being real is **"eagerly"** and **"triumphantly"** accepted by Mr Birling, despite his actions being real.
- Instant **catharsis** (relief from strong emotions) is felt by Mr Birling, when the prospect of a criminal record is no longer apparent, due to the Inspector not being real.
- Therefore,, it is clear Mr Birling did not care for Eva Smith's suicide, but simply for his own chances of attaining a knighthood by avoiding **"the police court or start(ing) a scandal"**
- For Mr Birling to accept **social responsibility**, he would have to **sacrifice the profiteering methods** of exploiting labourers and paying **subsistence wages** (just enough to live on). Thus, it is in his best interests to oppose the Inspector and attempt to **discredit his message** of social responsibility.
- Priestley's use of the **adverb "eagerly"** to describe both Mr Birling's denial of the Inspector's existence and also Sheila's agreement with Eric that **"this girl's still dead"** emphasises the **divide between the generations**.



- Priestly **contrasts the characters** of Eric and Sheila, against Mr and Mrs Birling. The younger generation acknowledge their **failing in their morality**. However, the older generation merely consider the potential detriment to their **social status through prosecution**, whilst disregarding any **moral duty**.

Cyclical presentation

Mr Birling, and the older generation as a whole, **intend to live in the same fashion** as they did before the arrival of the Inspector. This continuous attitude of not caring about the impact of his actions is demonstrated by Priestley. The **cycle of immorality** is implied by the ending of the play, which finishes as it began: with Mr Birling offering Gerald a drink. The **lack of change in attitude** is reflected by the **lack of visual change** in the play. Here, Priestley conveys the underlying message that the **flaws of the current society** are caused by the **upper-classes' resistance to change**.

The cyclical structure of Mr Birling's outlook creates a **static character**, who cannot change. Priestley, through the character of Mr Birling, critiques how these societal flaws and **capitalism** allow the upper-classes to be supported and their **unfair privileges maintained**. In a way, Priestley **manipulates the audience** into siding with his personal preference of **socialism**, as they turn to this **alternative** in disgust of Priestley's presentation of Mr Birling as uncaring, self-absorbed and manipulative, all traits we come to **associate with capitalism**. Priestley ends the play, also, with **another phone call** - perhaps this time from a **'real' Inspector**. This cyclical device is used to **warn the audience** of not taking on board social responsibility themselves.

Relationships between other characters

Marriage to Mrs Birling

Priestley immediately creates a **divide** between Mr and Mrs Birling through the aforementioned stage direction ***"her husband's social superior"***.

The theme of capitalism affects even the most intimate relationships, as Mr Birling married Mrs Birling **for her social status rather than love**. Their marriage was a **transaction** - Mr Birling's financial stability in exchange for Sybil's **reputable family**. The lack of love and **intimacy** in their relationship is demonstrated through Mrs Birling ***"reproachfully"***

(disappointedly and shameful) responding to Mr Birling. Mrs Birling clearly feels unfulfilled by Mr Birling as she reminds Sheila that she'll just ***"have to get used to, just as I did"*** highlighting to the audience the **unhappiness** caused by this **capitalist system**, where status and wealth are **paramount** (most important).



Father-son relationship

Mr Birling's relationship with his son, Eric, lacks a sense of **familial connection**. Eric opposes the way that his father runs Birling & Co. and is against the way his father exploits the employees. He remains "**not quite at ease**" with his privileged life, formed at the expense of the lower-classes, yet he accepts it.



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The father-son divide is symbolic of the divide between the **older generation and the younger generation**. Eric's resentment of Mr Birling's workplace practices reveals that Eric will also oppose **capitalism** and is more aligned to the concept of **socialism**. Priestley creates an instantaneous divide between father and son, as Mr Birling exclaims "**we try for the highest possible prices**", which Eric demonstrates his disgust by responding with the **rhetorical question** "**why shouldn't they try for higher wages?**". This divide is maintained throughout the play as Mr Birling deflects blame for firing Eva Smith as it's a "**free country**", which Eric challenges: "**it isn't (a free country) if they can't go and work somewhere else**".

Mr Birling attempts to lecture Eric and influence him with capitalist and **individualistic** notions; "**a man has to make his own way – has to look after himself**", however, this largely fails to resonate (be taken on board) with Eric. Despite this divide, Eric shares some qualities with his father. Indeed, they both exploit Eva in some way.

Mr Birling's foil (opposite character) - the Inspector.

Priestley deliberately creates the Inspector as the **antithesis** of Mr Birling in order to compare the ideologies that each character symbolises. Mr Birling represents capitalism, whilst the Inspector is symbolic of socialism.

Exam tip -

You will develop your AO2 for characterisation, if you are able to include a direct comparison between the characters of Mr Birling and the Inspector.

The concept of **rugged individualism** and "**a man has to look after himself**" proposed by Mr Birling is contrasted by The Inspector's notion of **social responsibility** and that "**we are all one body**". This difference in ideas is reflected in their differing appearances.

- The Inspector plays on Mr Birling's appearance of a reputable family "**you seem like a nice well-behaved family**", while emphasising the **superficiality** of their appearance with the verb "**seem**".



Appearance

The appearance of the Inspector as an “**impression of massiveness**” is significant as it presents **socialism** as the more powerful idea. This power and confidence that the Inspector has is due to him presenting a true portrayal of himself, rather than Mr Birling’s obsession with his own **perceived public image**. His contrasting lack for the need for **material objects** to validate his own social status is reflected through his minimal “**plain darkish suit**”.

Speech

In speech, the Inspector “**speaks carefully, weight fully**” while arguing his case with evidence such as Eva Smith’s diary and photograph. This compelling argument is contrasted with Mr Birling who is portrayed as ignorant and arrogant; his speech is diluted with **dashes** and **hesitations**, while his arguments such as “**the Germans don’t want war**” and “**(the Titanic is) unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable**” are proven invalid by **dramatic irony** (the audience knows and understands that the Germans did want war and that the Titanic did sink, as they play was performed in 1945, whilst Mr Birling is unaware).

Power struggle

The Inspector resists Mr Birling’s assertions of authority and attempts of intimidation. Mr Birling attempts to use his social status to **intimidate** the Inspector and retain some **authority** by referencing his irrelevant roles as “**I was an alderman for years – and lord mayor two years ago**”, however, this leaves the Inspector unaffected.

Birling’s constant attempts to **condescend** the Inspector with **rhetorical questions** such as “**Is it now?**” or “**eh Inspector?**” create a **façade** (deceptive outward appearance) of authority to **mask his own insecurity in his social status**. The Inspector’s indifference to Mr Birling’s attempts to intimidate him lead to Mr Birling asserting his authority over his children: “**you’ve had enough of that port, Eric**” and “**you keep quiet Eric**”. Here, Priestley demonstrates how Mr Birling’s **insecurity in his own authority** leads to **oppression**, which is also reflected onto the lower-classes in the workplace as Mr Birling resists his workers’ strike for a pay rise.

Uncertain relationship with Gerald Croft

Gerald is naturally above Mr Birling in the all-important **social hierarchy**, as the Croft family are more reputable and wealthier than the Birling family. This causes a noticeable **tension** from Mr Birling, who increases his **ostentatious tendencies** (he tries to impress Gerald).

The higher status of Gerald is evidenced by Mr Birling’s **hesitant tone**: “**you ought to like this port, Gerald ... It’s exactly the same port your father gets**”. The uncertain **verb “ought”** to reveal Mr Birling’s **insecurity** and **wariness** of not giving Gerald orders, as he would to those below him on the social hierarchy.

- Mr Birling deliberately brought the same port as Gerald’s father in order to present himself as a **social equal** and to mask the insecurity he feels.
- Gerald’s mother, Mrs Croft, disapproves of the marriage therefore Mr Birling attempts to **compensate** for his lower social status by suggesting that there’s a “**very good chance of a knighthood**”.

Exam tip -
Here, context can be added.
The middle class of 1912 could not become upwardly socially mobile without connections to respected families (e.g. wedlock)



- This **self-promotion** of Mr Birling reveals the real motive behind marriage, as rather than praise Sheila as a great potential partner, he promotes himself in an attempt to unite the Croft and Birling families and thereby **increase his ranking on the social hierarchy**.
- The profound effect of the **class system** is revealed by Mr Birling's great respect to Gerald, despite Mr Birling being considerably older.
- Here, Priestley demonstrates that respect is merely gained through status.

Symbolism of Mr Birling

Priestley deliberately portrays Mr Birling as a **static character**, who shows no remorse or accepts any responsibility.

- Mr Birling is **symbolic** of the selfish, capitalist higher middle-class. This is demonstrated through his relief upon Gerald's theory that the Inspector wasn't real and that "**the whole thing's different now**".
- Eva's torment no longer matters to Mr Birling as he is no longer at risk of legal prosecution or socially accountable for her suicide.
- Priestley demonstrates this uncaring attitude as Mr Birling "**jovially**" displays his happiness, as he no longer has to worry about **social responsibility** and he can continue to resist change.
- Through displaying Mr Birling and the older generation as unaffected and resistant to change, Priestley **targets the younger generation**, who are "**more impressionable**" (in the words of the Inspector) in a hope to **rebuild society** with a more **socialist mindset**.
- It is necessary for Mr Birling to remain a **static character**, as Priestley intends for him to be a **vehicle for capitalism** and the source of opposition to positive change to society.
- Therefore, Mr Birling **must be completely dislikeable** and through the audience's hatred of Mr Birling, Priestley is able to gain support and persuade the younger generation in his **critique of capitalism**; Mr Birling is a **construct of capitalism**.

Audience's reaction

Priestley's message

Priestley involves the audience heavily in his play and uses **dramatic irony** to form the audience's opinion of the characters, especially Mr Birling. It is important to consider the methods Priestley uses to convey his **underlying message of socialism**.

- The audience's dislike of Mr Birling causes them to dismiss his view of socialism "**as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense**".
- However, the contemporary middle-class audience likely related to Mr Birling's insecurities and therefore Priestley is able to cause the audience to **reflect on their own social responsibility** and the way in which they conduct themselves.
- Priestley targets the younger middle-class audience through this portrayal of Mr Birling, as they have the **combination of wealth and influence to drive change** and therefore not become like Mr Birling.



Hence, Priestley attempts to convince this powerful audience, who can afford theatre admission, that a **less divided society** would not only **benefit** the working-classes, but all people.



Focused analysis AO2

Use of dramatic irony

Priestley uses **dramatic irony** to portray Mr Birling as both foolish and unlikable. It is important to consider why Priestley creates this obvious irony, with reference to widely known events.

- Mr Birling's complete confidence in "**the Germans don't want war**" as he goes "**to that I say - fiddlesticks**", is received by the **contemporary audience** in 1945 as ignorant, as these people have most likely lost loved ones and have strong memories of both **WWI** and **WWII**. The use of the **dismissive exclamation "fiddlesticks"** furthers the audience's loathing of Mr Birling.
- Mr Birling makes the bold claim that England was undergoing a "**time of steadily increasing prosperity**", yet the audience is aware that the **great depression** followed the aftermath of WWI. This causes Mr Birling to become demonised and for the audience to **oppose his capitalist notions**, as the audience most likely suffered one of the greatest economic depressions in modern history.
- The audience is provided with a sense of **relief** at the arrival of the Inspector, who interrupts Mr Birling's repetitive ranting and domination of speech in the play. This allows Priestley to **establish an atmosphere of relief** associated with the appearance of the Inspector.
- Priestley encourages a favourable perception of the Inspector and this relief is extended to the ideologies which Mr Birling and the Inspector represent; the Inspector's **socialism** provides relief from Mr Birling's **capitalism**. The Inspector is perceived by the audience as a **force for good**, saving society from the **backwards views** of Mr Birling.



Possible 'Topic Sentences'

- Priestley uses the character of Mr Birling as a construct for capitalism and demonstrates the individualistic nature of this ideology through Mr Birling's appearance and personality.
- However, Priestley explores the initial insecurity demonstrated by Mr Birling, in his own social position within the social hierarchy of 1912 British society.
- Priestley explores the static nature of Mr Birling, as this insecurity is maintained throughout the play - unaffected by the Inspector's anti-class-system message of socialism.
- Priestley explores the stark contrast between the younger and older-generation, regarding their attitudes to responsibility. Mr Birling's initial rejection of any responsibility remains constant throughout the play, as Priestley confines the character of Mr Birling to a static development.
- The character of Mr Birling is the antithesis to the Inspector. Priestley explores the ideologies that these characters represent - capitalism and socialism, respectively - and how these are also in direct opposition.

Exam tip -

A 'Topic Sentence' is the first sentence of your argument. This should convey the overall point you are making. It should reference Priestley explicitly and his ideas.

Exam tip -

Topic sentences should always link back to the question at hand. Also, try to link these sentences together (e.g. discuss the initial, transitional and final portrayals of a character).



Mr Birling quote bank by theme

| Theme | Quote | Analysis |
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| Insecurity | <i>“Provincial in his speech”</i> | The adjective “provincial” is used to show the low-class origins of Mr Birling. He has to compensate for his lower-class accent with material possessions. |
| | <i>“You ought to like this port, Gerald It’s exactly the same port your father gets”</i> | The verb “ought” reveals Mr Birling’s insecurities regarding social status; he is hesitant to command Gerald (who is of a higher class) like he would command Eric. |
| | <i>“There’s a fair chance that I may find myself into the next honours list.”</i> | Mr Birling’s insecurity is revealed by his feeling of inadequacy due to his lower social status, compared to the Crofts. Therefore, he feels the need to compensate with boasts of a potential knighthood. |
| Capitalism vs socialism | <i>“We may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together – for lower costs and higher prices.”</i> | This reveals the true motive behind Sheila’s marriage, which is profit - rather than love. |
| | <i>“as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense.”</i> | The simile “like bees in a hive” is an attempt by Mr Birling to trivialise the concept of socialism. |
| | <i>“A man has to mind his own business and look after himself”</i> | Here, Mr Birling speaks in the third person in an attempt to create a philosophical element to his speech. |
| | <i>“It’s my duty to keep labour costs down.”</i> | Priestley uses the noun “duty” to emphasise Mr Birling’s dedication to capitalism and profit. |
| | <i>“If you don’t come down sharply on some of these</i> | The hyperbole (exaggeration for effect) of “asking for the earth” is an attempt by Mr Birling to explain his rejection of Eva Smith’s pay rise. However, the |



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| | <i>people, they'd soon be asking for the earth."</i> | absurdity of people "asking for the earth" reflects the absurdity of Mr Birling's refusal to pay a decent wage. |
| | <i>"Probably a socialist or some sort of crank"</i> | The noun "crank" is an attempt by Mr Birling to condemn socialism, however, Priestley's use of dramatic irony causes the audience to oppose Mr Birling's views and therefore sympathise with socialists. |
| Older generation vs younger generation | <i>"Why you hysterical young fool – get back – or I'll – "</i> | Here Priestley uses irony to further create a dislikeable perception of Mr Birling, who insults and threatens violence towards his own child. Therefore, it is clear that it is in fact Mr Birling who is "hysterical" . |
| | <i>"now look at the pair of them – the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke"</i> | The use of the noun "joke" is significant as it is ironic . It occurs just before the phone rings and a 'real' inspector calls on the telephone. Also, trivialising Eva Smith's suffering as a "joke" emphasises the static character of Mr Birling. |
| Responsibility | <i>"As it happened more than eighteen months ago – nearly two years ago – obviously it has nothing to do with the wretched girl's suicide."</i> | The adverb "obviously" is used to emphasise Mr Birling's arrogance and disregard for his own social responsibility. Priestley does this to continue Mr Birling's unlikable image. |
| | <i>"I can't accept any responsibility."</i> | The use of the adverb "any" reveals Mr Birling's complete lack of morality, as he believes sacking Eva Smith had no impact on her life, which drove her to suicide. |
| | <i>"If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody... it would be very awkward wouldn't it?"</i> | Priestley's use of the adjective "awkward" , coupled with Mr Birling's self-absorbed character reveals that an increased sense of responsibility for everyone would really only be "awkward" for him. This awkwardness extends to the class and ideology that he represents: capitalist middle-class. |
| | <i>"I've got to cover</i> | Priestley uses this sense of urgency as Mr Birling's |



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| | <i>this up as soon as I can."</i> | reaction to his involvement in Eva Smith's suicide shows how he is focused solely on the well-being of his own social status, rather than the death of Eva and how his actions contributed to it. |
| | <i>"There's every excuse for what both your mother and I did."</i> | Mr Birling separates himself and Mrs Birling, as the older generation, from Eric and Sheila in the younger generation. This diversion of blame onto his children reveals the selfish core of Mr Birling and inability to develop a sense of social responsibility. |
| | <i>"(jovially) But the whole thing's different now"</i> | Priestley uses the stage direction <i>"(jovially)"</i> to emphasise Mr Birling's indifference to the well-being of Eva Smith, as <i>"the whole thing's different now"</i> due to there being no social or legal consequences affecting Mr Birling. |
| | (the Inspector is speaking) <i>"Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges"</i> | Priestley uses the Inspector as a vehicle for socialism, as Mr Birling is reminded of his <i>"responsibilities"</i> and the need to address them. |
| Self-absorbed | <i>"It's one of the happiest nights of my life... your engagement to Shelia means a tremendous lot to me"</i> | The selfish nature of Mr Birling is revealed by the use of the personal pronoun <i>"me"</i> and <i>"my life"</i> . The emphasis on Mr Birling's own life is due to his own reputation and social status increasing after Sheila's marriage to Gerald. In reality, it matters not whether Sheila and Gerald are happily married. |
| | <i>"Perhaps I ought to warn you that that [the Chief Constable is] an old friend of mine. We play golf together."</i> | Mr Birling attempts to intimidate the Inspector through the verb <i>"warn"</i> . The belief that association with the Chief Constable puts Mr Birling above the law epitomises the need for greater social justice and responsibility. |
| | <i>"I don't like your tone nor the way you're handling this enquiry."</i> | Again, Birling attempts to sway the Inspector and force him to leave by mentioning the irrelevant fact that he doesn't <i>"like"</i> the Inspector's tone. This is due to the higher classes, generally, being let off by law enforcement due to association with officers in higher positions. |



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| | <p><i>“I care. I was almost certain for a Knighthood in the next honours list.”</i></p> | <p>Priestley uses the short sentence “I care” to create a potential turning point, where Mr Birling finally accepts his moral and social responsibility. However, what follows is an anti-climax as Mr Birling’s static nature as a character is reaffirmed. What Mr Birling only cares about is his social position, not the wellbeing of Eva Smith and other employees.</p> |
| | <p><i>“There’ll be a public scandal... and who here will suffer for that more than I will?”</i></p> | <p>This rhetorical question is used by Priestley to demonstrate Mr Birling’s self-pity rather than sympathy for Eva Smith. His social status is more valuable to him than his employee’s lives.</p> |
| | <p><i>“A heavy looking, rather portentous man”</i></p> | <p>The use of the adjective “portentous” in the stage directions gives an immediate indication of Mr Birling’s self-indulged temperament.</p> |
| | <p><i>“Alderman for years / Lord Mayor two years ago”</i></p> | <p>Priestley uses these high-ranking local roles to reveal Mr Birling’s belief that social status transcends law and order.</p> |
| Dramatic irony | <p><i>“You’ll hear some people say that war is inevitable. And to that I say – fiddlesticks!”</i></p> | <p>The use of the noun “fiddlesticks”, alongside Priestley’s use of dramatic irony causes Mr Birling to seem overwhelmingly confident in his arrogance. This is due to Britain entering WWI soon after 1912.</p> |
| | <p><i>“(the Titanic is) unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable”</i></p> | <p>The certainty shown by Mr Birling’s repetition of “unsinkable” demonstrates his poor judgement. This is due to the Titanic sinking.</p> |
| | <p><i>“time of steadily increasing prosperity”</i></p> | <p>The Great Depression followed 1912 and engulfed post-war Britain. Therefore, the audience in 1945 would identify Mr Birling as unreliable and thus dislike him.</p> |

