

Context			
<p>J. B. Priestley: a broadcaster and playwright, he also served in the army in World War One (1914 – 1918). During the war, he witnessed men from different paths in life/ classes coming together and working for the common, greater good. He believed that this principle should be taken forward in a broader context to make people in society more responsible for one another. When working for the BBC as a broadcaster during World War Two (1939 – 1945), Priestley broadcast a series of short propaganda radio shows which were credited for strengthening civilian morale. His left-wing beliefs brought him into conflict with the government, but they did influence the birth of the Welfare State after the war. The programme was eventually cancelled by the BBC for being too critical of the government.</p>			
<p>1912: when the play is set, just before the outbreak of World War One (1914) and the sinking of the Titanic (1912). Priestley wanted to make sure audiences in 1945 recognised the problems that existed in Edwardian society in 1912 before the wars and weren't tempted to go back to living like that. He wrote the play to highlight the dangers of living in a capitalist society and living by outdated ideas i.e. where social classes were segregated, women were paid less than men for the same work, sexist attitudes were widespread, there was no benefits system or help with unemployment or housing. Society was patriarchal (male dominated) and there was a great deal of inequality.</p>			
<p>1945: when the play was written and performed. After World War Two, society changed for the better. The benefits system was introduced, there was more equality for women and less of a class divide due to different classes and different genders mixing in the war effort. Priestley 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.</p>			
<p>Socialism: Priestley was a keen socialist. He believed society should be founded upon responsibility, where people looked after each other rather than just caring about themselves. In the play, socialist characters like the Inspector are far more respectable, compassionate and thoughtful than the capitalist ones.</p>			
<p>Capitalism: Priestley despised capitalism, as he believed it promoted selfishness and prioritised money and profit over human rights. He created Mr and Mrs Birling as capitalists in order to make capitalism seem outdated, selfish and blinkered.</p>			
Characters		Themes	
Mr Birling	An arrogant, ignorant capitalist businessman who despises the notion of social equality and loves money. He sacks Eva from his factory when she asks for equal pay for women and threatens a strike.	<p>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.</p>	<p>RESPONSIBILITY/ JUSTICE: the Inspector, as Priestley's mouthpiece, is a symbol of socialism – he wants everyone to look after each other and to see the importance of community and shared responsibility for each other. He is sent to uncover the family's wrongdoings and to make them see that they should take care of others and show compassion. Sheila and Eric realise this, but Mr and Mrs Birling do not.</p>
Mrs Birling	A snobbish, supercilious and cold-hearted capitalist who believes everyone is responsible for themselves. She refuses to help Eva when she comes to the charity for help.		
Inspector	Priestley's mouthpiece (representing his ideals), he is a keen socialist who advocates community responsibility and forces the Birlings to face up to what they have done.	<p>GENDER INEQUALITY: Priestley intended 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 hierarchy and the most vulnerable in those times).</p>	<p>SELFISHNESS: Priestley presents selfishness as a pernicious and harmful influence upon society. He presents the Birlings as ignorant and selfish – they exploit others and prioritise themselves over the rest of humanity. In doing so, he raises uncomfortable truths about what would happen if we behaved like the Birlings. The play is a warning about the wider selfishness of a society that is driven by profit and that has no structured welfare system to support vulnerable people.</p>
Sheila	The daughter, who has Eva sacked from the shop for smirking at her. She begins as a spoilt bourgeois girl but quickly changes her views, feels sorry for Eva Smith and starts to become more of a empathetic and enlightened socialist as the play progresses. She is ashamed of her parents at the end.		
Eric	The son, who is a young man of privilege . He drinks too much and has a one-night stand with Eva. He gets her pregnant and steals from his father to give Eva money. He begins to regret his actions, change his ways and is also ashamed of his parents at the end. He refuses to ignore the consequences of his actions, unlike his parents		
Gerald	Sheila's fiancé. A businessman who has capitalist ideals and is similar to Mr Birling politically. He shows some regret for his affair with Eva, but eventually relinquishes all sense of responsibility for his actions, and reverts to ignorance and dishonesty by the end of the play.	<p>POWER: Priestley explores how power is wielded by the powerful. He suggests that power can lead to exploitation and corruption - the Birlings and Gerald abuse the power they hold over the powerless (symbolised by Eva Smith). Eva becomes more and more powerless as the play progresses, and the consequences of her exploitation become more tragic.</p>	<p>SOCIAL CLASS: Priestley wanted to show that inequality between the classes still existed and that the upper-classes looked down upon the working-class in post-war Britain. Priestley explores the theme of class through the mistreatment and exploitation of working-class Eva Smith by the wealthy Birlings and Gerald Croft.</p>

Subject terminology	
* Allegory	A story with two different meanings , where the straightforward meaning on the surface is used to reveal/ unlock a deeper meaning underneath.
* Allusion	A reference to something else, such as a historical event, a person, a place. Priestley makes religious allusion to the Bible in particular.
Audience surrogate	An audience surrogate is a proxy for the audience i.e. a character acting on behalf of the audience who the audience can identify with. Such characters think like the audience thinks and ask the questions the audience wants answering . In this play, the Inspector is the audience surrogate.
* Cliffhanger	When the end of the text is strangely or dramatically abrupt , so that the main character/s is left in a difficult situation, without offering any resolution of their conflict or situation.
* Cyclical structure	A structural technique where the ending of the text mirrors the opening e.g. in this play, the characters end up in the same position they were at the beginning: expecting the arrival of an Inspector. A cyclical structure can help an audience understand why change is so necessary – unless we act, things will never change and characters like Eva Smith will continue to suffer.
* Dramatic irony	When the audience knows something that the characters do not. Dramatic irony can be used to heighten tension or expectation in the audience.
* Foil	A character whose purpose is to emphasise or contrast with the qualities of another character.
* Foreshadowing	Where the author gives the reader hints or signs about the future . It suggests what is to come through imagery, language, and/or symbolism. It does not directly give away the outcome, but rather, suggests it.
* Metaphorical language	Where writers use techniques such as imagery, metaphor, motifs, personification, similes and symbols to construct their characters and convey their message.
* Monologue	A long and important speech by one character in a play. It is uninterrupted and it is intended that other characters can hear it and take note.
Morality play	(See opposite) ‘An Inspector Calls’ is a morality play because all of the Birlings and Gerald Croft commit crimes which are similar to the Seven Deadly Sins .
Real time	When the stage time is real time; this makes the play more naturalistic. In ‘An Inspector Calls’, the Birlings’ actions are unveiled in real time, making their downfall more dramatic and showing how quickly their world can crumble .
Tension	A dramatic device used to create a sense of suspense or to make the audience feel on edge; tension is often created through the use of cliffhangers and dramatic irony .
Well-made play	(See opposite) In a well-made play the plot is intricate and complex – more and more layers are uncovered and the action usually builds to a shocking and dramatic climax .

Literary context: morality play	
<p>Morality plays were first performed in the late middle ages. They are a type of allegory (a story which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one). Morality plays were popular during the 15th and 16th centuries.</p> <p>In these types of plays, the main characters are met by supporting characters who are personifications of good and evil. They are used to prompt the main character to choose a good life over one of evil. The point of a morality play was to educate the audience and get them to lead a better life so that they would determine a better fate for themselves in the ‘after-life’. The supporting characters sometimes represented the Seven Deadly Sins. These were vices that people believed could lead to the eternal damnation of your soul if you committed them - you would go to hell forever. The Seven Deadly Sins were lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride. Whilst characters who committed these sins were punished, morality plays showed that if a character repented, then they could redeem themselves.</p> <p>‘An Inspector Calls’ is a morality play because all of the Birlings and Gerald Croft commit crimes which are similar to the Seven Deadly Sins. Mr Birling is greedy because he wants more money, Sheila is guilty of wrath and envy when she spitefully complains about Eva Smith and so on. Not all of the characters manage to redeem themselves. Priestley uses the morality play structure to teach a 20th century audience a series of lessons that relate to his beliefs about social responsibility, age, gender and class. The audience is invited to enjoy judging these characters; they are also forced to question their own behaviour. Priestley would have hoped that people watching the play would have left the theatre as better people.</p>	
Literary context: the well-made play	
<p>A well-made play is a popular dramatic genre from the 19th century. In a well-made play the plot is intricate and complex and the action builds to a climax. This is often concerned with events that happened before the events of the play.</p> <p>A well-made play usually ends with a return to order but Priestley moves away from this genre with the revelation at the end. ‘An Inspector Calls’ is a well-made play because the events are all influenced by what happened to Eva Smith before the play takes place. This structure allows Priestley to manipulate the audience. They do not know what happened to Eva Smith and so each revelation about her treatment by the Birlings and Gerald Croft adds to the drama. Each revelation is more shocking than the last and so Priestley cleverly builds to the climax.</p> <p>In ‘An Inspector Calls’ there is a twist at the end of the plot: the characters are unsure if the Inspector existed at all. This gives the audience time to reflect on the events of the play. When it is revealed that another inspector is on their way and the curtain falls, the audience would be stunned.</p>	