

## 1: Context— J. B. Priestley

- Born in to a working –class family in Yorkshire.
- Fought for England in WWI.
- Studied at Cambridge University after the war.
- Wrote plays, novels, biographies and essays.
- Priestley was a socialist and disliked exploitation of the working classes by capitalism.

**Key Vocabulary / Terms:**

**Socialism:** Where everyone benefits from a country's wealth, including the workers. People are socially responsible.

**Capitalism:** Where private owners benefit from their business' wealth, making profits that they keep themselves.

**Exploitation:** Treating someone unfairly to benefit from their work. For example, paying workers below minimum wage to keep more profits for yourself.

## 2: Edwardian England / Post War England

'An Inspector Calls' was written and first performed in 1945, after WWII (post-war England).

But it is set in 1912: before WWI (Edwardian Era).  
WWI—1914-1918    WII—1939-1945

**1912**

Strong distinctions between the upper and lower classes

Women were considered to be lower than men. Society was **patriarchal**

The ruling classes saw no need to change the status quo

**1945**

Class distinctions had been greatly reduced as a result of two world wars

As a result of the wars, women had earned a more valued place in society

Great desire for social change

## 3: Characters

**Arthur Birling:** A 'new money' entrepreneur and business owner.  
**Sybil Birling:** Arthur's wife—comes from 'old money' or inherited wealth.

**Eric Birling:** Arthur and Sybil's son and heir to the business.

**Sheila Birling:** Arthur and Sybil's daughter - engaged to Gerald.

**Gerald Croft:** A traditional young man from a respectable family. Engaged to Sheila.

**Inspector Goole:** A police inspector investigating the death of Eva Smith.

**Eva Smith:** A working class woman who used to work in Mr. Birling's factory.

**Key Vocabulary / Terms:**

**Old money:** Money which has been inherited. Linked more with upper class morals and a higher social status.

**New money:** money made from business / the Industrial revolution. Although still rich, these businessmen would be associated with a lower social status in the upper classes.

## 4: Mr Arthur Birling

Arthur's main concerns are the Birling family's good name and his ability to climb English society. Arthur is aware that, although his firm is successful, it is not as successful as the Crofts'. Arthur also does not yet possess a formal title as the Crofts do, so he gleefully tells Gerald in Act One that he is expecting a knighthood. We discover that he sacks Eva Smith for leading a strike at his factory. Although Arthur does seem somewhat upset at the idea that he contributed to Eva Smith's death, he is more upset that his family's implication in the scandal would become public. Arthur's opinion, that men ought only to look after themselves as individuals, is a strictly capitalist mentality.

**Key Vocabulary / Terms:**

**Proletariat:** The working class

**Bourgeois:** The middle class

**Trade Union:** an association of workers formed to protect and further their rights and interests.

**Entrepreneur:** A person who sets up a business

## 5: Key Vocabulary &amp; Terminology

**Dramatic irony:** When the audience is aware of something that the characters are not.

**Foreshadowing:** To suggest that something unpleasant is going to happen.

**Patriarchal:** A male-dominated society.

**Misogynistic:** Strongly prejudiced against women.

**Undermining the reliability of a character:** When a character is made to look stupid / inaccurate by something that they say .

**Social conscience:** A sense of responsibility for the injustices of society.

**Collective responsibility:** Where responsibility is shared between everyone—e.g. Society has a collective responsibility to help the poor.

**Generational differences:** Differences between the old and the young.

## 6: Sheila Birling

Sheila is the conscience of the Birling family. She realises very soon after the Inspector's arrival that her anger at Milward's resulted in Eva/Daisy's dismissal, and that, because Eva/Daisy went on to commit suicide, Sheila played a role in her demise. Sheila wonders how she will live with the grief her actions have caused, for herself, and of course for Eva/Daisy. She seems genuinely upset and lost, and reminds the rest of her family that they, too, have acted wrongly. She wants the family never to forget what they have done, despite their desire to proceed as though nothing is amiss.

**Key Vocabulary / Terms:**

**Superficial:** to be shallow, artificial or insincere

**Materialistic:** More concerned with possessions and money than feelings and morals.

**Remorseful:** Very sorry for what you have done.