

How does Priestley use language, structure and form to present ideas about social responsibility?

Components:

1. Context	4. Act 3 – Eric and the Inspector’s Message
2. Act 1 – Mr Birling and Sheila	5. Act 3 – The Inspector Hoax and The Human Condition
3. Act 2 – Gerald and Mrs Birling	6. Priestley’s message



Key Vocabulary

Dialogue	Juxtaposition	PEARL meaning connotation imagery	
Stage directions	Dramatic Irony		
Foreshadowing	Props		
Cliff-hanger	Characterisation		
Symbolism	Euphemism	Cyclical narrative	Microcosm
Coup de theatre	Morality play	Allusion	Construct

Plot Breakdown

Act 1

- The Birling family and Gerald Croft are celebrating Sheila’s engagement to Gerald.
- Mr Birling makes pompous speeches outlining his political and social views.
- The evening is interrupted by Inspector Goole making enquiries about a suicide of
- Mr Birling is questioned and admits sacking Eva Smith for leading strikes for higher wages.
- Sheila is questioned and admits having Eva sacked from Milward’s due to her jealousy.

Act 2

- Gerald is questioned and admits keeping Daisy as his mistress for six months.
- Mrs Birling tries to bully the Inspector and to control events.
- Sheila starts to realise that the Inspector’s enquiries are well founded.
- Mrs Birling is forced to admit that the girl asked her charity for help and she refused.
- It is revealed that the girl was pregnant. Mrs Birling lays the blame on the child’s father.

Act 3

- Eric confesses that he got a girl pregnant. He also confesses to stealing his father’s money.
- Eric blames his mother for the girl’s death.
- The Inspector makes a dramatic speech about the consequences of selfish behaviour and social irresponsibility. Having shown that each had a part in ruining the girl’s life, leaves.
- Gerald and Mr Birling prove the man was not a police Inspector and there was no suicide.
- Eric and Sheila continue to feel guilty about their behaviour. The others shrug it off.
- Mr Birling answers the telephone: a young woman has just died on the way to the Infirmary. An Inspector is on his way to make enquiries.

Contextual Influences

Britain in 1912

- Society firmly divided amongst class lines. Those with the most money had the most power.
- Only men who owned property could vote. Women’s lives were controlled by men.
- Little government help for people in need.
- Dangerous level of tension between the big European countries in 1912, which resulted in WWI.
- After the war, many British people questioned the leadership given by upper classes during the war.

Britain in 1945

- Still divided by class, but power more evenly shared (e.g. men and women able to vote)
- Still conflicts between business owners and workers (e.g. 1926 General Strike)

Priestley wrote the play during WWII

- Millions from all classes fought for Britain during WW2. After the war, people wanted to work out how to make a better society.
- The world wars made people question Britain’s social structure.
- Socialism and other left wing ideas, which call for the more equal sharing out of wealth and power became more popular.

Key Characters

Arthur Birling

- “Heavy looking, rather portentous man”
- “A hard-headed practical man of business”
- “Just a knighthood, of course”
- “A man has to mind his own business”

Sheila Birling

- “these girls aren’t cheap labour – they’re people”
- “I had her turned out of a job”
- “I expect you’ve done things you’re ashamed of”
- “Why – you fool – he knows!”
- “you don’t seem to have learnt anything”

Mrs Birling

- “cold woman... her husband’s social superior”
- “It’s disgusting to me”
- “I did nothing I’m ashamed of”

Eric Birling

- “Not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive”
- “I wasn’t in love with her or anything – but I liked her – she was pretty and a good sport”
- “You’re not the kind of father a chap could go to”

Gerald Croft

- “Easy, well-bred young man about town”
- “You seem to be a nice well-behaved family”
- “You’re just the kind of son-in law I wanted”

Eva Smith

- “A lively good-looking girl”
- “She had a lot to say ... so she had to go”
- “She was very pretty and looked as if she could take care of herself”

Revision Websites

- BBC Bitesize:** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zpr639g>
- Mr Bruff:** <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqGFsWf-PcDvuiSH8SycEDh1Ugke9tmb>

Key Themes

Social responsibility	Wealth, power, influence	Capitalism vs Socialism	Love, sex and consent	Hypocrisy
Truth and lies	Morality vs legality	Gender roles	Guilt	Age

Inspector Goole

- “Massiveness, solidity and purposefulness”
- “It’s better to ask for the earth than to take it”
- “there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us”
- “fire and blood and anguish”