



# An Inspector Calls – Social Responsibility

## Transcript

- Mr Birling: We employers, at last are coming together to see that our interests, and the interests of capital are properly protected. We're in for a time of a steadily increasing prosperity.
- Presenter: On the night the Inspector calls, the Birlings are celebrating Sheila and Gerald's engagement. A jovial Arthur Birling speaks freely of his wealth and good fortune.
- Mr Birling: I don't want to lecture you two young fellows again, but what so many of you don't seem to understand is that now things are so much easier, and man has to make his own way. He has to look after himself and his family too, of course when he has one. So long as he does that, he won't come to much harm.
- Presenter: Priestley's socialist views embraced the sharing of wealth and responsibility. People needed to work together as a community, and look after one another. The rich, for instance, could help the poor by paying higher taxes. Arthur Birling's ideology is the opposite of Priestley's. He's a staunch capitalist and isn't afraid to sing the praises of greed and self-preservation.
- Mr Birling: But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think that everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we're all mixed up together like bees in the hive. Ah, community and all that nonsense. But take my word for it, you youngsters, that I have learned in the good, hard school of experience, that a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own and the ... Oh, I wonder who that could be?
- Presenter: The Inspector arrives bearing news of Eva Smith's suicide, which further exposes the Birlings selfish behaviour and sense of entitlement. For the first time they are made to realise that their actions have consequences. In the interest of preserving profits, Arthur Birling refused Eva a pay increase. Sheila had her fired because Eva hurt her vanity. Gerald took her as his mistress out of lust, while Eric ...
- Inspector: Just used her for the end of a stupid drunken evening, as if she was an animal. A thing, not a person.
- Presenter: Pregnant with Eric's child, Eva was denied assistance by the women's charity organisation, thanks to Sibyl Birling.
- Inspector: Was it owing to your influence, as the most prominent member of the committee, that help was refused the girl?
- Mrs Birling: Possibly.
- Inspector: Was it, or was it not your influence?





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- Mrs Birling: I didn't like her manner. She'd impertinently made use of our name, though pretended afterwards it happened to be the first that she'd thought of. She had to admit, after I began questioning her, that she had no claim to the name, that she wasn't married, and that the story she'd told, at first about her husband who deserted her, was quite false.
- Presenter: Priestly publicly supported the formation of the National Health Service, a healthcare system designed to provide equal access for everyone to medical and health services, including the country's underprivileged. He observed that charities were often run by wealthy people, like Sibyl Birling who have no personal experience of poverty and desperation.
- Mrs Birling: Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility.
- Inspector: That doesn't make it any less yours. She came to you for help at a time when no woman could've needed it more and you not only refused it yourself, but saw to it that others refused it too. She was here alone, friendless, almost penniless, desperate. She needed not only money, but advice, sympathy, friendliness.
- Presenter: Just as Sibyl Birlings attempts to shift the blame for Eva's suicide, the other Birlings too have an opinion about who bears the most responsibility for her death. The Inspector, meanwhile, endeavours to make them accept and share the responsibility.
- Inspector: This girl killed herself and died a horrible death, but each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it, but then, I don't think you ever will.
- Presenter: The importance of collective responsibility is further emphasised in his final speech.
- Inspector: One Eva Smith is gone but there are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness all intertwined with our lives with what we think and do. We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other and I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, they will be taught it in fire, and blood and anguish.
- Presenter: *An Inspector Calls* was written as the Second World War was coming to an end and Priestly is warning us that unless we learn to live together and be collectively responsible, then we will continue to witness the fire, blood and anguish of further conflicts.
- Mr Birling: That fellow obviously didn't like us. Prejudice from the start. Probably a socialist, or some sort of crank. He talked like one, and then, instead of standing up to him, you let him bluff you into talking about your private affairs.





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Presenter: The play concludes with the Birlings receiving a phone call from the infirmary. A girl really has died from swallowing disinfectant.

Mr Birling: And a police inspector is on his way here to ask some questions.

Presenter: The cycle of events starts again. Priestly is warning us not to make the same mistakes, to be collectively responsible as a society, so mankind can escape its own cycle of death and destruction.

