

50 or so things you need to know for An Inspector Calls

1. What is Priestley's main message about the class system?	Priestley's main message is that the class system is inherently unfair. The working classes are exploited by those with more power
2. Who does Eva Smith represent?	Eva represents all of the real life working class woman who were suffering in similar circumstances.
3. When is the play set and when was it written?	The play is set in 1912 but was written in 1945.
4. How did the two World Wars affect the relationships between the working and middle classes?	Middle-class men and working-class men fought side by side during both wars, which helped to break down the barriers between them. Priestley hoped this could continue and that, one day, the class system would disappear. He knew that this would not be easy.
5. Which women's movement encouraged women of means, like Sheila Birling, to become more independent?	The suffragette movement encouraged women to be more independent and campaigned for women's rights.
6. In what way might <i>An Inspector Calls</i> be described as allegorical?	The characters are symbolic representations of the upper, middle and working classes. They may also symbolise specific sins that Priestley associated strongly with the middle classes. For example, Mr Birling might represent the sin of greed.
7. How does Priestley suggest that the Birlings are trapped in a loop and that time will repeat itself?	The play is cyclical; the ending echoes the beginning.
8. How are Mrs Birling and Sheila presented as quite different women?	Priestley suggests that Mrs Birling is more accepting of traditional values in which a woman must 'get used to' her husband working long hours. There is an implication here that she reflects a common attitude at the time: men's infidelity was to be tolerated, providing they did not get caught. Sheila breaks off her engagement with Gerald when she realises he was unfaithful.
9. Why does Priestley suggest Sheila is different to her mother?	Priestley characterises the women this way to suggest that middle class women's roles were changing and that wider societal change was possible through women like Sheila.
10. Which characters accept responsibility for their actions towards Eva Smith?	Sheila and Eric accept responsibility for their actions and show willingness to change.
11. What differences exist between those characters who are willing to accept responsibility and try to change and those who are not?	The older generation, represented by Mr and Mrs Birling, and the upper classes, represented by Gerald, are unwilling to change. Priestley suggests that hope for change lies with the younger generation of middle class men and women, who are less beholden to a rigid class system.

12. What phrase does Priestley use when the Inspector suggests we are all connected to each other?	He says, 'we are members of one body'. The imagery is significant because it suggests that, just like a body, society is interconnected and all parts rely on, and are responsible to, all other parts. The middle and upper classes have a responsibility to the working classes, on whom they depend for their own survival and status.
13. Why does Priestley suggest the older generation cannot change?	Priestley recognised how difficult it would be to bring about societal change. He seems to have believed that the older generation would struggle to imagine any other way of living. Life without a rigid hierarchy would seem impossible to them.
14. What does 'hypocrisy' mean?	'Hypocrisy' can be defined as 'claiming to have higher standards or more noble behaviour than is really the case.'
15. How is Gerald's behaviour hypocritical and why does Priestley characterise Gerald in this way?	Gerald accuses Ole Joe Meggarty of being a 'notorious womaniser' when Gerald himself is guilty of the same sin. Priestley uses Gerald to represent all of the upper classes. He uses Gerald as an example of their inability to recognise their own failings.
16. Why does Mr Birling fire Eva Smith from his company?	Eva was not conforming; she was speaking out against low pay and demanding more money. This is why Mr Birling fired her.
17. Why does Priestley characterise Mr Birling as someone who is hoping for a knighthood?	Priestley characterises Mr Birling as an example of a wealthy industrialist and social climber who wants to acquire higher status and more wealth. He is chiefly concerned with his reputation.
18. How does Mr Birling respond at the end of the play when he, briefly, thinks it was all a hoax?	Mr Birling suggests that they will all have a 'good laugh' about it later. He seems to have learned nothing from the Inspector's visit
19. How does Priestley characterise Mrs Birling's reaction when Sheila complains about Gerald working too hard?	Priestley characterises Mrs Birling as someone who believes women have to 'get used to' this behaviour. There is a subtle implication that she expects her daughter to tolerate his possible infidelity.
20. How does Priestley suggest that Mrs Birling refuses to accept responsibility and is unlikely to ever change?	She says, 'I accept no blame for it at all.' She is referring to Eva's death.
21. What upper middle class values does Priestley suggest are important to Mrs Birling?	She exemplifies the belief that good manners and 'breeding' make the middle classes worthy of their high status and wealth, and the belief that the poor can be divided into those who deserve help (as a reward for conformity and obedience) and those who do not.
22. Why does Sheila have Eva sacked from the dress shop?	Priestley characterises Sheila as being jealous of Eva and thinks Eva is mocking her. She exemplifies the negative middle-class attitudes Priestley sought to expose. She feels jealous and uses her power over Eva, a working-class woman, to make herself feel better. She also initially fails to understand the seriousness of the consequences of her actions for Eva Smith.

23. What language does Priestley use to suggest that Sheila is relieved and somewhat jubilant when she finally confronts Gerald about his infidelity?	Priestley describes her as looking at Gerald, 'almost in triumph.'
24. How does the characterisation of Sheila give the audience hope for a fairer society in the future?	Sheila is characterised as someone who has the potential for change. She faces up to her responsibilities and shows us that such moral courage is possible.
25. Which word is used by both Sheila and Eric, at different times, in reference to his drinking? Why is it an understatement?	Priestley uses the word, 'squiffy,' which is really a euphemism for what is quite a severe drinking problem. Priestley characterises the family as somehow wanting to ignore the truth.
26. How is Eric characterised as self-indulgent and aggressive towards Eva?	Eric has sex with Eva despite knowing she does not really want him to. This constitutes rape.
27. Where did Eric get the money he gave to Eva Smith?	Eric steals from his father's office. Priestley uses this as an example of how the upper middle classes may turn on one another in order to get themselves out of a difficult situation.
28. How is Eric presented as responding to the news that the Inspector may not have been a real policeman?	Eric is characterised as someone who, like his sister, feels remorse and wishes for social change. He says, 'why shouldn't they try for higher wages?'
29. How is Gerald connected to the Birling family?	Gerald Croft is engaged to Sheila Birling.
30. Who are Gerald's parents and what status does that give him?	Gerald's parents are Lord and Lady Croft, which makes him an upper class aristocrat.
31. What does Gerald say about 'Old Joe Meggarty' which suggests he is characterised as lacking self-awareness?	Gerald describes Joe Meggarty as a 'notorious womaniser' when he himself is a womaniser. He has an affair with Eva while being engaged to Sheila.
32. Why is Gerald characterised as being more like the older generation than the younger generation that he actually belongs to?	He is the only truly upper class character in the play and is used to exemplify what Priestley saw as their inability to ever change. They protect their own interests by maintaining the status quo.
33. How and why does Priestley suggest the lighting should change when the Inspector arrives?	The lighting changes to 'pink and intimate' to 'brighter and harder' because Inspector Goole will 'shine a light' on the Birling family, meaning he will expose their secrets and lies.
34. What structural device does Priestley use in the dialogue to show that the Inspector is able to take control of the conversation away from other characters?	Dashes are used to show that the Inspector interrupts other characters. They also interrupt each other but the Inspector seems to take control as and when he chooses.

35. What two lines does the Inspector say in his speech that sum up the message of the entire play?	'We are members of one body. We are responsible for one another.'
36. What theories are there about who or what the Inspector may really be?	For most of the play he is presented as a middle-class police Inspector. However, behind that façade, he may be the voice of God; the voice of the deceased Eva Smith; he may simply be seen as a moral conscience explaining Priestley's key message about ending social injustice.
37. The audience never actually sees Eva Smith but what is her significance in the play?	Eva Smith is a central character. Everything revolves around her life story. She is Priestley's example of an exploited working-class woman and she represents other women like her.
38. How does Eva take her own life?	She drinks disinfectant. This is likely to symbolise that she felt she had to be cleansed of sin.
39. Put these in the right order: Eva is attacked by Eric; Eva has an affair with Gerald; Eva is fired by Mr Birling; Eva is fired because of Sheila.	Eva is fired by Mr Birling; Eva is fired because of Sheila; Eva has an affair with Gerald; Eva is attacked by Eric.
40. Edna has only a very small role in the play but how is she presented?	Priestley characterises Edna as an obedient, dutiful servant to the Birling family.
41. How might Priestley use Edna as a contrasting character to Eva Smith?	Edna is an example of what Mrs Birling would think of as 'deserving' poor. She conforms and serves, which is what Priestley suggests the middle classes demand from their working classes: subservience and conformity. She is used to subtly highlight how unusual Eva's behaviour was.
42. What does the conversation between Edna and Mrs Birling reveal about upper middle class interactions with servants?	Mrs Birling uses a calm, neutral tone with her servant. This is not particularly because she cares for Edna's feelings but probably more about presenting herself as a well-mannered middle class woman who deserves her wealth and power.
43. How and why does Priestley create a cyclical structure?	The ending relates back to the beginning: a girl has just died and a police inspector is on his way. Priestley is suggesting that society is trapped in a never-ending loop, doomed to repeat its mistakes and continue the social injustice he protests against.
44. In the opening stage directions, which details might suggest that, despite their wealth, the Birling are not a close, happy family?	The house is described as 'not cosy and homelike,' which suggests the family is not close
45. How and why does Priestley say the lighting should change when the Inspector arrives?	Priestley suggests the lighting should change from, 'pink and intimate' to 'brighter and harder' to suggest the Inspector will reveal truths about the Birling family that they will have to confront.
46. How is Eric described in the opening stage directions?	Eric is described as as 'half-shy, half-assertive,' which may hint at the way Eric's confidence will grow; he becomes more confrontational to his father and mother.

<p>47. How might the symbolism of Eva's suicide connect to Priestley's message that 'we are members of one body'?</p>	<p>Priestley suggests that the body, meaning the whole of our society, also needs to be 'cleansed'. By this, Priestley means that British society needs to give up the class system and move to a fairer way of life.</p>
<p>48. What device is being used when Mr Birling says, 'the Germans don't want war'?</p>	<p>This is dramatic irony, where the audience knows something that a character does not know.</p>
<p>49. What might Inspector Goole represent?</p>	<p>The Inspector is an important symbol in Priestley's allegory. He could be the voice of God; he could be Eva Smith's alter-ego; he is certainly a moral conscience.</p>
<p>50. Why does Priestley include supernatural elements in his play?</p>	<p>It may be that Priestley wanted to suggest that it would take a miraculous intervention to actually change society. He may even have hoped that suggesting we couldn't do it by ourselves would be provocative, and that our response would be to prove we could change by ourselves.</p>