
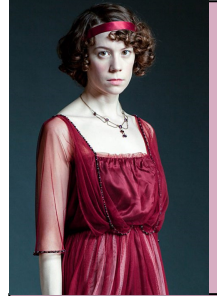





Mr Birling
A businessman and capitalist who is against social equality
Adjectives: pompous, overconfident, stubborn, social climber



Mrs Birling
Her husband's social superior; she believes in personal responsibility
Adjectives: "cold", upper class, supercilious, prejudiced



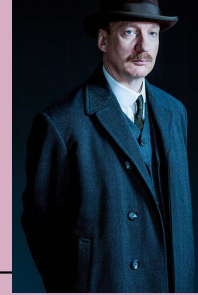
Sheila Birling
A young girl who comes to change her views and pities Eva, feeling regret.
Adjectives: naïve, curious, compassionate, perceptive, wiser



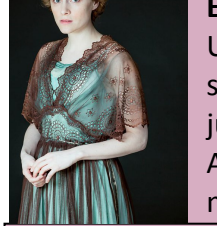
Eric Birling
A young man who drinks too much, gets Eva pregnant; regrets his actions.
Adjectives: irresponsible, reckless, frustrated, repentant



Gerald Croft
A businessman who is engaged to Sheila and politically close to Birling.
Adjectives: aristocratic, partly repentant, unchanged



The Inspector
Priestley's mouthpiece; advocates social justice.
Adjectives: "massiveness", systematic, unflappable, mysterious



Eva Smith
Unseen in play; comes to stand for victims of social injustice
Adjectives: "warm-hearted", moralistic, representative

Edna: servant of the Birlings. voiceless, the underdog, working-class

The Inspector's Final speech...

'But just remember this. One Eva Smith has 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 say 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, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Good night.'

1912	Play is set here; just before WWI and sinking of the Titanic
1945	Priestley wrote the play then; start of the welfare state and ideals of social equality made real



Theatrical Stagecraft: Dramatic Devices

1. Dramatic irony	The audience knows what the characters don't
2. Stage directions	Instructions for the actors; often revealing
3. Setting	Constant throughout but subtle changes e.g. lighting
4. Tension	Builds up throughout the play
5. Cliff-hanger	The ending allows the audience to make up their minds

Act 1
The family are celebrating the engagement of Sheila and Gerald. Inspector Goole arrives announcing the suicide of Eva Smith. Mr Birling threw her out after a strike; Sheila had her fired for laughing. Eva changed her name to Daisy Renton.

Act 2
Gerald admits to the affair with Daisy. We discover Mrs Birling refused to offer Eva charity. It is revealed that Eva was pregnant. Suspicion turns to Eric.

Act 3
Eric admits guilt and also having stolen money. The inspector leaves, lecturing the family on the need for social responsibility. Gerald discovers the inspector was a fake and there is no recorded death of Eva Smith. Then the phone rings...



Key quotes	
Birling's confidence	'We're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity'
Birling on society	'the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else'
Sheila's recognition	'but these girls aren't cheap labour – they're <i>people</i> '
Sheila's regret	'it's the only time I've ever done anything like that, and I'll never, never do it again to anybody'
Sheila on the Inspector	'we all started like that – so confident, so pleased with ourselves until he began asking us questions'
Sheila on Eric	'he's been steadily drinking too much for the last two years'
Inspector on guilt	'I think you did something terribly wrong – and that you're going to spend the rest of your life regretting it'
Mrs Birling defends herself	'she was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position'
Eric explains	'I'm not very clear about it, but afterwards she told me she didn't want me to go in but that – well, I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty – and I threatened to make a row'
The Inspector says	'but each of you helped to kill her. Remember that'
Sheila is sarcastic	'I suppose we're all nice people now...'
Birling's confidence	'the famous younger generation who know it all'

Key concepts and context	
Priestley asks his audience to examine their individual and collective responsibility to society. He wants a welfare state.	
Class: Upper and lower social classes are segregated Eva Smith is the embodiment of young, working class women who were oppressed by middle/upper classes.	
The play demonstrates that when workers do not have full employment rights they cannot fight back.	
Capitalism: Business should make money no matter the human cost; we are all responsible only for ourselves. Priestley criticizes the selfishness of capitalism and wants a fairer, socialist future after the horrors of two world wars.	
The hypocrisy of middle-class Edwardian society is uncovered; appearance and reputation matter more than reality and morality.	
Age: Priestley shows the older generation (Mr and Mrs Birling) to be set in their ways, while the young (Sheila and Eric) are open to change.	
Attitudes to women are patriarchal, leading to misogyny	