**Inspector Goole**

An ‘Inspector’ who sets out to make a wealthy family understand their social responsibility towards poorer members of society – he succeeds with some, but not all.



**Key Facts**

* He has a **strong moral stance** and displays this clearly, often taking a very strong stand in favour of **Socialism** and labour rights.
* He tries to show the Birlings that **Eva Smith was one of many thousands of girls** who are in a similar situation and **encourages them to think about how their actions affect others** – particularly how we as a society treat the disadvantaged.
* At the end of the play, his identity is called into question and the audience conclude that he may be a **God-like or ghostly character sent to make the Birlings understand social responsibility - or simply our conscience.**
* Can be seen as the **voice of J.B. Priestley.**

**Key Quotations**

‘One person and one line of inquiry at a time. Otherwise, there’s a muddle.’ *This means we learn about all characters individually which reinforces the idea of individual responsibility.*

‘Each of you helped to kill her. Never forget it. But then I don’t think you ever will.’ *– this is the Inspector’s intention. He* ***wants to permanently change their opinion towards responsibility****.*

‘What happened to her then may have determined what happened to her afterwards…a chain of events’ – *the Inspector outlines the nature of the moral crime the family have committed against Eva and shows that each of them are partly responsible for her death.*

‘Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges’ – *the Inspector highlights that if a person is in a position of authority then they have a duty of responsibility to those they are in charge of. The idea of power and responsibility going hand in hand.*



A man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period. He speaks carefully, weightily.

‘**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.**’ – The Inspector’s final lines. *Here, we see that the Inspector sees society as more important than individual interests and encourages the audience to adopt a more Socialist-style viewpoint. This last speech is aimed at the audience (he uses words like ‘we’) as much as the Birling family and he encourages us to consider our own attitude towards responsibility – and alter our behaviour if required.*

**Sheila Birling**

Daughter of the wealthy Birlings, engaged to Gerald. Has Eva fired from Milwards. Accepts her responsibility and becomes less selfish.



**Key Facts**

* **Initially very selfish and vain** (holding similar views to her parents - Capitalist), her **views change quickly** after meeting the Inspector and she adopts a more Socialist-style viewpoint.
* At the end of the play, she is unaffected by the suggestion that Eva Smith may not really have died at all as she has **fully understood the idea of social responsibility**.
* **Changes viewpoint from Capitalist to Socialist** and can therefore be seen as the character J.B. Priestley wants us to model ourselves on – **he wants us to change our opinions just as Sheila has done.**

**Key Quotations**

‘I can’t help thinking about that girl – destroying herself so horribly – and I’ve been so happy tonight’ *- At the beginning of the text****, Sheila certainly feels sympathetic*** *for the girl, but she seems more annoyed that her suicide has brought the mood of the evening down rather than the reality that a girl has ended her life. This shows* ***initially that Sheila is fairly selfish*** *and doesn’t think of others in any deep or meaningful fashion.*

‘I know I’m to blame and I’m desperately sorry.’ – ***Sheila’s viewpoint changes rapidly*** *after her altercation with the Inspector and she understands that her actions have consequences and she becomes less selfish as a result.*

‘But these girls aren’t cheap labour – they’re people’ – Sheila demonstrates compassion immediately after she hears of her father’s treatment of Eva. She changes early on in the play.

‘Everything we said had happened really had happened. If it didn’t end tragically, then that’s lucky for us. But it might have done.’ – ***Sheila has genuinely learned from the experience*** *and the audience respects her for this.*



A pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited.

‘It frightens me the way you talk’ – *she cannot understand how her parents haven’t learnt a lesson from the Inspector. She is seeing her parents in a new, unfavourable light.*

*‘I suppose we’re all nice people now’- Sheila clearly realises that they all need to become more socially responsible whether or not the particular scenario was a true example. She is in* ***stark contrast to her father*** *who has not learned this lesson.*

**Arthur Birling**

A fairly prosperous manufacturer, he fired Eva Smith for wanting a pay rise. Initially accepts responsibility – but rejects this latterly. Remains unchanged.



**Key Facts**

* Incredibly **selfish** – seems to care more about his business and his reputation than he does about his family. A fierce **Capitalist** character who Priestley characterises to be unlikeable and to symbolise all Capitalists.
* Desperate to receive knighthood.
* When he believes the Inspector to be a fraud, he is triumphant and relieved only that there will not be a scandal. **Does not learn anything from Inspector**.

**Key Quotations**

‘heavy looking, rather portentous man’ – *J.B. Priestley initially characterises Arthur Birling as overweight and self-important, encouraging the audience to* ***immediately take a disliking to him, thereby making the concept of Capitalism seem less appealing from the outset.***

*On toasting Gerald and Sheila’s engagement, Birling states* ‘perhaps we may look forward to a time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together’. *This demonstrates that* ***Birling’s main focus is on business and financial gain rather than the happiness of his daughter****. He makes it sound like a business transaction and this demonstrates his total selfishness. Not wanting to align themselves with this selfish man, the audience are likely to begin to see the error in a Capitalist-style viewpoint.*

‘The Germans don’t want war’ and ‘unsinkable, absolutely *unsinkable’ characterise Birling as a know-it-all character who is lacking in intelligence.* ***Undermines the credibility of the Capitalist viewpoint*** *by suggesting that only unintelligent people (like Birling) would accept it. Dramatic irony.*

‘A man has to mind his own business and look out for himself and his own’ *really underlines Birling’s selfishness. At the end of this speech, the Inspector enters(symbolic – wishes to change their opinion) and we are forced to compare the two characters. The Inspector’s relentless focus on community, selflessness and fairness stands in* ***stark contrast*** *to Birling’s self-centred behaviour and* ***we are encouraged to adopt the Inspector’s viewpoint.***



A heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his mid-fifties.

‘She’d had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go’ ***emphasises Mr Birling’s uncaring attitude*** *towards Eva Smith (and the working classes in general).*

**Sybil Birling**

Wife to Arthur, snobby and unfeeling woman. Thinks Eva is impertinent and a liar and refuses to give her assistance. Does not accept responsibility.



**Key Facts**

* Resists the Inspector’s inquiries and constantly reminds him of their family’s high social status.
* Finally admits to having used her influence to have Eva’s claim denied due to her prejudice at the girl’s alleged rudeness.
* Does not accept responsibility at any point. After the revelations at the end of the play that the whole inspection was a hoax, Mrs. Birling prides herself on having resisted the Inspector more than the rest of her family.
* Accidentally places the blame for Eva’s suicide on her own son.

**Key Quotations**

‘I didn’t like her manner. She impertinently made use of our name.’ *– despite knowing the consequences of her actions, Mrs B still stands by her decision to deny her charity – simply for being (as Mrs B saw it) rude. Shows her* ***true lack of empathy*** *and understanding.*

‘I did nothing I’m ashamed of.’ – *using unambiguous language, Mrs Birling makes it clear that she feels* ***no remorse*** *for what she did and shows that, despite the Inspector’s efforts,* ***she does not accept her responsibili****ty.*

‘She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl of her position.’ – *Mrs Birling suggests that Eva could not possibly be moral due to her working class background. This demonstrates her low opinion of the working class.*

‘I blame the young man. He ought to be dealt with very severely’ – *without realising it, in an attempt to* ***shift the blame from herself****, she places the blame on the father of the child (her own son). Dramatic irony. Demonstrates her* ***selfishness*** *and her lack of ability to accept blame.*



About 50, a rather cold woman and her husband’s social superior.

‘They’re over-tired. In the morning they’ll be as amused as we are’ - *suggests that she feels the lessons her children have learned are frivolous and that they will soon realise they are being ridiculous.* ***Highlights quite how strongly she feels about the stupidity of the Inspector’s suggestion that we should be socially responsible.***

**Gerald Croft**

Engaged to Sheila, heir to Crofts Ltd. Had affair with Eva. Initially takes responsibility but once consequences are gone, his interest and guilt is too.



**Key Facts**

* Gerald initially seems to come out as the least guilty of all for Eva’s suicide as he ‘made her happy for a while’. His connection with her seems somewhat rooted in a desire to help her and so the audience have mixed feelings towards him.
* However, he is the first to suggest that the Inspector may be a hoax and we can see here that he is trying to wheedle his way out of a scandal.
* He too seems considerably less interested in responsibility once the consequences are removed.
* Ultimately sides with Birling and does not accept responsibility or learn a lesson.

**Key Quotations**

‘You seem to be a nice well-behaved family’ *– another example of dramatic irony as the last thing the Birlings have been is ‘well-behaved’. The lines suggest an* ***alliance between Gerald and Birling*** *– both men share the same values and their bond will become stronger after the Inspector’s exit.*

(Sheila to Gerald) ‘Except for last summer when you wouldn’t come near me.’ *– whatever his initial intentions were with Eva, Gerald still was* ***unfaithful*** *to Sheila and the audience do not condone this behaviour. Gerald shows himself to be* ***a member of the upper class to whom working class girls are nothing but a plaything that can be tossed aside at will****.*



An attractive chap, about 30, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred young man-about-town.

‘I didn’t install her there so I could make love to her.’ *– Gerald’s intentions were (apparently)* ***initially admirable*** *and he wanted to help her.*

‘I didn’t feel about her as she felt about me.’ – *Gerald’s admission makes it clear that whilst Eva loved him,* ***he saw her as disposable****. Sets Gerald up as a fairly selfish upper class man who has limited feeling for how his enjoyment might be negatively affecting someone else.*

*Although he is initially upset by her death* ‘I’ve suddenly realised – taken it in properly – that she’s dead’, he soon tries to divert blame from himself and try to protect his own interest (rather like Birling) and suggests the Inspector might be a hoax.

**Eric Birling**

Son and drunkard, Eric impregnated Eva and stole from his father. Accepts responsibility and joins Sheila in condemning their parents’ behaviour.



**Key Facts**

* Disapproves of his father’s decision to deny Eva Smith higher wages.
* His parents are more ashamed of the fact he stole from them than the fact he impregnated Eva and had a part to play in her suicide.
* He and his sister Sheila both learn a lesson from the Inspector and accept their responsibility. They both judge their parents’ ignorance.

**Key Quotations**

‘I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty.’ – *Eric demonstrates that he was* ***capable of aggression towards women*** *and*

‘Why shouldn’t they try for higher wages?’ *Eric (along with Sheila) support the workers’ right to strike and is sympathetic to their cause (showing his* ***compassionate side****).*

*Even although his actions (getting Eva pregnant) were immoral, he does try to help her by giving her money to help her through (even if he does steal it). This potentially shows that* ***even before the Inspector arrived, on some level he understood that he needed to take responsibility****.*

‘We helped to kill her.’ *– Eric, like Sheila,* ***accepts his responsibility*** *in Eva’s death.*

‘Whoever that chap was, the fact remains that I did what I did…It’s still the same rotten story whether it’s been told to a police inspector or to somebody else.’ *And* ‘You’re beginning to pretend as if nothing’s really happened at all. And I can’t see it like that. The girl’s still dead, isn’t she?’ - *Eric realises that* ***no matter the consequences, his actions were still appalling*** *and his response here shows he has* ***truly learned a lesson from the Inspector*** *and as a result will become* ***more socially responsible.***



In his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive.

‘I’m ashamed of you’ – *Eric makes it clear that he does not approve of his parents uncaring attitude and* ***distances himself from their opinion.***

‘That doesn’t matter to me’ – *the theories of innocence that Gerald and Birling are concocting do not take away the fact that Eric feels guilty for his actions.* ***His opinions have changed irrecoverably****.* ‘We did her in all right’.