

	Key Ideas	Language/Word analysis	Form and Structure	Context	Priestley's intentions	
Social Class, society, responsibility and the Inspector	<p>Birling vs Inspector, Capitalism vs Socialism: When the Inspector arrives, he interrupts Mr Birling's proud speech of 'community and all that nonsense', and the m-dash highlights how this is done mid-speech, emphasising just how much of an obtrusion the Inspector seeks to be in order to demonstrate the stark clash between socialism and capitalism. In a way, Mr Birling's words about the ridiculous notion of being 'mixed up like bees in a hive' may summon the Inspector, creating the idea that he is some sort of ghost (as Priestley already suggests by the homophone of Goole with ghou), linking with a literary allusion to A Christmas Carol, where there is a similar moral teaching.</p> <p>Just before the Inspector arrives, Mr Birling also says that 'A man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own - and -'. Firstly, this comes across as very commanding and almost like an instruction towards Eric and Gerald who must follow on from his capitalist attitudes. The reference to 'his own business' is also ironic here because the Inspector dissects their entire 'business' (in the meaning of what he gets up to) due to the fact that the Birlings all interfere with Eva's business. The order in which the ideas here are arranged further adds to Mr Birling's self-centred attitude, how the top priority is his 'business' then 'himself' and finally 'his own'. This sums up capitalist perfectly, emphasising the idea that the two most important things in life are your business and you.</p> <p>Furthermore, in Mr Birling's description of himself 'I'm talking as a hard-headed practical man of business', Priestley is deliberately using the language of the Labour Party manifesto, to turn it into a drama that his audience can relate to – it is also an allusion to a phrase used by Sir Stanley Baldwin, in an effort to show how the business owners made profits from the war.</p> <p>Birling's reference to the titanic 'unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable' is dramatic irony intended to make him look stupid, and therefore because he is a symbol of rich capitalists, Priestley wants to make them look stupid also – this is emphasised by Priestley setting the play just 2 weeks before the titanic sank. Perhaps Priestley is trying to display that the power of the capitalist and their privilege will also be sunk by the peace and election which would follow the second world war.</p>	<p>Edna: Mr Birling's very limited interactions with Edna. 'Show him in' and 'Give us some more light' demonstrates how he speaks to her in fragments, suggesting that he wants the interaction to be over as soon as possible so that he can return to his pleasant evening. His referral to the parlour maid by her Christian name may be seen to be out of friendliness, but in fact it reminds Edna of her vulnerability, how she is disposable to the Birling's and so must respect and obey them as shown through her use of 'please' and 'sir' when addressing Mr Birling.</p> <p>Despite this, Edna's interruption of Mr Birling mid-speech to inform them of the arrival of the inspector – 'Please, sir, an inspector's called' – may be a subtle hint that she is in fact eager to see the Birling's under interrogation themselves for once. The fact that her interruption mirrors the title of the play may be a subtle hint by Priestley to the social uproar of the working class.</p> <p>The use of the character of Edna also not only acts as a status symbol for the Birlings but also means that the setting does not need to change since everything is brought to the family, allowing the audience's central focus to be on the Inspector and his message.</p>	<p>'we' 'I' → contrast between inspector and Birling → pronouns 'unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable' 'wild talk' → dramatic irony 'pink and intimate' 'brighter and harder' → contrast → positives 'Show him in' 'Give us some more light' → unmitigated imperatives → short demanding sentences 'Girls of that class' → demonstrative pronoun → noun 'If men will not learn that lesson, they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish' → rule of three → lexical field of Hell 'I'm talking as a hard-headed practical man of business' → language of the Labour Party manifesto</p>	<p>The stage directions indicate the change in lighting from 'pink and intimate' to 'brighter and harder' when the Inspector arrives is an immediate indicator of the Inspector's intentions.</p> <p>The dramatic device of the setting: unchanging and dull. This could reflect the self-centred attitude of the Birlings, since just as the audience is not given even a glimpse of the outside world, the Birlings (and more broadly, the upper class) are completely disconnected from the rest of society. The use of the character of Edna also means that the setting does not need to change since everything is brought to the family, allowing the audience's central focus to be on the Inspector and his message.</p> <p>Well-made play. The unchanging setting supports this form, with the purpose of it being that all actions and dialogue contribute to the central theme, with nothing extraneous to distract the audience's attention. However, Priestley strays away from the conventional return-to-order ending of a well-made play, perhaps to emphasise that the characters (like Mr and Mrs Birling had already done) should not return to their original ways and instead learn from the events and experiences.</p> <p>The ending of the play, with the phone call reporting that an Inspector is coming, depicts how the entire experience will be repeated, which – it seems – is a direct result of the Birling's incapability to 'learn that lesson' that the Inspector so</p>	<p>Priestley was a socialist who was involved in both the foundation of the Commonwealth and the welfare state</p> <p>The national coal strike of 1912, that Mr Birling regards as 'wild talk' went on to establish minimum wage.</p> <p>During WW2, he started broadcasting Postscripts on BBC radio, which was cancelled for being too critical of the Government's actions.</p>	<p>Capitalism: Priestley is desperately trying to get the audience to understand that it was capitalism that led them to war, and socialism, the idea of caring for everyone, which would save them from future war. Priestley is depicting war as the ultimate capitalism dream, also attacking the way that rich capitalists exploit people.</p> <p>Eva: Priestley uses Eva as this symbol to show how the characters that represent the ruling classes refuse to learn their moral lessons. This makes the audience question whether characters like Sheila truly learnt the lesson.</p> <p>Christianity: This – eternal damnation – is something that would be very disturbing to the Christian audience of 1946, so Priestley therefore employs this technique in order that this fixed capitalist mindset that the Birling's exhibit can be completely irradiated from society. Priestley does this so that the Christian audience, who otherwise might not be sympathetic to socialist ideas, would be more drawn to it because they could see the parallels between Christianity and socialism. Therefore, his aim is that Christians would vote for a socialist government in 1945 (since that is when he predicted his play to be first performed).</p>
	Patriarchy and treatment of women	<p>Inspector and Christianity: The Inspector's parting message 'If men will not learn that lesson, they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish', the use of imagery symbolises the pain and suffering to come after 1912, when the play was set, due to the two world wars, that (as a part of the inspector's message) can be seen as a punishment for the upper classes' unwillingness to accept collective responsibility. However, during the wars, companies like Crofts Limited as well as Mr Birling's business would have thrived and benefitted economically. Therefore, the much more plausible interpretation may be that it instead represents the Christian Hell that the Birlings will be subject to as a result of being guilty to various degrees of the Seven Deadly Sins.</p> <p>'members of one body' comes directly from the Bible and Church service, Priestley uses this language with the Christian audience so that they can make a connection between them, that Socialism is Christianity – thereby suggesting that capitalism is anti-Christian, if you are a capitalist then you are not behaving in a Christian way. As a result, Priestley is undermining capitalism as impeding societal development.</p>	<p>'If men will not learn that lesson, they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.' → 'men' → rule of three → lexical field of Hell 'I suppose we're all nice people now' → sarcastic tone → irony</p>	<p>persistently preaches. This deliberate use of structure could symbolise the two world wars, how history was repeated due to society's failure to accept collective responsibility. Sheila and Eric's acceptance of their mistakes and guilt means that they could escape this cycle, whereas the others who have not must endure the experience again, and therefore the play ends with their 'guilty and dumbfounded' expressions.</p>	<p>In 1912 women could not vote and were on the whole politically powerless; however, in 1945, when the play was produced in 1946, women did have a vote and did in fact vote in the general election that elected the Labour government, therefore reflecting the progression in gender equality that Priestley wants to sustain.</p>	<p>Patriarchal society: Priestley is showing how much society has changed since 1912, how in 1946 when the play was performed women did have a vote, and Priestley is attempting to keep pushing society in that direction. He is seeking to create a socialist society in which the working classes are not exploited by the upper classes.</p> <p>Sheila: Perhaps Priestley's message is that she did learn the</p>
		<p>Patriarchal society: 'If men will not learn that lesson, they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.' Through the use of 'men' instead of 'man' (the term for both men and women), Priestley may be simultaneously attacking the patriarchal society, suggesting that it is the 'men' that must learn the lesson since women in 1912 had no political power whatsoever, not even the right to vote and so are unable to take part in the improvement of society. Through this, Priestley may be emphasising that women need to be allowed this chance to improve society and not be shielded from 'unpleasant and disturbing' realities, such that Sheila is incessantly protected from by both her father and Gerald.</p> <p>Arthur Birling: Through Mr Birling, women are shown as commodities, as displayed through the fact that he is willing to sell his daughter to Gerald as a business opportunity. This is emphasised by his response to Gerald's sexual infidelity 'Now, Sheila, I'm not defending him. But you must understand that a lot of young men...', demonstrating that this is just the way that rich capitalists behave, showing that it has been so normalised that Mr Birling is insinuating that Sheila just ought to let Gerald carry on (as this is something he will most likely do again). The financial benefit that this marriage will bring Mr Birling is emphasised when he refers to the marriage as an alliance between the companies.</p>				

Gerald Croft: 'It happened that a friend of mine... had gone off to Canada for six months and had let me have the key of a nice little set of rooms' His language here shows that he wants the rooms (rent-free and at very little cost in fact) to have a sexual adventure. The audience can see that Gerald is persuading Eva that he is making this grand gesture, when in reality it barely costs him a thing. 'Daisy knew it was coming to an end' Although he claims the end was brought about by needing to go away for business for a few weeks, we know the real reason is that his friend was returning from Canada.

This would mean that Gerald would have to pay for a flat to put her in. This would cost far more than the little he had paid her, 'she'd lived very economically on what I'd allowed her'. This demonstrates that although he is depicted as this 'fairy prince', he does not sacrifice anything for Eva, making us believe that it was total sexual exploitation.

Eric: 'she told me she didn't want me to go in' 'in that state when a chap easily turns nasty' Eva tried to refuse Eric, but he forced himself on her, and his justification is that he was in 'that state'. Firstly, he does not call it a state, which suggests that this state is one that is common to all men, not just to Eric, and therefore is not such as sinful. Secondly, he distances himself from this nastiness by referring to himself as 'a chap' rather than 'I'.

Furthermore, Eric further says 'I wasn't in love with her or anything – but I liked her – she was pretty and a good sport', where his comparison to Eva as a 'sport' is particularly reflective of capitalist sexist attitudes since Eric treats Sheila like a game – something that is a source of pleasure but that doesn't last forever, a temporary exploit. demonstrates

Sheila: The symbol of the ring is used to convey how Sheila has grown to reject materialistic values, for she has realised that she does not value the ring's meaning, and instead she 'must think' before proceeding with her actions. However, the very fact that she must think about remarrying Gerald when he has been unfaithful and dishonest, suggests that she accepts the patriarchy. 'And it was my fault really that she was so desperate.' Here Sheila is actually blaming herself for Gerald's actions showing how in a patriarchal society woman are taught at birth to take the blame.

Sybil Birling: Sybil can also be seen as a victim of the patriarchal society, but in fact a wilful one since she expects Sheila to simply turn a blind eye to Gerald's infidelity 'just as I had' – women are made to expect the injustice of the behaviour of the men that they're married to. This society can be seen to have forced Sybil to turn a blind eye and put aside the truth so that she can live a happy life, therefore her refusal to accept the truth in the play ('I don't believe it. I won't believe it') can be justified in this way, and the audience may in fact sympathise with her slightly.

'in that state when a chap easily turns nasty'
→ definite determiner

Priestley structures the progressive revelations in a way to sustain the audience's interest by their desire to find out who, ultimately, was responsible for driving Eva to her suicide. In this way, it represents a **Whodunnit genre**. The fact that the Inspector goes to such great efforts to interrogate and reveal the happenings to a working-class woman (the bottom of the social hierarchy) proves his point how women's issues should not be justified by the stereotypical view that they are frail and weak-minded.

Furthermore, in 1912 a woman like Sheila would not be able to become independent of her parents – she doesn't have any kind of professional education and jobs for women were very limited to low-power roles. This means that the only way that she would have been able to gain independence is through marriage to Gerald. This reminds us of the end of the play: Sheila doesn't dismiss the marriage entirely, showing that society will force her to return to Gerald, having no other option with no political or social power.

moral lesson that her parents refused to, and she even acted on this; however, this didn't influence those in power due to the nature of the patriarchal society, and therefore (in the symbolic view of Eva's second death representing the second world war) the second world war still occurred. However, if Priestley's message is that Sheila has not learnt this lesson – which can be seen at the end of the play when she says 'It's too soon – they he may be attacking the patriarchal system. He may be emphasising that it allowed women no other form of autonomy other than through marrying well – their independence was determined by the type of husband they could find.

Younger Generation and Gerald	<p>Sheila changes: Priestley uses language to deliberately present Sheila as infantile when she refers to her parents, Sybil and Arthur Birling, as 'Mummy' and 'Daddy', which is a childish mode of address, hinting at the fact that Sheila, although in her 'mid-twenties', still relies on her parents. Furthermore, her euphemistic use of the adjective 'squiffy' further emphasises her juvenile nature, which Priestley portrays in order to later show her dramatic change in both her political views and actions.</p> <p>Her almost mocking response to Gerald 'Why – you fool – he knows.' indicates her realisation that the Inspector is omniscient and that he controls the events perfectly in chronological order to achieve his goal in warning the family. Approaching the end of the play, Sheila calls her parents 'Mother' and 'Father' instead of her childish address at the beginning, which implies that she no longer clings to her parents as a child would, but she has learnt to become her own, unique person, who can have views that contradict her parents'</p> <p>In this way, she becomes a mouthpiece of the Inspector, as opposed to her parents who believe they 'can all go behaving just as [they] did'. Eric behaves in a similar way to Sheila, and in the same way, Priestley makes his attitudes in Act 1 very care-free, feeling little if any responsibility in order to later show his dramatic changes in acceptance of responsibility.</p> <p>Reactions to events: Furthermore, the differences are further highlighted through the reactions that the characters have towards the Inspector's revelation of how they participated in the death of Eva Smith. For example, Mr Birling reacts in a very dismissive tone 'Yes, yes. Horrid business,' where the short simple phrases reflect his lack of care about the situation. His initial thought is 'I don't see where I come into this', displaying his blatant disregard for anyone else but himself and his reputation.</p> <p>On the other hand, Sheila responds inquisitively, inquiring 'Was it an accident?' expressing a deeper level of care (albeit naive) that her father does not possess. Furthermore, Eric's outburst to his mother's dismissal "– my child – your own Grandchild – you killed them both – damn you, damn you...You don't understand anything. You never did." elevates how the younger generation have more experience with characters such as Eva, and therefore display the most explosive reaction. Through the repeated use of dashes, Priestley demonstrates Eric's fragmented speech which in turn reflects the sheer volume of thoughts and his inability to express them due to his strong emotions of disdain towards his mother. This is emphasized by the repetition of 'damn you' and the short simple sentences as Eric attacks Mrs Birling, highlights how the younger generation do not cower away from standing up to their superiors and rejecting capitalist ideology.</p> <p>Furthermore, through Eric's response towards Sybil, Priestley is highlighting the huge difference between the generations since Sybil refuses to feel any guilt, even though her decision has led to the death of her own grandchild.</p> <p>Gerald: Initially it sounds like the Inspector isn't being too critical of Gerald, which may be due to the fact that he himself was openly unfaithful in his marriage, and therefore did not disapprove of Gerald's affair with Eva. He is in fact complimentary about him, 'he at least had some affection for her and made her happy for a time'. Priestley further suggests this through Sheila's response to the affair 'And now at least you've been honest', therefore Sheila is also shown to be forgiving of Gerald, and so the audience should be too (AI → patriarchy).</p> <p>He, despite being the same age as Sheila and Eric behaves very differently, and the change that is seen in them is not seen in Gerald. This can be seen at the end of the play, when he offers Sheila her engagement ring back as if nothing between them had changed, despite being unfaithful and dishonest towards her. This shows how, much like it is to Birling, to Gerald this marriage is merely a way to provide a respectable façade that can maintain his reputation as a 'respectable citizen'. Therefore, Priestley is accusing the upper-class older generation of being unwilling to recognise the need for societal change despite having the power to do so.</p> <p>Ending: The final telephone call which ends the play emphasises that the older generation still hold political and social power. Sheila and Eric, representing the younger generation, have learned the Inspector's socialist and Christian message, but because their parents still control the levers of power, this is not enough. Another working-class woman has taken her life. This is a cycle Priestley wants the audience to break in choosing a socialist future in 1945.</p>	<p>"– my child – your own Grandchild – you killed them both – damn you, damn you...You don't understand anything. You never did."</p> <p>→ dashes → fragmented → repetition</p>		<p>Priestley was actually openly unfaithful in his marriage, and this could be the reason why he did not disapprove of Gerald's affair with Eva.</p>	
Sybil and the welfare state	<p>Since Sybil is the last person who could have helped Eva, she is often the character most blamed. However, perhaps this is the opposite to what Priestley intended because it is being sexually exploited by both Eric and Gerald that initially puts her in that state of despair in the first place – feeling utterly degraded by the end of it. Furthermore, Priestley may be keeping Sybil until last in the lines of inquiry because she represents the last resort, the safety net that society provided at the time. Therefore, Sybil represents the only form of welfare that poor women like Eva had at that time and therefore should not be seen as the most to blame.</p> <p>Furthermore, through Sybil's account of what happened, Priestley prompts the audience to believe that Sybil is right to disbelieve Eva. This is because Eva lies repeatedly to her in order to get financial support, and this sounds like fraud. So, when Eva does tell her the truth that she refused to marry Eric because they weren't in love, and that she refused to take money from him because it was stolen, these both sound like lies. The audience is therefore left thinking that any reasonable person would question Eva.</p> <p>This doesn't excuse Sybil, but Priestley points out that it is not the job of the welfare state to make moral judgments. It helps people who are poor even if their poverty is their own fault.</p>			<p>During the election in 1945, the Labour party proposed the welfare state, which is the idea that when you are unemployed or homeless, the state will help you financially and also help to house you. The government is there to look after every citizen. This, however, is not the position of 1912 and so Eva's only option is to go to charities, which are funded by the rich and therefore it is they who decide who gets the welfare.</p>	<p>Priestley attempts to emphasise that it is not Sybil that is most to blame, perhaps so that the audience can realise that the bigger problem in society is the injustice of the patriarchy as demonstrated by Eric and Gerald who sexually exploit Eva.</p> <p>Priestley wants to change the poor's reliance on charities as the only source of welfare, since they are susceptible to capitalist prejudice. This is shown through Priestley's contribution for the development of the welfare state in 1945.</p>