



How is the theme of responsibility presented in the play 'An Inspector Calls' by J.B Priestley?

A02 In *An Inspector Calls*, responsibility is a main theme throughout the play. Priestley uses a higher class family (The Birlings) and their links with a young woman (Eva Smith) to explore responsibility. Priestley does this to express to the audience the theme of responsibility throughout the play and how he wants them to understand the characters through responsibility. The play shows people of different class, gender and age. Priestley represents his thoughts on responsibility and society through the characters, all throughout the play.

A02 Priestley uses the contrasting features of the Birling family to explore moral responsibility. An example of this is Sheila's change from the start to the end of the play. Towards the end she stands up to her parents and fights for what she thinks is right. This is very different to how Priestley introduces her at the start of the play, when she is young and overjoyed with her engagement which comes off to the audience as slightly immature. Priestley uses her to show the contrast between the young and old characters and how responsible they are. He uses Sheila's transformation to show how he thinks young people in society should change. I think Sheila tries to protect the family and take responsibility for them, she said "But, mother, do stop before it's too late". I think Sheila wants to protect the family because she knows that they can't take responsibility for themselves.

lang Priestley presents the younger characters, Eric and Sheila as honest. They acknowledge that they have done something bad whereas Mr and Mrs Birling only think how this could affect their reputation, Mr Birling states "There's every excuse for what both your mother and I did", he tries to reassure the inspector, his family and himself that he is innocent and this makes him seem scared of what might happen to him, so therefore he tries hard to protect himself. Priestley does this to show the audience that young people should be more responsible in society. Sheila admits what she has done when she says "I know I'm to blame - and I'm desperately sorry". The use of the adverb "desperately" emphasises her remorse/guilt. Eric takes responsibility for the family too, "I did what I did. And mother did what she did. And the rest of you did what you did to her." The repetition of the word "did" shows that the family don't want to explain in much detail because it is a deliberately vague verb, Priestley does this because it shows even more about how the Birlings don't want to take responsibility for their actions. Overall, Priestley presented the younger characters in this way because they don't trust their parents and that makes them feel as though they have to take responsibility for them.

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Priestley uses a structure that sets a joyful scene with the family in the beginning, they are celebrating the engagement between Gerald and Sheila. The stage directions say that the lighting is "pink and intimate" at this moment but when the inspector arrives it changes to "brighter and harder" which creates a change of atmosphere for the audience. It is almost like when the inspector arrives he brings truthfulness but also curiosity, I think Priestley does this to show how quickly the inspector changes the tone of the play. *could be developed*

A02

Priestley uses the male characters in the play to explore responsibility. I think that Mr Birling plays the self-centered mind in society. He only thinks about himself and how the issue will affect him. An example of this is "I care. I was almost certain for a Knighthood in the next honours list.", this shows what kind of person Birling represents in society by stating that he cares but only about himself and his possible knighthood. Priestley presents the male characters in this way to show how people like Eva Smith in the world will continue to suffer if people like Mr. Birling remain in power and a position of authority. In my opinion Mr Birling is not responsible, he isn't thinking about the rest of his family and how it will affect them all collectively.

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structure

On the other hand Eric takes the responsible role towards the end of the play, he owns up to his actions and tries to stand up for Eva against his parents, he says: "The money's not the important thing. It's what happened to the girl and what we did to her that matters." This communicates to the audience that Eric cared for Eva and will protect her honour. Priestley shows Eric as a comparison and contrast to his Father, he does this because it resembles the different people in society and the relationships they have with one another. Although we saw this part of Eric at the end of the play, at the beginning he didn't show much responsibility. He is introduced to the audience as drunk when Sheila states: "You're squiffy". In act one Eric is irresponsible as he is drinking lots around his family. This then makes the audience wonder maybe there is a reason behind the drinking.

Eva Smith is used to represent the consequences of society's lack of responsibility and how everyone in society is linked in some way, in the same way that the family are all linked with Eva Smith. The last name Smith is a very common name which could therefore mean she represents a symbol of young, working class women of the time to show the difference between upper class and working class. Priestley uses the technique of making her a main character even though she does not have a speaking role; Priestley deliberately silences her, just like women like her in Edwardian society. Priestley makes the audience feel sympathy for this character, the way that she kills herself, her background and her hopelessness.

Priestley is a socialist and he uses the inspector to represent him and to speak through him, a time this happens is when the inspector warns them about what they have done. "If men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.", the inspector

talks not just about the Birlings but about society as a whole and how they all need to be taught the same lesson in ignoring responsibility.

A02 The way that Mr and Mrs Birling look down upon Eva can show the difference in power, in society. I think Mr Birling discharged her from her job which shows he could have been intimidated by her or seen her as a threat. Mrs Birling who Eva went to seeking for help and was turned down because she "didn't like her manner", this shows that she doesn't feel sympathy towards others maybe it is because she only helps people like Eva because it's good for her reputation. Priestley uses key moments like these in the plot to explore responsibility because it reflects what role the characters play in society. This is similar to society and how people are quick to let others down and judge them depending of their gender, age or class.

Gerald shows guilt and responsibility for what he did to Shelia but not so much about Eva, Priestley does this because it shows Gerald as untrustworthy and irresponsible. Gerald saw Eva as "young and fresh and charming", he confesses to what he has done but also tries to save himself when he says: "It was all over and done with, last summer. I hadn't set eyes on the girl for at least six months. I don't come into this suicide business." by saying this Gerald puts his reputation and saving himself in front of the fact of what he did to Sheila and Eva. Priestley does this because it shows that there were men like Gerald in society - he is irresponsible and is acting in the same way Mr Birling has, by only thinking how it will affect them and how they can escape the blame and the responsibility.

Overall, there is a huge contrast between the older and younger generation and how much responsibility they take for Eva Smith's death. The older generation take less authority for her death and they want to protect themselves instead of admitting to the fact that they were a part of Eva's suicide. On the other hand the younger generation are honest and they feel guilty about what happened to Eva. Priestley uses this contrast technique to express a message to the audience about older and younger generations in society. He views the young as the hope for a socialist future. Priestley presents his views on socialism through the inspector and through the way that the family treat Eva.

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