

An Inspector Calls by JB Priestley (1945)		LITERATURE			
Structure		Themes		Key Terms	
1	The 'well-made play' : tight plot; action based on previous events; suspense through series of complications; a climax where truths/secrets are uncovered.	1	Time - The relationship between the past, present and future.	1	Tragedy - in this play, an unseen character dies as a result of the flaws and errors of the characters on the stage.
		2	Secrets and Lies		
		3	Appearance and reality	2	Hubris - an elevated sense of pride that leads to tragedy.
2	The 'whodunit' : murder/mystery to be solved; an expert detective investigating and/or interrogating; clues; a climax where the murderer is revealed and accepts guilt.	4	Responsibility - 'You'll be able to divide the responsibility between you when I've gone' (Act 3)	3	Anagnorisis - character(s) recognition of their flaws/errors, a feature of Greek Tragedy (GT) .
		5	Rich and poor	4	Catharsis - a rush of emotions as the results of a tragedy are played out: 'broken' characters are pitied. Feature of GT .
		6	Employers and employees	5	Denouement - resolution of the plot. Feature of GT .
		7	Blame and shame	6	Peripeteia - a reversal of fortunes, just as an escape seemed possible. Feature of GT .
3	'Greek tragedy' (GT) : 3 act format; follows 'unities' - of time (action unfolds in real-time), of place (one place for all action), of action (one plot)	8	Guilt and innocence	7	Subvert - A challenge to, or overturning of, authority.
4	Act - The major divisions in the play. AIC is in 3 acts.	9	Control	8	Linear structure - the play follows a chain of events.
		10	Young and old	9	Circular structure - Priestley uses the appearance of the engagement ring at the beginning and end of the play, to symbolise the change in Sheila, as opposed to the steadfast attitude of Gerald.
1	Act 1 - Exposition : The Birlings, their lifestyle and attitudes introduced. We see that pride/self-satisfaction is Mr Birling's fatal flaw . The Inspector interrupts Gerald & Sheila's engagement party to investigate the death of Eva Smith. Mr B & Sheila interrogated; Sheila accepts responsibility following encounter in the dept. store & urges others to do the same. Ends on a cliffhanger , as the audience anticipates the interrogation of Gerald.	Context		10	Exposition - the introduction to the Birlings and their lifestyle.
		1	J. B. Priestley - A writer with a social conscience . AIC is one of his 'time' plays (see themes). A popular figure and keen supporter of social reform. Declined a knighthood and peerage, but accepted the Order of Merit.	11	Cliffhanger - The audience is left in anticipation.
2	Act 2 - Development: Gerald is interrogated & confesses to affair with 'Daisy Renton'; Gerald departs; Mrs Birling is interrogated.	2	The play was written in 1945 . It was aimed at a post-war audience, asking them to imagine life in the Edwardian era and recognise the follies of pre-war attitudes. The horrors and loss of two world wars reignited the drive for greater equality. With the end of each war came change: WW1 changes to voting rights, WW2 welfare reforms.	12	Catastrophe - The sense of horror engulfing the characters.
3	Act 3 - Eric interrogated; confesses to forcing himself on her & stealing from the company to support her; confirms Eva's story that she refused marriage & financial support. Inspector delivers his prophetic message about the future, then departs. Characters react to his departure, showing how the young change while the elder Birlings remain concerned with the 'public scandal' that will ensue. Gerald returns: no new inspector in Brumley, confirmed by Birling who contacts the chief constable; G calls the infirmary, no death - the older Bs & G talk of hoax. Mr B is triumphant, S & E won't be consoled. The phone rings 'A girl has just died [...] inspector is on his way here...'	3	The play is set in 1912, amidst a time of significant political change. Liberal reforms between 1906 and 1914 meant attitudes had begun to change, but the upper-middle and upper classes were resistant. Reforms included: minimum wage (some industries), National Insurance, Pensions, Labour Exchanges. Ironically, it is possible that a character like Birling would have benefitted from the political changes (to voting) that were fought for during the 1800s, yet resisted those of the early 1900s.	13	Climax - In this case, where the catastrophe can be felt.
		4	Social Class - Birling is one of a so-called nouveau riche , furthered by his marriage to Mrs Birling, his 'social superior' . They are still looked down upon, however, by Lady Croft who is 'from and old country family - landed people and so-forth' (Act One). This tells us that her family are part of the old Aristocracy , or ruling class of Gt. Britain. Birling is keen to impress his social status, even though they are of a lower status than the Crofts, hence several references his status as alderman .	14	Dramatic Irony - where the audience have more knowledge than the characters on the stage.
				15	Capitalist society - where individuals run their own businesses in a way that maximises profit.
				16	Socialist society - where businesses are run as co-operatives and profits are shared among the people involved.
				17	Democratic society - where all members of society have a say in the way it is run.
				Language	
				1	Stage directions - used to make Priestley's intentions clear.
				2	Mr Birling - straightforward structure and vocab' to reflect his humble start. Self-important: personal pronouns 'I', 'me', 'we'.
				3	Mrs Birling - speaks with a dismissive tone, reflecting her sense of superiority and propriety.
				4	Sheila and Eric - examples of slang & colloquialism to reflect younger generation, Sheila says 'squiffy', 'ass', 'chump' (Act 1)
				5	Gerald - occasional slang, but measured dialogue: experienced
				6	Inspector - emphatic (triadic), no hesitation, deliberate.
				7	Realistic language - little use of figurative lang, mainly cliché when present: sense of realism.
STUDENT NOTES					
Characters					
1	Mr Birling - the protagonist . A self-made, successful businessman and social climber, Birling married well and is aiming for a knighthood. He is a proud man, which Priestley highlights as his fatal flaw (hubris) .				
2	Mrs Birling - Priestley states in the stage directions that she is 'her husband's social superior' . She infantilises her children: of Eric 'he's only a boy' (Act 2); is notably concerned with social etiquette 'Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things' (Act 1) and is chiefly concerned with ensuring that her family do not 'lose face'.				
3	Sheila Birling - Sheila is the first character to admit responsibility and show remorse. Because of this, she quickly becomes a sympathetic character despite her obvious poor behaviour				

	towards Eva in the past. Priestley uses her as a foil to Eva : they are both young women who, by virtue of class and circumstance, have led very different lives.	STUDENT NOTES
4	Eric Birling - Eric is the other character to admit responsibility, but is not a sympathetic character initially. He 'drink[s] far too much' (Act 2); steals from the business and forces himself upon Eva. He is also a frustrated character : his parents treat him like a child; Mr B is obviously doesn't see him as a worthy heir.	
5	Gerald Croft - 'very much the easy well-bred young man-about-town' (Act 1, stage directions). Engaged to Sheila, but older (around 30) and, in contrast to Eric, proven in business. Gerald becomes less sympathetic as the play progresses: like the older Birlings, his character will not learn from his mistakes.	
6	Inspector Goole - The antagonist . Disrupts the engagement party to question the Birling family about their parts in the lead up to the death of a young woman. It becomes clear that he already knows much of the private affairs of the Birlings and Gerald Croft. He is no ordinary policeman : he interviews them together; delivers his own verdict and social message.	
7	Edna - A parlour maid, she plays a minor role . However, she answers the door to the inspector and announces him which establishes him as a 'living' character, rather than a ghost, as some readings suggest. She also represents the ordinary people , whose lives are bound to everyone else's.	
8	Eva Smith - never seen in the play, so not a character as such. She is the everywoman figure. She is a deliberate moral contrast to Sheila: a country orphan; a good worker; principled and gracious.	