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| ***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 |
| 2 | Secrets and Lies |  | the flaws and errors of the characters on the stage. |
| 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 gon*e'** (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 | **Peripiteia** - 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. |
| **Plot** | | | 10 | Young and old | 9 | **Circular structure** - Priestley uses the appearance of the |
| 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** | |  | engagement ring at the beginning and end of the play, to |
| 1 | J. B. Priestley - A writer with a **social conscience.** AIC is one of his |  | symbolise the change in Sheila, as opposed to the steadfast |
|  | 'time' plays (see themes). A popular figure and keen supporter of |  | attitude of Gerald. |
|  | social reform. Declined a knighthood and peerage, but accepted | 10 | **Exposition** - the introduction to the Birlings and their lifestyle. |
|  | the Order of Merit. | 11 | **Cliffhanger** - The audience is left in anticipation. |
| 2 | **The play was written in 1945**. It was aimed at a post-war | 12 | **Catastrophe** - The sense of horror engulfing the characters. |
|  | audience, asking them to imagine life in the Edwardian era and | 13 | **Climax** - In this case, where the catastrophe can be felt. |
| 2 | Act 2 - Development: Gerald is interrogated & confesses to affair with 'Daisy Renton'; Gerald departs; Mrs Birling is interrogated. | |  | recognise the follies of pre-war attitudes. The horrors and loss of | 14 | **Dramatic Irony** - where the audience have more knowledge |
|  | two world wars reignited the drive for greater equality. With the |  | than the characters on the stage. |
| 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...'*** | |  | end of each war came change: WW1 changes to voting rights, | 15 | **Capitalist society** - where individuals run their own businesses |
|  | WW2 welfare reforms. |  | in a way that maximises profit. |
| 3 | **The play is set in 1912, amidst a time of significant political** | 16 | **Socialist society** - where businesses are run as co-operatives |
|  | **change**. **Liberal reforms between 1906 and 1914** meant attitudes |  | and profits are shared among the people involved. |
|  | had begun to change, but the upper-middle and upper classes | 17 | **Democratic society** - where all members of society have a |
|  | Were resistant. Reforms included: minimum wage (some industries), |  | say in the way it is run. |
|  | National Insurance, Pensions, Labour Exchanges. Ironically, it is | **Language** | |
|  | possible that a character like Birling would have benefitted from | 1 | **Stage directions** - used to make Priestley's intentions clear. |
|  | the political changes (to voting) that were fought for during the 1800s, yet resisted those of the early 1900s. | 2 | Mr Birling - straightforward structure and vocab' to reflect his |
|  |  |  | humble start. Self-important: personal pronouns 'I', 'me', 'we'. |
| 4 | Social Class - Birling is one of a so-called **nouveau riche**, furthered | 3 | Mrs Birling - speaks with a dismissive tone, reflecting her |
| **Characters** | | |  | by his marriage to Mrs Birling, his ***'social superior'***. They are still |  | sense of superiority and propriety. |  |
| 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)**. |  | looked down upon, however, by Lady Croft who is ***'from and old*** | 4 | Sheila and Eric - examples of slang & colloquialism to reflect |
|  | ***country family - landed people and so-forth'*** (Act One). This tells |  | younger generation, Sheila says 'squiffy', 'ass', 'chump' (Act 1) |
|  | us that her family are part of the old **Aristocracy**, or ruling class of | 5 | Gerald - occasional slang, but measured dialogue: experienced |
|  | Gt. Britain. Birling is keen to impress his social status, even though | 6 | Inspector - emphatic (triadic), no hesitation, deliberate. |
| 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'. |  | they are of a lower status than the Crofts, hence several | 7 | Realistic language - little use of figurative lang, mainly cliché |
|  | references his status as **alderman**. |  | when present: sense of realism. |
| **STUDENT NOTES**  **STUDENT NOTES** | | | |
| 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. |
| 4  5 | | 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.  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. |
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