

“An Inspector Calls”

by JB Priestley



Complete all tasks in full detail: Read or listen to the play first.

Pre-Reading and Understanding

Name:

Overall Analysis: An Inspector Calls

In *An Inspector Calls*, J.B. Priestley presents an unconventional approach to the traditional whodunit of detective fiction, resisting the trope in which an investigator interviews suspects to determine which character committed the crime, often a murder. Instead, the guiding mystery of Priestley's play is not who killed the young woman, Eva (a.k.a Daisy), but how each member of the Birling family contributed to her suicide. By adopting aspects of mysteries, Priestley creates a work that examines collective, capitalist guilt. The play, as events unfold, suggests that an empowered class exploits the underclass without consideration of consequences for its exploitation. The Birling family's collective guilt conveys Priestley's message that it is the social duty of every human being to examine the impact of any action on others and to care for and help them, without self-consideration.

The play's inciting incident occurs when Inspector Goole arrives at the Birling residence to question the family about the young woman's suicide. Strangely, the Inspector does not ask questions about what they know about her death. His questions, instead, prompt each family member to struggle with and eventually face guilt for Eva/Daisy's death. By using the Inspector to draw forth the characters' emerging internal conflicts around responsibility, Priestley highlights how social status and affluence can blind people to others' suffering. As the play moves on, the Birling family and Gerald begin gradually to accept their roles and, therefore, accountabilities in the young woman's downfall.

The events of the rising action reveal how each member of the Birling family has negatively affected Eva/Daisy. The Inspector's questioning unravels the mystery of how each family member has used social standing, influence, and power over others without personal consequence, devastating the young woman's life. Arthur and Sheila ended her employment because she dared to strike for higher wages at the factory. Gerald exploited her sexually by having an affair with her after meeting her in a bar, knowing that his wealth and status ultimately would protect him. Sybil, as a matter of blaming the victim, refused to provide the homeless and pregnant Eva/Daisy with charity when she sought aid, although it is later revealed that her family is to blame for her condition. Each of these events, as the plot develops, highlights ways that greed coupled with the prerogatives of class victimize the poor and vulnerable. Arguably, if even one family member had acted kindly toward the woman, she might not have been driven to end her life.

As the play approaches its climax, the Inspector's questioning focuses on Eric Birling, the likely heir to the family name and fortune, drawing attention to his apparent alcoholism. Priestley uses alcohol as a motif throughout the play, a symbolic catalyst for upper class abuse of the working class and a sign of dissipation. Alcohol is involved when both Gerald and Eric start their affairs with Eva/Daisy, and Eric's drunkenness is a way for him to escape a sense of culpability for her situation. At the play's climax, the family learns that Eric is likely the father of Eva/Daisy's child and that he has been stealing money from the family business to help her—a matter of avoiding scandal. Arthur and Sybil worry, nevertheless, that a public scandal is likely, though they worry not because they had failed to help their grandchild but because of the negative effects it might have on the family's reputation. This self-serving reaction epitomizes Priestley's message about the inhumane treatment of the underclasses in a capitalist society.

After the Inspector's departure, during the plot's falling action, members of the family blame each other for the potentially scandalous situation in which they find themselves.

Priestley's genius lies in the twists that come to the surface as the play draws toward its conclusion. Sheila does offer glimpses of caring and compassion for Eva/Daisy when she criticises her parents for worrying about their reputation rather than their treatment of the young woman. Gerald introduces an ambiguity by suggesting that the whole inquiry may have been a hoax or that there may have been more than one woman; Inspector Goole, after all, had never shown the picture to everyone at the same time. Priestley, by introducing doubt, is able to shift attention from the play's specific events to broader questions about the treatment of all working-class people at the hands of empowered and wealthy families like the Birlings.

At the play's resolution, the group concludes that the investigation may have been a prank, and most of the family, especially Arthur, is relieved that their actions will stay private. Society, they assume, will not know of their indiscretions. However, they get a call that a young woman has committed suicide, and are told that an inspector is coming to their house for an inquiry. Their collective guilt, Priestley implies, will come to light after all. In the end, he suggests that there is no hiding when people abuse and mistreat the poor and vulnerable. The only way for society to flourish is for everyone to consider the common good, rather than personal or familial interests. Individual actions, he makes clear, have collective consequences.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. How does Priestley use the term "collective guilt" in the context of the play, and what does it imply about the characters' responsibilities?
2. What does the phrase "capitalist guilt" suggest about the societal commentary Priestley is making in the play?
3. In what way does Priestley depict "social status" as a hinderance in the characters' recognition of moral responsibility?

Summarising

1. Summarise the play's inciting incident and its significance to the overall narrative.
2. Briefly outline the various ways the Birling family contributes to Eva/Daisy's tragic end.
3. In your own words, summarise the play's resolution and the implications it has for the characters involved.

Analysis and Evaluation

1. Analyse how Priestley's use of the Inspector as a character serves to challenge societal norms of the time.
2. Evaluate the significance of Gerald's character in regards to the power dynamics between social classes.

3. Discuss the role of alcohol as a motif in the play. How does it contribute to the understanding of Eric's character?

Inference

1. What can be inferred about the consequences of the family's actions on their social standing by the end of the play?
2. How does Inspector Goole's character challenge the family's worldview and values, based on the text provided?
3. Infer the potential impact the investigation has on the future dynamics within the Birling family.

Explaining and Exploring

1. Explain how the play reflects the social issues of the time period in which it was written.
2. Explore the significance of the Inspector's line of questioning in revealing the family's guilt and responsibility.
3. Discuss how Sheila's character evolves through the play. What key moments contribute to her change?

Retrieval

1. What specific action led to Eva/Daisy losing her job at the factory?
2. What revelation does the family receive regarding Eric Birling's actions at the climax of the play?
3. How does the play conclude in terms of the family's ultimate awareness of their actions?

Act One: Part One

The play begins in 1912 with a dinner at the Birling residence. Arthur leads a toast to the impending marriage of his daughter, Sheila, and his son-in-law-to-be, Gerald Croft. The family members joke happily among themselves, and Sheila teases Gerald about his distant behavior the previous summer, when, Gerald explains, he was especially occupied at “the works,” the manufacturing company his father owns. That company, Crofts Limited, is a direct competitor to Birling and Company, Arthur’s manufacturing business. Arthur believes that Gerald and Sheila’s marriage will help bring the two companies closer together. Arthur stresses that their competition, to this point, has been civil, and that the Crofts’ is the larger company and the older, more distinguished family.

Sheila and Gerald tell one another, in front of the family at the dinner table, how lucky they are to be engaged. Gerald presents Sheila a ring, and Sheila vows to keep it in her possession forever. Birling tells the couple that, despite news reports to the contrary, he believes that the world is in a “good time,” and that business operations will pick up, not slow down, in the coming years. Arthur says that reports of German aggression should be discounted, and that there is a new, “unsinkable” ship being built that will be able to travel from the United Kingdom to New York in five days. Arthur continues that capital versus labor disputes, a topic of public discussion at the time, will not go on much longer, except perhaps in Russia, which Arthur calls “always ... behind-hand.”

After dinner, the rest of the family leave and Arthur and Gerald speak privately while drinking port. Arthur tells Gerald that, based on his public service as Lord Mayor in the town of Brumley (in the North Midlands), he believes the English government might soon offer him a knighthood. Arthur is especially excited about this prospect, he tells Gerald, because he knows that Lady Croft, Gerald’s mother, thinks Gerald might be “marrying down” socially in choosing Sheila for his bride. This is because the Birling family, though wealthy, does not have a title as the Croft family does. Arthur tells Gerald that the knighthood should come barring any unforeseen problems, like a “crime” in the family, or a “public scandal.” But, Arthur notes, he is only kidding about this, as he considers the possibility of either extremely unlikely. Gerald appears relieved to hear that Arthur is up for a knighthood and offers to tell his mother when the conferral is more certain.

Eric returns to the room where Arthur and Gerald are sitting. Arthur tells Eric and Gerald that it is important for a man to look out “for himself” and “for his family.” He says that in 1912, there are some “cranks” and critics who argue that “everybody has to look after everybody else.” Arthur is suspicious of this kind of socialism, and he urges Eric and Gerald to “mind their own business,” which, he says, will guarantee success in commerce and in life. Gerald says nothing, and Eric tells his father that he has offered the family a good deal of advice that night. Edna comes into the room and tells Arthur that a man wishes to speak with him. He is an Inspector from the police department.

AnalysisThe first part of Act One is an occasion for much dramatic irony. Dramatic irony is a situation, in performance, in which the audience knows more about the characters’ predicaments than the characters do. In this case, the dramatic irony has two forms. First, the audience senses that the happiness the Birlings rejoice in will soon be torn apart. Sheila’s semi-playful claim that Gerald was distant the previous summer will turn into the revelation of Gerald’s affair. And Eric’s casual drinking in this scene will become the heavy, dependent drinking of the later parts of the play. Arthur’s belief that he will receive a knighthood, if nothing terrible befalls the family, seems almost to invite exactly that kind of terrible

event. Then there is the broader dramatic irony, of the historical context in which the play occurs, and of when the play was written. Priestley, having fought in the First World War and lived through the Second, understands that German aggression will rip Europe to pieces, twice. He knows, as the audience would know, that the Titanic was an “unsinkable” ship that sank, and that Russia would overthrow its tsar and establish the first explicitly socialist government in the world. These instances of dramatic irony have two effects. First, they are morbidly funny, as they point out the characters’ naïveté and the audience’s knowledge of history and psychology. Second, they cause the audience to sympathize with and to better understand the play’s characters. After all, many people have experienced false confidence, and many people have been disappointed by personal or world events they could not anticipate. That the Birlings do not know what will happen to them does not make them stupid. It makes them realistic human beings.

The problems of the characters’ temperaments arise at this point in the play as the audience learns about the facets of the characters’ personalities that they choose to show and to conceal. Arthur presents an image of steadfastness and power, but he is deeply concerned with his social station. He reveals this to Gerald when he acknowledges the Crofts’ social superiority. Arthur’s desire for a knighthood is almost painfully poignant, and Gerald, for his part, seems relieved to hear it because he believes it will satisfy his mother. It is not clear whether Sybil’s unflappability in this section is reserve or disdain. And Sheila’s teasing of Gerald is not readily identifiable, either. Although one wonders if Gerald’s absence the previous summer will be explained, there could, of course, be a simple and innocent reason for it. Thus Priestley sets in motion the problems that will combine to form the play’s dramatic tensions. But these problems are not announced from the beginning. Instead, they are insinuated, revealed through the characters’ words and the manner in which those words are said. The play’s lack of narrator and its revelation of plot only through dialogue means there is no third person who announces their intentions. The closest the play will come to this kind of organizing presence is the Inspector, but even he primarily asks questions. He does not feel it is necessary to answer them, and, as Sheila notes, he appears aware of the truth already, and more interested in getting the other characters to admit to it.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What does the term “unsinkable” suggest about Arthur’s perspective on technological optimism?
2. In the context of the text, what does the word “cranks” imply about those who challenge social norms?
3. How does the use of the phrase “marrying down” reflect societal values of the time?

Analysis and Evaluation

1. How does Arthur Birling’s character represent the attitudes of the upper middle class in 1912?
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of the dramatic irony present in the opening act of the play.

3. In what ways does the structure of the dialogue contribute to the overall themes of the play?

Inference

1. What can we infer about Sheila's feelings for Gerald based on the way she teases him?
2. What does Arthur's view on socialism reveal about his personal values and priorities?
3. How does Gerald's reaction to Arthur's comments about a knighthood suggest his character's motivations?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Explain the significance of the setting in 1912 to the themes explored in the play.
2. Explore the significance of the ring that Gerald gives to Sheila during the dinner.
3. Discuss the implications of Arthur's comment about looking out "for himself" and his apprehension towards social responsibility.

Retrieval

1. What event is the family celebrating at the beginning of the play?
2. Who does Arthur believe might be offering him a knighthood?
3. What major world event does Arthur dismiss as unlikely to affect business operations?

Summarising

1. Summarise the main points of Arthur Birling's toast at the dinner.
2. What key elements of tension are introduced in the opening scene of the play?
3. Summarise how the relationships between the characters are established during this dinner scene.

Act One: Part Two

The Inspector enters, introducing himself as Goole. Arthur says he's never heard of Goole before, despite being an Alderman, Lord Mayor, and "a member of the Bench." The Inspector states that the two have not met. Arthur offers the Inspector a drink, and he refuses, saying he is "on duty." The Inspector tells Arthur that a girl named Eva Smith has committed suicide that evening, after swallowing disinfectant. Eric cries out at this, and Arthur says it is difficult news to hear.

The Inspector asks Arthur if he has heard of Eva Smith. Arthur says the name might be familiar, but he isn't sure. The Inspector shows Arthur, and Arthur alone, a photograph, and refuses to show the picture simultaneously to Eric, noting that questioning multiple people at a time would create confusion. Although Arthur is perturbed, he lets the Inspector proceed. Arthur says that he employed Eva in his factory and discharged her in September 1910. Hearing this, Gerald offers to leave, but when the Inspector says he knows that Gerald and Sheila are engaged, he asks Gerald to stay. Gerald, agitated, remains.

Arthur tells the Inspector that he dismissed Eva in a "straightforward" case. He argues that he "can't accept responsibility" for what has happened to Eva. The Inspector counters that Arthur has initiated a "chain of events" leading to Eva's death. Eric interjects that Arthur was saying just before the Inspector arrived that men must look out for themselves and their families, but not all society. Arthur describes why he dismissed Eva: she was the normal wage, but joined with other laborers to ask for a raise of three shillings a week. Arthur would not grant this, saying it would cut into profits. The Inspector asks Arthur why he refused, and Arthur objects to the idea that the Inspector would question his business practices. Arthur says that the workers, including Eva, went on strike, but it lasted no more than two weeks, after which the laborers were taken back on "at the old wage." Eva, however, was not offered her job back, as punishment for initiating the strike. Gerald announces that Arthur did what he had to do, as the owner of a business.

Arthur asks the Inspector how he gets along with the Chief Constable, a man with whom Arthur is friendly. The Inspector says he does not "see much" of the Chief Constable. When Eric asks why Arthur couldn't grant the raise, Arthur accuses Eric of being lazy. Eric responds that they do not need to speak this way with the Inspector present. Sheila enters the room, and wonders what's the matter. The Inspector tells Sheila that a girl named Eva Smith, aged twenty-four, has killed herself, and Sheila is appalled to hear it. Sheila is also shocked to learn that Arthur fired Eva after the strike.

The Inspector begins questioning Sheila, who says she does not know anyone named Eva Smith. The Inspector tells Sheila that Eva Smith went on to work at a clothing store called Milward's. Sheila admits to having shopped there before, and asks to see the Eva's picture. The Inspector shows Sheila, and only Sheila, and she gasps. Arthur becomes angry that the Inspector has upset Sheila, and Sheila asks the Inspector if he knew "all along" that Sheila had interacted with Eva previously, a question the Inspector does not answer.

Sheila admits to having gotten the girl fired from Milward's. Sheila was shopping there in January of 1911 and, after having tried on an unflattering dress, she noticed that the girl, Eva Smith, seemed to find this funny. Sheila became enraged and said she would not return to the store unless the girl, Eva, was fired. Sheila is mortified to hear that her actions might have contributed to Eva's death. The Inspector tells the room that Eva worked at Milward's

under the name Daisy Renton, rather than Eva Smith, which is why Sheila did not recognize her name.

All but Gerald and Sheila leave the room. Sheila notices that Gerald was shocked at the name “Daisy Renton,” and she asks whether Eva/Daisy was the girl he was seeing in the spring and summer when he claimed to have been occupied at work. Gerald admits to an affair with a girl he thought was named Daisy. He asks Sheila to conceal this from the Inspector, but Sheila tells Gerald that the Inspector must already be aware of this information.

AnalysisThe Inspector is the play’s great unexplained presence, perhaps even stranger a character than Eva/Daisy, whose “real” identity is never defined. The Inspector is notable because his motivations are not clear to the audience, nor to the Birling family. He says he is a part of the police department, but Gerald’s and Arthur’s later investigation will show this is not the case. The Inspector seems aware of some police protocol, but no one on the force knows him, and it is not even evident if he is a resident of the town of Brumley. His political sympathies appear roughly socialist, but he does not identify them as such, nor does he say that his mission in the Birling home is a political one.

Instead, the Inspector begins by stating that he is there to ask questions. It becomes evident that these questions are designed to relate the characters, one by one, to the life of Eva Smith/Daisy Renton. As Sheila goes on to realize later, the Inspector has arrived to ask these questions just as Arthur has finished telling Gerald and Eric that men do not have heavy obligations to their fellow men. The Inspector thus offers, over the course of the play, a rebuke to this idea. He seems to argue that, because each family member can be connected to one girl, or to the idea of one girl, named either Eva or Daisy, then perhaps all people can be connected to all others by bonds of trust, betrayal, love, or anger.

Once the Inspector gets Arthur and Sheila to acknowledge that they recognize Eva/Daisy, he then wants them to admit the part they have played in her downfall. Arthur is unwilling to do this, because his personal beliefs do not allow for these kinds of causation. That is, Arthur thinks that people should look out for themselves, or, at most, for their families. He does not think that all people owe obligations to all other people. Thus the concerns of the workers in his factory are utterly abstract to Arthur. The workers will want higher wages, but that is because, in Arthur’s mind, workers are lazy and accustomed to “handouts.” Arthur accuses his own son Eric of this laziness. Sheila is more willing to acknowledge and come to terms with her guilt. She realizes that her anger, directed toward the Eva/Daisy at Milward’s, was unjustified. Further, that anger derived from a feeling of resentment that other young women might look better in the outfit she wore than she did. Sheila realizes that she got Eva/Daisy fired because she, Sheila, was not comfortable with herself in her own skin. She begins, in this section of the play, to come to terms with that personal failing, and to imagine what it would mean to make amends for her actions.

The stage directions say that the Inspector is a large and imposing presence, and one can imagine in reading the play that the other characters more or less cower around him. The Inspector thus destabilizes the order that the family had achieved up until this point. In that old order, Arthur was the head of the household, and whatever Arthur commanded at a given moment was considered the truth. Sybil, then, was to carry out Arthur’s orders and make sure the family was comfortable. And Eric and Sheila were to go along with whatever their parents demanded of them. With Sheila’s engagement to Gerald, Arthur implies that he is handing off concern for his daughter to another man whom he trusts, and who himself works in manufacturing and is of a good family. This economy of marriage might seem, to a

contemporary audience, at best outdated, and at worst offensive. And it is exactly this structure of the nuclear family that the Inspector's presence upsets.

Gerald's character similar to Sheila's, and a contrast to Arthur's and Sybil's. Gerald seems sheepish during the questioning. He offers no reply to the Inspector, and none to Arthur. When Sheila realizes she is guilty of her immoral behavior and of ruining Eva/Daisy's job at the store, Gerald neither stands up to support his fiancée, nor denounces her. This is perhaps because Gerald recognizes that he has had an affair with that same Eva/Daisy, a fact that Sheila will soon figure out. Gerald's passivity is a counterpoint to Arthur's and Sybil's resistance to the Inspector's authority. Whereas they wonder what he is doing there, and openly call his questioning "rude," Gerald does not resist the interrogation, nor does he offer up any information voluntarily. He seems to recognize that, in the Birlings' living room, he is trapped until the Inspector tells him he can leave.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What is the significance of the name "Eva Smith" as used in the text?
2. How does the term 'responsibility' evolve throughout the interactions between the Inspector and Arthur?
3. Describe the implications of the word 'disinfectant' in the context of Eva Smith's death.

Analysis and Evaluation

1. How does the Inspector's role serve as a commentary on social responsibility in the text?
2. In what ways does Gerald's character contrast with those of Arthur and Sybil throughout the dialogue?
3. Discuss how the Inspector's methods of questioning influence the dynamics of the family during the interrogation.

Inference

1. What can be inferred about Arthur's values based on his reaction to the Inspector's claims regarding responsibility?
2. What is implied by Sheila's initial ignorance of Eva Smith's identity, and how does this change by the end of the text?
3. How does the Inspector's refusal to answer Sheila's question about his knowledge of her previous interactions with Eva impact her character development?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Explain how the Inspector uses Eva Smith's story as a tool in his questioning of the Birlings.

2. Explore Arthur's justification for firing Eva Smith. How does this reflect on his attitudes towards the working class?
3. How do the characters' responses to the Inspector highlight their personal justifications for their actions?

Retrieval

1. What was Eva Smith's position in relation to Arthur, and why was she dismissed?
2. How does Sheila become aware of her connection to Eva Smith?
3. What does the Inspector reveal to Sheila regarding Eva's name at Milward's?

Summarising

1. Summarise the key events that lead to the confrontation between the Inspector and Arthur.
2. In a few sentences, summarise the Inspector's overall purpose in the play as suggested through the text.
3. What are the main consequences that have emerged from the dialogue between the characters regarding their treatment of Eva Smith?

Act Two: Part One

The Inspector returns to the room, where Sheila and Gerald are talking. Sheila says she believes the Inspector already knows about Gerald's relationship with Eva. Gerald tells the Inspector he worries that Sheila is becoming "hysterical" and should be excused. Sheila admits she might be hysterical, but asks to remain. Gerald asks Sheila if the reason she wants to make him suffer the guilt of Eva/Daisy's death is because had to suffer, too. Sheila counters that Gerald couldn't really love her if he accuses her of being so spiteful. Sybil enters and asks what the matter is. The Inspector tells her he is asking Sheila and Gerald about Eva's death, and Sybil tells the Inspector that his questions are "impertinent."

Sheila warns Sybil that anything Sybil says might become fodder for the Inspector's inquiry. Sybil dismisses this warning and tells Sheila to be quiet. Sybil notes that Eric is distressed, probably because he's had too much to drink at the dinner. When Sheila mentions that Eric's drinking is a steady problem, Sybil counters that this isn't the case, and is embarrassed that the subject is brought up before the Inspector. Sybil asks Gerald whether Eric's drinking is a problem, and to Sybil's chagrin Gerald agrees that it is.

Arthur returns to the room. He says he has tried to persuade Eric to go to bed because of his drunkenness, but the Inspector warns that Eric, too, will be questioned that evening. Sheila worries what will happen to the family when the Inspector has finished his investigation. The Inspector turns to Gerald. He asks Gerald directly if he knows a girl named Daisy Renton. Gerald at first refuses, but Sheila warns him he ought to come clean to the Inspector. Gerald admits to knowing her, and tells Sheila again that she won't like anything he has to say about Eva/Daisy. Gerald says he met Eva/Daisy, who introduced herself only as Daisy, at a bar where he assumed she was a prostitute, and where a lecherous older man had cornered her. Gerald helped defend Eva/Daisy from the gentleman's advances, for which Eva/Daisy was grateful.

Gerald says that he arranged for Eva/Daisy to live at a friend's apartment in town while the friend was away for business. Gerald maintains that he did not initially support the girl in order to have an affair, but she did become his mistress. Their affair lasted for some months. Gerald knew that the relationship would end, as did Eva/Daisy, and by the beginning of September he told her they could no longer see each other. Gerald says that, though he feels guilty for lying to Sheila, he "did what any man would do" in protecting Eva/Daisy, and he does not regret the time they shared. Gerald tells the Inspector he lost contact with Eva/Daisy. The Inspector informs him that, in her diary, she wrote she had gone away for two months to the seaside, to think about what had happened between her and Gerald.

Gerald asks the Inspector if he might walk outside, to collect his thoughts. The Inspector allows this. Before Gerald goes, he and Sheila talk in front of the rest of the family. Sheila says she is still angry at Gerald, but not as mad as she was before hearing the story of the affair from him, because at least now no secrets are being kept. She says that if they are to repair their relationship, they must begin from scratch, and see if they can become intimate again knowing what they now know about their pasts. Gerald leaves the room, and the Inspector turns to Sybil.

Analysis Gerald understands that his affair will now be revealed to the family. He knows it will hurt Sheila, and initially he lashes out at her, believing Sheila wants to see him suffer as she has suffered. Gerald does have a hard time understanding that Sheila will be more accepting of the affair once she has heard all about it from his own mouth. For Sheila

admits, at the end of this section, that knowing or guessing only a bit of the story is harder than find out about it all at once. This, the audience will later learn, is uncharacteristic of Gerald, who appears a kind and conscientious person. Even the Inspector agrees, later in the play, that Gerald's behavior to Eva/Daisy has not been overly cruel. Their relationship was illicit, and Gerald was dating Sheila and lying to her while it was ongoing. But Gerald was not cruel to Eva/Daisy, and he appears to have genuinely wanted to help her.

It is a credit to Sheila that she can accept some of the good in Gerald, even while recognizing the selfishness of his affair and the part that Gerald has played in the death of Eva/Daisy. And Sheila is willing to do this even after Gerald has accused her of being spiteful. This is further evidence that Sheila is the play's emotional core, willing to admit to her faults, and willing to look past the faults in others. In this sense, Sheila demonstrates the feeling of collective human connection that the Inspector insists on before leaving the Birling house in Act Three.

Gerald and Sheila each serve as voices of reason in this play. Gerald wishes to leave the house to clear his head and think more clearly about what has been said. Although he wonders if Sheila is becoming "hysterical," Gerald also seems to recognize that Sheila, in contrast to her father Arthur, wants to confront and process her guilt about Eva/Daisy's death. Neither Gerald nor Sheila, once the truth is revealed, wishes to shy away from it. Though they accept the truth in different ways, they genuinely desire to accept it, to learn from the experiences of the play, and not simply to pretend nothing has happened.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What does the term "hysterical" imply in the context of Sheila's character?
2. How is the term "impertinent" used by Sybil to describe the Inspector's questions, and what does it reveal about her character?
3. What significance does the term "fodder" have in Sheila's warning to Sybil?

Analysis and Evaluation

1. Discuss how Gerald's understanding of his affair and its implications evolve during his conversation with Sheila and the Inspector.
2. How does the interaction between Gerald and Sheila demonstrate the theme of truth versus secrecy in the play?
3. Evaluate Sheila's character based on her willingness to confront the reality of her relationship with Gerald.

Inference

1. What can be inferred about Gerald's feelings towards Eva/Daisy based on his initial refusal to acknowledge their relationship?
2. How does Sheila's reaction to Gerald's affair suggest her understanding of love and trust?

3. What can we infer about the dynamics within the Birling family based on Sybil's dismissal of Sheila's warnings?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Explain the significance of the Inspector's role in the dialogue between the characters and the unfolding of their relationships.
2. Explore the symbol of the diary mentioned in the text and its implications for Gerald and Eva/Daisy's relationship.
3. How does the return of Arthur signify authority and control within the Birling family, particularly in the context of their reactions to the Inspector?

Retrieval

1. What event does the Inspector attribute to Eva's death, and how do the characters respond to this claim?
2. How does Sheila consider the future of her family in light of the Inspector's inquiries?
3. What actions does Gerald take to help Eva/Daisy, and how are they initially framed in the conversation?

Summarising

1. Summarise the conflicts present between Gerald and Sheila during their discussion about the affair.
2. Provide a brief overview of how Sybil's attitude towards the Inspector contributes to the overall tension in the scene.
3. Summarise the significance of the final conversation between Sheila and Gerald as they discuss their relationship.

Act Two: Part Two

Arthur and Sybil, however, demonstrate in this sequence their insistence that the family has done nothing wrong in order to keep up appearances. Arthur believes that firing Eva/Daisy was the right thing to do, and he is willing to reason away Sheila's behavior that resulted in Eva/Daisy getting fired from Milward's. Although Arthur and Sybil are deeply upset and saddened to learn that Gerald has been unfaithful to Sheila, they are even more scandalized by the thought that Gerald's affair could become public.

Arthur is even willing to accept that men characteristically have affairs. He thinks that Gerald's actions, though lamentable, should not paint him as a bad person, nor should they get in the way of the wedding Arthur wants to desperately to occur for his own social advancement. Although Sybil is offended at the idea that Gerald might not be the utterly upright young man he presents himself to be, she seems far more offended by the Inspector's continued presence than this. The Inspector, Sybil says, is rude and "impertinent," and his questions that get to the heart of the family's misbehavior are not fitting for a stranger to ask.

Sybil thinks that the interrogation should be over. But the Inspector says that Sybil might know something about the girl's death. He shows her the picture, and Sybil, not responding at first, hands the picture back, saying she has no memory of her. Arthur tells the Inspector that the Inspector is behaving rudely, and that he, Arthur, should be respected as a "public man." The Inspector says that Arthur has responsibilities as a citizen, as well as privileges. Sheila announces to Sybil, Arthur, and the Inspector that she knows Sybil has recognized the Eva/Daisy's, based on Sybil's reaction to the photo. Sheila begs Sybil and Arthur to say what they know about Eva/Daisy's death.

The front door opens and shuts. The family wonders if Gerald has come back, or if Eric has gone out, but neither person enters the room. The Inspector asks Sybil if she is a member of the Brumley Women's Charity Organization, and Sybil says that she is, and that she is proud of the group's community work. The Inspector tells Sybil and the family that Sybil must recognize the girl, because she saw her only two weeks before that night, when the girl petitioned the charity for financial assistance. Sybil agrees that this is the case, and her husband and daughter are shocked. Sybil says that the charity refused to give the girl money because of her "impudence."

The Inspector asks what name the girl provided to the charity. Sybil says the girl did not provide the name Eva Smith, nor Daisy Renton, but "Mrs. Birling." Sybil found this to be a cruel, impossible joke, since the girl no relation to the Birling family. Sybil tells the Inspector that this "prejudiced" her against the girl's case from the beginning. Sybil defends hers and the charity's decision to withhold assistance, because she did not find the girl's claim for aid compelling. The Inspector reveals to the family that the girl required aid because she was going to have a child. When Arthur interjects to ask whether Gerald was the father, the Inspector says no, that it was another, yet-unnamed man.

Sybil says that, first, the girl claimed to be married, and to have been abandoned by her husband. Sybil told the girl that this husband should be responsible for paying the child's bills. Sybil says under the pressure of questioning that the girl revised her story to say she was not married to the father of her child, and that she could no longer take money from that man because she knew his money was stolen. Sybil argues to the Inspector that,

because the girl changed her story, Sybil did not know which to believe, and despite the girl's dire straits, Sybil rejected her petition.

The Inspector leads Sybil into admitting that the father of the girl's child bears enormous responsibility for the girl's difficulties and eventual death. Sheila and Arthur realize, with great disappointment, that Eric is probably the father of the child, thus explaining why Eva/Daisy would present herself to the Women's Charity as Mrs. Birling. Sybil then realizes, after seeing the looks on Arthur and Sheila's faces, that Eric is most likely to blame. At this moment, caught in her statement that Eric should suffer for his malfeasance, Eric reenters the room, and all characters stare at him expectantly.

AnalysisThis section of the play presents perhaps the most damning evidence against the family. On Sheila's urging, Sybil admits that she has seen Eva/Daisy, or at least the girl in the picture that the Inspector shows only to Sybil. The very idea that Sybil would be in charge of a charitable organization is shown here to be a fanciful, cruel joke. For Sybil is the play's least charitable character, by a long stretch. She shows little alarm at Arthur and Sheila's misbehavior, and appears worried only about the family's reputation. She admits that, when Eva/Daisy came to the charity, she was inclined not to like her simply because she presented herself as "Mrs. Birling." What Sybil did not realize, however, was the possibility that Eva/Daisy actually might be tied to their family, and that Eric could be the father of the unborn child. Thus Sybil unwittingly repelled the charitable request for her own grandchild. Sybil appears unmoved by this, even when the Inspector and Sheila remind her of the fact. Sybil notes that, as a matter of procedure, the charitable organization was correct in withholding its money from Eva/Daisy. But the Inspector urges Sybil to consider that there is more to the case than procedure. In other words, Sybil might have added human emotional connection as a factor in helping the girl. But Sybil will have none of this, and even after learning that Eric was the father of the child, she still believes that the charity ought to deny petitions from people it considers unsavory or unworthy of help.

Here, the Inspector has turned Arthur's maxim against them. Arthur believes that people should only help their families and themselves. But without realizing it, Sybil has directly harmed her family out of a belief that the Eva/Daisy had no relation to her. In a society where people care only for their immediate friends and loved ones, the Inspector implies that these sorts of tragedies can occur. People die because the people closest to them give them no time, no effort, no consideration. That humans care more for some people than for others is natural, but that should not prevent anyone, the Inspector says, from thinking about the common good as much as they can. Eric is the play's "wild card," a character whose presence is difficult to characterize and explain. His drunkenness makes his own actions hard even for Eric to remember. He stumbles back into the home at the end of Act Two, hoping perhaps to go to bed. But he is instead confronted with an entire relationship he barely remembers or understands. Eric does little to hide what he knows, at this point, to be his guilt in the matter, as will be taken up in Act Three. But Eric's descent throughout the play thus far has been a precipitous one. His drinking in Act One has become heavier and has been revealed to be a pattern. And that drinking has resulted in a dissipation that only added to Eva/Daisy's troubles, which have led, of course, to her demise. Even as Arthur and Sybil alternately make excuses for Eric's behavior and try to think about him as little as possible, they realize at the end of Act Two that Eric is at the center of the night's predicament.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What does the term "impertinent" imply about the Inspector's character from Sybil's perspective?
2. Explain the significance of the name "Mrs. Birling" as used by the girl when petitioning for charity.
3. How does the word "prejudiced" reflect Sybil's attitudes towards those in need?

Analysis and Evaluation

1. Discuss the underlying motivations for Arthur and Sybil's desire to maintain their family's public image.
2. How does the Inspector's presence challenge the authority and preconceived notions of the Birling family?
3. Evaluate how the characters' reactions to Eva/Daisy's plight highlight their moral failings.

Inference

1. What can be inferred about the social values of Arthur and Sybil based on their responses to Gerald's affair?
2. How does Sybil's reaction to the Inspector's questions reveal her character and values?
3. Consider the consequences of Sybil's insistence on strict adherence to procedure. What conclusions can be drawn about her empathy?

Explaining and Exploring

1. How does the play suggest that personal responsibility is tied to social accountability through the Inspector's character?
2. What does Sybil's attitude towards the charity reflect about the class divide in society?
3. Explore the irony in the Inspector's claim that everyone has a role in the well-being of others.

Retrieval

1. What actions did Sybil and the charity take regarding Eva/Daisy when she sought financial assistance?
2. How does Arthur react to the Inspector's assessment of his public responsibilities?

3. When does Sybil finally acknowledge having seen Eva/Daisy, and what is her initial response to this realisation?

Summarising

1. Summarise the events leading up to Sybil's confrontation with the Inspector about her knowledge of Eva/Daisy.
2. Give a brief overview of how the family dynamics shift during the Inspector's interrogation.
3. What is the ultimate revelation that the family comes to regarding Eric and his involvement with Eva/Daisy?

Act Three: Part One

With Eric back in the room, Sheila points out that all the characters now know that Sybil's speech against the father of Eva/Daisy's child will force her to condemn Eric's actions. Sheila notes that Eric is an alcoholic, and Eric admits that he was very drunk the first night he met the girl, although Eric does not supply the name with which she introduced herself to him. On the Inspector's goading, Eric admits to beginning an affair with the girl, after following her back from the bar one night, and convincing her to let him into her room. Eric relates that, after several such meetings, the girl tells him that she is pregnant, and that she will need financial support for the unborn child. To provide the money, Eric swindles Arthur's company, cashing out receipts without returning the payments to the office. Arthur is furious when he hears this, and Eric realizes that the truth of his theft and relationship are out.

With the family in a state of anguish, the Inspector goes from Birling to Birling, blaming them each in turn for a share of the guilt regarding Eva/Daisy's suicide. The Inspector repudiates Arthur for firing her, Sheila for getting her fired again, Gerald and Eric for having illicit relationships with her, and Sybil for refusing aid when Eva was pregnant. Before leaving the house in a flourish, the Inspector tells the Birlings that all people are "one body," and that people must help and look out for one another if society is to survive. He says that the Birlings and Gerald must now live with their actions for the rest of their lives as recompense for Eva/Daisy, who has lost hers. The Inspector leaves.

Analysis Eric's revelation is twofold. At this point, the audience knows that Eric has most likely had an affair with the same Eva/Daisy that Gerald has. But his theft is a new revelation, even though it was foreshadowed when Sybil hints that Eva/Daisy petitioned the charity because she could no longer take stolen money from the father of the child. Nevertheless, Arthur and Sybil are particularly upset at the idea that Eric has defrauded the company, even if this money was used to support a girl and child to whom he owed a great deal. Arthur believes that Eric's theft must be answered for, and that Eric's behavior is the most likely to tip all these events into "public scandal," which Arthur fears above all else. The Inspector's closing speech is important for several reasons. First, it advances his politics most clearly, although the Inspector stops short of explicitly saying that he is a socialist, and that the Birlings and Gerald ought to become socialists, too. But the Inspector's motivations do seem to have to do with a critique of the capitalist system that Arthur advances, in which families are left to fend for themselves. The Inspector believes that it is exactly this system that has caused Eva/Daisy to die, and that, in order for the world to change, this economic system must change too, or be replaced. As a link to the play's performance history, its debut in the USSR in 1946 would have informed how audiences understood the Inspector's speech. In an immediate post-World War Two and Soviet context, the Inspector's argument would have sounded very much like the state's rationale for collectivization of property, and for the demonization of the ownership classes. In an English context soon after, the Inspector might sound more moderate, for he is not actually advocating an overthrow of the government. Thus, the Inspector's words are both socialist enough to make him and the playwright seem sympathetic to the socialist cause, but they are not so overtly partisan as to demand a specific course of action.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What does the term "repudiate," as used in the text, signify regarding the Inspector's attitude towards the Birlings?
2. In what context does the word "anguish" appear in the text, and how does it describe the family's emotional state?
3. How does the term "swindle" reflect Eric's character and decisions throughout the narrative?

Analysis and Evaluation

1. What are the implications of Sheila's mention of Eric being an alcoholic in relation to his actions towards Eva/Daisy?
2. Examine the dual nature of Eric's revelation about his relationship with Eva/Daisy and the theft. How does this complexity add depth to his character?
3. How does the Inspector's speech critique the capitalist system, and what evaluation can be made about his influence over the other characters?

Inference

1. Based on Eric's admission and the family's reaction, what can be inferred about the social expectations and moral standards of the time?
2. What does the Inspector's assertion that "all people are 'one body'" imply about his worldview, and how can we infer this might relate to the play's themes?
3. In what ways do the characters' responses to blame suggest their understanding of personal responsibility?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Explore the significance of "financial support for the unborn child" in the context of Eric's choices. How does this reflect the social attitudes towards responsibility?
2. Explain how the concept of guilt is manifested within the family dynamic, especially in relation to Eric's actions.
3. What exploration does the text offer regarding the relationship between personal failings and societal structures?

Retrieval

1. What actions does Eric take to provide financial support for Eva/Daisy, and what are the repercussions of these actions?
2. List the characters that the Inspector directly blames for Eva/Daisy's suicide. What reasons does he provide for their blame?

3. What significant moment occurs when the Inspector leaves the Birlings' house, and how does it signify a larger message?

Summarising

1. Summarise the key points of Eric's confession and the subsequent reactions from his family.
2. Outline the main themes conveyed in the Inspector's closing speech to the Birlings.
3. Provide a brief summary of the Inspector's role in the narrative and the messages he seeks to communicate.

Act Three: Part Two

Arthur says that Eric is primarily at fault for the family's situation. Arthur worries that there will be a "public scandal" made of the family's relationship to Eva Smith's death. Eric criticizes Arthur for worrying about his potential knighthood, considering that Eva/Daisy is dead. Sheila also criticizes Arthur and Sybil, and says that in thinking about their reputations, they are trying to move beyond Eva/Daisy's suicide and pretend that nothing terrible happened. Eric reminds Arthur of the speech Arthur gave to Gerald and Eric, before the Inspector's arrival, about how men should "look out for themselves first." Sheila, upon hearing this and the Inspector's parting words, wonders if he is a legitimate police inspector after all.

Eric and Sheila agree that, even if the Inspector was not really a public servant, he interrogated the family and found out their complex relationship to Eva's death. Eric and Sheila agree that he did "inspect" them. But Arthur, realizing that perhaps Inspector Goole is not a genuine inspector, says that this difference is crucially important. For if the Inspector was not acting officially, the family's collective guilt cannot be made into a "public scandal," and there will be no impact on Arthur's business reputation or on his knighthood. Arthur accuses Sybil, Eric, and Sheila of being susceptible to the Inspector's bluffing, as the Inspector tricked them into revealing all they knew. Arthur believes that the Inspector is a "socialist" and a "crank."

Edna, the maid, announces that Gerald is back, and he enters the room. Gerald says he has run into a police sergeant during his walk outside, and the sergeant tells him there is no officer in Brumley named Inspector Goole. Gerald concludes that the Inspector was a fraud, and Arthur agrees, saying that the family has been "hoaxed." Arthur begins thinking through the damage done, and hastily concludes that, if the family can keep the night's proceedings a secret, their reputations will not be harmed. Sheila and Eric dispute this. Sheila asks everyone in the family to consider his or her part in Eva/Daisy's suicide, and she again castigates Arthur for pretending the events of the night were entirely unreal, even as the characters' revelations of wrongdoing are authentic. Arthur phones the police force, confirming there is no Inspector Goole. Gerald admits that he really did have an affair, that he was not lying to the Inspector. Eric says he wants to leave the family and travel far away from them. But Arthur says that Eric must work for the family business to pay back the money he stole.

Gerald reasons that, because no characters saw Eva/Daisy's photo simultaneously, and because of the frequent changes of her name, the family members might not actually be speaking about the same woman. Their actions each would have been true as reported, but the common link between them the Inspector might have faked. Arthur calls the local hospital and verifies that no suicide has been brought in for weeks. Arthur is now convinced that the Inspector has utterly tricked the family. He believes that since no one died, the family members' actions are not so grave.

Sheila protests that Arthur is trying even more concertedly to cover up the revelations of the evening. Arthur says he has no interest in doing so, but Eva/Daisy's "unreal" death changes everything. Sheila disagrees, saying that the family members each behaved uncharitably and that the actuality of Eva/Daisy's death should have nothing to do with the calculation of the immorality of their actions. Sheila tells Arthur that he "began to learn something, but now [he's] stopped." The phone rings, and Arthur relays to the family that a girl has just

been transported to the hospital, dead, “after swallowing some disinfectant.” As the curtain falls, Arthur announces that a police inspector is headed to the house to interrogate the family. All on stage are shocked.

AnalysisThe end of the play is a source of much productive disagreement. Arthur blames his son Eric as the primary cause of Eva/Daisy’s and the family’s misfortune. But Eric points out that all share the blame, and Sheila notes this, too. Sheila is the most willing to accept what she has done and becomes increasingly unmoored as she realizes that Arthur and Sybil want only to pretend that the night has not happened at all.

Is Eva Smith/Daisy Renton a real person, and the same person? One whom each family member has harmed? And is she the same girl who is reported dead at the very end of the play? Is the Inspector who is said to arrive after the play’s action the same Inspector Goole who showed up before? And what are Goole’s motivations? Does he want to use the family as a kind of moral example for the consequences of selfishness? These questions might at first seem too perplexing or too open-ended. Some readers might find the play unsettling or even unsatisfying in the openness of its ending.

But Priestley has created a work of art that invites the critique of those who watch it. Sheila notes that if the girl who dies at the end of the play really is Eva/Daisy, or even if she is someone else entirely, it does not change the behaviors that have brought about her death. For Arthur, the distinction between public and private life is a crucial one, since private life allows for the hiding of mistakes. But for Sheila, this distinction is meaningless where moral matters are concerned. What is important to Sheila is the guilt the family must sort through and face. On the one hand, this means that the possibility of Eva/Daisy’s reality and the factual nature of her death would reinforce the characters’ conclusions. But this also means that the question of Eva/Daisy being real and actually dying might also be used to judge the immorality of their actions. This kind of judgment, where “all’s well that ends well” even if people’s motivations were selfish, impure, and criminal, is the judgment Priestley’s Inspector speaks out against. For the Inspector, immoral acts are immoral absolutely because they violate the fabric of social togetherness. It should not matter, then, whether or not Eva/Daisy is real. The suffering the family members have caused is real, and that must be addressed. Although it seems not to be borne out in the text, it is useful to note that Edna disappears at the close of the play, and that no indication is given as to her whereabouts. The openness of the ending means that anyone, including Edna herself, might be Eva/Daisy. That is, any person in a working-class situation, who is dependent on a capitalist system of labor to survive, could potentially lose everything and be forced to the brink of death. In the world that Priestley paints of free capitalist enterprise, there are very few mechanisms in place to protect the poor, the enfeebled, or those who have lacked representation in the past.

Indeed, what appears to upset the Inspector the most is not simply the family’s crimes, but the ease with which these crimes could have been avoided, or their consequences remedied. The Inspector does not so much criticize the family members for their misbehaviors as he does for their total ignorance of the impact of these misbehaviors on another person. The Inspector’s broadly socialist point, that individual actions have collective consequences, is most vividly illustrated in the case of Eva/Daisy, but it might be applied to many people in similar situations, the world over. This is the “universal” principle the Inspector supports, which is a direct contrast to the narrow worldview of Arthur and Sybil, who believe individuals should protect themselves and their families, but no one else.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What does the term "public scandal" refer to in the context of Arthur's concerns?
2. How does the word "unmoored" describe Sheila's emotional state throughout the discussion?
3. What is the significance of the term "socialist" as used by Arthur in relation to the Inspector?

Analysis and Evaluation

1. Examine how the concept of honesty is portrayed in the dialogue between Arthur, Sheila, and Eric. What does this reveal about their characters?
2. Evaluate the role of the Inspector in the play. How does his presence influence the family dynamics?
3. Discuss how Priestley uses the character of Sheila to demonstrate the theme of self-reflection and accountability.

Inference

1. Based on their discussion, what can be inferred about the family's values and priorities in relation to their social status?
2. What can Eric's desire to leave the family suggest about his relationship with them and his moral compass?
3. How might Sheila's insistence on recognising individual culpability indicate a shift in her character from the beginning to the end of the play?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Discuss the implications of the Inspector's accusation that the family is collectively guilty. What does this reveal about social responsibility in the text?
2. Explore how the theme of reality versus perception is significant in the family's discussions about Eva/Daisy.
3. What exploration of class divides does Priestley present through the characters' interactions with Edna and the notion of working-class struggle?

Retrieval

1. What evidence does Gerald provide that casts doubt on the legitimacy of the Inspector?
2. What is Arthur's reaction upon confirming that there is no Inspector Goole?

3. How does Sheila respond to her family's attempts to dismiss the Inspector's revelations?

Summarising

1. Provide a summary of the arguments made by Eric and Sheila against Arthur's focus on reputation over accountability.
2. Summarise the key events that lead to the family's realisation of their shared complicity in Eva/Daisy's death.
3. What does the final announcement by Arthur imply about the unresolved tension within the family?

Character Analysis in An Inspector Calls

Gerald Croft

Gerald offers a contrast to the combative attitudes of Arthur and Sybil Birling in regards to Inspector Goole's questioning. He isn't quite as quick to defend himself, nor to denounce others; he and Sheila serve as voices of reason throughout the investigation, and Gerald's desire to process what's been said speaks to his level-headed nature, one that complements his easy confidence as the privileged son of an industrialist. It's his lofty position in society, and the success that comes with it, which grants him a certain lack of deference to consequences. He is less affected by Inspector Goole's accusations because he enjoys the invulnerability of the upper classes. The Birlings, on the other hand, prize their social standing precisely because it is not set in stone; they are lower on the rung than Gerald, and will stop at nothing to maintain what they have.

Gerald had an affair with Daisy Renton and doesn't explicitly deny culpability, but also manages to appear least culpable in the eyes of Inspector Goole, owing to his claim that he truly cared for her. Where Arthur and Sybil lash out at Goole and claim they're the victims of an unjust attack, characterizing the accusations as invalid and thus of little consequence, Gerald takes a moment to collect his thoughts. This contemplative move is what allows Gerald to discover the nature of Goole's deception, and bring to light the idea that the investigation is a "hoax." Once Gerald realizes the girl in question may not have been the same girl they all did wrong, and that no girl committed suicide, he is firm in his belief that nothing really happened, aligning himself with Arthur and Sybil. However, his relief is less palpable than that of the elder Birlings because for Gerald, the stakes were never as high; Gerald admits to his transgressions, discovers the "hoax" revelation, and accepts Sheila's unwillingness to re-enter into an engagement with him, all with a sense of detachment. He may technically be the least culpable and he may have maintained a sense of pragmatism throughout the proceedings, but he also had the least to lose.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What is the significance of the term "invulnerability" in relation to Gerald's character?
2. Explain the meaning of "contemplative" and how it applies to Gerald's actions during the investigation.

Analysis and Evaluation

1. How does Gerald's approach to Inspector Goole's questioning differ from Arthur and Sybil Birling's approach?
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of Gerald's character as a 'voice of reason' in the context of the investigation.

Inference

1. What can be inferred about Gerald's relationship with Sheila based on his acceptance of her unwillingness to re-enter into an engagement with him?
2. How does the contrast between Gerald and the Birlings reflect the social hierarchy presented in the text?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Discuss the implications of Gerald discovering the investigation to be a "hoax" on his moral compass.
2. Explore the idea that Gerald's sense of detachment is a protective mechanism. What does this suggest about his character?

Retrieval

1. According to the text, what does Gerald claim regarding his feelings for Daisy Renton?
2. What accusations do Arthur and Sybil Birling make against Inspector Goole during the inquiry?

Arthur Birling

Arthur's primary concerns are the Birling family's good name and his ability to climb in early-twentieth-century English society. Arthur is aware that, although his firm is successful, it is not as successful as the Crofts'. Arthur also does not yet possess a formal title as the Crofts do, so he gleefully tells Gerald in Act One that he is expecting a knighthood. Although Arthur does seem somewhat upset at the idea that he contributed to Eva Smith's death, he is more upset that his family's implication in the scandal would become public. This would mean that the knighthood might be withheld, and that Birling would no longer continue his social ascent.

Arthur's opinion, that men ought only to look after themselves as individuals, is a strictly capitalist mentality, in which owners of capital value only profits, and do not care for workers' rights. As Sheila says in Act Three, the Inspector calls just as Arthur tells Eric and Gerald that they must put their own interests before anyone else's, and that socialist ideas of human brotherhood are strange and not to be trusted. Sheila wonders if the Inspector's visit was meant to prove to Arthur that people's lives are actually very complexly intertwined.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What is the significance of the term "capitalist mentality" as used in the text?
2. How does the phrase "social ascent" contribute to our understanding of Arthur's character and ambitions?

Summarising

1. Summarise Arthur's main concerns regarding his family's reputation and his social status.
2. In what ways does Arthur's attitude towards responsibility shape the overall narrative of the text?

Analysis and Evaluation

1. Analyse how Arthur's perspective on self-interest reflects the broader themes of the play.
2. Evaluate the implications of Arthur's desire for a knighthood in relation to his moral responsibilities.

Inference

1. What can be inferred about Arthur's character based on his reaction to the Inspector's visit?

2. How does Sheila's comment about the Inspector reflect her understanding of social responsibility compared to Arthur's views?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Explain the relationship between Arthur's business success and his views on worker's rights.
2. Explore the significance of the knighthood in the context of Arthur's identity and societal role.

Retrieval

1. What does Arthur say to Gerald about his expectation of a knighthood?
2. How does Arthur respond to the idea that he contributed to Eva Smith's death?

Sybil Birling

From the start, Sybil—the matriarch of the Birling family—maintains a chilly and aloof attitude toward the proceedings, as evidenced most notably by her refusal to help the pregnant Eva. That someone as uncharitable as Sybil might be in charge of a charitable investigation is presented as cruelly ironic, as is the fact that Sybil unwittingly denied aid to her own grandchild. When confronted about her lack of generosity, Sybil denies responsibility and insists her behavior was correct; Eva, in her eyes, was unworthy of help.

But Sybil wasn't merely uninterested in helping Eva. She's also uninterested in, or in denial of, the investigation as a whole. She offers a defensive and occasionally combative attitude towards Goole and an unwillingness to cooperate throughout. Her issues with the Inspector have less to do with the information he conveys, and more to do with her belief that it's inappropriate for a stranger to make such baseless claims. Her chief concern is with reputation; she writes off references to Eric's drinking habits, for instance, and though she's upset to learn of Gerald's affair, she's more worried about the prospect of the affair becoming public and causing a scandal. She calls the Inspector "impertinent" for having the gall to ask questions. She can't conceive of someone of her social station being met with such scorn, enabling her to act, in her view, as if she is the victim. Goole demonstrates that Sybil herself has violated social conventions by denying help to Eva, and has even violated the Birling family's own personal maxim—that they should only help themselves and their families—once it's revealed Eva's child was also Eric's. Despite the trap the Inspector has laid, all but forcing Sybil to condemn her own son and herself, she ultimately refuses to take accountability.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What does the term "aloof" imply about Sybil's character as portrayed in the text?
2. How does the use of the word "impertinent" reflect Sybil's attitude towards the Inspector?

Analysis and Evaluation

1. In what ways does the author use irony to emphasise Sybil's character flaws?
2. What is the significance of Sybil's denial of responsibility in terms of the text's broader themes of social responsibility and accountability?

Inference

1. What can be inferred about Sybil's relationship with her children, particularly Eric, based on her concerns and reactions within the text?

2. How does Sybil's behaviour during the investigation reveal her underlying values regarding social class and propriety?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Discuss how Sybil's attitude towards Eva reflects the societal norms of her time.
2. How does the Inspector's challenge to Sybil's values serve as a critique of the social hierarchy presented in the text?

Retrieval

1. What specific action does Sybil take that demonstrates her refusal to help Eva?
2. What does Sybil express concern over regarding Gerald's affair, and how does this concern illustrate her character?

Sheila Birling

Sheila is the conscience of the Birling family. She realizes very soon after the Inspector's arrival that her anger at Milward's resulted in Eva/Daisy's dismissal, and that, because Eva/Daisy went on to commit suicide, Sheila played a role in her demise. Sheila wonders how she will live with the grief her actions have caused, for herself, and of course for Eva/Daisy. She seems genuinely upset and lost, and reminds the rest of her family that they, too, have acted wrongly. She wants the family never to forget what they have done, despite their desire to proceed as though nothing is amiss.

Sheila's position is, broadly, an empathetic one. Although she does not seem to care much for the Inspector's implicit critique of capitalism, she does believe that humans are responsible for one another's good will. She is despondent that she cannot undo what she has done, but is committed to the idea that the family can change going forward. She is also willing, at the play's end, to forgive Gerald his infidelity, because he appeared to have genuinely cared for Eva/Daisy, even if at Sheila's expense.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. Define the term "conscience" as used in the context of Sheila's character. What does it imply about her role in the Birling family?
2. What does the word "despondent" reveal about Sheila's emotional state following her realisation of her impact on Eva/Daisy's life?

Analysis and Evaluation

1. Evaluate Sheila's ability to confront the consequences of her actions. Do you think this demonstrates strength or weakness in her character? Justify your response.
2. Analyse how Sheila's empathy towards Eva/Daisy contrasts with the views of her family members. What does this reveal about the different values held within the Birling family?

Inference

1. What can we infer about Sheila's relationship with her family based on her insistence that they remember their actions?
2. How does Sheila's willingness to forgive Gerald reflect her understanding of human relationships, especially in the context of her earlier actions?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Explain the significance of Sheila's character development throughout the text. How does her awareness impact the play's overall message?

2. Explore the theme of responsibility as presented in Sheila's realisation. How does this theme resonate with contemporary societal issues?

Retrieval

1. What specific event does Sheila attribute to her feelings of grief and remorse regarding Eva/Daisy?
2. According to the text, what is Sheila's stance on the Inspector's critique of capitalism?

Eric Birling

Eric's position is similar to his sister's, in that he, too, is wracked by guilt after learning of the Eva/Daisy's suicide. But Eric's addiction to alcohol and his moodier, wilder temperament keep him from reasoning as succinctly as Sheila does at the play's end. Eric believes that he behaved justifiably in stealing from the family business to help Eva/Daisy. And, when he learns that his mother refused Eva/Daisy from her charity despite being pregnant, he is aghast at his family's lack of sympathy.

Different characters interpret Eric's alcoholism in different ways. Arthur sees it as a sign of weakness, an indication that Eric is lazy and was spoiled as a child. Sybil refuses to acknowledge that Eric has a drinking problem, despite Sheila's protestations. And Gerald, though he wants to believe that Eric's drinking is "normal" for a young man, admits that very few young men drink the way Eric does.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What is the meaning of the term "wracked" as used in the context of Eric experiencing guilt?
2. How does the word "aghast" contribute to our understanding of Eric's feelings towards his family?

Analysis and Evaluation

1. Compare Eric's reactions to his guilt with Sheila's. How do their differing responses highlight their characters?
2. Evaluate the significance of Eric's belief that his theft was "justifiable." What does this reveal about his moral compass?

Inference

1. What can be inferred about the dynamics within Eric's family based on the characters' reactions to his alcoholism?
2. Why might Gerald's admission about Eric's drinking being atypical for young men be significant in the overall context of the play?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Explain how Eric's addiction to alcohol may serve as a symbol within the text. What broader themes could it represent?
2. Explore the effect of parental influence on Eric's character development. How does this play a role in his actions and attitudes?

Retrieval

1. What does Eric learn about his mother's actions regarding Eva/Daisy and her charity?

2. How do different characters react to Eric's alcoholism, and what are the specific views expressed by Arthur, Sybil, and Gerald?

Inspector Goole

The Inspector is physically imposing, and he has no trouble articulating his frustration with the Birlings and with Gerald. Over the course of his questioning, the Inspector reveals that each of the characters has, in some sense, contributed to Eva Smith/Daisy Renton's demise. The Inspector implies that the other characters care primarily for themselves, that they are angry and impulsive, and that they cannot control their sexual appetites or their intake of alcohol. He also says that they cannot change what has happened to Eva/Daisy, because she is no longer alive and capable of accepting their apologies. But the Inspector, too, is a curt, direct man, and his motivations for grilling the other characters are not readily comprehensible. His apparent socialist sympathies at the end of the play might account in political terms for some of his anger, but the Inspector's desire to see justice through, in this case, is left unexplained.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What does the term "physically imposing" suggest about the Inspector's character?
2. Explain the meaning of the word "curt" as used in the text.

Analysis and Evaluation

1. Analyse how the Inspector's attitude towards the Birlings contributes to the overall themes of the play.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Inspector as a character in portraying the consequences of social irresponsibility.

Inference

1. What can you infer about the Birlings' attitudes towards Eva Smith/Daisy Renton based on their reactions to the Inspector's questioning?
2. How does the Inspector's reference to "socialist sympathies" contribute to your understanding of his character and motivations?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Explore the significance of the Inspector stating that "they cannot change what has happened to Eva/Daisy." What does this reveal about the nature of guilt and accountability?
2. Explain the dual nature of the Inspector's character as someone who seeks justice while remaining unclear in his motivations.

Retrieval

1. What does the Inspector reveal about each of the characters' contributions to Eva Smith/Daisy Renton's demise?
2. How does the Inspector articulate his frustration with the Birlings and Gerald throughout his questioning?

Eva Smith

A character who does not appear onstage in the play, but who is the absent figure around which the action spins. She is referred to as Eva Smith, Daisy Renton, and “Mrs. Birling.” She may be a combination of these young women, or a different person, or a fiction. Whether she is real or not, Eva/Daisy is a stand-in for the girls that Arthur, Sybil, Sheila, Eric, and Gerald have wronged, either separately or together. Eva/Daisy worked for a low wage, and Arthur fired her for attempting a strike. Sheila had her fired for impertinence. Eric and Gerald both had affairs with her, and though Gerald cared for her, Eric’s relationship to her was more vexed and required him to steal money for her. If Eva/Daisy is a real person, as the last phone call suggests, then the family’s guilt might really knot them together. But if she is not one person, and rather a set of people, this makes her no less substantial as an organizational principle for the work. Priestley demonstrates how selfish, or economically motivated, or jealous behaviour can ruin people’s lives. Eva/Daisy is the lesson each character must learn individually.

Questions

Word Meaning

1. What does the term “impertinence” mean in the context of Sheila firing Eva/Daisy?
2. Define the word “substantial” as used in the phrase, “makes her no less substantial as an organizational principle.”

Analysis and Evaluation

1. How does the character of Eva/Daisy reflect the societal issues of the time in which the play is set?
2. Evaluate how Priestley uses Eva/Daisy as a tool for character development among the primary cast.

Inference

1. Why might Priestley have chosen to make Eva/Daisy an absent character, rather than a present one?
2. What can be inferred about the characters of Arthur, Sybil, Sheila, Eric, and Gerald based on their treatment of Eva/Daisy?

Explaining and Exploring

1. Explain how Eva/Daisy serves as a “stand-in” for the wronged girls in the play.
2. Explore the implications of Eva/Daisy being seen as a different person or a combination of young women.

Retrieval

1. List the different names by which Eva/Daisy is referred to in the text.
2. According to the passage, what actions did each of the main characters take against Eva/Daisy?