

## 1. Opening Stage Directions

**TASK #1** – What impression is Priestley trying to give us of the Birlings here? Why?

(At rise of curtain, the four Birlings and Gerald are seated at the table, with Arthur Birling at one end, his wife at the other, Eric downstage and Sheila and Gerald seated upstage.)

**TASK #4** – Complete single word analysis on the following words:

-portentous      -cold      -shy      -assertive

**TASK #2** – Why is Mrs Birling, Mr Birling's 'social superior' considering 'An Inspector Calls' is set in a patriarchal society?

Edna, the parlourmaid, is just clearing the table, which has no cloth, of the dessert plates and champagne glasses, etc, and then replacing them with decanter of port, cigar box and cigarettes. Port glasses are already on the table. All five are in evening dress of the period, the men in tails and white ties, not dinner-jackets. Arthur Birling is a heavy-looking, rather **portentous** man in this middle fifties with fairly easy manners but rather provincial in this speech. His wife is about fifty, a rather **cold** woman and her husband's social superior. Sheila is a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited. Gerald Croft is an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the well-bred young man-about-town. Eric is in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half **shy**, half **assertive**. At the moment they have all had a good dinner, are celebrating a special occasion, and are pleased with themselves.)

**TASK #5** – Why is Edna present in this scene? How is she different from the others?

**TASK #3** – Highlight any words that you do not understand. Write them in this box and look up their definition.

**TASK #6** – What do the possessions of the Birlings tell you about them?

## 2. 'Lower costs and higher prices...'

**TASK #1** – Why do you really think Sir George and Lady Croft are not at the party?

Mrs Birling: Now stop it, you two. Arthur, what about this famous toast of yours?

Birling: Yes, of course. (*clears his throat.*) Well, Gerald, I know you agreed that we should only have this quiet little family party. It's a pity Sir George and – er – Lady Croft can't be with us, but they're abroad and so it can't be helped. As I told you, they sent me a very nice cable – couldn't be nicer. I'm not sorry that we're celebrating quietly like this-

Mrs Birling: Much nicer really.

Gerald: I agree.

Birling: So do I, but it makes speech-making more difficult-

Eric: (*not too rudely*) Well, don't do any. We'll drink their health and have done with it.

Birling: No, we won't. It's one of the happiest nights of my life. And one day, I hope, Eric, when you've a daughter of your own, you'll understand why. Gerald, I'm going to tell you frankly, without any pretences, that your engagement to Sheila means a tremendous lot to me. She'll make you happy, and I'm sure you'll make her happy. You're just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted. Your father and I have been friendly rivals in business for some time now – though Crofts Limited are both older and bigger than Birling and company – and now you've brought us together, and perhaps we may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together – for lower costs and higher prices.

Gerald: Hear, hear! And I think my father would agree to that.

**TASK #4** – What kind of character is Eric here?

**TASK #2** – Highlight everywhere where Mr Birling mentions Sheila in his engagement speech. What do you notice? What does this tell you?

**TASK #5** – How does this extract enforce Mr Birling as a capitalist?

**TASK #3** – Does Mr Birling actually care about Sheila's engagement? Discuss your ideas using quotations from the text.

**TASK #6** – 'You're just the son-in-law I always wanted' – Which of Gerald's qualities does Mr Birling like?

### 3. 'The Ring'

**TASK #1** – 'Look mummy...' – What does this quotation tell you about Sheila's character?

Sheila: (*trying to be light and easy*) You be careful – or I'll start weeping.

Gerald: (**smiling**) Well, perhaps this will help to stop it. (*He produces a ring case.*)

Sheila: (**excited**) Oh – Gerald – you've got it – is it the one you wanted me to have?

Gerald: (*giving the case to her*) Yes – the very one.

Sheila: (*taking out the ring*) Oh – it's wonderful! Look – mummy – isn't it a beauty? Oh – darling -

(*She kisses Gerald **hastily**.*)

Eric: steady the buffs!

Sheila: (*who has put the ring on, **admiringly***) I think it's perfect. Now I really feel engaged.

Mrs Birling: So you ought, darling. It's a lovely ring. Be careful with it.

Sheila: Careful! I'll never let it go out of my sight for an instant.

Mrs Birling: (**smiling**) Well, it came just at the right moment. That was clever of you, Gerald. Now, Arthur, if you've no more to say, I think Sheila and I had better go into the drawing room and leave you men-

Birling: (*rather heavily*) I just want to say this. (*noticing that Sheila is still admiring her ring.*) Are you listening, Sheila? This concerns you too. And after all I don't often make speeches at you -

Sheila: I'm sorry, daddy. Actually I was listening.

(*She looks attentive, as they all do. He holds them for a moment before continuing.*)

**TASK #4** – What kind of character is Eric here?

**TASK #2** – What do you think the ring symbolises here?

**TASK #5** – Consider the stage directions that have been highlighted. What do they tell you about the atmosphere of this scene? Why does Priestley want to set this atmosphere?

**TASK #3** – 'I'll never let it go out of my sight for an instant' – Considering what happens later in the play, what is the significance of this line?

**TASK #6** – '(He holds them for a moment before continuing)' – Why does Mr Birling do this?

## 4. Birling's Speech #1

**TASK #1** – Highlight everything in Birling's speech that he gets wrong.

How is DRAMATIC IRONY being used here?

**TASK #2** – What is Priestley hoping to achieve by making Birling unlikeable?

**TASK #3** – Eric tries to speak to his father in this speech but Birling keeps cutting him off. Why do you think Birling treats Eric in this way?

I just want to say this. There's a good deal of silly talk about these days – but – and I speak as a hard-headed business man, who has to take risks and knows what he's about – I say, you can ignore all this silly pessimistic talk. When you marry, you'll be marrying at a very good time. Yes, a very good time – and soon it'll be an even better time. Last month, just because the miners came out on strike, there's a lot of wild talk about possible labour trouble in the near future. Don't worry. We've passed the worst of it. We employers at last are coming together to see that our interests – and the interests of Capital – are properly protected. And we're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity.

Just because the Kaiser makes a speech or two, or a few German officers have too much to drink and begin talking nonsense, you'll hear some people say that war's inevitable. And to that I say - fiddlesticks! The Germans don't want war. Nobody wants war, except some half-civilized folks in the Balkans. And why? There's too much at stake these days. Everything to lose and nothing to gain by war.

I say there isn't a chance of war. The world's developing so fast that it'll make war impossible. Look at the progress we're making. In a year or two we'll have aeroplanes that will be able to go anywhere. And look at the way the automobile's making headway - bigger and faster all the time. And then ships. Why, a friend of mine went over this new liner last week - the Titanic - she sails next week - forty-six thousand eight hundred tons - New York in five days - and every luxury - and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable. That's what you've got to keep your eye on, facts like that, progress like that - and not a few German officers talking nonsense and a few scaremongers here making a fuss about nothing.

Now you three young people, just listen to this - and remember what I'm telling you now. In twenty or thirty years' time - let's say, in 1940 - you may be giving a little party like this - your son or daughter might be getting engaged - and I tell you, by that time you'll be living in a world that'll have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations and all these silly little war scares. There'll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere - except of course in Russia, which will always be behindhand naturally.

**TASK #4** - Why is Birling wrong here?

*'We're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity.'*

**TASK #5** – Why is Birling wrong when he speaks to Eric and Gerald?

*'When you marry, you'll be marrying at a very good time.'*

**TASK #6** – Birling presents his opinion as fact. Why does he do this? What does this tell you about his character?

## 5. Birling's Speech #2

**TASK #1** – Highlight all of the personal pronouns. Does the fact they are all masculine tell you anything about Birling or the time the play is set?

**TASK #2** – Look at the word 'again' in the first line. What does it imply about Birling?

**TASK #3** – Who is Birling referring to when he says, 'the way some of these cranks talk...'?

I don't want to lecture you two young fellows again. But what so many of you don't seem to understand now, when things are so much easier, is that a man has to make his own way – has to look after himself – and his family too – and so long as he does that, he won't come to much harm. But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense. But take my word for it, you youngsters – and I've learnt in the good hard school of experience – that a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own – and—

*We hear the sharp ring of a front door bell. BIRLING stops to listen.*

**TASK #4** - Why does Birling emphasise the fact that Gerald and Eric are 'young'?

**TASK #5** – How does Birling disregard the socialist ideology in this extract? Try and use a quotation in your answer.

**TASK #6** – Why does the doorbell ring when it does?

## 6. The Inspector

**TASK #1** – Complete single word analysis on the words highlighted in the stage directions. What can you infer about the Inspector based on them?

**TASK #2** – ‘He speaks carefully, weightily...’ – What do these adverbs suggest about the Inspector?

**TASK #3** – Why do you think the Inspector looks ‘hard’ at the person he addresses before speaking?

Edna: (opening door, and announcing) Inspector Goole.

*(The Inspector enters, and Edna goes, closing door after her. The Inspector need not be a big man but he creates at once an impression of **massiveness, solidity and purposefulness**. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period. He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking.)*

Inspector: Mr Birling?

Birling: Yes. Sit down inspector.

Inspector: (sitting) Thank you, sir.

Birling: Have a glass of port – or a little whisky?

Inspector: No, thank you, Mr Birling. I'm on duty.

Birling: You're new, aren't you?

Inspector: Yes, sir. Only recently transferred.

Birling: I thought you must be. I was an alderman for years – and lord mayor two years ago – and I'm still on the bench – so I know the Brumley police offices pretty well – and I thought I'd never seen you before.

Inspector: Quite so.

**TASK #4** – How do you think Priestley wants the audience to react to the Inspector when they first see him enter?

**TASK #5** – The Inspector's lines are short and blunt compared to how Mr Birling speaks. Why?

**TASK #6** – Why does Mr Birling mention his societal positions to the Inspector?

## 7. Sheila and Milwards

**TASK #1** – How does the Inspector demonstrate that he is in control here?

Sheila: (*distressed*) I went to the manager at Milwards and I told him that if they didn't get rid of that girl, I'd never go near the place again and I'd persuade mother to close our account with them.

Inspector: And why did you do that?

Sheila: Because I was in a furious temper.

Inspector: And what had this girl done to make you lose your temper?

Sheila: When I was looking at myself in the mirror I caught sight of her smiling at the assistant, and I was furious with her. I'd been in a bad temper anyhow.

Inspector: And was it the girl's fault?

Sheila: No, not really. It was my own fault. (*suddenly, to Gerald*) All right, Gerald, you needn't look at me like that. At least, I'm trying to tell the truth. I expect you've done things you're ashamed of too.

Gerald: (*surprised*) Well, I never said I hadn't. I don't see why –

Inspector: (*cutting in*) Never mind about that. You can settle that between you afterwards. (*to Sheila.*) What happened?

Sheila: I'd gone in to try something on. It was an idea of my own – mother had been against it, and so had the assistant – but I insisted. As soon as I tried it on, I knew they'd been right. It just didn't suit me at all. I looked silly in the thing. Well, this girl had brought the dress up from the workroom, and when the assistant – Miss Francis – had asked her something about it, this girl, to show us what she meant, had held the dress up, as if she was wearing it. And it just suited her. She was the right type for it, just as I was the wrong type. She was very pretty too – with big dark eyes – and that didn't make it any better. Well, when I tried the thing on and looked at myself and knew that it was all wrong, I caught sight of this girl smiling at Miss Francis – as if to say: 'doesn't she look awful' – and I was absolutely furious. I was very rude to both of them, and then I went to the manager and told him that this girl had been very impertinent – and – and – (*she almost breaks down, but just controls herself.*) How could I know what would happen afterwards? If she'd been some miserable plain little creature, I don't suppose I'd have done it. But she was very pretty and looked as if she could take care of herself. I couldn't be sorry for her.

Inspector: In fact, in a kind of way, you might be said to have been jealous of her.

Sheila: Yes, I suppose so.

Inspector: And so you used the power you had, as a daughter of a good customer and also of a man well known in the town, to punish the girl just because she made you feel like that?

**TASK #4** – Highlight everywhere in the extract where Sheila begins to accept responsibility.

**TASK #2** – How does Priestley create sympathy for Eva Smith through Sheila's description of her?

**TASK #5** – Sheila agrees with what the Inspector tells her and begins to accept that what she has done is wrong. What does this tell you about her?

**TASK #3** – How is Priestley beginning to portray the younger generation in a positive light?

**TASK #6** – How have the rich and powerful exploited the poor and weak in this scene?

## 8. Sheila questions Gerald

**TASK #1** – Summarise what is happening in this scene.

**TASK #2** – How is Gerald presented in this scene? Use quotations to help you back up your ideas and make sure you hit all assessment objectives.

Sheila: He went into the drawing room, to tell mother what was happening here. Eric, take the inspector along to the drawing-room.

*(As Eric moves, the inspector looks from Sheila to Gerald, then goes out with Eric.)*

Well, Gerald?

Gerald: *(trying to smile)* Well what, Sheila?

Sheila: How did you come to know this girl – Eva Smith?

Gerald: I didn't.

Sheila: Daisy Renton then – it's the same thing.

Gerald: Why should I have to know her?

Sheila: Oh don't be stupid. We haven't much time. You gave yourself away as soon as he mentioned her other name.

Gerald: All right. I knew her. Let's leave it at that.

Sheila: We can't leave it at that.

Gerald: *(approaching her)* Now listen, darling--

Sheila: No, that's no use. You not only knew her but you knew her very well. Otherwise, you wouldn't look so guilty about it. When did you first get to know her?

*(He does not reply)*

Was it after she left Milwards? When she changed her name, as he said, and began to lead a different sort of life? Were you seeing her last spring and summer, during that time you hardly came near me and said you were so busy? Were you?

*(He does not reply but looks at her.)*

Yes, of course you were.

Gerald: I'm sorry, Sheila. But it was all over and done with, last summer. I hadn't set eyes on the girl for at least six months. I don't come into this suicide business.

Sheila: I thought I didn't half an hour ago.

Gerald: You don't. Neither of us does. So – for god's sake – don't say anything to the inspector.

Sheila: About you and this girl?

Gerald: Yes. We can keep it from him.

Sheila: *(laughs rather hysterically)* Why – you fool – he knows. Of course he knows. And I hate to think how much he knows that we don't know yet. You'll see. You'll see.

**TASK #3** – Highlight words that Sheila calls Gerald and analyse them. What do they imply about the way she is feeling at this point in the play?

**TASK #4** – How is the Inspector's presence felt in this scene even though he does not appear?

**TASK #5** – How has Sheila developed from the beginning of the play?