

## 1. Gerald and Sheila

**TASK #1** – Sheila and Gerald's relationship begins to crumble quickly. Why do you think Priestley destroys their relationship so quickly?

**TASK #2** – What atmosphere is Priestley trying to convey here? Why? How does he do it?

Gerald: You've been through it – and now you want to see somebody else put through it.

Sheila: (*bitterly*) So that's what you think I'm like. I'm glad I realized it in time, Gerald.

Gerald: No, no, I didn't mean -

Sheila: (*cutting in*) Yes, you did. And if you'd really loved me, you couldn't have said that. You listened to that nice story about me. I got that girl sacked from Milwards. And now you've made up your mind I must obviously be a selfish, vindictive creature.

Gerald: I neither said that nor even suggested it.

Sheila: Then why say I want to see somebody else put through it? That's not what I mean at all.

Gerald: All right then, I'm sorry.

Sheila: Yes, but you don't believe me. And this is just the wrong time not to believe me.

Inspector: (*massively taking charge*) Allow me, Miss Birling. (to Gerald.) I can tell you why Miss Birling wants to stay on and why she says it might be better for her if she did. A girl died tonight. A pretty, lively sort of girl, who never did anybody any harm. But she died in misery and agony – hating life –

Sheila: (*Distressed*) Don't please – I know, I know – and I can't stop thinking about it –

Inspector: (*Ignoring this*) Now Miss Birling has just been made to understand what she did to this girl. She feels responsible. And if she leaves us now, and doesn't hear any more, then she'll feel she's entirely to blame, she'll be alone with her responsibility, the rest of tonight, all tomorrow, all the next night--

Sheila: (*eagerly*) Yes, that's it. And I know I'm to blame – and I'm desperately sorry – but I can't believe – I won't believe – it's simply my fault that in that in the end she – she committed suicide. That would be too horrible –

Inspector: (*sternly to them both*) You see, we have to share something. If there's nothing else, we'll have to share our guilt.

Sheila: (*staring at him*) Yes. That's true. You know. (She goes close to him, wonderingly.) I don't understand about you.

**TASK #3** – Highlight all the lines that imply Sheila is beginning to take responsibility. Explain your choices.

**TASK #4** – How is the Inspector presented in this scene?

**TASK #5** – 'There's no reason why you should' – Is it important that we understand who the Inspector is or not? Explain.

## 2. Mrs Birling and the Inspector

**TASK #1** – How is Mrs Birling presented through Priestley's use of stage directions? Explain your ideas.

Mrs Birling: (*rebuking them*) I'm talking to the inspector now, if you don't mind. (*to inspector, rather grandly*) I realize that you may have to conduct some sort of inquiry, but I must say that so far you seem to be conducting in a rather peculiar and offensive manner. You know of course that my husband was lord mayor only two years ago and that he's still a magistrate--

Gerald: (*cutting, rather impatiently*) Mrs Birling, the inspector knows all that. And I don't think it's a very good idea to remind him--

Sheila: (*cutting in*) It's crazy. Stop it, please, mother.

Inspector: (*imperturbable*) Yes. Now what about Mr Birling?

Mrs Birling: He's coming back in a moment. He's just talking to my son, Eric, who seems to be in an excitable silly mood.

Inspector: What's the matter with him?

Mrs Birling: Eric? Oh – I'm afraid he may have had rather too much to drink tonight. We were having a little celebration here--

Inspector: (*cutting in*) isn't he used to drinking?

Mrs Birling: No, of course not. He's only a boy.

Inspector: No, he's a young man. And some young men drink far too much.

Sheila: And Eric's one of them.

Mrs Birling: (*very sharply*) Sheila!

Sheila: (*urgently*) I don't want to get poor Eric into trouble. He's probably in enough trouble already. But we really must stop these silly pretences. This isn't the time to pretend that Eric isn't used to drink. He's been steadily drinking too much for the last two years.

Mrs Birling: (*staggered*) it isn't true. You know him, Gerald -and you're a man – you must know it isn't true.

Inspector: (*as Gerald hesitates*) Well, Mr Croft?

Gerald: (*apologetically, to Mrs Birling*) I'm afraid it is, y'know. Actually I've never seen much of him outside this house – but- well, I have gathered that he does drink pretty hard.

Mrs Birling: (*bitterly*) And this is the time you choose to tell me.

**TASK #3** – 'Mrs Birling is not a typical maternal figure.' Highlight evidence in the text that helps you prove this statement correct and explain your choices.

**TASK #2** – What was the role of upper class women in the early 1900s? Does Mrs Birling reflect this stereotype?

**TASK #4** – 'We really must stop these silly pretences' – What does Sheila mean here? If they stop these 'pretences', what would the impact be on the Birling family?

### 3. Gerald and the Inspector

**TASK #1** – What is Sheila’s purpose in this scene? Explain your ideas.

Gerald: Yes. I asked her questions about herself. She told me her name was Daisy Renton, that she'd lost both parents, that she came originally from somewhere outside Brumley. She also told me she'd had a job in one of the works here and had had to leave after a strike. She said something about the shop too, but wouldn't say which it was, and she was deliberately vague about what happened. I couldn't get any exact details from her about herself – just because she felt I was interested and friendly – but at the same time she wanted to be Daisy Renton – and not Eva Smith. In fact, I heard that name for the first time tonight. What she did let slip – though she didn't mean to – was that she was desperately hard up and at that moment was actually hungry. I made the people at the county find some food for her.

Inspector: And then you decided to keep her – as your mistress?

Mrs Birling: What?

Sheila: Of course, mother. It was obvious from the start. Go on, Gerald. Don't mind mother.

Gerald: (*steadily*) I discovered, not that night but two nights later, when we met again – not accidentally this time of course - that in fact she hadn't a penny and was going to be turned out of the miserable back room she had. It happened that a friend of mine, Charlie Brunswick, had gone off to Canada for six months and had let me have the key of a nice little set of rooms he had – in Morgan Terrace – and had asked me to keep an eye on them for him and use them if I wanted to. So I insisted on Daisy moving into those rooms and I made her take some money to keep her going there. (*carefully, to the inspector.*) I want you to understand that I didn't install her there so that I could make love to her. I made her go to Morgan Terrace because I was sorry for her, and didn't like the idea of her going back to the palace bar. I didn't ask for anything in return.

Inspector: I see.

Sheila: Yes, but why are you saying that to him? You ought to be saying it to me.

Gerald: I suppose I ought really. I'm sorry, Sheila. Somehow I--

Sheila: (*cutting in, as he hesitates*) I know. Somehow he makes you.

**TASK #3** – Gerald and Eva bond on an emotional level. Do you think Gerald’s abandonment of Eva is the worst thing she has experienced so far or not? Explain.

**TASK #2** – Why do you think Gerald talks to the Inspector ‘steadily’ and ‘carefully’?

**TASK #4** – What is your own opinion of Gerald’s story? Do you think he truly loved Eva/Daisy or do you think this is another example of the rich exploiting the poor?

## 4. Sheila hands back the ring

**TASK #1** – What do you think the ring represents/symbolises in this scene?

**TASK #2** – Consider what Sheila said about the ring at the beginning of the play. Why is it so significant that she hands the ring back herself? What does this suggest about her character and the events that have forced her to hand it over?

Gerald: In that case – as I'm rather more – upset – by this business than I probably appear to be – and – well, I'd like to be alone for a while – I'd be glad if you'd let me go.

Inspector: Go where? Home?

Gerald: No. I'll just go out – walk about – for a while, if you don't mind. I'll come back.

Inspector: All right, Mr Croft.

Sheila: But just in case you forget – or decide not to come back, Gerald, I think you'd better take this with you. (*She hands him the ring.*)

Gerald: I see. Well, I was expecting this.

Sheila: I don't dislike you as I did half an hour ago, Gerald. In fact, in some odd way, I rather respect you more than I've ever done before. I knew anyhow you were lying about those months last year when you hardly came near me. I knew there was something fishy about that time. And now at least you've been honest. And I believe what you told us about the way you helped her at first. Just out of pity. And it was my fault really that she was so desperate when you first met her. But this has made a difference. You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner here. We'd have to start all over again, getting to know each other--

Birling: Now, Sheila, I'm not defending him. But you must understand that a lot of young men-

Sheila: Don't interfere, please, father. Gerald knows what I mean, and you apparently don't.

Gerald: Yes, I know what you mean. But I'm coming back – if I may.

**TASK #3** – Why would Birling attempt to defend Gerald?

**TASK #4** – How is Sheila challenging conventions here? What would be expected of her at this time and what is she doing instead?

**TASK #5** – 'Don't interfere, please, father' – What is happening to the older and younger generation?

## 5. Mrs Birling's Story

**TASK #1** – 'I think she had only herself to blame' – What does this tell you about Mrs Birling's character?

**TASK #2** – How does Mrs Birling attempt to gain control of the situation here?

**TASK #3** – 'I did nothing I'm ashamed of' – How is Priestley using Mrs Birling to help promote socialism to his audiences?

Mrs Birling: Yes, I think it was simply a piece of gross impertinence – quite deliberate – and naturally that was one of the things that prejudiced me against her case.

Birling: And I should think so! Damned impudence!

Inspector: You admit being prejudiced against her case?

Mrs Birling: Yes.

Sheila: Mother, she's just died a horrible death – don't forget.

Mrs Birling: I'm very sorry. But I think she had only herself to blame.

Inspector: Was it owing to your influence, as the most prominent member of the committee that help was refused the girl?

Mrs Birling: Possibly.

Inspector: Was it or was it not your influence?

Mrs Birling: (*stung*) Yes, it was. I didn't like her manner. She'd impertinently made use of our name, though she pretended afterwards it just happened to be the first she thought of. She had to admit, after I began questioning her, that she had no claim to the name, that she wasn't married, and that the story she told at first – about a husband who'd deserted her – was quite false. It didn't take me long to get the truth – or some of the truth – out of her.

Inspector: Why did she want help?

Mrs Birling: You know very well why she wanted help.

Inspector: No, I don't. I know why she needed help. But as I wasn't there, I don't know what she asked from your committee.

Mrs Birling: I don't think we need discuss it.

Inspector: You have no hope of not discussing it, Mrs Birling.

Mrs Birling: If you think you can bring any pressure to bear upon me, Inspector, you're quite mistaken. Unlike the other three, I did nothing I'm ashamed of or that won't bear investigation. The girl asked for assistance. We were asked to look carefully into the claims made upon us. I wasn't satisfied with the girl's claim – she seemed to me not a good case – and so I used my influence to have it refused. And in spite of what's happened to the girl since, I consider I did my duty. So if I prefer not to discuss it any further, you have no power to make me change my mind.

Inspector: Yes I have.

**TASK #4** – How is Mrs Birling presented as hubristic in this scene? Use quotations from the text and hit all of the assessment objectives.

**TASK #5** – 'Despite her flaws, Mrs Birling should be commended for trying to protect her family.' Discuss.

## 6. Mrs Birling 2

**TASK #1** – Find and highlight a quotation that shows a difference in Mrs Birling’s character to what we have seen before. Explain your choice.

**TASK #2** – Mrs Birling ‘triumphantly’ says ‘I’m glad to hear it.’ What does this adverb imply about how she is feeling? Try and come up with TWO ideas.

**TASK #3** – Why has the Inspector interrogated Mrs Birling and Eric out of sequence? Consider what the structure of events does to the drama.

(Sheila *begins crying quietly*. Mrs Birling *turns to the Inspector*.)

Mrs Birling: And if you'd take some steps to find this young man and then make sure that he's compelled to confess in public his responsibility – instead of staying here asking quite unnecessary questions – then you really would be doing your duty.

Inspector: (*grimly*) Don't worry, Mrs Birling. I shall do my duty. (*He looks at his watch*.)

Mrs Birling: (*triumphantly*) I'm glad to hear it.

Inspector: No hushing up, eh? Make an example of the young man, eh? Public confession of responsibility – um?

Mrs Birling: Certainly. I consider it your duty. And now no doubt you'd like to say good night.

Inspector: Not yet. I'm waiting.

Mrs Birling: Waiting for what?

Inspector: To do my duty.

Sheila: (*distressed*) Now, mother – don't you see?

Mrs Birling: (*understanding now*) But surely .... I mean ... it's ridiculous . . .

(*She stops, and exchanges a frightened glance with her husband*.)

Birling: (*terrified now*) Look Inspector, you're not trying to tell us that – that my boy – is mixed up in this - ?

Inspector: (*sternly*) If he is, then we know what to do, don't we? Mrs Birling has just told us.

Birling: (*thunderstruck*) My God! But – look here -

Mrs Birling: (*agitated*) I don't believe it. I won't believe it . . .

Sheila: Mother – I begged you and begged you to stop-

(*Inspector holds up a hand. We hear the front door. They wait, looking towards door. Eric enters, looking extremely pale and distressed. He meets their inquiring stares. Curtain falls quickly*.)

**TASK #4** – Consider Priestley’s use of punctuation. Discuss what the punctuation reveals about how the characters are feeling.

**TASK #5** – How is the Inspector presented as a powerful figure in full control of the situation?

**TASK #6** – At this point in the play, do you think there is any hope of redemption for the Birlings? Explain.