

1. Eric's Confession

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

Birling: You must give me a list of those accounts. I've got to cover this up as soon as I can. You damned fool – why didn't you come to me when you found yourself in this mess?

Eric: Because you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble – that's why.

Birling: (*angrily*) Don't talk to me like that. Your trouble is – you've been spoilt--

Inspector: (**cutting in**) And my trouble is – that I haven't much time. You'll be able to divide the responsibility between you when I've gone. (*To Eric.*) Just one last question, that's all. The girl discovered that this money you were giving her was stolen, didn't she?

Eric: (*miserably*) Yes. That was the worst of all. She wouldn't take any more, and she didn't want to see me again. (*sudden startled tone*) Here, but how did you know that? Did she tell you?

Inspector: No. She told me nothing. I never spoke to her.

Sheila: She told mother.

Mrs Birling: (*alarmed*) Sheila!

Sheila: Well, he has to know.

Eric: (*to Mrs Birling*) She told you? Did she come here – but then she couldn't have done, she didn't even know I lived here. What happened?

(*Mrs Birling, distressed, shakes her head but does not reply.*)

Come on, don't just look like that. Tell me – tell me – what happened?

Inspector: (**with calm authority**) I'll tell you. She went to your mother's committee for help, after she'd done with you. Your mother refused that help.

Eric: (*nearly at breaking point*) Then – you killed her. She came to you to protect me – and you turned her away – yes, and you killed her – and the child she'd have had too – my child – your own grandchild – you killed them both – damn you, damn you-

Mrs Birling: (*very distressed now*) No – Eric – please – I didn't know – I didn't understand-

Eric: (*almost threatening her*) You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried – you -

Sheila: (*frightened*) Eric, don't – don't-

Birling: (*furious, intervening*) Why, you hysterical young fool – get back – or I'll-

Inspector: (**taking charge, masterfully**) Stop.

TASK #4 – Look at the Inspector's stage directions. Analyse them. What do they imply about his character?

TASK #2 – How does this scene present Mr Birling as a weak character?

TASK #5 – What do the dashes in Eric's speech suggest about the way he is feeling?

TASK #3 – How do you think Priestley intends an audience to react here? Why?

TASK #6 – 'The older and younger generation are complete strangers by the end of the play. It is impossible for them to fix the rift that has occurred between them.' Discuss.

2. Inspector's Final Speech

TASK #1 – What is Priestley's view about the importance of society?

TASK #2 – When addressed to an audience in 1946, what is Priestley's message to the audience at the end of the speech?

TASK #3 – Identify a language technique used, and explain its effect.

'But just remember this. One Eva Smith has gone- but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, with what we think and say and do. We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Good night.'

TASK #4 - Why does Priestley use the Inspector to deliver this speech?

TASK #5 – Why does Priestley use such common names?

TASK #6 – What is the most important word or phrase in this speech? Why is this so?

3. Older Generation vs Younger Generation

TASK #1 – Look at the stage directions for how the characters are speaking. Complete single analysis on THREE adverbs.

TASK #2 – What are the differences between the stage directions for the older and younger generation?

TASK #3 – What do you think the pace of this scene would be like and why?

Birling: (**angrily**) Yes, and you don't realize yet all you've done. Most of this is bound to come out. There'll be a public scandal.

Eric: Well, I don't care now.

Birling: You! You don't seem to care about anything. But I care. I was almost certain for a knighthood in the next Honours List-

(Eric laughs rather hysterically, pointing at him.)

Eric: (**laughing**) Oh – for God's sake! What does it matter now whether they give you a knighthood or not?

Birling: (**sternly**) It doesn't matter to you. Apparently nothing matters to you. But it may interest you to know that until every penny of that money you stole is repaid, you'll work for nothing. And there's going to be no more of this drinking round the town – and picking up women in the palace bar-

Mrs Birling: (**coming to life**) I should think not. Eric, I'm absolutely ashamed of you.

Eric: Well, I don't blame you. But don't forget I'm ashamed of you as well – yes both of you.

Birling: (**angrily**) Drop that. There's every excuse for what both your mother and I did – it turned out unfortunately, that's all--

Sheila: (**scornfully**) That's all.

Birling: Well, what have you to say?

Sheila: I don't know where to begin.

Birling: Then don't begin. Nobody wants you to.

Sheila: I behaved badly too. I know I did I'm ashamed of it. But now you're beginning all over again to pretend that nothing much has happened-

TASK #4 – How does Priestley intend an audience to perceive the younger generation and the older generation?

TASK #5 – What are the differences between Mr Birling and Eric? Why do you think the differences between these two men are so important?

TASK #6 – The younger generation are a way for Priestley to present what the future might look like. What is this future?

4. The Final Call

TASK #1 – How have the characters changed throughout the play?

Sheila: (*passionately*) You're pretending everything's just as it was before.

Eric: I'm not!

Sheila: No, but these others are.

Birling: Well, isn't it? We've been had, that's all.

Sheila: So nothing really happened. So there's nothing to be sorry for, nothing to learn. We can all go on behaving just as we did.

Mrs Birling: Well, why shouldn't we?

Sheila: I tell you – whoever that Inspector was, it was anything but a joke. You knew it then. You began to learn something. And now you've stopped. You're ready to go on in the same old way.

Birling: (*amused*) And you're not, eh?

Sheila: No, because I remember what he said, how he looked, and what he made me feel. Fire and blood and anguish. And it frightens me the way you talk, and I can't listen to any more of it.

Eric: And I agree with Sheila. It frightens me too.

Birling: Well, go to bed then, and don't stand there being hysterical.

Mrs Birling: They're over-tired. In the morning they'll be as amused as we are.

Gerald: Everything's all right now, Sheila. (*Holds up the ring.*) What about this ring?

Sheila: No, not yet. It's too soon. I must think.

Birling: (*pointing to Eric and Sheila*) Now look at the pair of them – the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke-

(*The telephone rings sharply. There is a moment's complete silence. Birling goes to answer it.*)

Yes?. . . .Mr Birling speaking. . . .What? - here-

(*But obviously the other person has rung off. He puts the telephone down slowly and looks in a panic stricken fashion at the others.*)

Birling: That was the police. A girl has just died – on her way to the Infirmary – after swallowing some disinfectant. And a police inspector is on his way here – to ask some – questions -----

(*As they stare guiltily and dumbfounded, the curtain falls.*)

TASK #4 – Highlight evidence that implies the hubristic nature of man has not been fully destroyed and explain WHY you have highlighted it.

TASK #2 – How has Sheila become a metaphorical inspector in this final scene?

TASK #5 – What do the dashes in Birling's final speech imply about him?

TASK #3 – How is the divide between the older and younger generations presented here?

TASK #6 – Is the end meant to be explainable? What is Priestley's purpose at the end of the play? What do you think is happening?