

An Inspector Calls – Super Six

Character	Symbolic meaning	Quote 1	Quote 2	Quote 3	Quote 4	Context and message
Mr Arthur Birling	Represents the Capitalist ethos and the world of business. Represents the patriarchal structure of Edwardian England. Represents the older generation.	<p>‘The Germans don’t want war. Nobody wants war.’ Act 1</p> <p>Dramatic irony used to undermine Birling and present him as foolish & overly confident. His optimism is misplaced.</p> <p>‘Nobody’ suggests he is arrogant enough to speak for all people, despite knowing very little about the wishes of others.</p>	<p>‘Mixed up together like bees in a hive’ Act 1</p> <p>Discussing the effects of socialism in a negative and dismissive manner.</p> <p>‘Mixed up’ suggests belief that social classes should not interact.</p> <p>‘Bees’ implies a fear that socialism will crush individuality and reduce humans to mindless drones.</p>	<p>‘It had nothing to do whatsoever with this wretched girl’s suicide.’ Act 1</p> <p>Remorseless and evades responsibility.</p> <p>‘Wretched girl’ is callous and uncaring. ‘Girl’ is dismissive and patronising. Refusal to use her name, despite knowing it, shows a reluctance to see the working classes as individuals.</p>	<p>‘She had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go’ Act 1</p> <p>‘Far too much’ suggests he wants to silence the working classes, particularly the women. He feels they should be voiceless and is disapproving when they stand up for themselves.</p> <p>‘Had to go’ shows his certainty that his actions were correct.</p>	Priestley uses Birling to criticise the flawed Capitalist classes as foolish, arrogant, prejudiced and cruel. Also criticises the obstinate older generation, their dismissiveness of new ideas, and their resistance to change.
Mrs Sybil Birling	Represents the upper classes, particularly older females. Represents the older generation.	<p>‘That is a trifle impertinent, Inspector.’ Act 2</p> <p>‘Impertinent’ means a lack of deserved respect. Suggests Mrs Birling expects deference as her due, despite doing nothing to earn it. Hints at the sense of entitlement she has as a member of the upper classes, expecting even the law to submit to her.</p>	<p>‘Unlike the other three, I did nothing I’m ashamed of’ Act 2</p> <p>‘The other three’ include her own husband and daughter. Explicitly blaming them in order to shift the responsibility from herself. Suggests a sense of cowardliness and disloyalty.</p>	<p>‘claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples ... simply absurd in a girl in her position.’ Act 2</p> <p>‘In her position’ could mean class or pregnancy. Suggests she believes the working classes are incapable of morality. Judgemental and unforgiving regarding unwed mothers.</p>	<p>‘They’re overtired. In the morning they’ll be as amused as we are.’ Act 3</p> <p>Infantilising her adult children – ‘overtired’ used to refer to babies. Complete dismissal of Sheila and Eric’s opinions and feelings, suggesting they are not valid. Speaking for them, not to them.</p>	Priestley uses Mrs Birling in order to convey his belief that upper classes are unfeeling, disloyal, entitled and judgemental. Suggests upper class women infantilise and invalidate their children, and do good works only for their public image.
Sheila Birling	Represents the young, female upper-middle class.	<p>‘Oh look, Mummy, isn’t it a beauty?’ Act 1</p> <p>‘Mummy’ shows immaturity – treated as a child so acts as one.</p> <p>‘Isn’t it a beauty’ – her delight over the ring suggests a materialistic attitude, which later changes due to the Inspector’s teachings. This can be seen when she refuses to take the ring back.</p>	<p>‘Pretty...I couldn’t be sorry for her’ Act 1</p> <p>Believes that Eva’s good looks means she won’t suffer for losing her job. Shows importance placed on looks by patriarchal Edwardian society. Explains her jealousy and insecurity. ‘Couldn’t’ suggests was impossible for her to do right thing, possibly due to being sheltered from reality of working class life so she doesn’t realise the impact her actions will have.</p>	<p>‘I feel now I can never go there again’ Act 1</p> <p>Speaking about Milwards after she finds out about Eva’s death. Could imply Sheila’s selfishness & materialism – cares more about the inconvenience to her life than woman’s death. OR could show how her growing social conscience has overpowered her materialism, as symbolised by the dress shop.</p>	<p>‘You mustn’t try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl... Inspector will just knock it down.’ Act 2</p> <p>Metaphor of a wall refers to the way Mrs Birling is attempting to present the working class as something different or alien – suggests Sheila doesn’t see it like this. Also shows Sheila is insightful and quickly understands the Inspector’s methods.</p>	Priestley suggests that young middle-class women can be intelligent & compassionate, but also selfish & materialistic due to way they are sheltered from realities of life. Sheila’s adoption of socialist ethos is message of hope from Priestley - believes young people are capable of change.
Eric Birling	Represents the younger generation Represents the upper-middle class young man.	<p>‘Half shy, half assertive’ (Act 1 stage directions)</p> <p>Suggests Eric has not yet established his own personality – conflicting personality traits which contradict each other. Suggests confusion in him. Assertive (forceful) foreshadows his behaviour towards Eva and his later behaviour towards his parents.</p>	<p>‘I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty.’ Act 3</p> <p>Drunk when attacked Eva. Implies attempt to evade responsibility by making excuses. ‘Easily’ suggests he thinks his behaviour was understandable, ‘a chap’ could mean he believes any man would have behaved this way.</p>	<p>‘Pretty and a good sport’ Act 3</p> <p>Shows attitude to working class women. ‘Pretty’ suggests expects women to look appealing to him. ‘Good sport’ refers to her willingness to sleep with him. Lack of reference to intelligence or personality is telling – these do not matter to him</p>	<p>‘The money’s not important. It’s what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters’ Act 3</p> <p>Eric’s lack of concern for ‘money’ emphasises the difference to Mr Birling’s capitalist views. Suggests Eric has potential for change, which reflects the audience’s hope for improved society after WWII.</p>	Comment on the behaviour of young, wealthy men. Suggests such men are infantilised and sometimes bullied, which leads to them seizing power where they find it. Also a comment on the common views of working class women as there for ‘fun’.

Gerald Croft	Represents the aristocratic upper classes. Represents the patriarchal male society.	<p>‘Getting a bit heavy-handed, aren’t you, Inspector?’ Act 1</p> <p>Expectation that he is entitled to certain level of respect due to his class, even from the law. ‘Heavy-handed’ suggests he is used to softer approach. Rhetorical question may suggest he does not expect an answer and merely asks in order to remind the Inspector of his place.</p>	<p>‘For God’s sake, don’t say anything to the Inspector!’ Act 1</p> <p>Imperative ‘don’t’ demonstrates power: he is comfortable issuing orders, even to own fiancé Sheila. Also shows his power as a man. ‘For God’s sake’ however, suggests a certain desperation and might hint at an erosion of his power.</p>	<p>‘I hate those hard-eyed, dough-faced women.’ Act 2</p> <p>Referring to working class women in Palace Bar. Presumable prostitutes. Casual use of ‘hate’ suggests very negative attitudes. ‘Hard-eyed, dough-faced’ is callous and cruel – focused on appearances and shows lack of understanding about hardships in their lives</p>	<p>. ‘Sorry – I – well, I’ve suddenly realised – taken it in properly – that she’s dead.’ Act 2</p> <p>‘Sorry’ – apology hints at loss of power as play continues. Use of hyphens suggest broken speech which implies he is emotional, perhaps holding back tears. Suggests compassion and the ability to care for others of different classes.</p>	Used to criticise entitlement & privilege enjoyed by aristocratic upper classes. Highlights unfairness of Edwardian society. Shown as compassionate - suggests there is hope. But refuses to change his ways – implies upper class will always resist change.
Inspector Goole	A foil to Mr Birling. Represents the Socialist ethos. A mouthpiece for Priestley’s own views.	<p>‘Need not be a big man but he creates an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness.’ (Act 1 Stage direction)</p> <p>‘massiveness’ demonstrates power that the Inspector has. Suggests he is imposing - although doesn’t have to be physical. ‘Solidity’ implies a sense of reassurance & stability.</p>	<p>‘I hate to think how much he knows that we don’t know yet.’ Act 1</p> <p>Sheila, about Inspector. He is extremely well informed. Presents Inspector as not only intelligent but also omniscient (all-knowing). ‘Hate to think’ - this omniscience will trouble the wealthier classes.</p>	<p>‘A pretty, lively sort of girl, who never did anyone any harm. But she died in misery and agony – hating life.’ Act 2</p> <p>Emotive language about Eva suggests compassion and ability to empathise with others. Also shows he is uncompromising and not prepared to sugar-coat the truth to protect the Birling’s feelings.</p>	<p>‘But each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it.’ Act 3</p> <p>Use of imperatives show his assertiveness, his authority and his confidence and certainty in his opinions.</p>	Priestley presents Socialism through Inspector - positive contrast to Birling’s Capitalist. He doesn’t develop or change as he doesn’t need to. Socialism presented as a powerful, intelligent, well-informed, compassionate choice.
Theme	Linked characters	Quote 1	Quote 2	Quote 3	Quote 4	Context/Message
Class	Working: Eva, Edna Middle: Birlings Aristocratic upper: Gerald, Mrs Birling. Edna barely speaks but is present – suggests voicelessness of working class.	<p>‘They’d all be broke, if I know them.’ Act 1</p> <p>Gerald commenting on strikers at Birling’s factory. Superior attitude – ‘broke’ suggests upper class view of working classes as dissolute & unable to control finances or act responsibly.</p>	<p>‘If you don’t come down sharply... they’d soon be asking for the earth.’ Act 1</p> <p>‘these people’ Mr B views the working class as alien. ‘The earth’ - upper classes believe working class demands are unreasonable or unrealistic, asking for too much.</p>	<p>‘As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money’ Act 2</p> <p>Mrs Birling ‘Girl’ – patronising and dismissive. Reflects upper class view of the working classes as lacking morals. Links to Mrs Birling believing Eva is lying about her ‘scruples’.</p>	<p>‘We are members of one body’ Act 3</p> <p>Inspector – Priestley’s view that all classes are the same. ‘Body’ means group but could also link society to a human body which needs every part in working order to survive. All classes are equally important and necessary.</p>	Society had become less divided by class due to WWI & WWII. Priestley highlights how society shouldn’t return to the ways of 1912 when upper class treatment of the working class was cruel.
Gender	Male: Gerald, Eric, Mr Birling Female: Eva, Sheila, Mrs Birling Behaviour of male and female characters used to comment on the damage patriarchal society can cause.	<p>‘clothes... not only something to make ‘em look prettier, but a sort of sign or token of their self-respect.’ Act 1</p> <p>Birling has stereotypical view of women. Believes attractiveness is crucial for women’s self-respect. Speaks for all women suggesting he believes they are all the same.</p>	<p>‘She was the right type for it, just as I was the wrong type.’ Act 1</p> <p>Sheila is superficial & concerned with her appearance, as a result of Edwardian expectation of women to appear pretty. Her insecurity, due to this upbringing, leads her to question her self-worth and results in her causing damage to Eva.</p>	<p>‘a notorious womaniser’ Act 2</p> <p>Gerald about Alderman Meggarty, who sexually assaults Eva Smith in the Palace Bar. ‘notorious’ - suggests he is well known for this but never challenged, due to his status. Shows how upper class men exploit working class women for sex.</p>	<p>‘my daughter, a young, unmarried girl, is being dragged into this’ Act 2</p> <p>Mr Birling believes Sheila, as an unmarried girl should be kept innocent of knowledge of working-class life. Suggests young women were sheltered and treated as children. This ignorance contributes to Sheila’s harmful behaviour towards Eva.</p>	Priestley depicts women as vulnerable in patriarchal society – Eva is unfairly used for labour & sex due to her gender. Wealthy women are sheltered & uninformed which leads them to unknowingly harm others.
Age	Young: Sheila, Eric Old: Mrs & Mr Birling, Gerald is young but aligns with older characters at end, due to his power & status. Suggests power/class outranks age in determining behaviour.	<p>‘But these people aren’t cheap labour, they’re people’ Act 1</p> <p>Sheila begins to challenge the values and views of her parents. The younger generation can show the empathy needed to create a better, more moral society.</p>	<p>‘Please don’t contradict me like that’ Act 2</p> <p>Mrs Birling allows her husband to take the lead but still shows dominance over the young. Young people were expected to respect and obey their elders.</p>	<p>‘You’re beginning to pretend now that nothing’s really happened at all. And I can’t see it like that.’ Act 3</p> <p>Eric to his parents at end. ‘Pretend’ implies he sees them as children refusing to face the truth. ‘Can’t’ shows that even if he wanted to do the same, it is impossible for him. Reflects growing distance between the generations.</p>	<p>‘You’re ready to go on in the same old way... it frightens me the way you talk’ Act 3</p> <p>Sheila to Mr Birling reflects the change and hope the children represent. The ‘old ways’ now ‘frighten’ younger people who have a social conscience and they are prepared to challenge this behaviour</p>	Priestley presents the change in Sheila and Eric to reflect how society had become less classist due to WWII, and that the poor social conscience and awareness of people in 1912 had been replaced by hope for a better post-war society.