English Revision

An Inspector Calls – Key Quotes

Sheila – Act 1

“Is it the one you wanted me to have?”

A ring was viewed as a **symbol of ownership** – when a woman got a ring, someone new (instead of her father) owned her. Shows society at the time – women being ‘owned’ and Gerald showing off his social status with an expensive ring.

“So I’m really responsible”

Sheila is the first to accept responsibility. Although she worries about how the experience affects her, she accepts that she played a part in Eva’s suicide. Contrasts with Mr Birling’s denial.

“Why – you fool – he knows!”

Sheila understands that they can’t hide anything from the inspector, and that he knows how they are involved. He is asking questions to make themselves realise they were involved.

Sheila – Act 2

“You and I aren’t the same people who sat down to dinner here”

Sheila shows emotional maturity and breaks her engagement because she realises that she doesn’t really know Gerald. Although she was harsh towards him earlier, she does not hate him. However, she is not worried about losing a business connection (unlike her father).

“We must really stop these silly pretences”

Sheila becomes the mature voice of reason – she realises that the Inspector already knows that everyone in the family is involved. She just tries to get her family to play along and tell the truth. Priestly is telling the upper-class that they should be caring more about the consequences of their actions, and not their social appearances.

Sheila – Act 3

“Everything that we said had happened really happened”

Moral awakening for Sheila. Shows that she has learnt a valuable lesson from this experience and accepts the blame and responsibility. She knows that her actions do have consequences for others.

“You don’t seem to have learnt anything”

Sheila is annoyed that her parents (Mr and Mrs Birling) have not learnt anything about themselves, or how they should live their lives. Instead, they continue to dodge responsibility for Eva’s death, and push the blame onto others.

Mr Birling – Act 1

“I can’t accept any responsibility”

Mr Birling refuses to accept his responsibility in Eva’s death – He thinks **his involvement is too small, and her misfortune was her fault.**

Mr Birling shows the upper-class attitude (at the time) of denial – not accepting blame and refusing to acknowledge that their actions affected the lower class.

“**A man has to make his own way** – has to look after himself – and his family too”

Author (Priestly) uses Mr Birling to demonstrate the selfish capitalist views – before the Inspector arrives, Mr B is trying to educate Gerald and Eric to only think about themselves. Mr Birling believes that people can only be responsible for themselves.

Mrs Birling – Act 1

“When you’re married, you’ll realise that men…”

Mrs Birling highlights the gender inequality at the time – women generally had much less power in society, and even upper-class women had to live by the rules of men. Mrs Birling highlights this by teaching her daughter about the expectations for women.

“Arthur, you’re not supposed to say such things”

Mrs Birling has strong views on appropriate conversations topics, both at the dinner table and with company. But although she is a higher social class, she still has very little influence over him, because he is the male.

Mr Birling is the head of the family, and in charge of the household. The rules of a patriarchal (male-ruled) society were much more important than the rules of social society.

Mrs Birling – Act 2

“She only had herself to blame”

Mrs Birling says many times that Eva Smith was to blame for her own fate, and later goes on to blame the father of Eva’s child. Mrs Birling never accepts any responsibility or think that her actions may have consequences for other people.

She only cares about her own family, how they look to others, and keeping/improving their social standing.

“You, of course, know that my husband was Lord Mayor only two years ago…”

Highlighting the influence of the upper-class – most people would let the Birlings be treated differently. Priestly uses their attitudes to show the corruption of a society that lets social classes be treated differently.

Inspector Goole – Act 2

“Public men, Mr Birling, have their responsibilities, as well as their privileges.”

This is a message to the wider British society in 1945 (when the play was written). Although upper-class people are free to enjoy the benefits of their lifestyles, they must also be responsible members of society, and care about the lower-class too.

Inspector Goole – Act 3

“Each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it.”

The Inspector speaks plainly to the Birlings. He wants them to have learnt something by the end of this. He urges them to remember what they have done – because he wants them to rethink their actions in the future, and to think about how their words and actions can affect others.

“We are members of one body. We are responsible for one another”

Inspector Goole is the socialist conscience (sense of wrong and right) in the play. He expresses that everyone is equally important, and that everyone should look after each other. This contrasts with Mr Birlings statement in Act 1.