English Revision

An Inspector Calls – Themes

Social Responsibility

Sheila

“And if I could help her now, I would”

Sheila has learnt to take responsibility for her actions and to tell the truth. This contrast with what she said before:

“It didn’t seem to be anything terrible at the time”

The contrast shows her moral awakening during the play, she fights her family’s capitalist views.

The Inspector

Preistly uses the inspector to show the values of socialism – such as quality and community. He proposes that people should aim to fulfil these values in their actions. The Inspector teaches the family to split responsibility between them – “you’re **partly** to blame, just as **your father is**”. He holds her responsible for her role in Eva’s death without pardoning Mr Birling. This introduces the idea of shared responsibility.

Mrs Birling

Even after hearing about Eva’s suicide, she is still ignorant, claiming that “I did my duty… I’ve done nothing wrong”, despite the fact that here ‘duty’ was to give Eva help, and not judge her.

Priestly suggests the Mrs Birling considers her duty to judge the monetary worth of women’s cases and stop the working class telling “packs of lies”.

Mr Birling

Mr Birling represents an upper-class capitalist. He only cares about himself and puts himself first, even when that means harming others. He is oblivious to what the lower-class go through, and never accepts responsibility, no matter what.

He tells the inspector “It is my duty to keep labour costs down” showing that his feels a duty to his business, but not his society. Priestly shows that neglect and inhumanity are considered to be a normal part of business.

Age (Young vs Old)

Social Class

Family and Control