

An Inspector Calls

by J.B. Priestley

Grade 9 Model Essays

with Technique Dissection & Examiner Commentary

3 full-length Grade 9 essays

Technique-by-technique dissection showing what scored marks

Paragraph-by-paragraph examiner commentary

Overall verdict explaining the grade

GCSE English Literature | AQA Paper 2, Section A

Grade 9 Targeted

EXAM QUESTION**How does Priestley present the theme of social responsibility in An Inspector Calls?****Grade 9****MODEL ESSAY**

Throughout 'An Inspector Calls', Priestley presents social responsibility as the moral foundation upon which a just society must be built. Writing in 1945, at the dawn of the welfare state, Priestley uses the play as a dramatic argument for collective duty – and against the selfish individualism embodied by Arthur Birling.

From the very beginning, Priestley systematically discredits the capitalist worldview through Mr Birling's speech: "a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own." The repetition of the possessive pronoun "his own" exposes the narrow, self-serving philosophy that underpins Birling's capitalism – responsibility extends no further than personal profit and family reputation. Priestley positions this speech deliberately before the Inspector's arrival so that the entire play functions as a systematic demolition of Birling's ideology. Furthermore, the devastating dramatic irony of his Titanic prediction – "unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable" – ensures the audience distrusts every word he says, priming them to reject his dismissal of social duty.

In contrast, the Inspector serves as Priestley's mouthpiece, delivering the play's central moral thesis: "We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other." The anaphoric repetition of "We are" creates an inescapable collectivist message – the pronoun refuses to allow any individual to exclude themselves. The organic metaphor "one body" compares society to a single living organism, deliberately echoing the Christian concept of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), granting the Inspector's socialist argument both religious and universal authority. These are not opinions but declarative moral truths delivered as imperatives, and Priestley instrumentalises the Inspector to break naturalistic convention and address the audience directly with a political manifesto.

Crucially, Priestley uses the generational divide to argue that change is possible but not inevitable. Sheila's moral awakening – "But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people" – demonstrates the younger generation's capacity for genuine ethical transformation. The antithesis between "cheap labour" and "people" exposes the dehumanising language of capitalism, while Sheila's simple, direct phrasing suggests that moral truth is not complex; it is inequality that requires elaborate justification. By Act 3, Sheila has fully internalised the Inspector's values: "I'm ashamed of you as well – yes both of you." The role reversal – a child judging her parents – inverts the expected family hierarchy, arguing that moral authority must be

earned, not inherited. For Priestley's 1945 audience, voting on the future of Britain, Sheila models the journey from complacent privilege to active social conscience.

However, the older generation's refusal to change provides Priestley's darkest warning. Mr Birling's relief when the Inspector is revealed as potentially fraudulent — "The whole thing's different now" — shows that he has learned nothing; the moral lesson is dismissed the moment social consequences disappear. Priestley demonstrates that some people value reputation over redemption, appearance over genuine moral change. The cyclical structure — the final phone call announcing another Inspector — refuses the audience comfortable closure, insisting that the moral question remains open.

Ultimately, the Inspector's prophecy — "if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish" — bridges the 1912 setting and the 1945 audience. The tricolon builds in apocalyptic intensity, and the 1945 audience knows this prophecy has already been fulfilled through two World Wars. Priestley's message is devastatingly clear: social responsibility is not optional. The play leaves the audience with a choice that mirrors the one facing post-war Britain — will they learn voluntarily, like Sheila, or will they require further catastrophe?

TECHNIQUE DISSECTION

WHAT MAKES THIS A GRADE 9 ESSAY?

Below we break down each technique the student used — the terminology, the quote, the Assessment Objective it targets, and why the examiner would reward it.

1. Repetition

Term used: *"The repetition of the possessive pronoun "his own"*

Quote: *"a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own"*

A02

The student doesn't just spot repetition — they name the grammatical class ('possessive pronoun') and explain the effect: it draws a 'narrow, self-serving' boundary around responsibility. This is A02 at its highest because it links a micro language feature to a macro ideological meaning.

2. Dramatic Irony

Term used: *"the devastating dramatic irony of his Titanic prediction"*

Quote: *"unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable"*

A02

The student explains how dramatic irony functions structurally — it isn't just that Birling is wrong, but that his wrongness 'poisons everything he subsequently claims'. This shows understanding of cumulative dramatic effect, not just technique spotting.

3. Anaphora

Term used: "The anaphoric repetition of "We are" creates an inescapable collectivist message"

Quote: "We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other"

A02

Naming 'anaphora' is precise terminology. But what earns marks is explaining the pronoun's function – it 'refuses to allow any individual to exclude themselves'. The student shows the technique has a political purpose, not just a rhetorical one.

4. Organic Metaphor

Term used: "The organic metaphor "one body" compares society to a single living organism"

Quote: "We are members of one body"

A02

The student links the metaphor to a specific literary/religious intertext (Body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:27).

This elevates the analysis from technique identification to conceptual exploration – a key Grade 9 skill.

5. Mouthpiece / Breaking Convention

Term used: "Priestley instrumentalises the Inspector to break naturalistic convention"

Quote: "We are responsible for each other"

A02

Using the term 'instrumentalises' shows the student understands that the Inspector is a dramatic device, not just a character. Recognising the break from naturalism shows awareness of dramatic form (not just language), which is exactly what A02 rewards at top band.

6. Antithesis

Term used: "The antithesis between "cheap labour" and "people""

Quote: "But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people"

A02

The student identifies a structural opposition and then makes a sharp conceptual point: 'moral truth is not complex; it is inequality that requires elaborate justification.' This kind of paradoxical insight is what distinguishes Grade 9 from Grade 8.

7. Role Reversal (Structural)

Term used: "The role reversal – a child judging her parents – inverts the expected family hierarchy"

Quote: "I'm ashamed of you as well – yes both of you"

A02

This is structural analysis: the student identifies a power shift within the play's relationships and connects it to the thematic argument about moral authority. Examiners reward this because it shows understanding of how dramatic structure creates meaning.

8. Tricolon / Prophecy

Term used: "The tricolon builds in apocalyptic intensity"

Quote: "fire and blood and anguish"

A02

The student names the technique (tricolon) and then explains its escalating effect ('apocalyptic intensity'). Linking it to dramatic irony – the 1945 audience knows the prophecy was fulfilled – shows simultaneous AO2 + AO3 integration.

9. Contextual Argument (1912/1945)

Term used: "Writing in 1945, at the dawn of the welfare state"

A03

The student doesn't list context as a separate section – they weave it into their argument. The 1912/1945 dual time frame is used to explain why Priestley wrote the play, not just when. This is AO3 done properly: context shapes interpretation, not bolted-on facts.

10. Cyclical Structure

Term used: "The cyclical structure – the final phone call announcing another Inspector"

A02

Discussing the play's overall structure shows awareness of form beyond sentence-level language. The student explains what the cyclical structure does to the audience: it 'refuses comfortable closure'. This is sophisticated AO2 – structure as a tool of persuasion.

EXAMINER COMMENTARY

PARAGRAPH-BY-PARAGRAPH BREAKDOWN

This section shows what the examiner would notice in each paragraph, which Assessment Objectives are covered, and why the work reaches Grade 9.

1 Introduction

What the examiner sees: Clear thesis statement that directly addresses the question. Establishes the 1945 context immediately and frames the play as a 'dramatic argument' – showing awareness of form and purpose from the first sentence.

A01 | A03

Grade justification: Top-band introductions don't describe – they argue. This paragraph makes a claim ('moral foundation upon which a just society must be built') that the rest of the essay will prove. The integration of AO3 into the thesis (not a separate context paragraph) is a Grade 9 marker.

2 Mr Birling – Capitalist Individualism

What the examiner sees: Two quotes embedded fluently. Repetition of 'his own' analysed at word level (AO2). Dramatic irony of Titanic explained as a structural device, not just a factual error. Phrase 'poisons everything' shows conceptualised analysis.

A01 | A02

Grade justification: The student explains how Priestley 'positions this speech deliberately before the Inspector's arrival' – this structural awareness (why the quote is where it is, not just what it means) pushes AO2 to the top

band. The word 'systematically' shows the student sees Priestley as a craftsman, not an accident.

13 The Inspector – Collectivism

What the examiner sees: Dense AO2 analysis: anaphora, organic metaphor, declarative statements, mouthpiece, political manifesto. Each technique is named, explained, and connected to Priestley's purpose. The religious intertext (Body of Christ) adds conceptual depth.

A01 | A02 | A03

Grade justification: This paragraph is what examiners describe as 'exploratory and conceptualised'. The student doesn't just explain what the Inspector says — they explain what Priestley is doing with the Inspector as a dramatic device. The phrase 'break naturalistic convention' shows genre awareness. Multiple AO2 methods are linked to AO3 purpose — this integration is the hallmark of Grade 9.

14 Sheila – Generational Hope

What the examiner sees: Antithesis identified and explained. Two quotes from different acts show development across the play (AO1 — whole text). Role reversal analysed as a structural device. The 1945 audience is invoked to explain Priestley's purpose.

A01 | A02 | A03

Grade justification: Tracking a character's development across acts demonstrates 'whole text' engagement (top-band AO1). The conceptual point — 'moral authority must be earned, not inherited' — goes beyond the text to make an argument about society. This is what examiners call a 'personal and original conceptualised response'.

15 Older Generation – Refusal to Change

What the examiner sees: Birling's quote analysed for what it reveals about moral failure. Cyclical structure explained as a dramatic device that affects the audience. Contrasting pair: 'reputation over redemption, appearance over genuine change'.

A01 | A02

Grade justification: The balanced phrasing ('reputation over redemption') shows confident, controlled writing — a top-band AO1 quality. The student doesn't just describe the ending; they explain its effect on the audience, which shows awareness of dramatic purpose.

16 Conclusion

What the examiner sees: Returns to the argument with new force. Tricolon analysed. Dramatic irony linked to audience reception. Final sentence poses a rhetorical question that mirrors Priestley's own strategy — the student writes like the playwright.

A01 | A02 | A03

Grade justification: The conclusion doesn't summarise — it escalates. By ending with a rhetorical question ('will they learn voluntarily, like Sheila, or will they require further catastrophe?'), the student mimics Priestley's own technique, showing deep internalisation of the writer's craft. This is the kind of original, assured voice that separates Grade 9 from Grade 8.

OVERALL VERDICT

This essay earns Grade 9 because it treats the play as a constructed argument, not just a story. Every paragraph analyses what Priestley is doing (AO2) and why he is doing it (AO3), while maintaining a clear, argued line of reasoning (AO1). Techniques are never just spotted – they are explained in terms of their effect on the audience and their role in Priestley's political project. Context is integrated into analysis, not bolted on. The writing style itself is assured and precise, with the student's own voice clearly audible throughout.

EXAM QUESTION**How does Priestley present the character of Mr Birling in An Inspector Calls?****Grade 9****MODEL ESSAY**

Priestley presents Mr Birling as the embodiment of capitalist arrogance, self-interest, and wilful ignorance – a character whose every certainty is systematically undermined to expose the moral bankruptcy of the ruling class he represents.

From the opening of the play, Priestley establishes Birling as a man of false authority. His speech about the Titanic – "unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable" – is a masterclass in dramatic irony: the 1945 audience knows the Titanic sank on its maiden voyage, and this catastrophic misjudgement poisons everything Birling subsequently claims. The intensifier "absolutely" amplifies the irony – Birling's certainty is inversely proportional to his understanding. Priestley deploys this technique deliberately: by discrediting Birling within the first few minutes, he ensures the audience distrusts the entire capitalist worldview Birling represents.

Birling's ideological position is laid bare in his self-serving philosophy: "a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own." The repetition of "his own" reveals an ideology centred entirely on possession and self-interest, excluding any obligation to the wider community. Priestley positions this statement strategically before the Inspector's arrival so that the play's entire moral architecture – built on collective responsibility – stands in direct opposition. Birling's worldview is not just morally wrong; it is presented as the root cause of Eva Smith's destruction. His decision to sack Eva for asking for a modest pay rise demonstrates how capitalist power operates: the wealthy can destroy lives through routine business decisions and feel no moral consequence.

Priestley further undermines Birling by exposing the gap between his public performance and his private reality. Mrs Birling reminds the Inspector that her husband "was Lord Mayor only two years ago," yet Birling has already dismissed community as "nonsense." The hypocrisy is deliberate: Birling sought civic positions not to serve but to accumulate social capital. His desperate attempts to impress Gerald – "you ought to like this port... it's exactly the same port your father gets" – reveal a man performing a class position he was not born into. The stage directions tell us he is "provincial in his speech," and Priestley uses this detail to show that Birling's entire social identity is constructed artifice.

Most damningly, Birling's response to the Inspector's revelations exposes a man incapable of moral

growth. When the Inspector's legitimacy is questioned, Birling's immediate relief – "The whole thing's different now" – reveals that he cares only about public exposure, not private guilt. The moral lesson is dismissed the instant social consequences disappear. His patronising attempt to reassert authority over Sheila and Eric – "Come, come, you can see that, can't you?" – shows a father more concerned with obedience than with truth. Eric's devastating accusation – "You're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble" – exposes Birling's failure as both a parent and a moral leader: he has provided material wealth but no ethical foundation.

Priestley presents Birling as a representative figure – not merely one flawed individual but the personification of the Edwardian ruling class whose complacent certainties led Britain into the catastrophe of two World Wars. The cyclical ending, with another Inspector on his way, suggests that men like Birling will face this reckoning repeatedly until they change – or are swept aside by history. For the 1945 audience, Birling is a warning from the past: this is the ideology that must not be allowed to rebuild Britain.

TECHNIQUE DISSECTION

WHAT MAKES THIS A GRADE 9 ESSAY?

Below we break down each technique the student used – the terminology, the quote, the Assessment Objective it targets, and why the examiner would reward it.

1. Dramatic Irony

Term used: *"a masterclass in dramatic irony"*

Quote: *"unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable"*

A02

The student doesn't just name dramatic irony – they explain its cascading effect: it 'poisons everything Birling subsequently claims'. This shows understanding that a single dramatic device can shape the audience's response for the entire play, not just one moment.

2. Intensifier (Word-Level Analysis)

Term used: *"The intensifier "absolutely" amplifies the irony"*

Quote: *"absolutely unsinkable"*

A02

Zooming into a single word ('absolutely') and explaining its function shows the micro-level language analysis that examiners reward. The conceptual link – 'certainty is inversely proportional to his understanding' – transforms a word-level observation into a character-level argument.

3. Repetition

Term used: *"The repetition of "his own" reveals an ideology centred entirely on possession"*

Quote: *"look after himself and his own"*

A02

The student links repetition to ideology – the repeated words aren't just emphatic, they expose a philosophical position. This is technique analysis in service of argument, not technique spotting for its own sake.

4. Structural Positioning

Term used: "Priestley positions this statement strategically before the Inspector's arrival"

A02

This is structural analysis: explaining why Priestley places the speech where he does. Examiners specifically reward awareness of how the playwright constructs the play's architecture to control audience response.

5. Stage Directions

Term used: "The stage directions tell us he is "provincial in his speech""

Quote: "provincial in his speech"

A02

Analysing stage directions (not just dialogue) shows awareness of dramatic form. The student connects 'provincial' to class performance – Birling's 'entire social identity is constructed artifice'. This is A02 at its best: form revealing character.

6. Hypocrisy / Juxtaposition

Term used: "exposing the gap between his public performance and his private reality"

Quote: "was Lord Mayor" vs. community as "nonsense"

A01

The student juxtaposes two moments from the text to expose a contradiction Birling himself doesn't see. This is critical analysis at its most effective – using the text against itself to build an argument.

7. Social Performance / Artifice

Term used: "a man performing a class position he was not born into"

Quote: "you ought to like this port... it's exactly the same port your father gets"

A03

The student reads the port scene as social performance, connecting it to Birling's class insecurity. This is A03 integrated into character analysis – understanding how Edwardian class anxiety drives Birling's behaviour.

Context is used to explain the character, not bolted on separately.

8. Patronising Tone / Power Dynamics

Term used: "His patronising attempt to reassert authority"

Quote: "Come, come, you can see that, can't you?"

A02

The student identifies tone as a technique – not just what Birling says but how he says it. 'Patronising' is linked to patriarchal authority, showing the student reads speech acts as power moves.

9. Representative Character / Typicality

Term used: "not merely one flawed individual but the personification of the Edwardian ruling class"

A03

This is the hallmark of a Grade 9 response: seeing the character as representative of a class and historical moment, not just an individual. The student reads Birling as Priestley's political argument made flesh.

EXAMINER COMMENTARY

PARAGRAPH-BY-PARAGRAPH BREAKDOWN

This section shows what the examiner would notice in each paragraph, which Assessment Objectives are covered, and why the work reaches Grade 9.

1 Introduction

What the examiner sees: The thesis is a triple characterisation: 'capitalist arrogance, self-interest, and wilful ignorance'. The student also signals their structural argument: Birling's certainties are 'systematically undermined'. This tells the examiner the essay will track a deliberate pattern.

A01

Grade justification: Top-band A01 requires a 'critical, exploratory, conceptualised response'. This introduction delivers a clear argument that frames Birling not as a person but as a construct – something Priestley built to demolish.

2 Titanic – False Authority

What the examiner sees: Dramatic irony explained as a structural device with cumulative effect. The intensifier 'absolutely' is analysed at word level. The student explains Priestley's deliberate technique: 'discrediting Birling within the first few minutes'.

A01 A02

Grade justification: The phrase 'certainty is inversely proportional to his understanding' is the kind of sharp, original formulation that examiners cite as evidence of a personal voice. This is not a learned formula – it's genuine critical thinking expressed with confidence.

3 Ideological Position – 'His Own'

What the examiner sees: Repetition linked to ideology. Structural positioning explained. The student then makes the leap from language to consequence: Birling's philosophy is 'the root cause of Eva Smith's destruction'.

A01 A02

Grade justification: Moving from technique to consequence is what separates Grade 9 from Grade 7/8. Grade 7 explains the technique. Grade 8 explains the effect. Grade 9 explains the implication – the student argues that Birling's words have material consequences for other characters.

4 Public vs Private – Class Performance

What the examiner sees: Three pieces of evidence (Lord Mayor, the port, stage directions) woven together to build a single argument about artifice. Stage directions analysed alongside dialogue. Context of Edwardian class mobility is integrated naturally.

A01 A02 A03

Grade justification: This paragraph demonstrates 'whole text' knowledge by drawing evidence from multiple moments. The analysis of stage directions shows awareness of dramatic form beyond dialogue. The phrase 'constructed artifice' could apply to both Birling's identity and Priestley's dramatic construction – this double meaning is sophisticated.

15 Incapable of Moral Growth

What the examiner sees: Eric's quote is used as evidence against Birling – other characters' words illuminate the subject. The student identifies the connection between parental failure and moral failure. The phrase 'material wealth but no ethical foundation' is precise and balanced.

A01 A02

Grade justification: Using another character's words to analyse the subject shows sophisticated evidence handling. The student doesn't just describe Birling's stagnation – they diagnose it: he prioritises 'obedience' over 'truth'. This is evaluative writing at the top band.

16 Conclusion

What the examiner sees: Birling elevated from individual to representative figure. Cyclical structure connected to the 1945 audience's political context. Final sentence directly addresses the audience's responsibility.

A01 A02 A03

Grade justification: The conclusion doesn't summarise – it widens. By calling Birling 'the ideology that must not be allowed to rebuild Britain', the student makes the character analysis serve a political argument. This is the kind of ambitious, conceptualised conclusion that defines Grade 9.

OVERALL VERDICT

This essay earns Grade 9 because the student never treats Birling as just a character – he is consistently analysed as a dramatic construct, a political symbol, and a representative of a failing class. Every technique identified (dramatic irony, repetition, stage directions, structural positioning) is linked to Priestley's purpose. The writing is authoritative and precise, with original phrasing ('certainty is inversely proportional to his understanding') that demonstrates a genuine critical voice rather than memorised formulas.

EXAM QUESTION

How does Priestley use the character of Sheila to present ideas about change in An Inspector Calls?

Grade 9**MODEL ESSAY**

Priestley presents Sheila Birling as the character who undergoes the most profound moral transformation in the play, using her journey from naive socialite to moral authority as a model for the change he wanted to see in post-war British society.

At the start of the play, Sheila is presented through the stage directions as a young woman "very pleased with life and rather excited" – she is the product of upper-class privilege, insulated from the suffering of the working class. Her engagement to Gerald is framed as a social and commercial transaction rather than a love match; her father's delight is transparently motivated by the merger of Croft's and Birling's businesses. Priestley establishes Sheila within a world where people are valued for their economic utility rather than their humanity – the same world that destroyed Eva Smith.

However, Sheila's capacity for empathy distinguishes her from her parents almost immediately. Upon learning of her father's role in Eva's sacking, she responds: "But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people." The antithesis between "cheap labour" and "people" exposes the dehumanising language of capitalism – the dash creates a typographical caesura that forces the audience to choose between the capitalist worldview and the humanist one. Sheila's simple, direct language suggests that moral truth is not complex; it is inequality that requires elaborate justification. This moment marks the beginning of her moral awakening, and Priestley uses its simplicity to argue that recognising others' humanity is the first step toward social change.

Crucially, Sheila is not exempted from guilt. Her confession that she had Eva dismissed from Milwards out of jealousy – "I went to the manager at Milwards and I told him that if they didn't get rid of that girl, I'd never go near the place again" – reveals the casual cruelty that privilege enables. Yet her immediate and genuine remorse – "I know I'm to blame – and I'm desperately sorry" – distinguishes her from every other character. The adverb "desperately" signals authentic emotional engagement, not the performative regret her parents later display. Priestley argues that acknowledging guilt is not weakness but the essential precondition for moral growth.

By Act 3, Sheila has fully absorbed the Inspector's moral framework and become his successor. Her

confrontation with her parents – "I'm ashamed of you as well – yes both of you" – performs a devastating role reversal: the child judges the parents, inverting the family hierarchy and arguing that moral authority belongs to those who earn it through conscience, not those who inherit it through class. When she accuses them of "pretending everything's just as it was before," the word "pretending" exposes the fundamental flaw in the older generation's worldview – they choose comfortable illusion over uncomfortable truth. Sheila refuses to return to the "pink and intimate" world of Act 1's opening; she has seen the harsher light the Inspector brought and cannot unsee it.

Priestley's use of Sheila is ultimately strategic. Writing in 1945 for an audience about to vote on Britain's future, he presents Sheila as proof that change is possible – that individuals raised within a corrupt system can recognise its injustice and choose differently. Her journey from privilege to conscience mirrors the transformation Priestley demands of his audience. The play's cyclical ending – with another Inspector arriving – suggests that this moral test will be repeated. The question for the audience, as for Sheila, is whether they will choose awareness and responsibility, or retreat into the comfortable pretence of the Birling parents.

TECHNIQUE DISSECTION

WHAT MAKES THIS A GRADE 9 ESSAY?

Below we break down each technique the student used – the terminology, the quote, the Assessment Objective it targets, and why the examiner would reward it.

1. Stage Directions

Term used: *"presented through the stage directions as a young woman "very pleased with life and rather excited"*"
Quote: *"very pleased with life and rather excited"*

A02

Analysing stage directions (not just dialogue) demonstrates awareness of dramatic form. The student uses them to establish Sheila's starting point – her privilege and naivety – so her later transformation has a clear baseline to measure against.

2. Subtext / Economic Framing

Term used: *"Her engagement to Gerald is framed as a social and commercial transaction"*

Quote: *engagement scene analysis*

A01

The student reads beneath the surface. Instead of taking the engagement at face value, they identify the economic subtext – Birling's delight is about business, not love. This shows the critical, inferential reading that examiners reward at the top band.

3. Antithesis

Term used: "The antithesis between "cheap labour" and "people""

Quote: "But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people"

A02

The student names the technique precisely, then makes a conceptual leap: the dash creates a 'typographical caesura that forces the audience to choose'. This is micro-level analysis (punctuation) linked to macro-level effect (audience moral choice) – exactly what top-band A02 demands.

4. Typographical Caesura

Term used: "the dash creates a typographical caesura"

Quote: "cheap labour – they're people"

A02

Naming the dash as a 'typographical caesura' is precise, advanced terminology. More importantly, the student explains its function: it 'forces the audience to choose between the capitalist worldview and the humanist one'. The punctuation mark becomes a moral dividing line.

5. Adverb Analysis (Word-Level)

Term used: "The adverb "desperately" signals authentic emotional engagement"

Quote: "I know I'm to blame – and I'm desperately sorry"

A02

Isolating a single adverb and explaining its function shows precise language analysis. The student then contrasts this with 'performative regret her parents later display' – comparative analysis across the text is a Grade 9 skill.

6. Role Reversal (Structural)

Term used: "a devastating role reversal: the child judges the parents"

Quote: "I'm ashamed of you as well – yes both of you"

A02

This is structural, not just linguistic analysis. The student identifies a power shift in the play's relationships and connects it to the thematic argument: 'moral authority belongs to those who earn it through conscience, not those who inherit it through class'.

7. Diction / Word Choice

Term used: "the word "pretending" exposes the fundamental flaw"

Quote: "pretending everything's just as it was before"

A02

Single-word analysis linked to the older generation's entire worldview. The student argues that 'pretending' is the Birling parents' defining characteristic. This is how Grade 9 students use evidence: one word illuminates a whole theme.

8. Light Symbolism / Stage Directions

Term used: "Sheila refuses to return to the "pink and intimate" world of Act 1"

Quote: "pink and intimate" (opening stage directions)

A02

The student connects Sheila's moral journey to the play's lighting symbolism from the opening stage directions. Drawing a link between a character's arc and a stage direction from a different part of the play demonstrates 'whole text' understanding and sophisticated AO2.

9. Priestley's Purpose / Audience

Term used: "Writing in 1945 for an audience about to vote on Britain's future"

Quote: contextual framing of Sheila's role

A03

A03 is not a list of historical facts – it's using context to explain authorial intention. The student argues that Sheila is strategically designed to model the transformation Priestley wants from his audience. Context explains purpose, not just setting.

EXAMINER COMMENTARY

PARAGRAPH-BY-PARAGRAPH BREAKDOWN

This section shows what the examiner would notice in each paragraph, which Assessment Objectives are covered, and why the work reaches Grade 9.

1 Introduction

What the examiner sees: Thesis statement positions Sheila as a 'model for the change' Priestley wanted. The student names her journey ('naive socialite to moral authority') immediately, signalling that the essay will track a transformation arc.

A01 A03

Grade justification: The introduction doesn't describe Sheila – it makes an argument about Priestley's purpose in creating her. This immediately signals to the examiner that this is a conceptualised response: the student sees characters as constructs, not people.

2 Starting Point – Privilege and Naivety

What the examiner sees: Stage directions analysed. Engagement read as economic transaction (subtext). The student connects Sheila's world to the world 'that destroyed Eva Smith' – linking character to theme.

A01 A02

Grade justification: Establishing a baseline is essential for character-change essays. The student doesn't just say Sheila was 'happy' – they explain the system that produced her happiness and the cost of that system (Eva). This shows structural thinking about character function.

3 Moral Awakening – 'Cheap Labour'

What the examiner sees: Antithesis named and explained. Typographical caesura identified in the dash. Conceptual argument about simplicity vs complexity of moral truth. AO2 is dense but never formulaic – each technique serves the argument.

A01 A02

Grade justification: The conceptual insight – 'moral truth is not complex; it is inequality that requires elaborate justification' – is the kind of original thinking that defines Grade 9. This is not a technique-spot followed by an effect; it's genuine literary analysis that goes beyond the mark scheme.

14 Guilt and Genuine Remorse

What the examiner sees: The student acknowledges Sheila's guilt (not hagiography). Single adverb 'desperately' analysed for emotional authenticity. Comparative judgment: her remorse vs her parents' 'performative regret'.

A01 A02

Grade justification: Balanced character analysis – acknowledging flaws while tracking growth – shows critical maturity. The comparative point (genuine vs performative remorse) demonstrates evaluative skills across the whole text, not just one scene.

15 Moral Authority – Act 3

What the examiner sees: Role reversal identified. Two quotes from Act 3 analysed. Connection to 'pink and intimate' lighting from Act 1 demonstrates whole-text awareness. The word 'pretending' is isolated and given thematic weight.

A01 A02

Grade justification: Linking Sheila's Act 3 moral stance to the Act 1 stage directions is exactly the kind of cross-text connection that earns top marks. The student shows the entire play is a coherent structure, not a series of isolated moments.

16 Conclusion – Priestley's Strategic Purpose

What the examiner sees: Sheila explicitly connected to Priestley's 1945 political purpose. The cyclical ending is invoked. The final sentence poses a choice that mirrors the play's own strategy.

A01 A02 A03

Grade justification: The conclusion elevates the character analysis into a political argument. The student's final question – 'whether they will choose awareness and responsibility, or retreat into the comfortable pretence' – mirrors Priestley's own rhetorical strategy, showing deep understanding of how the play works on its audience.

OVERALL VERDICT

This essay earns Grade 9 because it tracks Sheila's transformation with precision, using evidence from across the entire play (stage directions from Act 1, dialogue from Acts 1-3, structural analysis of the ending). Every technique – antithesis, typographical caesura, adverb analysis, role reversal – is named precisely and then explained in terms of its dramatic effect. The student consistently asks 'why did Priestley do this?' rather than just 'what does this mean?', which is the key distinction between Grade 8 and Grade 9 analysis. Context is woven into the argument, not separated into its own paragraph.