How does Priestley explore the importance of social class in An Inspector Calls?

Throughout the play, Priestley uses the presence of social class to reveal difference between the characters. Priestley uses the segregation of social classes to portray how the different

social classes think of each other. By having characters from different classes, this allows Priestley to reinforce that people from lower classes were stereotyped and experienced prejudice. It also reveals how higher classes held too much authority and the effect that inflicted on Edwardian society.

Eva Smith is shown to appeal to the charity Mrs Birling works at. She didn’t have a good impression of Eva Smith because she “used my authority to have her dismissed”. Straight away, the audience understand how the power higher classes have can affect society. The line is contextually significant because it reveals how people with a higher class can control the lives of working-class people. This was strongly prominent in Edwardian England. Priestley then reinforces this when Mrs Birling says, “Girls of that class”. This quote is important because it reveals more about the prejudice of lower classes in that era. It is now revealed that higher classes are derogatory towards others. This means Mrs Birling thinks she is superior to the “girls of that class” because of her social class. The line also shows how she thinks of them as all the same, stereotyping them for being in a certain position, and classing them as the same people.

In Edwardian England, marriage was prominent in the context of social class. Marriage meant that families could form to provide more money, status and land. People would only marry people of the same class, or somebody with a lot of money. Mrs Birling is Mr Birling’s social superior, meaning that she has a higher class than him. The marriage only happened because Mr Birling owns a business and makes a lot of money. Mr Birling doesn’t like that Mrs Birling has a higher class than him, because it makes him insecure. When they were eating dinner Mr Birling told Edna to “tell cook from me” that the food was good. Mrs Birling has to interfere, telling him “don’t say such things”. This is significant in that time because it was informal to compliment people of a lower class, such as the cook.

Sheila is planning to marry Gerald, whom is from a higher class. This makes the family more socially superior, and Mr Birling appeals to this. He made a speech about the marriage of Sheila and Gerald. At the end of the speech, he said “for lower costs and higher prices”. Mr Birling sees this marriage as a business deal or just a reach for higher social status. Mr Birling is also constantly trying to self-aggrandise when Gerald is with him, to overcompensate for his insecurities. He tries to show off his money to Gerald. This is proven when, on the first line of the play, he says “Giving us the port, Edna?” This reveals that he is trying to impress Gerald with him money, because he thinks that means everything. He then goes on to talk about his chance of knighthood.

To conclude, Priestley uses techniques throughout the play to portray different aspects of social class in Edwardian England, and how this made a huge difference in society. He portrays people in lower classes as prejudiced against and stereotyped. He also shows how the higher class are proud of themselves and take pride in not helping people of lower classes. This is quite different with the Inspector. He is classless and Priestley uses him as a mouthpiece to show his views. Social class is largely important in An Inspector calls and the whole play is based around it.

I think this should be a level 5 because I have used more technical vocabulary than before and used many examples. I also avoided using “shows” and used different words like “portrayed” and “revealed”. I personally think I did better than my last assessment.