

# Grade 9 An Inspector Calls Essay

## 2021 PAPER

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How far does Priestley present society as unfair in *An Inspector Calls*?

Write about:

- what can be seen as unfair in the play
- how far Priestley presents society as unfair.

[30 marks]

## PLAN

- Mr Birling perpetuates social injustices and unfairness through exploitative behaviour + reluctance to change
- Sheila understanding the inequality and unfairness of society
- Inspector highlights how society is unfair due to capitalist views

Mr Birling is constructed as the embodiment of capitalism and the social injustice and unfairness these individuals perpetuate through their exploitative and dehumanising treatment of the lower classes- Eva is microcosmic of this belligerent exploitation of the lower class. Mr Birling ridicules and mocks the idea of a fair and united society; "as if we were all mixed up like bees in a hive-community and all that nonsense". Mr Birling uses zoomorphism through "bees" to portray the principles of socialism as animalistic, absurd and unachievable. As socialism is synonymous with change, Mr Birling is rejecting any change within society as he benefits from this unfair societal system where the lower classes are exploited, and he can capitalise of this. Moreover, the idiomatic noun "nonsense" is used to depict Mr Birling's arrogance and ignorance as he is rudely dismissive of any societal idea that promotes fairness, degrading and ridiculing it as an absurd idea as he thrives of society being unfair and unequal. The cyclical structure crafted by Priestley, exacerbates Mr Birling's stagnancy and rigidity in his unfair societal views. In act 1, his "provincial" speech could've perhaps foreshadowed his rigidity and lack of impressionability as in act 3 his acerbic tone and apathy is clear as he renders this unfair societal system all as a "joke". Mr Birling's regressive views and inflexibility, especially in regard to changing his unfair social views, makes him microcosmic of the rigid class system that upper/ middle class individuals favoured. In 1912 there was little social mobility, a continuation of the Victoria era fixed social structure, thus the class you belonged to you were confined too. Priestley crafts Mr Birling as emblematic of the individuals who favoured this strict class divide and an unfair society in order to vilify the individuals who perpetuate inequality and unfairness. He shows the audience that capitalism is synonymous with these exploitative and unfair views, thus a society that is capitalist is a society that promotes unfairness.

Alternatively, Sheila begins to understand of the vast inequalities that plague society and develops a social and political voice to stand up against this. This reinforces that not only is society unfair but there needs to be a change to reverse this. She becomes empowered through her development of empathy and responsibility, causing her to be a foil to her remorseless and irresponsible parents, recognising "[rather wildly, with laugh] No, he's giving us the rope- so that we'll hang ourselves.". "Rope" has fibres that are all intertwined, this mimicking how Sheila has recognised that everybody in society is intertwined with their responsibilities, capitalist or not, they have a moral obligation to reverse the unfairness in society by protecting the "millions and millions" that suffer. This strong stance against the unfairness in society juxtaposes her earlier docile and naïve presentation. In act 1 [Trying to be light and easy], showing how is she is trying to play into the expectations of her, yet in act 3 she goes from [bitterly] to [scornfully], showing her open criticism to her father's exploitative and unfair treatment of the lower classes. Sheila's disillusionment with capitalism, as a result of being introduced to socialism, causes her realisation of the detrimental consequences of being ignorant to how unfair society is. She serves to represent how socialism encourages progressive changes in abolishing an unfair society, whereas capitalism promotes this regressive societal system to flourish. Sheila's realisation of the unfairness of capitalism, thus changing to socialism, is symbolic of the huge electoral change in 1945 from capitalism to socialism. In 1945, the labour party won by a landslide victory of around 10%, reinforcing that society was adopting more socialist beliefs. Priestley constructs Sheila to represent this change as he wants to highlight to the audience that individuals who support socialism, and parties such as the Labour party, are actively encouraging social change and the abolishment of an unfair society. Thus, he holds up a mirror to his audience and encourages them to reflect on if their views contribute to this unfair society or if they are understand the desperate need for change.

Lastly, Priestley uses the Inspector as a dramatic vehicle to carry his compelling political message of socialism and morality to the audience. He utilises the Inspector as his mouthpiece to indict: the vast social inequalities and unfairness that plagued society, the strong barrier between classes and how this was permitted due to capitalists being in charge. This indictment is clear in his final speech when he uses biblical allusions to hell to warn the Birling's of the hellish consequences of "fire and blood and anguish" they will face if they continue to contribute to this unfair society. The polysyndeton reinforces the sempiternal torture they will face if they continue to part with their responsibility and recognition of their contribution to social ills and unfairness- his prophetic, omniscient element makes this message seem more daunting and important. Moreover, he also directly relays the biblical teaching, used in baptism, that we are "members of his body" in Christ. This is parallel language to "we are members of one body". Thus, the Inspector, alike to Jesus, promotes the union of society and togetherness which will then remove the unfairness of society. The Inspector serves to articulate Priestley's socialist views and clear criticisms. Priestley's younger life was surrounded by socialist ideologies, and he was openly scathing of institutions, such as the British army after he fought in WWI. Thus, as the Inspector is Priestley's mouthpiece it allows Priestley to use his political diatribe as also a work of social commentary- he critiques to the audience that society is unfair as selfish capitalists are not held accountable for their actions and the detrimental effects it has on the vulnerable members of society.

In a final effort to concatenate, Priestley presents society as unfair as a result of ignorant capitalist perpetuating the rigid class divide through their exploitative and dehumanising treatment of the lower classes. He uses the Inspector as his mouthpiece to catalyse a change within Sheila, thus allowing her to recognise an unfair society is synonymous with capitalism. He therefore shows the reader that the abolition of an unequal society is inextricably linked to the abolition of capitalism.