

# AIC Top Tips for knocking it out of the park

## How to stand out when so many students study this text

- Yes, millions and millions and millions of John Smiths and Eva Smiths study 'An Inspector Calls' (literally millions with the number of years it has been taught!) but there are ways you can stand out to the examiner and really impress them.
- The following ideas are a collection of my own research, things I've learnt from other teachers but, more often than not, things I have learnt from students from examining papers! I've been so impressed that I've remembered them to teach my own students!

## Consider each of the characters as a construct

To use this in a sentence, you could say: 'Sheila is a **conscious construct** to represent the wisdom of the younger generation.'

For help with this, consider these questions:

- What is the purpose of your character in the play?
- What do they symbolise?
- What is Priestley trying to demonstrate through their characterisation?
- For further reading, take a look at: <https://tinyurl.com/lightuphub>

## Talk about the fact the play is an allegorical modern morality play

**Allegorical** (book with a deeper message intended to teach)

- *An Inspector Calls* was written to **foster** a sense of collective responsibility for societal ills, at a time when the British public had the opportunity to **build a new society** in the wake of WWII
- Some consider it a modern 'morality play' – a play that uses **allegorical characters** to teach the audience a moral lesson.
- 15th century morality plays were based on opposing the seven deadly sins of **pride, sloth, gluttony, envy** (jealousy), **covetousness** (desire for wealth), lust and anger.
- In the play, the Inspector plays a **choric** role (in the play, but provides ironic commentary to the audience), voicing the opinions of Priestley

## Aristotle's Three Unities

Priestley wanted the form of his play to be uniform and he followed the three unities set out by Aristotle:

- **unity of action:** one main plot that moves on rapidly and smoothly through the play.
- **unity of time:** the action takes place over a short period in the real time of the play.
- **unity of place:** the play takes place in a single location (the dining room).

What is the effect of this and why does Priestley use it?

- You can reference this in the Priestley's intentions bit and say that **Priestley follows Aristotle's three unities** to keep the audience's focus on the central themes of the play
- He also does this to add to **dramatic tension** – if the audience are focused on one plot of Eva's suicide (**unity of action**), within the space of one evening (**unity of time**) and it all set in the dining room (**unity of place**) then it creates a claustrophobic and urgent atmosphere – audience forced to face the interrogations with the Birlings one by one with no other distractions

## Further niche context to impress the examiner

### Trigger warning SA...

- Sexually assaulting your wife was not made illegal in the United Kingdom until **1991!** This helps us understand why the Birlings are more bothered about Eric stealing the money than being a predator.
- The play is only ever set in the dining room to reveal the insular nature of the Birlings and serves as a **microcosm** (something small representing something larger) for the upper class/ aristocracy.
- We all know that the poor were left to drown on the Titanic, but did you know there are **pictures of prize show dogs being saved before working class people?**

### Ticklist

- Talk about them as a construct
- Talk about it being an allegorical modern morality play
- Reference Aristotle's three unities in your Priestley's intentions
- Use some niche context

# An Inspector Calls

## Literary Criticism

### Marxist Theory

Theorist: Karl Max

#### **Key ideas:**

- Society is capitalist as it is based on making profit, rather than by the interests of all people.
- The **proletariat** (working class) make money for the **bourgeoisie** (upper class) who control the means of production.

#### **Key Terminology:**

- Proletariat (working class)
- Bourgeoisie (upper class)
- Capitalism
- Conflict
- Division
- Hierarchy
- Profit

### An Inspector Calls: Marxist theorists may argue that ...

- Eva Smith represents the **proletariat**, who has been exploited by the **bourgeoisie**.
- Mr. Birling represents capitalist ideas and the belief that **profit is key**. The Inspector hints at social revolution when he speaks of '*fire and blood and anguish*' if the **bourgeoisie do not change their behaviour**.

## Feminist Theory

Theorist: Simone de Beauvoir

### Key ideas:

- Gender is different from one's biological sex and is a **social construction**. Society expects each gender to behave in a distinct way.
- Women are oppressed as they are only valued for **their looks and their societal functions as wives and mothers. This is a restrictive gender role.**
- Women are 'the second sex' as they are seen as less powerful and important to men.
- Society is therefore **patriarchal** (male dominated).

### Key Terminology:

- Autonomy (freedom)
- Dominant ideologies
- Dominant/submissive
- Equality
- Gender role
- Liberation (freed)
- Objectification (treated like an object)
- Patriarchy (male-dominated)
- Power
- Reinforce/Subvert
- Stereotypical

### An Inspector Calls: Feminist Literary Critics may argue that ...

- Mr. Birling expresses shallow and **patronising opinions of women**, claiming that clothes are a '*token of their self-respect*', and refers to women who for him as '*girls*' believing that they would not have the resolve to keep their strike.
- Gerald and Eric both express **a mixture of disdain and attraction** to the prostitutes who work in the bar, and objectify them in their descriptions of the older women.
- When Gerald keeps Eva in his friends 'rooms', she stays for the six months that is convenient for him, treating Eva **as if she is a commodity**, dismissing her when it is no longer easy for him to do so.

## Psychoanalytic theory

Theorist: Sigmund Freud

### Key ideas:

- Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis suggests that the human psyche (personality) has three parts.
- **The id** is with us from birth. This part wishes to satisfy every urge it has immediately, regardless of the consequences. This is why babies cry to be fed, will snatch toys etc.
- **The ego** develops next. It is the decision-making part of our psyche (soul, mind, spirit) and works by reason and strategy.
- **The superego** develops last. It reflects the values and morals of society which are learned from our parents and others. It is our conscience (knowing right from wrong) and means that we experience guilt.

### Key Terminology:

- Conscience
- Ego
- Freudian
- Id
- Infantile
- Morals
- Psyche
- Reason
- Strategy
- Superego
- Values

## An Inspector Calls: A Psychoanalyst may argue that ...

- **Eric's character experiences all three stages:** his initial treatment of Eva is the result of his id, he wishes to satisfy his sexual urges without any consideration to Eva's feelings;
- When faced with the dilemma of unplanned fatherhood, Eric's ego uses **logic to steal** from his father's work in an attempt to resolve his problems;
- In the end, when he hears of Eva's death, Eric's superego experiences deep and sincere guilt- unlike that of Gerald or Mrs. Birling

## What to avoid

The main **rubric infringements** (breaking the exam 'rules') for modern texts is answering more than one question (whether both the 'An Inspector Calls' questions or questions about other texts).

- Avoid deviating from the question – keep focused on that command word in the question. Repeat it as often as you like!
- Don't just retell the story.
- Don't chuck in context if not relevant to your point/ evidence: it must extend thinking.