

# Mr Birling - Quote Sheet

## BLAME/RESPONSIBILITY

### Act 1

"as it happened more than eighteen months ago-nearly two years ago-obviously it has nothing to do with the wretched girl's suicide"

- His reasoning is **ignorant** and **illogical**, yet his use of **the adverb "obviously"** shows **his arrogant defensiveness**.
- His inability to display any kind of remorse is reflective of the **stubbornness of the older generations**, he doesn't allow there to be any question of him being responsible.
- The **apostrophe** on **"girl's"** shows how he believed the suicide belonged to her and did not involve him; more **macabre matters were possessions of the working class**.

### Act 3

"(jovially) But the whole thing's different now"

- The stage directions **"jovially"** depict an **unorthodox emotion** for a play concerned with the matter of suicide, Mr Birling is so self-absorbed he seems to **operate in his own realm**. He is **apathetic** towards the things that happen around him.s.

## OLDER VS YOUNGER GENERATION

Act 3	<u><i>"now look at the pair of them-the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke"</i></u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>His <b>callousness is apparent</b> through both his <b>acerbic tone</b> and his ability to dismiss the notion of suicide and the exploitation of the working classes as a <b>"joke"</b>.</li> <li>He ridicules his own children, yet it is <b>ironic</b> as he is the only character who claims to <b>"know it all"</b> with his mentions of the <b>"unsinkable"</b> Titanic and <b>"silly little war scares"</b>. Priestley encourages the younger generation of his audience to reject the beliefs of their parents.</li> </ul>
Act 2	<u><i>"What's the matter with that child?"</i></u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <b>diminutive noun "child"</b> is used to disregard Sheila's beliefs as immature and unimportant.</li> <li>The pronoun <b>"that"</b> is used to <b>expel himself from responsibility</b> over Sheila once she starts exhibiting socialist beliefs, he is so <b>strongly repulsed by them he will reject his own child</b>.</li> </ul>

## CAPITALISM VS SOCIALISM

Act 1	<u><i>"as if we were all mixed up like bees in a hive- community and all that nonsense"</i></u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr Birling uses <b>zoomorphism to portray the principles of socialism as animalistic, absurd and unachievable.</b></li> <li>The <b>idiomatic noun</b> "nonsense" is used to depict Mr Birling's arrogance and ignorance as he is rudely dismissive of any political view he does not agree with.</li> </ul>
Act 1	<u><i>"we may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but working together-for lower costs and higher prices"</i></u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This exposes his perceived function of Sheila and Gerald's marriage; he sees it as a <b>financial transaction</b> as this is all that matters to him.</li> <li>It is a selfish disregard for his daughter.</li> <li>Exposes his <b>exploitative nature</b> as he wishes to take advantage of both the worker and the customer- he is overtly self-absorbed.</li> </ul>
Act 1	<u><i>"hard-headed practical man of business"</i></u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is a <b>political allusion to Sir Stanley Baldwin</b> who accused <u><i>"hard-faced men"</i></u> of profiting from the wars, Mr Birling stands to represent these affluent businessmen who <b>callously took advantage of the suffering of war for financial gain.</b></li> <li>The alliterative <b>"h"</b> on <u><i>"hard-headed"</i></u> sounds aggressive, used to assert his status and power.</li> </ul>

## GUILT

### Act 3

**"There'll be a public scandal... and who here will suffer for that more than I will?"**

- -The use of a question is an attempt for Mr Birling to evoke pity and sympathy from his family. This exposes his **hypocrisy** as he exhibited no sympathy for Eva.
- The verb **"suffer"** is **hyperbolic and melodramatic**, proving him to be self-centred.
- It also highlights how he is incapable of feeling guilt as he is too preoccupied with the **"public"** repercussions. The repetition of **"public"** throughout the play is used to show how **closely intertwined wealth and reputation** were.

## GENDER

Act 2	<u>"a young unmarried girl [Sheila], is being dragged into this—".</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>His artificial care for his daughter is <b>ironic</b> as we know that <b>he exploits Sheila for social and financial gain through marriage</b>. We also see his insincerity as he doesn't care that a young girl was pushed to suicide so his apparent concern for a young girl to be involved in a police investigation is deceitful.</li> </ul>
Act 1	<u>"...not only something to make 'em look prettier - but - well, a sort of sign or token of their self-respect."</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mr Birling is a <b>mouthpiece for a stereotypical view of women</b>- he explains to Gerald that clothes have a deeper meaning for girls. He <b>collectivises all women</b> suggesting he does not see them as individuals.</li> <li>He <b>epitomises the male gaze</b> in suggesting that a women's sole purpose is to look <u>"prettier"</u>.</li> <li>The <b>colloquial abbreviation "em"</b> and phrase <u>"sort of"</u> could depict how he did not take women seriously as he speaks about them in an offhand, rather than respectful manner. It is <b>ironic</b> how Sheila's confrontation with Eva was centred around clothes- it leads the audience to question whether Birling has projected his patriarchal and misogynistic views onto Sheila as his daughter.</li> </ul>
Act 2	<u>"is there any reason why my wife should answer questions from you, inspector?"</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <b>possessive pronoun 'my'</b> is a means of him <b>establishing control to elevate himself</b>. The use of a <b>rhetorical question</b> paints Birling as <b>patronising</b>, he is in a power struggle with the inspector and he immediately resorts to aggression and disrespect to win the social battle, painting him as undeserving of respect.</li> </ul>