

An Inspector Call

Key Terms

AUTONOMY

- **Meaning:** The right of a person to self-govern, or to make their own choices.

Example sentence:

*When Eric forced himself on Eva, he stripped her of her **autonomy**, mirroring the way the autonomy of the lower classes was often minimised by the upper classes.*

BIGOTRY

- **Meaning:** An intolerance of any belief or opinion that differs from one's own.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling's **bigotry** prevents him from seeing Eva as a human being with the ability to suffer as he can, leading to his mistreatment of her.*

BOURGEOISIE

- **Meaning:** The middle classes. This term is typically used to refer to the materialistic and self-serving interests of the middle classes.

Example sentence:

*The Birling family are representative of the way the **bourgeoisie** exploited the proletariat.*

CAPITALIST

- **Meaning:** Someone who believes in the economic and social concept of capitalism, which prioritises privately-owned, for-profit businesses. Capitalists tend to be against the idea of government intervention to help the poor.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling represents **capitalist** ideals, including the overarching belief that profit is a priority.*

COMPLACENCY

- **Meaning:** A smug satisfaction in one's own achievements, often paired with a blatant unawareness of external danger imposed on them or others.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling's **complacency** is evident in his contentment with the status quo and the value he places on the way society is set up.*

CONSCIENCE

- **Meaning:** A moral sense of right and wrong.

Example sentence:

*Inspector Goole's questioning develops Sheila's **conscience**, and the guilt she feels serves as evidence that her conscience would prevent something like this from happening again in the circumstances.*

CONSERVATIVE

- **Meaning:** Someone who favours private ownership and traditional social concepts. There is a lot of overlap between Conservatives and capitalists.

Example sentence:

*It is abundantly clear that Mr Birling is a **conservative**; his prioritisation of money and profit serve as evidence of his support for private ownership.*

CONSERVATIVE PARTY

- **Meaning:** A centre-right wing British political party known for favouring private ownership and traditional social concepts.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling clearly agrees with the ideology of the **Conservative Party**, and we can see this in the way he prioritises profit over the conditions of his workers.*

CYCLICAL STRUCTURE

- **Meaning:** When a text begins and ends in the same place with the same idea or theme.

Example sentence:

*The plot is **cyclical**; an inspector calls at the beginning of the text, and after Inspector Goole has questioned the family and left again, a real inspector calls to interrogate the family.*

DEGRADE

- **Meaning:** To treat someone with disrespect or to belittle them.

Example sentence:

*Mrs Birling's treatment of Eva Smith is based on **degradation**; she turned her away from the support of her charity because she believed Eva's pregnancy out of wedlock was evidence of loose morals.*

DEHUMANISE

- **Meaning:** To regard someone as less than human and to deprive them of their status as a person.

Example sentence:

*Mrs Birling repeatedly **dehumanises** the working classes by referring to it as "that class", creating distance between the lower classes and their status as people.*

DICHOTOMY

- **Meaning:** A division into two opposite groups to emphasise their differences.

Example sentence:

*Priestley juxtaposes the characters of Mr Birling and Inspector Goole to create a **dichotomy** of viewpoints on the structure of society.*

DIDACTIC

- **Meaning:** Intending to teach the reader a lesson, often a moral one.

Example sentence:

*'An Inspector Calls' is a **didactic** text filled with moral messages. It teaches the reader to more carefully consider the impact their treatment of others can have.*

DISILLUSIONMENT

- **Meaning:** The disappointment felt when something turns not as good as it was expected/believed to be.

Example sentence:

*Eva Smith became **disillusioned** with the upper classes, particularly once Mr Birling fired her for demanding a fair wage, and Mrs Birling turned her away from her charity.*

DISENFRANCHISED

- **Meaning:** To deprive a person (or group of people) of a privilege.

Example sentence:

*Critics have argued that the Birling family **disenfranchised** themselves from common decency and social responsibility.*

EMBLEMATIC

- **Meaning:** Representative of a particular concept or quality. Emblematic is another word for symbolic.

Example sentence:

*Eva Smith is **emblematic** of the lower and working classes in the early twentieth century, used to emphasise their constant oppression.*

EMPOWERMENT

- **Meaning:** Becoming more confident and powerful. The word is typically used in relation to a person gaining control over their life.

Example sentence:

*The Inspector's questioning **empowers** Sheila. It helps her grow into herself and stand up for herself, especially when speaking to Gerald.*

EXPLOITATION

- **Meaning:** The action of treating a person unfairly in order to benefit from their mistreatment.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling fired Eva Smith when she refused to be subjected to his low pay and **exploitation**.*

FAÇADE

- **Meaning:** A deceptive outward appearance used to conceal a person's true personality or feelings.

Example sentence:

*Priestley presents upper class respectability as a **façade** invented by the upper classes to feed into their own delusions of grandeur.*

GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

- **Meaning:** The difference in opinion between people of different generations. This tends to manifest in social and political ideology.

Example sentence:

***Generational divide** can clearly be seen in the way the younger generation are more impressionable and accepting of their guilt, while the older generation are hardheaded and resistant to the Inspector's lessons.*

HYPOCRISY

- **Meaning:** Claiming to have a higher degree of virtue or goodness than is actually true.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling's **hypocrisy** becomes clear in the way he talks about responsibility; despite how often he brings up responsibility during the Inspector's questioning, he fails to act responsibly towards his workers.*

IDEOLOGY

- **Meaning:** A body of beliefs and ideals that dictates how a person thinks and acts. It can also be used in relation to political and religious beliefs.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling's capitalist **ideology** is responsible for his actions towards Eva Smith and his other workers; it prevents him from seeing them as anything other than generators of profit.*

INDICTMENT

- **Meaning:** To heavily criticise a system/ idea/ group of people.

Example sentence:

*Priestley creates **An Inspector Calls** as an **indictment** of the ignorance of the upper classes. He creates the Birlings' to personify this utter lack of a social conscience.*

INDIVIDUALIST

- **Meaning:** Someone who believes we are solely responsible for ourselves.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling is an **individualist** who believes we should look out for our own best interests, rather than those of others.*

INDOCTRINATION

- **Meaning:** To teach someone to accept a new set of beliefs without questioning them.

Example sentence:

*Mrs Birling is a woman who has been subject to the **indoctrination** of her husband (and of the patriarchy) to believe that her gender should submit to their male counterparts.*

INDUSTRIALIST

- **Meaning:** Someone who is involved in the ownership and management of industry.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling is an **industrialist** because he owns and manages his own factory.*

INFIDELITY

- **Meaning:** Being involved in a sexual or romantic relationship with someone other than one's partner; cheating.

Example sentence:

*Gerald's **infidelity** is brought into the open when the Inspector reveals that Eva changed her name to Daisy Renton - the name of the woman Gerald had an affair with.*

LABOUR PARTY

- **Meaning:** A centre-left wing British political party known for opposing conservatism, and supporting public ownership and state intervention.

Example sentence:

*Priestley was a member of the Common Wealth Party, which later merged with the **Labour party** and formed the Welfare state. If the **Labour party's** welfare state had been in place during the play, Eva wouldn't have had to rely on the support of a charity, and thus wouldn't have been turned away, and likely wouldn't have died.*

MATERIALISTIC

- **Meaning:** Someone who values material possessions and physical comfort as the highest priority.

Example sentence:

*Mrs Birling is **materialistic**, valuing appearances over good moral standing. Her **materialism** is made explicitly clear in the way she looks down her nose at Eva Smith, who has no material possessions.*

MICROCOSM

- **Meaning:** A community or situation intended to represent the characteristics of something much larger.

Example sentence:

*The Birling family's mistreatment of Eva Smith acts as a **microcosm** for the upper class's mistreatment of the lower classes.*

MISOGYNIST

- **Meaning:** Someone who dislikes or is strongly prejudiced against women.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling is a **misogynist** whose prejudice against women can be found in his treatment of women throughout the play, from his exploitation of Eva Smith, to his condescension towards his own daughter.*

MORALITY

- **Meaning:** Principles regarding the differentiation between right and wrong.

Example sentence:

*Inspector Goole represents ideal **morality** and compassion for the masses.*

MOUTHPIECE

- **Meaning:** A person or character who speaks on behalf of another.

Example sentence:

*Inspector Goole is Priestley's **mouthpiece**; he conveys Priestley's personal beliefs through his questioning, thus teaching the characters and the reader about Priestley's ideology.*

NEGLIGENCE

- **Meaning:** Failure to take care of something, or a failure to meet a duty of care.

Example sentence:

*The Birling family are all socially **negligent** in the way they treat Eva Smith. They reject social responsibility to prioritise their own personal gain.*

OBJECTIFY

- **Meaning:** To degrade a person to the status of an object, with complete disregard for their individual status as a person with emotions.

Example sentence:

*The Inspector identifies Gerald's **objectification** of Eva when he asks her if he intended to keep her as his mistress, with the word "keep" being used to imply ownership.*

OMNISCIENT

- **Meaning:** All-knowing.

Example sentence:

*It is implied that Inspector Goole is **omniscient**; he knows what each of the Birling family did to Eva in explicit detail, despite the fact that their actions were insignificant to them.*

OPPRESSION

- **Meaning:** On-going unjust treatment by an authority figure.

Example sentence:

*Eva Smith is representative of the continuous **oppression** of the working classes by their upper class employers.*

PATRIARCHY

- **Meaning:** A social system in which men hold the power and women face oppression from these men in power.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling is representative of the **patriarchy**, emulating traditional male dominance in the way he treats the women around him.*

POLITICAL DIATRIBE

- **Meaning:** The way a text is written to criticise a political system or belief.

Example sentence:

*Priestley uses 'An Inspector Calls' as a social and **political diatribe** to criticise the rigid class divides which are responsible for the exploitation of the lower classes*

PRIVILEGE

- **Meaning:** The rights or advantages of an individual, available to them because of their race, class, gender, or sexuality.

Example sentence:

*Priestley creates a dichotomy between poverty and **privilege** by contrasting the vastly different lifestyles of Eva Smith and the Birling family.*

OPPRESSION

- **Meaning:** On-going unjust treatment by an authority figure.

Example sentence:

*Eva Smith is representative of the continuous **oppression** of the working classes by their upper class employers.*

PATRIARCHY

- **Meaning:** A social system in which men hold the power and women face oppression from these men in power.

Example sentence:

*Mr Birling is representative of the **patriarchy**, emulating traditional male dominance in the way he treats the women around him.*

POLITICAL DIATRIBE

- **Meaning:** The way a text is written to criticise a political system or belief.

Example sentence:

*Priestly uses 'An Inspector Calls' as a social and **political diatribe** to criticise the rigid class divides which are responsible for the exploitation of the lower classes*

PRIVILEGE

- **Meaning:** The rights or advantages of an individual, available to them because of their race, class, gender, or sexuality.

Example sentence:

*Priestley creates a dichotomy between poverty and **privilege** by contrasting the vastly different lifestyles of Eva Smith and the Birling family.*

PROLETARIAT

- **Meaning:** The working classes.

Example sentence:

*Eva Smith is representative of the way the **proletariat** were exploited by the bourgeoisie.*

SEMANTIC FIELD

- **Meaning:** A set of related words used in close proximity to refer to a specific subject.

Example sentence:

*Priestley uses words like "murder", "poison", "suicide" etc to create a **semantic field** of death in order to emphasise the severity of the situation.*

SEPERATE SPHERE IDEOLOGY

- **Meaning:** A Victorian and Edwardian concept which placed women in the domestic sphere (ie in the home), and men in the public sphere (ie at work).

Example sentence:

Separate sphere ideology can be seen in the occupations of Mr and Mrs Birling; while Mr Birling owns and manages a factory, Mrs Birling resides mainly in the home, though she often participates in 'feminine' charity work.

SOCIAL CLASS

- **Meaning:** A grouping of people into hierarchical social categories, with the wealthy being seen as superior to the poor.

Example sentence:

Eva Smith serves as evidence of the way those in the lower social classes were oppressed by those in the upper classes.

SOCIALIST

- **Meaning:** Someone who opposes conservatism, and who supports public ownership and state intervention.

Example sentence:

Inspector Goole's criticism of the Birling family's actions are driven by his support of socialism; their conservative ideology influenced their actions, leading to Eva's death.

SOCIALITE

- **Meaning:** Someone who is well-known in society, who often engages in entertainment and other social activities.

Example sentence:

Mrs Birling is a socialite because she is a prominent figure in high society known for her engagement in charity work.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- **Meaning:** The obligation of an individual to work and cooperate with other individuals for the benefit of society.

Example sentence:

Inspector Goole's main intention was to instil a sense of social responsibility in the Birling family in an attempt to prevent another such tragedy.

STIGMA

- **Meaning:** Social disgrace associated with a certain idea, circumstance, or person.

Example sentence:

Mrs Birling turned Eva Smith away from her charity as a result of the stigma surrounding pregnancy outside of wedlock.

SYCOPHANTIC

- **Meaning:** Sucking up to a person in order to gain some kind of advantage; obsequious behaviour for personal gain.

Example sentence:

*Priestley writes Gerald as a **sycophant**, agreeing with virtually every statement Mr Birling makes.*

PROXY

- **Meaning:** A person's authority to represent someone else.

Example sentence:

*Inspector Goole acts as Priestley's **proxy**; he is a vehicle for Priestley's message and political beliefs.*

REDEMPTION

- **Meaning:** Being saved from sin or error.

Example sentence:

*one of Priestley's main messages is that **redemption** can be achieved through taking responsibility for one's actions - something Mr and Mrs Birling struggle to do.*

WELFARE STATE

- **Meaning:** A type of governing in which the national government protects and promotes the economic (and thus social) wellbeing of its people.

Example sentence:

*Eva Smith was forced to appeal to a charity for support in her pregnancy because the **welfare state** wouldn't exist for some 40 years after the play was set.*

WILLFUL IGNORANCE

- **Meaning:** Choosing not to acknowledge or learn about something that would go against a person's existing belief system and force them to make difficult decisions.

Example sentence:

*The Birling family are **willfully ignorant** of the plight of the working classes; acknowledging the difficulties they faced would force Mr Birling to increase wages in line with his workers' requests.*

UNIONISATION

- **Meaning:** The act of organising workers into trade unions with the intention of improving pay or working conditions.

Example sentence:

*The strike Eva Smith took part in was not organised by a trade union, and thus was destined for failure. With **unionisation**, the strike would've had more chance at success.*