

KEY WORDS

*Same as act 1 and act 2-
She remains a stagnant character
throughout*

Mrs Birling Act 3

LACK OF CONSCIENCE

- Much like Mr Birling and Gerald, Mrs Birling **relishes** in the idea that the inspector may be a fraud. They perceive it as a means through which to **absolve themselves of any responsibility as they foolishly believe it would negate their wrongdoings from being truthful also**.
- She is boastful at the suggestion that the inspector wasn't real, speaking **[triumphantly]**. These stage directions connote to the idea that Mrs Birling feels she has won a battle- she **blatantly disregards** the loss of innocent life and is only enthused that her pristine reputation won't be compromised.
- On the surface, the **metaphorical battle** may be between her and the inspector who she deems **'a trifle impertinent'** in his behaviour, she perceived him as a threat and **quickly became defensive against him setting up the dynamic of a battle**.
- Alternatively, it could be a more abstract, microcosmic representation of the battle between the socialist forces trying to change the capitalist society and the classist older generation.

REJECTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

- Mrs Birling is **overtly proud** in her rejection of any responsibility for Eva Smith's death, and she feels that it is **necessary to publicly assert this as a truth**. She boasts **"He certainly didn't make me confess"**.
- The verb **"confess"** has connotations of crime, she asserts that she has not been **unlawful in her actions to implicitly suggest she is not responsible**.
- The imperative verb **"make"** hints at another reason as to why she so actively rejects responsibility- **it is a way of keeping afloat in the power struggle between her and the inspector**.
- Mrs Birling's **lexis here insinuates that admitting responsibility would be conceding to the inspector**, which **threatens her social role thus she is reluctant to do so**.
- She also attempts to propel events forward after the inspector leaves to dismiss the truth, claiming **"in the morning they'll be as amused as we are"**. The verb **"amused"** implies that she is in no way complicit in **an immoral event**, as it juxtaposes what she should be feeling which is guilt or remorse.
- Perhaps she is **overcompensating**, rejecting responsibility by suggesting she is **feeling the antithesis of guilt**.

TOP TIP



By thinking about Mrs Birling as a product of her environment, you are considering both A03 (link to context) as you're understanding the societal effects it would have had on her. Additionally, you'd be hitting A01 (maintain a critical style)

IS SHE MOST TO BLAME?

- As Mrs Birling's charity organisation was Eva Smith's last resort- it is possible we would hold her responsible.
- However, the discretion must be made between her and the other **perpetrators of Eva's demise**, she was **not complicit in driving her to despair** she merely failed to help.
- Rather than portraying her as malicious, it seems that Priestley uses Mrs Birling as a **tool to comment on the distorted perspectives and beliefs of the upper classes**.
- It seems Mrs Birling is nothing more than a **marionette of her own class**, thus she is absolved somewhat of responsibility as she has **internalised the class system** of her time to such an extent, she has rid herself of any autonomy.
- A more niche interpretation could extend from the arguably logical conclusions she made about Eva Smith when she sought help from the charity, Mrs Birling is truthful in saying **"the girl had begun by telling us a pack of lies"**, which could be considered a valid reason to deny her help. This highlights the flaws that were present with the **welfare system in 1912 and the lack of a welfare state**.

A COMMENTARY ON THE WELFARE STATE

- Mrs Birling's organisation forms an important link to AO3 (context) and the creation of the **welfare state in 1945**. It is a **mouthpiece for Priestley** to express why it is necessary as charity organisations are rife with **too much prejudice** to be able to provide care for all those who need it.
- Her reaction to learning the truth portrays how she would've behaved differently if she had been aware of the circumstances pleading to Eric in a **"distressed"** manner, **"No- Eric- please- I didn't know- I didn't understand-"**.
- This is the closest to **remorseful** we see Mrs Birling throughout the text, the **staccato and fragmented speech** depicts her inability to communicate regarding these unfamiliar, disreputable matters.
- Alternatively, the disrupted speech (employed by the commas) could emulate how she is trying to pause to be **calculative in her response** as she is preoccupied with the maintenance of her pristine reputation.
- The verb **"understand"** is pivotal to depict how subjective welfare organisations are set to fail, and instead should be **implemented by an objective government body**.



UNFAIR DISTRIBUTION OF POWER

- Mrs Birling's power within the play seems **entirely undeserving, yet she exercises it consistently**, not only in her immediate family through **scolding** them but also in the treatment of Eva Smith, she **"used her influence"** to refuse Eva Smith's resistance.
- **"I was the only one who didn't give in to him"** portrays her **distorted perception of pride**, she **boasts about a lack of moral sensitivity which seems corrupt and callous**. Priestley critiques how it is the **insensitive echelons of society** that conduct the most power.
- In terms of viewing, it is a morality play, this links Mrs Birling **to the cardinal sin (7 deadly sin) of Pride**, which is extended throughout the play. Her continued pride in the final act, despite the circumstances, confirms her **static character** development. She fails to navigate the world outside of her **egotism and pride**.

TOPIC SENTENCES

Mrs Birling provides Priestley with a tool to produce a commentary on the welfare state, and highlight why it was necessary, it seems that charity organisations were destined to fail as they could not help everyone in need.

Mrs Birling's lack of a conscience is evident in her celebratory reaction to the suggestion that the inspector may not have been real, as a woman secure within her class, she is threatened by any agents of change and is in direct opposition against them.

The pitfalls of classist society are arguably epitomised through the unequal distribution of power, it seems the upper classes unrightfully have a greater influence which they are prone to abusing.