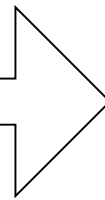


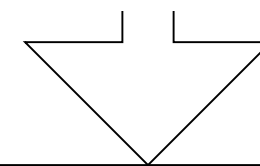
J.B Priestley's Early Life

John Boynton Priestley was born in Yorkshire in 1894 and from an early age he began writing. As a member of the middle classes he had the chance to go on and study at university, but felt he would get more of a feel for the 'real' world by going out to work instead. Therefore, he became a junior clerk with a wool firm at the age of 16.



Priestley's War

During the First World War, Priestley joined the infantry and narrowly avoided death on a number of occasions. After the war, he went to Cambridge University and earned a degree before moving to London to work as a freelance writer. *An Inspector Calls* is Priestley's most well-known work, but he wrote many articles, novels and plays. He was very interested in politics, and this is clear in his writing.



Where Does *An Inspector Calls* Fit Into This?

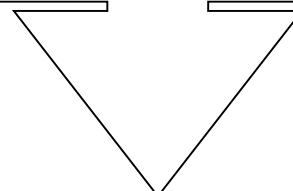
'*An Inspector Calls*' was published and performed in 1945 in the Soviet Union as the Second World War came to an end. It was written at a time when class divisions were becoming blurred in Britain, where women were being given more rights and respect, and people want great change in society.

The play itself is set in 1912 – a time before the two World Wars, where class divisions were very clear, where women were poorly treated, where social inequality was great and where there was very little support for the elderly, sick, disabled and poorest in society. It is important to remember that women were not even given the vote in Britain until 1928; before that time movements like the Suffragettes campaigned through militant action to make significant changes to society.

In 1945 Clement Attlee's Labour Party won a landslide election victory despite Winston Churchill's Conservatives leading the UK to victory in Europe in the Second World War. It was clear that the British people wanted great social change, and with the NHS being founded in 1948, the play helped to continue to change attitudes towards social inequality in the country. This is what Priestley intended with his play; he wanted the people of Britain to embrace change and make the most of the social upheaval that the two World Wars had caused.

Priestley's Politics

In the 1930s Priestley became very concerned about social inequality and set up a new political party; The Common Wealth Party. The party wanted public ownership of land, greater levels of democracy, and a new kind of 'morality' in politics. This party eventually went on to merge with the Labour Party in 1945, but it was instrumental in helping to establish the Welfare State in the United Kingdom (which includes pensions, benefits, the NHS and more). During the Second World War Priestley presented a left-wing radio programme but this was cancelled by the BBC because it was felt to be too critical of the Government at the time.



Priestley's Later Life

Priestley continued to be involved in politics and continued to write into the 1970s. He died in 1984.



AN INSPECTOR CALLS BY JOHN BOYNTON PRIESTLEY

| Act One | Act Two | Act Three |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Birling family are celebrating Sheila's engagement to Gerald Croft. • Mr Birling makes pompous speeches about his views on everything from science to business, he makes it clear that he does not believe in socialist ideals. He says the 'cranks' should be ignored when they claim everybody has responsibility to care for each other. • The maid (Edna) interrupts to announce the arrival of 'Inspector Goole' who is investigating the suicide of a young woman. • The Inspector shows Mr Birling a photograph of a girl Mr Birling admits to having employed and later fired as she led a strike for improved wages for his workers. • Sheila and Eric are shocked by their fathers' actions and believe he has acted harshly in firing her. • The inspector then shows Sheila the photo, Sheila admits that she had this girl fired from a store in a fit of anger and jealousy, Sheila feels remorse for this. • Gerald hears that the girl changed her name to Daisy Renton and it is clear he too knows the girl. • The Inspector suggests that many people have some responsibility for this girl's death. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gerald is shown the photo and admits to having met the girl in the spring of the previous year, where he 'rescued' her from the drunken advances of Alderman Meggarty. He kept her as his mistress for six months before breaking off their affair. • Sheila is angry with Gerald for his affair but respects his honesty. • Mrs Birling attempts to take control of the interrogation and bully the inspector. • While Eric is out of the room Mrs Birling is shown the photo and admits to having encountered the girl when she requested assistance from a charity Mrs Birling works with. • It is revealed that the girl sought help as she was pregnant and was refused by the charity because Mrs Birling was angered that the girl referred to herself as Mrs Birling. • Mrs Birling lays the blame for the girl's death on the father of her unborn child, unaware of the suspicion that Eric is the father. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eric is shown the photo and confesses to having got the girl pregnant. • Eric confesses to having stolen money from his father to give to the girl but which she refused to take. • Learning of his mother's actions Eric accuses his mother of being responsible for the death of his unborn child. • The Inspector makes a speech about the immorality of the capitalist irresponsibility that Mr Birling was advocating at the beginning of the play. • The inspector, having demonstrated the role each person at the dinner played in the death of Eva Smith, leaves. • Gerald and Mr Birling suspect the inspector is not who he claims to be and after a telephone call establishes, he is not a police officer. • A further telephone call establishes that there has not been a recent suicide. • Eric and Sheila still feel guilty and make it clear that even without the girl they should learn the lessons from this investigation. The rest of the group however feel relieved and shirk off any responsibility. |

AN INSPECTOR CALLS BY JOHN BOYNTON PRIESTLEY

- Sheila and Gerald are left alone and Sheila warns Gerald not to hide anything from the Inspector.

- The play ends with Mr Birling receiving a phone call to say a girl has just died and an inspector is on his way to make enquiries.

Why did Priestley decide to write An Inspector Calls?



CONTEXT



Audience Reception








NOW



THEN



Character Context

| | |
|---|---|
| | Inspector Goole  |
|  | Mr Birling |
| | Mrs Birling  |
|  | Gerald Croft |
| | Eric Birling  |
|  | Sheila Birling |
| | Eva Smith  |