

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

STORY

ACT 1 Birling family celebrating Sheila's engagement to Gerald Croft, son of a rival manufacturer in Brumley. The year is 1912. All very smug, happy and full of themselves. Birling lets Gerald know he is likely to be given a knighthood in the near future as long as he doesn't get into trouble.

Birling shows he is a fool by saying there won't be a war and uses the Titanic as an example of how wonderful progress is. (The play was written in 1946 so the reader/audience realises that what he says is nonsense.)

When Sheila and mother leave to have coffee in drawing room, Birling starts to lecture the 2 young men about how important it is to look after yourself and your family - never mind all this rubbish about looking after others.

At THIS MOMENT the Inspector arrives. Birling tries to intimidate him saying what an important member of the community he is etc. Inspector couldn't care less.

Inspector says an Eva Smith has killed herself by drinking disinfectant. We find out that Birling had sacked Eva 2 years earlier because she'd been one of the ring-leaders in a strike for more pay at his factory. Birling feels he has done nothing wrong and is backed by Gerald Croft though Eric disagrees.

We find out Eva was penniless for 2 months then found a job at Milwards, a clothes shop, where they were short-handed because of flu. She was delighted.

Sheila went in one day in a bad mood and insisted to the manager Eva had been insolent and must be sacked or the Birlings would close their account. (Eva had smiled when Sheila looked awful in a dress she tried on.) NOW Sheila is sorry for what she did and realises her mistake.

Inspector tells them that Eva Smith changed her name to Daisy Renton. Gerald startled. He leaves Gerald and Sheila alone together and Gerald tries to pretend he's never heard of her. Sheila not that stupid. He admits he had an affair with her the previous summer and suggests they don't bother telling the Inspector but Sheila has realised the Inspector seems to know everything anyway.

ACT 2 We hear Gerald's story. Eva had turned to prostitution to make a living and hated it. Gerald rescued her one night from the clutches of a drunken councillor and found out she was penniless, hungry and about to be turned out of her room. He set her up in a flat belonging to a friend of his and she became his mistress.

He had no intention of marrying her (not in his class) and when he had to go away on business he gave her some money and told her to leave. She took it well but was clearly upset. Gerald is sorry the girl is dead but doesn't seem to think he has done anything wrong. Sheila gives him back the engagement ring and he goes for a walk.

Inspector turns on Mrs Birling. She, like her husband, tries to intimidate him, equally unsuccessfully. We find out that only 2 weeks ago Mrs Birling had seen Eva and refused her help when she went to the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation. She was pregnant and single and at first lied that her husband had deserted her. She called herself Mrs Birling, which the real Mrs Birling thought was sheer cheek. She used her influence to have Eva's plea for help turned down.

Mrs Birling is insistent she has done nothing wrong and that girls of that class deserve all they get. She blames the father of the child and says he should be forced to confess his guilt in public. Sheila suddenly realises who the father is and begs her mother to shut up but Mrs Birling carries on in her usual arrogant, self-righteous manner.

Eric enters and mother suddenly 'twigs'.

ACT 3 Eric had picked up Eva one night when he was drunk and forced her to let him into her room. After a couple of meetings, she told him she was pregnant. Eric offered to marry her but she refused knowing they did not love each other. Eric stole money from his father's office but she refused to take that too when she realised it was stolen.

When Sheila tells Eric what their mother has done, he is furious and accuses her of killing her own grandchild. Mr Birling is more concerned about the stolen money and the possibility of losing his knighthood than anything else. Mrs Birling still insists none of it is her fault. Both Sheila and Eric full of remorse for what they have done.

Inspector leaves with a warning that there are millions like Eva Smith and we all have a duty towards them.

Gerald returns from walk saying he thinks it has all been a hoax - he met a policeman who said there was no Inspector Goole on the force. Birling phones to check. he is right. Immediately Birling, his wife and Gerald are cheerful again despite warnings from Sheila and Eric that it doesn't matter - they are all still guilty of everything the Inspector accused them of.

Gerald phones hospital and finds there have been no suicides. Much joy. Sheila and Eric upset because parents don't seem to have learnt anything but they shrug this off and start to behave as though nothing has happened. Then a phone call comes through to say a girl has just been brought into the hospital having drunk disinfectant and that an Inspector is on his way round.

CHARACTERS

Birling pompous, smug, know-all, concerned only with self and family, uncaring, vain, likes to make money, doesn't understand much, won't accept he has faults.

Sybil a snob, uncaring, doesn't even know own children well, influential, mean, humourless.

Sheila spoilt, vain, learns quickly, perceptive, cleverer than the others - she realises there is something odd about the Inspector.

Eric spoilt, foolish, reckless, a drinker, learns from mistakes, not a snob, caring.

Gerald wealthy, a two-timer, doesn't understand women, doesn't learn from mistakes, rather old-fashioned.

Goole good, cares about poor, dominant, gets his own way, forceful, not easily intimidated by power or wealth, a ghost? a conscience?

Eva honest (won't take stolen money), hard working, willing to speak for the rights of others, decent, desperate, - though we don't see her, she is obviously a better person than any of the Birlings.

N.B. Sheila, Eric and possibly even Gerald are children of snobbish, selfish parents so their behaviour might well have been different had they been brought up by better people.

THEMES

1. The way we treat people. We should not be concerned with class differences or wealth but should treat everybody with respect as we can not foresee the consequences of our ill-treatment of others.
2. War, social unrest, hatred and misery are the consequences of our lack of concern for others.
3. The young are more likely to learn from their mistakes and be adaptable than the old who are too set in their ways.

OTHER FEATURES

1. Who or what is the Inspector? A mystery. A spirit? A messenger from God? His final speech is certainly like that of a preacher. A conscience? Certainly not human and definitely a force for good.

2. The TIME element. Play written in 1946, set in 1912, about events of past 2 years. This means the reader/audience knows more about the truth than the people in the play do.
 - Sept. 1910 - Eva sacked by Birling
 - Dec. 1910 - Eva gets job at Milwards
 - Jan. 1911 - Eva sacked from Milwards
 - March 1911 - Gerald meets Eva
 - August 1911 - Gerald leaves Eva
 - Sept. - Nov. 1911 - Eva goes to seaside town
 - Dec. 1911 - Eric meets Eva
 - Feb. 1912 - Eva tells Eric she's pregnant
 - March 1912 - Eva meets Mrs Birling then kills herself (according to Goole)
 - End March 1912 - play takes place

We know the time-scale must be something like this because it all takes place shortly before the Titanic sank (April 1912). These dates are rough estimates. The impact of this play being written in 1946 is that we know HOW wrong Birling is when he predicts the future.