

**Lesson  
Fourteen**

# *An Inspector Calls: the curtain rises*

**Aims**

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to

- analyse the ways Priestley establishes characters and setting
- analyse the ways in which the themes of the play begin to emerge
- understand some of the social and historical context of the play

**Context**

This lesson is the first of a group of lessons which explore *An Inspector Calls*, a play by J.B. Priestley. The first act is covered.



You will need to use the Penguin Classics edition of the play, ISBN number 978-0-14-118535-4. Page numbers here refer to that edition and may differ in other editions.

Read the information at the start of the play, about the action, the characters and the stage directions (page 159). We recommend that you read the play through at least once before starting detailed study of the first act.



Oxford Open Learning

## Introduction

This play was written in 1945 and first performed in 1946, but it remains very popular today. There are several filmed versions which you can (and should) watch; never forget that this is a play, designed to be watched and heard, rather than read. If at all possible, go to see a production of the play in a theatre. We will consider the dramatic effects as we study the play and it will be helpful to imagine sitting through a performance as you read it. To whet your appetite, watch this trailer for a particularly successful recent production of the play at [www.ool.co.uk/1402elg](http://www.ool.co.uk/1402elg).

Watch it again, and make notes on what sort of play you think this will be (for example, farce, tragedy, murder mystery, costume drama, thriller...?) and jot down what you can remember about the setting, the characters and any lines. Which of the following words best describes the overall effect of the trailer?

*Dramatic, violent, emotional, explosive, contrasting, sinister, intriguing, sensational*

Things to notice:

- there are only seven characters, and four of them are related
- the play is set specifically in 1912, but it was written in 1945
- the acts are continuous, meaning that the action of the next act picks up at exactly the moment when the last act finished
- the set does not change throughout the play
- there are very precise details regarding the set, lighting and costume, which compel producers and designers to set the play at a precise moment in time and in a specific place (Brumley is a fictional town, but could be any large manufacturing centre in the Midlands)
- there are also precise details about the characters; actors are given very clear notes on how to play their parts.

These stage directions are important. Notice the phrases in bold; they will be significant later.

*The dining room of a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a **prosperous manufacturer**. It has good solid furniture of the period. The general effect is substantial and heavily comfortable, but **not cosy and homelike**....*

*The **lighting should be pink and intimate until the INSPECTOR arrives, and then it should be brighter and harder**....*

*ARTHUR BIRLING* is a heavy-looking, rather **portentous** [means pompously solemn] man in his middle fifties with fairly easy manners but **rather provincial in his speech**. His wife is about fifty, **a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior**. *SHEILA* is a **pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life** and rather excited. *GERALD CROFT* is an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the **easy well-bred young man-about-town**. *ERIC* is in his early twenties, **not quite at ease**, half shy, half assertive. At the moment they have all had a good dinner, are celebrating a special occasion, and **are pleased with themselves**.



NOW READ ACT ONE: from the beginning to the exit of Mrs Birling, Sheila and Eric on page 166. There are some unfamiliar expressions which are explained in the glossary at the end of the lesson.

What are your first impressions? Would you use any of the adjectives in the earlier list (beginning 'dramatic, violent..)? Probably not. This is a slow start; the main physical movement is the exit of Edna after it has been established that she is a maid, at the beck and call of the family round the table.

Here is a summary of what happens: this is the Birling family celebrating the engagement of their daughter to the son of a local rival in business, Sir George Croft. They have finished their meal and Birling wants to mark the occasion with a speech, welcoming Gerald as a future son-in-law. Gerald presents the engagement ring to Sheila in front of her family. Birling returns to speech-making, saying at length why he thinks this is an excellent time to get engaged and why they can all enjoy the benefits of prosperity and progress, despite what some others are saying about the possibility of strikes and war breaking out.

Find examples of **dramatic irony** – when a character says something on stage which the audience can interpret as having a different meaning to the one intended by the speaker. Remembering the setting in 1912, which two historical events will the audience know about which show that Birling's vision of the future is incorrect?

**Activity 1****FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

Take five pieces of A4 paper, and write the name of a different character at the top - Birling, Mrs Birling, Sheila, Eric and Gerald. Re-read the stage directions and the start of the play again, and note down your first impressions of each character. Select a quotation for each character which you think could be significant and which seems to be representative of the character. Remember that stage directions are useful, too.

You will find suggestions for the answers at the end of this lesson.

**Optional Creative Exercises**

This module includes a number of optional 'creative' exercises, which you may find an interesting and alternative way of looking at the text. You might do one or two, all of them, or none. Empathic and creative responses can help you understand and appreciate both the characters and Priestley's skill in bringing them to life. They are subjective activities and there are no suggested answers, as there are many ways of responding to them. However, the creative exercises are *additional* to the main activities and meant to be fun!

**Activity 2****Creative exercises**

1. Become a reporter for the *Brumley Journal*. Write a newspaper report about the strike at Birling and Co, including an interview with Mr Birling and one with one of the strikers.
2. Imagine that you are the manager of Milwards on the evening of the day in which you sacked Eva. Write down your thoughts. Remember you are short-staffed and Eva was a great worker.
3. Costume designs for Mrs Birling and Sheila – do some research into fashions of Edwardian period first. This is a special occasion, so think how they will want to show off their wealth.

## Social climbing and Birling's insecurities

You may remember that Mrs Birling is described in the opening directions as 'her husband's social superior' and that Birling, Sheila's father, has 'a provincial accent'. In contrast, we find out quickly in the play that Gerald's father is a knight – Sir George. It's important to be aware of the changing nature of the ruling class in Britain after the Industrial Revolution. Before that, people of power and influence nearly all came from old, aristocratic and land-owning families. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, increasing industrialisation brought new challenges and opportunities.

It became possible to rise to a position of influence by being entrepreneurial and successful in business, or 'trade'. The rise of the 'nouveau riche' was often regarded with distaste and some resentment by the previously unchallenged old families, who still lived in large houses with a 'Tradesmen's entrance' at the back, so only guests of the family used the front door. Nevertheless, some of the old families were in business already and Gerald's is clearly one of them. He and his family represent 'old' money, Birling represents 'new'.

Birling's lack of breeding is shown immediately in his accent, and his 'mistake' of telling his wife to congratulate the cook on the dinner they have just served up to their guest. He's anxious about the port and has checked it is the same as Gerald's father buys. He is insecure, despite all his bluster. Notice how he hesitates when talking about the absent Sir Gerald and Lady Croft.

Now read on, up to the arrival of the Inspector, on page 168.

Notice how keen Birling is to tell Gerald about his impending knighthood, and that he was Lord Mayor two years ago – clearly Birling is climbing high in Brumley society. He mentions twice the need to stay out of trouble over the next few weeks and not 'start a scandal'. He's joking, but you can probably guess that this will prove to be another example of **dramatic irony**. In this case, we can guess that the Birlings are about to 'start a scandal', they just don't know it yet.

## Birling's values

Eric returns and arouses Birling's (and our) suspicion when he begins to agree with Birling's comment about the link between a woman's clothes and her sense of worth, and then checks himself. Why? What or who might he remember?

Birling quickly dismisses it and returns to giving his opinions on upbringing and the important things in life.

The speech below is very important and helps the audience understand Birling's values. Look at the extracts in italics. Sum up what Birling is saying in your own words.

Now look at the extracts highlighted in bold. Which words tell you that Birling disagrees strongly with the idea of collective responsibility (i.e. everyone has a duty to help others less fortunate than themselves)?

Birling uses the image of a beehive. Why might he hate the idea of society as being like a beehive?

Birling: (solemnly) *But this is the point. I don't want to lecture you two young fellows again. But what so many of you don't seem to understand now, when things are so much easier, is that a man has to make his own way – has to look after himself – and his family too, of course, when he has one – and so long as he does that he won't come to much harm. But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense. But take my word for it, you youngsters – and I've learnt in the good hard school of experience – that a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own – and –* (We hear the sharp ring of a front door bell. Birling stops to listen.)

The Inspector rings the door bell and interrupts Birling's speech. What do you think this represents? Why did Priestley make the inspector arrive at this precise moment? Consider the attitudes Birling has just been expressing.

The Inspector need not be a big man but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period. He speaks carefully, weightily and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking. (Act 1)

## The Inspection begins...

Now read on up to Sheila's entrance on page 174.

Remember the initial stage direction told us that the lighting should shift from 'pink and intimate' to being 'harder, brighter'. This is a subtle way of suggesting that things will be shown up more clearly with the Inspector on stage.

You will have noticed that the Inspector and Birling are quickly in conflict. Birling's attempts to intimidate him by commenting on his links with the Brumley police fall flat, much to his irritation. The

Inspector explains the case he is investigating – the suicide of a young girl, Eva Smith. He shows Birling (but not Gerald or Eric) a photograph. Birling remembers Eva now: despite employing hundreds of young women in his factory, she's memorable because she was a ring leader in a strike over pay. You will notice how Birling shows no remorse over her suicide and certainly takes no responsibility for it, even after the Inspector explains that his sacking of Eva was the first in a chain of events which led to her suicide. Birling defends his actions strongly and is backed up by Gerald, although Eric expresses sympathy for Eva.

### Activity 3

#### OPEN YOUR QUOTATION BANK!

It will be useful to be able to quote some lines or phrases from the play from memory. Begin to make a list of quotations which you think reveal a lot about a character (or which develop a theme, when we begin to notice themes emerging).



You can organise your quotations under character and theme headings later; for now just copy out any line which you think is important and note the page number. If possible, type them out on a Word document. Keep the quotations short, or you will find it very hard to memorise them. You could have, for example, 'unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable' (about the Titanic) and 'I say there isn't a chance of war' to show how wrong some of Birling's opinions are.

### Learning about Eva and Birling

What do we find out about Eva? She seems to have been principled; she was in line for promotion but took a prominent role in supporting the strike for higher wages for everyone. She was a good worker, lively and good looking. Although we don't see her for ourselves, she seems a sympathetic character.

What do we find out about Birling when he is rattled by the Inspector? He is offended when his actions are questioned and tries to pull rank by hinting that he has friends in very high places, who could punish the Inspector for taking such a hostile and impertinent line of questioning. Eric keeps chipping in with support for Eva and criticism of his father. This leads to the only joke in the play: Birling tries to intimidate the Inspector by telling him he plays golf with the Chief Constable. When the Inspector replies flatly that he doesn't play, Eric bursts in with 'Well I think it's a damn shame',

still referring to Eva. The Inspector (deliberately? humorously?) misinterprets him and says ‘No, I’ve never wanted to play.’

### Activity 4

Now answer the question: how does Priestley make the Inspector seem intimidating from the moment he enters? Focus on some of the words in the description, and also in the stage directions for the characters. You will find some suggestions for your answer at the end of the lesson.



### The focus of attention shifts from Birling to Sheila and a key theme begins to develop

Read from Sheila’s entrance on page 174 to the end of the Act One.

Find some examples of the way in which Sheila is still treated like a child by her parents, despite being in her twenties and engaged to be married.

We notice that despite Birling’s efforts to get the Inspector to leave, the investigation is clearly just beginning: Sheila, Gerald, Eric may have some information he is here to get.

Look closely at the way Sheila reacts to the news of Eva’s suicide. How is her reaction very different from her father’s?

*You talk as if we were responsible...*

Sheila immediately responds to the details about Eva with sympathy, making a connection between herself and Eva. They were about the same age and both were attractive. Like her brother Eric, she criticises her father’s sacking of Eva, calling it a *rotten shame* and rejects the classification of girls like Eva as *cheap labour* – *But these girls aren’t cheap labour – they’re people.*

We find out more about Eva: unlike Sheila, she had no family to protect her when she fell on hard times. She had a stroke of good luck and was able to get another job eventually, this time at a fashionable store in town, Milwards. This was a good job and she enjoyed it, but was sacked because a customer complained about her. We notice Birling’s judgmental speculations about Eva – *she*

*got herself into trouble there, I suppose.... not doing her work properly?*

Sheila's reactions and questions are more revealing – she is 'agitated' as soon as she hears about the customer complaint, and runs out sobbing after the Inspector has shown her (but not Birling, Eric or Gerald) a photograph of Eva. We can guess that Sheila was the customer who complained; we know she visits Milwards regularly, and as Birling's daughter she would be very valued.

Birling is angry that Sheila is upset and the engagement dinner has been spoiled, not sorry that Eva Smith has died in agony by her own hand. Notice how unfazed the Inspector is by this, and how he turns Birling's words back against him:

*A nice promising life there, I thought, and a nasty mess someone's made of it.*

What do you notice about the way Gerald and Eric both try and fail to take some control over the situation, Gerald by demanding to see the photograph, Eric by trying to go to bed? Could they have something to hide, too?

Sheila returns, having composed herself, but she is clearly still distressed.

Select some quotations for your quotation bank which show the differences between Birling and Sheila's reactions to their treatment of Eva Smith.

## The theme of responsibility

The theme of responsibility is a central one. Notice how Sheila is ready to accept responsibility for Eva's death at once, the opposite to Birling. When Sheila is asked questions by the Inspector about the events leading up to her making the complaint, she answers them honestly, although she is fully aware that her actions do not reflect well on her and that it is very embarrassing for this to be unfolding in front of Gerald. We are left in no doubt that Sheila bitterly regrets what she did, saying *...if I could help her now, I would* – but the Inspector harshly reminds her (and us) that the moment to help Eva has gone – *It's too late. She's dead.*

The Inspector recaps on what has been established about Eva and then goes on to say *she changed her name to Daisy Renton*. Gerald's startled reaction is suspicious although he tries to cover it and fortifies himself with a drink. Once the Inspector leaves to go to find Mr and Mrs Birling, Sheila challenges Gerald at once, asking him how he came to know Eva/Daisy. Sheila is insistent and quickly gets him to confess that he did know her and had some sort of

affair with her, but he is more like Birling in his refusal to accept responsibility, saying *I don't come into this suicide business*. Gerald believes he can withhold information from the Inspector but Sheila is convinced that this is impossible – *Why you fool, he knows. Of course he knows*.

The act ends unexpectedly with the Inspector returning and saying *Well?*

### Activity 5

#### PREDICTIONS

A pattern has been established: one line of enquiry at a time, says the Inspector. He has interviewed Birling and then Sheila. Gerald is clearly coming next. Make some predictions about the next Act. How do you think Gerald will behave with the Inspector? Will he be honest? What do you think went on between Gerald and Eva? How will Sheila react? Will the engagement survive? And is any other member of the family involved in the sad story of Eva Smith?



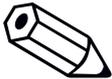
## Act One: some questions to consider

### What is it like to work in Birling's factory?

Re-read pages 171-174, looking for clues as to what pay and conditions were like for workers at Birling and Co, then answer these questions:

1. How large was the workforce?
2. How long had Eva Smith been working at Birling and Co?
3. What was the average weekly wage for workers at Birling and Co?
4. Eva was about to be promoted to a new position. What was it called?
5. When did the factory shut down to give its employees holiday?
6. Why did Eva and the other girls go out on strike in September?
7. What was Birling's reaction to the demands of the strikers?
8. Why did the strike fail?

9. Why was Eva sacked, despite being a good worker in line for promotion?
10. Why do you think she found it so hard to get another job?

Activity 6	Creative exercises.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Inspector mentions Eva's diary on page 193. Write a page or two as Eva, reflecting on her time with Gerald and what she will do now.</li> <li>2. Cast the movie version! Imagine that there is going to be a lavish new filmed version of the play. You can approach any actors in the world. Who would your dream cast be?</li> <li>3. Pick one of the actors from your dream cast and write a letter to them, offering them the part and telling them a bit about it. Explain why you think they would be ideal for the part.</li> <li>4. Reduce the play to pictograms: go back over the first two acts, and draw significant objects as they appear or are referred to in the script. You could begin with a bottle of port, an engagement ring, a cigar...</li> </ol>

### Rich v poor; capitalism

Birling is convinced that everything is good and getting better – he dismisses talk of unrest, the fact that the miners went on strike in early 1912, the tensions which would lead to the outbreak of the first World War in 1914, and predicts that in twenty or thirty years' time (in the 1930s or 1940's) you'll be living in a world that'll have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations. He is wrong, of course; there were many strikes and protests in these years (for example the Jarrow March in 1936), as well as the horror of another World War (from 1939 – 1945).

Birling mentions *Capital* frequently. Capital means accumulated wealth, or the money with which one enters business. Capitalism is a system in which private wealth is used in the production and distribution of goods, and Birling is a committed capitalist. He is making lots of money which he and his family enjoy. He guards his profit margins carefully, paying his huge workforce no more or less than his competitors in business, such as the Crofts. Birling can be seen as a representative of capitalism, while Eva represents the

thousands of people who were 'cheap labour' which capitalists used to make their fortunes.



### Activity 7

#### RESEARCH TASK

Find out about life in 1912 - the main events in Britain and Europe, the biggest companies, the sort of jobs which poor people could do, the fashions and pastimes of the rich, etc. Make brief notes below.



### Happy Families?

Priestley wants us to notice how wealthy the Birling family is from the moment the play begins. However, he also wants us to question if they are as truly happy as they might be, even before the Inspector enters. Re-read the stage directions. You will notice that he says the room is *not cosy or homelike*. Look for further evidence

that there are tensions underneath the surface. You could ask yourself why Sheila mentions Gerald's disappearance *last summer* so early in the play and notice Mrs Birling's defence of Gerald. Mrs Birling also changes the subject when Sheila says Eric is *squiffy* (meaning slightly drunk) and criticises Sheila's choice of language rather than Eric's rather odd behaviour. Is Eric a 'mummy's boy' and Sheila 'a daddy's girl'? How significant is the absence of Gerald's parents? Why might they disapprove of the engagement?

## Tension rising

Once you have completed the above task, you will notice that there is some tension around the dining table from early on in the play, but it is very subtle and intermittent. The ring of the doorbell raises the tension – who is calling unannounced at this time of the evening? From then on, the tension begins to rise steadily. Pick out moments which you think are particularly effective in making the atmosphere more charged and tense.

You may wish to begin watching a production online such as the one at [www.ool.co.uk/1411elg](http://www.ool.co.uk/1411elg).

There was a famous 1954 film version starring Alistair Sim as the Inspector, and a much more recent BBC version in 2015. You should watch any of these versions with caution, noting any departures from the original script. You could compare the ways in which different actors play the same roles, despite the restrictions placed on them by Priestley's stage directions and script. It would be wise to watch up to the end of Act One and wait until you have read Act Two before you resume watching.

## Glossary for Act One:

Mrs Birling says to Edna *I'll ring from the drawing room when we want coffee*. This refers to the system of bells set up in each room which would alert servants to come and perform a task.

Sheila calls Eric *squiffy* – she means he is drunk.

When Sheila kisses Gerald, Eric says *Steady the Buffs!* meaning *keep calm, steady on*.

Birling refers to *the Kaiser*, Wilhelm II of Germany and *the Balkans* – the area of Europe where the first in a chain of events leading to the First World War took place.

He also mentions *these Bernard Shaws and H.G. Wellses*. Both Shaw and Wells expressed sympathy for the new movement of socialism developing at the start of the twentieth century. Socialism is a system which advocates common ownership, or shared profits

by the community as a whole, and is roughly the opposite of capitalism.

When Birling says *I'm still on the Bench*, he means he is still a magistrate. He was also an *alderman*, a high ranking official on the local council.

Birling speculates [rather disparagingly] that Eva was likely to *Go on the streets?* after he sacked her. He means did she become a prostitute?

## Suggested Answer to Activity One (First Impressions)

BIRLING loves the sound of his own voice; he has the longest speeches of anyone in the opening part of the play. He seems genuinely delighted about the engagement and loves the idea of having a son-in-law who comes from the aristocratic Croft family, who own a rival company. Perhaps he hopes the two companies might merge in future. He talks more about business than about his daughter and the married life she can look forward to with Gerald.

He enjoys lecturing people and is absolutely sure he is right that all is well with the world. He is completely wrong about the war, and about the unsinkable Titanic, so we are encouraged to challenge and question much of what he says.

Birling likes to think of himself as *a hard-headed man of business* and refers to himself in this way frequently.

A quotation which seems to sum up his values: *a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own.*

MRS BIRLING says less than her husband; she is rather reserved, distant and slightly cold and critical of both her husband and daughter. She backs up Gerald when Sheila reminds him of his disappearance the previous summer and says she will have to get used to being neglected in favour of business by her husband. She has to prompt Eric to join in congratulating the happy couple and is clearly used to her husband's habit of talking too much.

A quotation which is typical of her: *Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things.*

SHEILA is girlish, happy and *'very pleased with herself'* throughout the opening, but the stage direction *half playful, half serious* is used twice. She teases Gerald and bickers with Eric but we notice how sincere her feelings for Gerald are – she says she will start weeping when he says *[I] hope I can make you as happy as you deserve to be.*

She is thrilled by the engagement ring. Eric says *she has a nasty temper* but there is no evidence of it here. She is not too spoilt to listen respectfully to her father's long speeches and leaves the room without hesitation when her mother directs her.

Sheila at the start of the play says things like *Look, Mummy, isn't it a beauty?* [about the engagement ring], but after the Inspector arrives she is much more questioning and troubled: *But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people.*

ERIC is less easy to read. He is *not quite at ease*; his first contribution is to suddenly burst out laughing for no apparent reason when Gerald and Sheila are promising each other to be careful. He is less tolerant of Birling's speech-making than Sheila and seems a bit distracted and 'the odd-one-out' at the dinner table. We get the impression he is used to being ordered around by his parents and is starting to get sick of it. He interrupts Birling and seems to disagree about the likelihood of war breaking out.

Eric's enthusiasm when Birling says that clothes are important to women because they are linked to a sense of worth is unexpected, and his sudden lapse into silence is noticeable. He is definitely hiding something, and this is reinforced by his uneasiness when Gerald makes a private joke with Birling about the awkwardness which would occur if Eric has been up to something.

A typical quotation showing Eric's hostility towards his father: *He could have kept her on instead of throwing her out.*

GERALD is presented as the ideal son-in-law for the Birlings. He is respectful of them both, even calling Birling 'sir' and agreeing with him throughout, even when Birling says the occasion is all the nicer for Gerald's parents being absent. He makes a big show of presenting (he is tactful at all times), and considerate of Birling's anxieties about how his parents view Sheila. He asks for permission to tell his mother about the impending knighthood, *I know she'd be delighted*, making us wonder if Birling is right about the lack of enthusiasm for the match.

Gerald is a firm ally of Birling: *You couldn't have done anything else.*

## Suggested Answer to Activity Four

How does Priestley make the Inspector seem intimidating from the moment he enters? Some suggestions for your answer:

The description of the Inspector states *he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness*. He is in his fifties, the same as Birling; unlike Birling, he speaks carefully and

looks hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking. These details hint that he will prove a natural adversary for Birling.

When he begins to talk, he is serious, and does not notice or care that Birling is hinting that he is 'in' with the local police officers. The Inspector waits to be asked to explain why he has called, which subtly gives him more power in the conversation.

The Inspector is blunt and graphic in his description of Eva's death, unsparing of the details. Eric is shocked, Birling impassive, dismissing it as a *horrid business*, and wondering what this could possibly have to do with the Birlings. The Inspector interrupts him without hesitation, something which Birling is not used to and will be offended by. When he shows him the photograph, the Inspector is in complete charge, refusing to let Gerald or Eric see it and replying *coolly* to Gerald when he complains.

The Inspector is unruffled by their irritation and explains that he likes to focus on *One person and one line of inquiry at a time*. Birling tries to 'pull rank' again, by pointing out that Gerald is the son of Sir George Croft. This backfires when the Inspector says that in that case, he would prefer Gerald to stay.

He challenges Birling over the refusal to pay his workers higher wages, again, something Birling is not used to and is offended by. He turns Birling's words back on him:

Birling: *If you don't come down sharply on some of these people they'd soon be asking for the earth.*

The Inspector: *They might. But it's better to ask for the earth than to take it.*

[He does this on more than one occasion – find another example for your quotation bank]

This provokes Birling into his most outright challenge to the Inspector: he mentions Colonel Roberts and his close ties with him, but the challenge falls flat; nothing will deter the Inspector. Birling keeps trying to draw the interview to a close but he ignores every attempt.

When Sheila enters, he does not spare her the details of Eva's death, either. Clearly he does not think she should be protected from them. When Birling realises he is not the only one the Inspector has come to interview, he is a little more apologetic, but the Inspector treats him (and all the others on stage) in the same way as before. He gives no clues as to where his questions are leading, which again puts him in a position of power.

The Inspector interrupts and rejects Birling's wish to *go and talk this over quietly in a corner*.

We get the impression that Birling is used to making deals in corners when necessary and that the Inspector will never do that.

The Inspector gives out the details of Eva's experiences before and during her employment at Milward's sparingly, letting Sheila work it out for herself that she is the customer who got her sacked. He is unmoved when she rushes out in tears and later on he agrees that she is [partly] responsible for Eva's downfall, and implacably reminds Sheila that she cannot help Eva now, no matter how much she might regret her actions.

As the Inspector interacts with Birling, Gerald, Eric and Sheila, we realise he is treating them all in the same way; age, social rank, wealth, gender make no difference to him at all. He is intimidating throughout.