



The English Notebook

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

**HOW DOES PRIESTLEY PRESENT IDEAS ABOUT
SOCIAL CLASS IN 'AN INSPECTOR CALLS'**

How does Priestley present ideas about Social Class in An Inspector Calls?

Strong Point / Topic Sentence (AO1)

Priestley demonstrates the power that social position has in 'An Inspector Calls' through the importance that the Birlings attribute to their position and class in society. The Birlings in the play use their social position to conduct themselves in an immoral and unethical manner, thereby disempowering people like Eva Smith even further.

Embedded Quotation (AO1)

This is clearly evident when Mr Birling says that they need to keep 'labour costs down' and 'prices up', suggesting that his social position as a wealthy middle-class business man, allows him to subject the working classes and people like Eva Smith to exploitation and unfair treatment in the workplace.

Furthermore, the contrast between 'costs up and prices down' symbolises the difference and contrast between the affluent people of society and the poorer working classes in Brumley. This contrast in society strengthens the social position of the upper and middle classes by protecting their identity and concealing their wrong doings. Priestley reflects a period when social mobility was very limited and this led to ingrained attitudes that reinforced social position and power during the Edwardian era in 1912.

Reason for my Point (AO1)

(links to question)

Identify, Analyse explain Language devices and link to question – AO2

Context (links to question) – AO3

Strong Point / Topic Sentence (AO1)

Priestley also demonstrates the importance that people attributed to social position through Mr Birling's claims of self-importance. When he says, 'Perhaps I ought to warn you that he's an old friend of mine, and that I see him fairly frequently' it is clear that Mr Birling attempts to belittle the Inspector through his status and authority in society, indicating that he had more importance than an Inspector in society. Through the use of the emotive verb 'warn', Mr Birling attempts to frighten the Inspector, in order to mitigate his wrongdoings

Identify, Analyse explain Language devices and link to question –

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through the value he thinks his social status gives him in society. His condescending tone emphasises his perception of social superiority in contrast to the inspector.

It is clear that Priestley illustrates how people from the middle and upper classes have used their position to hide their shameless conduct, only because they had the wealth and they owned the capital which allowed them to have influence in society.

Context (links to question) – AO3

Strong Point / Topic Sentence (AO1)

Identify, Analyse explain Language devices and link to question – AO2

Another way in which Priestley explores the idea of social position in society is through the gender inequality that existed in society during the Edwardian era. When Sheila says, “*Is it the one you wanted me to have?*” Priestley depicts ideas of male superiority and female submissiveness. Sheila’s question about Gerald’s choice of the ring when she affirms, ‘*you wanted me to have?*’, demonstrates her absolute lack of choice; and her compliance with his choices. Priestley’s use of the pronoun ‘you’ is a clear indication of the importance Sheila attributes to Gerald’s choices for her. Priestley reinforces the ideas about gender and its relationship to social status here and the gender inequality that was prevalent during the Edwardian Age. Men were shown to be socially superior to woman, even in the upper classes and girls were passive and submissive, as indicated through Sheila. However, in the play, Priestley depicts Eva as expressing her concern about inequalities, clearly portraying the Suffragettes movement and their rights.

Context (links to question) – AO3

Strong Point / Topic Sentence (AO1)

Furthermore, Priestley explores the ideas about social position through the snobbery of Mrs Birling’s snobbery. He illustrates her condescending attitude in the play when she calls Eva a “*girl of that sort.*” Priestley’s use of the relative pronoun ‘that’ represents the ignorant and derogatory attitudes of the middle and upper classes, and especially the older generations of society at that time, who belittled the poorer working classes. Their superior position in society gave them a false sense of importance, which entrenched the inequality and strengthened their social position in society, leading to further division between the classes. Priestley’s timing of the play, which was

Identify, Analyse explain Language devices and link to question – AO2

Context (links to question) – AO3

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viewed by post World war 2 audiences, had the didactic purpose of ensuring that people learn from the short-sighted views of Edwardian society. In this way it was hoped that social change would level the playing fields and remove the social barriers in society.