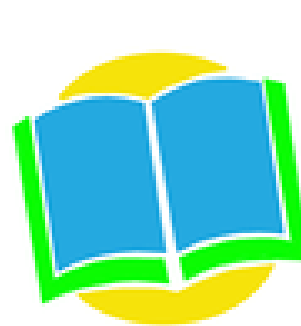
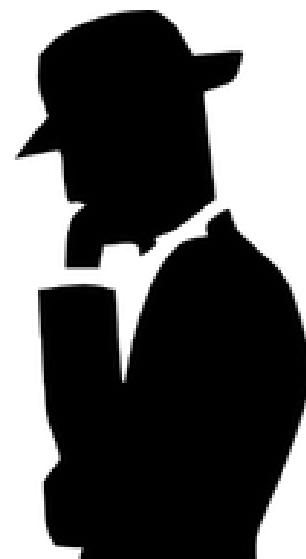


# An Inspector Calls



The English  
Notebook

# To integrate context into your written response in the Literature P2:

## Learning Objective:

To consolidate our understanding of the link between the **text** and the **context** it was written in.

## Learning Outcome:

To be able to demonstrate how the **context** is revealed through the different **characters** in the play.



# Context

## Why was the play set in 1912?



The Germans don't want war'-



'Fire and blood and anguish'

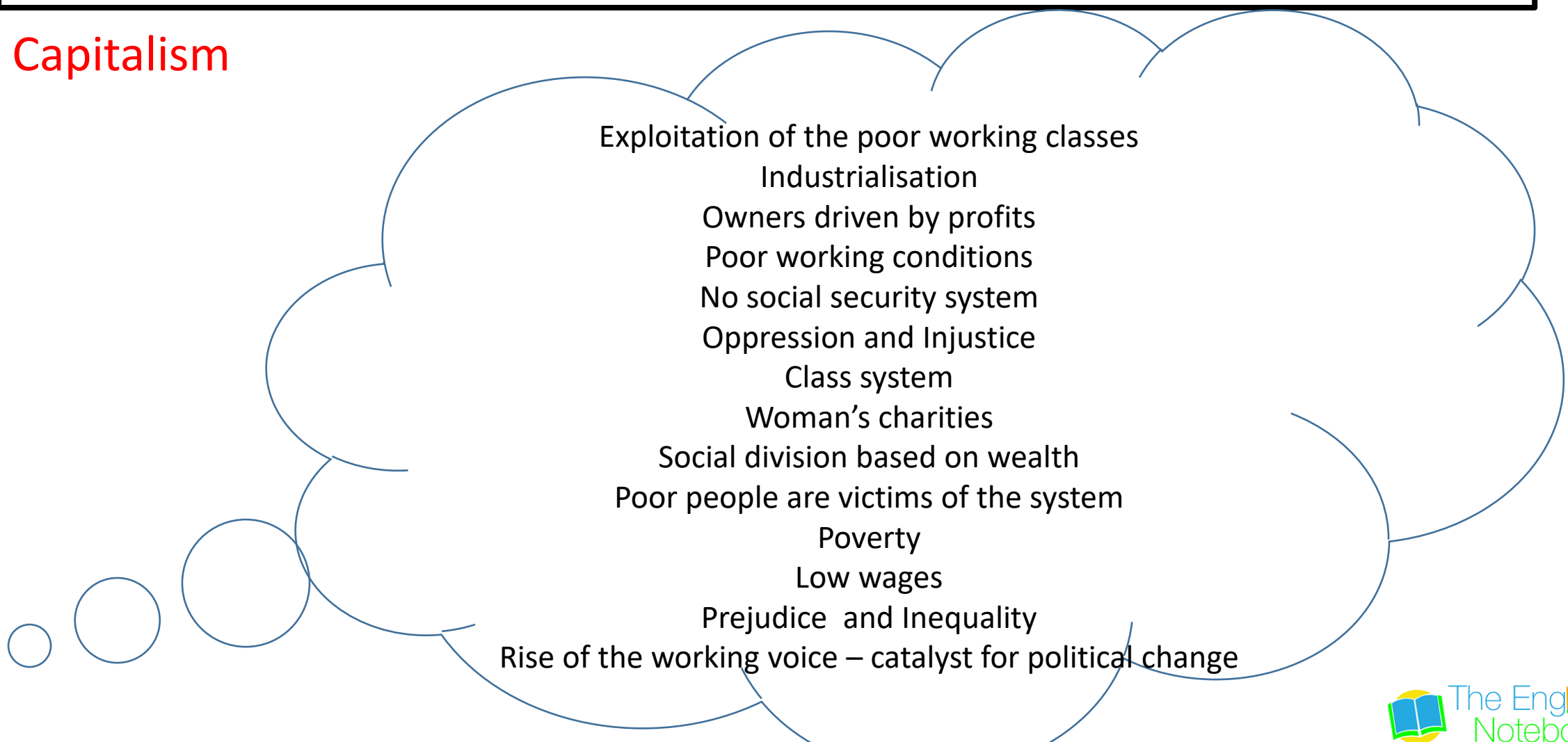
# Priestley's views

## Background

- Concerned about social inequality during the 1930s
- Fought in WW1
- Set up the Common Wealth Party – 1942
- Argued for public ownership of land and greater democracy
- Merged with Labour party
- Landslide victory in 1945
- Developed the idea of a Welfare State after WW2

# The Politics and Historical Background

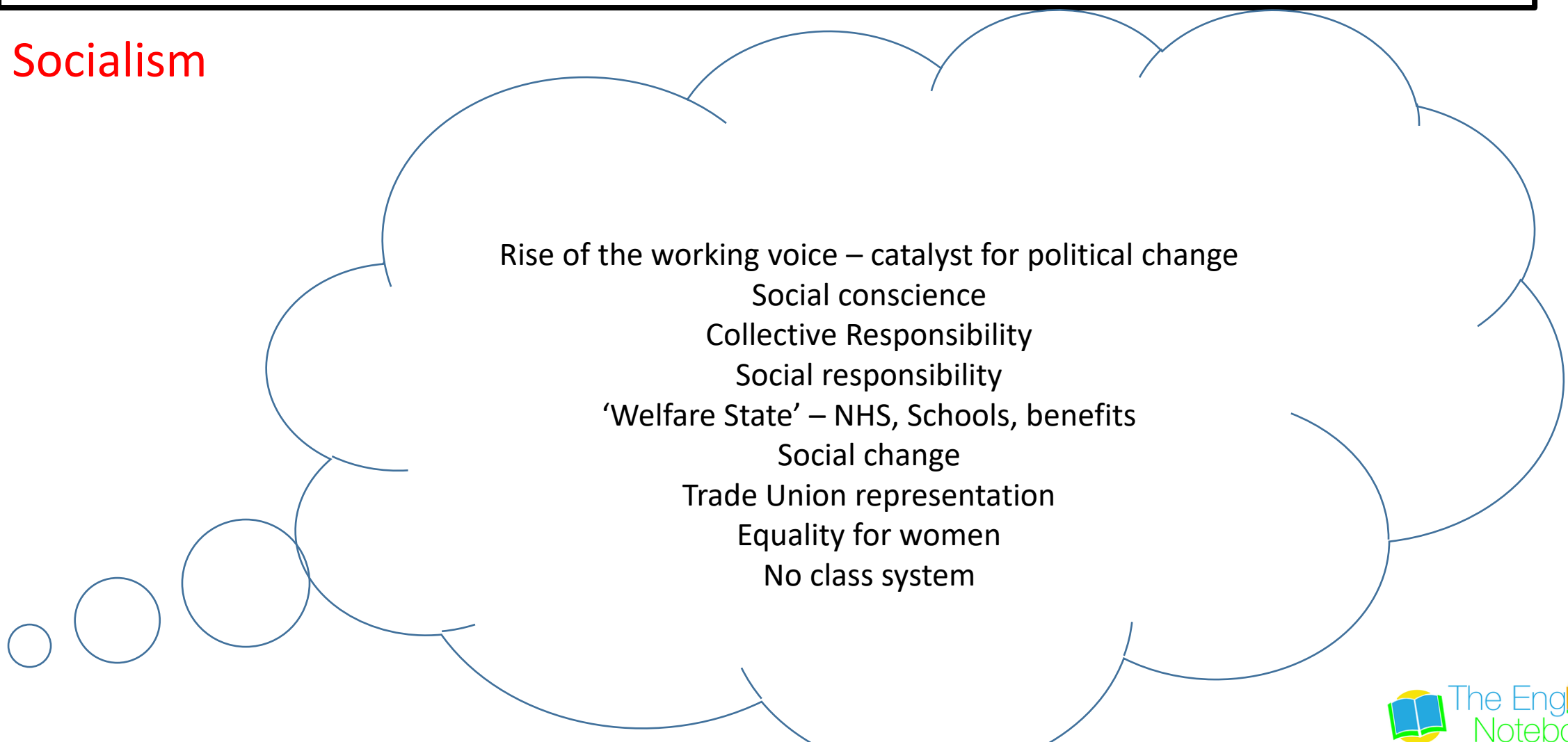
## Capitalism



Exploitation of the poor working classes  
Industrialisation  
Owners driven by profits  
Poor working conditions  
No social security system  
Oppression and Injustice  
Class system  
Woman's charities  
Social division based on wealth  
Poor people are victims of the system  
Poverty  
Low wages  
Prejudice and Inequality  
Rise of the working voice – catalyst for political change

# The Politics and Historical Background

## Socialism



Rise of the working voice – catalyst for political change  
Social conscience  
Collective Responsibility  
Social responsibility  
'Welfare State' – NHS, Schools, benefits  
Social change  
Trade Union representation  
Equality for women  
No class system

# Lets look at some Exam questions and essay techniques

- How do start writing the answer?
- What do we include in our answer?
- How do we end each paragraph?

# How is the context explored in the play?

## Through which characters has Priestley depicted the context?

**Activity:** to consolidate our understanding of Context and its link to each character

In your books, write 3 sentences on each character to explain how they reflect the different aspects of **context** in the play.

Eg.

Through Mr Birling, Priestley demonstrates:

- **Industrialisation and the capitalist economy** showing that wealth only belonged to a small sector of the population.
- **Exploitation** – portraying how factory workers were over worked and underpaid and poor people were disempowered - 'Cheap labour'
- **Individualistic and Self centered Attitudes** - The Middle and upper classes (like the Birlings and Crofts )were selfish and were very adamant that everyone should look after themselves; there was no consideration of the less fortunate ...'community and all that nonsense'



# Key Characters



## Mr Birling

‘heavy-looking and portentous man’

- A successful business man, a magistrate and someone who is active in local politics, Mr Birling has also had the honour of being Lord Mayor of Brumley.
- Hoping for knighthood - more socially acceptable to Sir George and Lady Croft.
- Pleased about the engagement of Sheila to Gerald Croft, as he believes it will be good for his business. His attitude to business and the fact that a man should ‘look after his own’ is discredited by the confessions that the inspector brings about.
- Has a matter of fact approach to life, he tells the Inspector that he wouldn't listen to Eva Smith's demand for a wage rise 'I refused, of course' and is surprised why anyone should question why. *'It's my duty to keep labour costs down'*
- 'You damned fool - why didn't you come to me when you found yourself in this mess?' Even at the end of the play, he continues to ignore the shameful things that his family has done
- He refuses to accept any responsibility for Eva 's death. He becomes increasingly annoyed by the Inspector's questioning and Eric's unsympathetic attitude • He tries to threaten the Inspector by talking about his friendship with the Chief Constable.
- he still thinks in terms of money at the end 'Look, Inspector - I'd give thousands’
- Mr Birling represents Priestley's hatred of businessmen who are only interested in making money. He will never alter his ways and it is left to the younger generation to learn from their mistakes

# Inspector Goole

Primary catalyst in the play

Represents their conscience – represents morality and is  
Priestley's social voice in the play

Promotes social responsibility and compassion

Determined, discerning and a solid, unshakeable character in pursuit  
of the truth

Direct, unemotional and grows in stature as the play progresses

Dismisses the Birling's ostentatious display of wealth, power and self  
importance through his line of questioning

He intimidates them, which exposes their culpability

Mysterious and omniscient through his knowledge of the events of  
Eva's life and death

Through his line of questioning, he controls the speech, actions and  
movement on stage

Creates moments of tension and intrigue and acts as a vehicle for  
Priestley's moral message

## Eva Smith and Daisy Renton

"country-bred"

"very pretty - soft brown hair and big dark eyes."

Absent from stage, yet her presence is felt by everyone else through their involvement with her

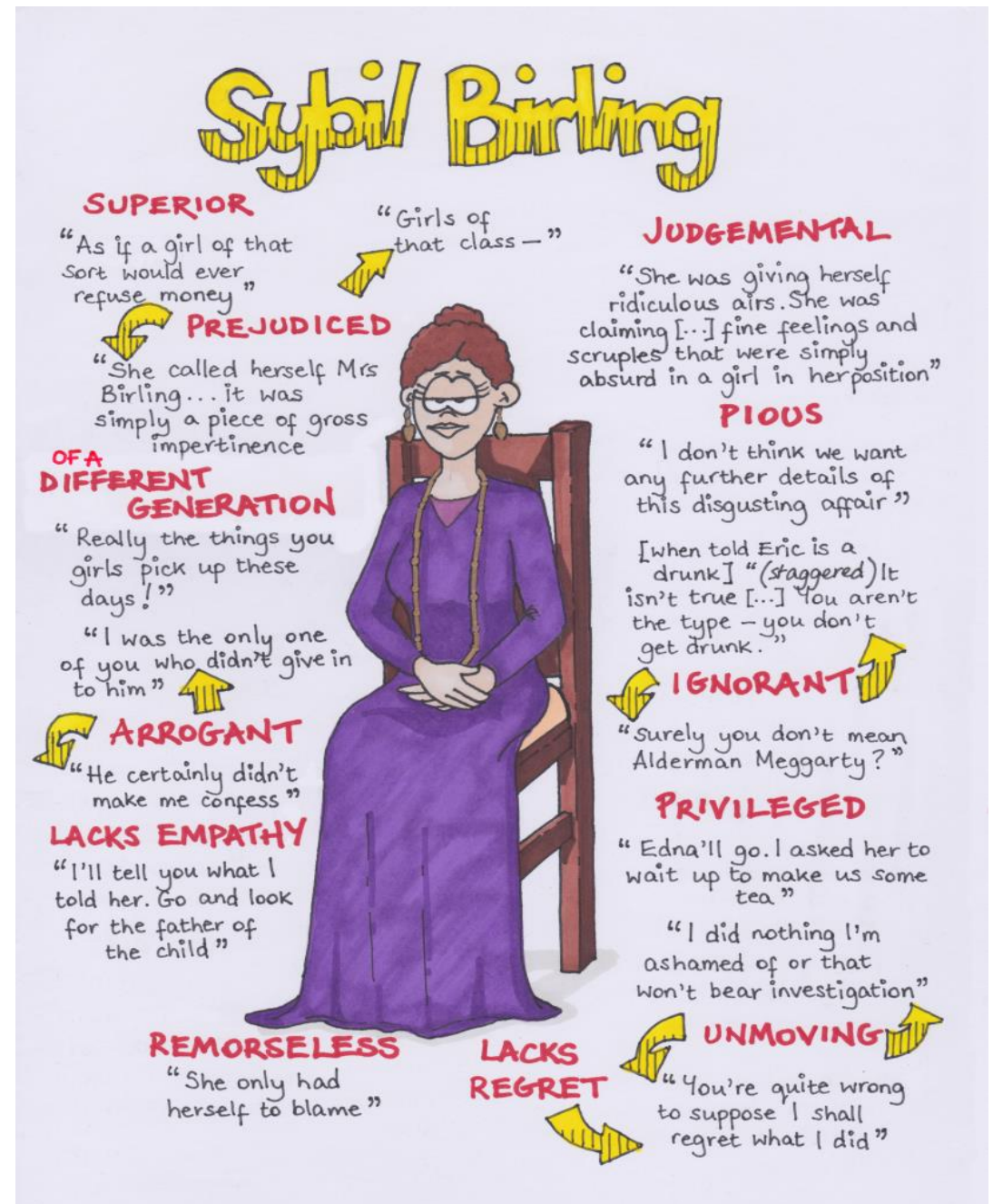
She is symbolic of the voiceless and faceless working classes

Creates mystery and intrigue in death

She represents the 'millions' of voiceless and faceless struggling people of society who go unheard and unnoticed by the wealthy minority

Through Eva, Priestley promotes the view of collective responsibility 'one body' – everyone has to share the responsibility of Eva's death

Stubborn  
Selfish  
Ignorant  
Hypocrite  
Naïve  
Callous  
Cold  
Prejudiced  
Snob





## Explore how Priestley presents Social Position in 'An Inspector Calls'?

### Use **TEEZEC**

Priestly 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.

This is clearly evident when Mr Birling says that they need to keep 'labour costs down' and 'prices up', 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. Furthermore the focus of Mr Birling on 'Prices' and 'costs' indicates his priority and preference to ensure profits are maximised for greater wealth. In this way Priestley conveys how the class system was perpetuated in society.

Furthermore, the contrast demonstrates Mr Birling's 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. As we know, this was common practice during the Edwardian Era, due to the distinct divide between the rich and the poor. 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.

**Topic Sentence/  
Point**

related to theme  
or character

**Evidence**

**Explanation**

**Zoom into words  
and techniques**

**Explain and  
Explore Further**

**Context**

# Social Position

Another way in which Priestly 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.

# How does Priestley present Sheila in the play?

At the beginning of the play in Act 1, Priestly presents Sheila as being naïve and spoilt upper class girl who is oblivious to the inequalities in society. Sheila clearly lives a very sheltered and uncomplicated life and is therefore 'very pleased with life and rather excited.' The intensifier 'very' and the adjectives 'pleased' and 'excited' portrays Sheila's simplistic personality. Furthermore, she is 'rather excited' due to the fact that she completely unaware of the injustices and unfairness that exists outside of her family and their exclusive lifestyle. Through Sheila, Priestly depicts the apathetic attitude of the wealthy middle and upper classes who are very materialistic and have only self – interest, to advance themselves and drive profits.

However, in Act 2, Priestley presents Sheila as a character who grows in stature and maturity. When she realises her role in the demise of Eva Smith, Sheila understands the negative impact she has had on Eva's life and this makes her feel really uncomfortable with the truth. At this point, Priestley demonstrates that Sheila starts to develop a social conscience and is portrayed as '(rather distressed)'. Priestley's use of the adjective 'distressed' in the stage directions to indicate the first signs of Sheila's remorse and sense of regret in the play. These are also the beginnings of hope for future social change.



# How does Priestley explore ideas about Responsibility in An Inspector Calls?

Priestley explores ideas about **responsibility** through the behaviour of the Birlings towards Eva Smith. Mr Birling very confidently says that 'a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own' suggesting very strongly that his only **responsibility** is to his family and business. This selfish attitude is contrasted sharply with Eva's attitude who takes **responsibility** for the other workers in the factory, by speaking up for them to be paid fairly for their work. Mr Birling's **lack of responsibility** and callous attitude is reinforced through Priestley's depiction of him as 'A hard – headed man of business.' Priestley demonstrates in this way that Mr Birling represents the capitalists and profit driven industrialists of society at that time, who do not feel at all **responsible** for the well – being of others and in so doing cause people like the working classes to be subjected to tragic consequences, like Eva.

## How does Priestley portray Eva Smith in the play?

*Even though Eva Smith doesn't make an appearance in the play, Priestley presents her as having a massive impact on the lives of the Birlings and Gerald Croft. She has been created to depict how the lower classes were exploited by the middle and upper classes.*

*To begin with, she is an employee of Mr Birling's works and is known for being a 'good worker'. This means that her industrious nature has been made known to Mr Birling. In fact, he was going to promote her after she came back from holiday to be in charge of a group of girls. Employing women during the time was common (in the 1910s) due to the fact that they weren't under the protection of trade unions like the men. This meant that work for them was harsh, sometimes taking long hours and were erratic.*

*These conditions caused some women to protest, but since they had no protection they were consequently fired. This is shown in the play where Eva Smith leads a protest and is fired because she had 'too much to say' and a lot of spirit. Priestley indicates the fact that the wealthier , upper and middle classes expected the working classes to be silent and tolerate the exploitation and unfair injustices of that time. This part of exploitation in the workplace doesn't seem wrong to most of the upper class because they have become used to the treatment. This is shown when Gerald agrees with Mr Birling by saying that he would have done the same. The fact that Mr Birling can easily fire her and replace her is because in those times there wasn't anywhere for Eva to go. Since there weren't any rules in place to protect the women, they would rather suffer through their jobs then lose a source of income.*