

An Inspector Calls

The Grade 9 Character Pack: every quote worth learning, and what each one proves.

“We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other.”

The Inspector, Act 3. Learn it. Then see who contradicts it.

Mr Birling

Mrs Birling

Sheila

Eric

Gerald

The Inspector

Inside: six one-page character sheets (31 quote cards with analysis and a model Grade 9 sentence for each character), a themes map, a one-page context guide, the exam page, and a ten-minute guide for parents.

How to use this pack

One character, ten minutes, three moves. Do it daily and you will know the play by the exam.

1. Learn

Read the quote cards for one character. Cover the right-hand side and say what each quote proves.

2. Explain

Read the "Say it like a Grade 9" sentence out loud. Then write your own using a different quote.

3. Use

Pick a theme from the themes map and join two characters' quotes in one paragraph.

How to read each character page

Quote	The line to learn, in italics, with the act in the coral tag.
What it proves	The argument you can make with it (your AO1 point).
Zoom in	The word, technique or structure to name (your AO2 point).
Say it like a Grade 9	A model sentence joining the quote, the method and Priestley's purpose.
Trap	The most common way to lose marks on this character.

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A note on the quotes

Quotes are short study extracts. Act references follow standard editions, but page and line numbers differ between editions, so none are shown. In the exam, quote briefly: a few accurate words often work better than a full line.

Mr Birling

The confident capitalist who is wrong about everything.

What Priestley uses him for. Priestley makes Birling the voice of 1912 certainty, then lets the 1945 audience's hindsight knock his opinions down one by one. If his predictions fail, so does his morality.

"A man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own."

Act 1

What it proves. His whole creed: self-interest above shared duty. "His own" shrinks his care to family and profit.

Zoom in. Repetition of "own". The doorbell rings straight after, as if the play answers him.

"The Titanic – she sails next week ... unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable."

Act 1

"I say there isn't a chance of war."

What it proves. He is publicly, confidently wrong. The 1945 audience knows the Titanic sank (1912) and that war came in 1914 and 1939.

Zoom in. Dramatic irony. Hyperbole and repetition ("unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable") expose his arrogance.

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

Act 1

What it proves. Workers are "these people": a faceless group to be controlled. Sacking Eva becomes "discipline".

Zoom in. "These people" shows class distance. The Inspector answers: "It's better to ask for the earth than to take it."

"Community and all that nonsense."

Act 1

What it proves. He sneers at the very idea Priestley wants the audience to adopt: that society is shared responsibility.

Zoom in. Dismissive noun "nonsense"; the sentence fragment sounds like a sneer.

"Now look at the pair of them – the famous younger generation who know it all."

Act 3

What it proves. After the Inspector leaves he mocks Sheila and Eric for feeling guilty. He has learned nothing.

Zoom in. Sarcasm in "famous". Sets up the generational divide.

Say it like a Grade 9

Priestley discredits Birling's capitalism by making him wrong about the facts: his boast that the Titanic is "unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable" invites the 1945 audience to distrust his creed that "a man has to mind his own business".

Trap

Don't stop at "he is rich and greedy". Argue that Priestley uses him as a warning: we watch a man refuse to learn.

Test yourself

Why does Priestley give Birling the Titanic and war lines?

Links to: [Responsibility](#) [Class](#) [Age](#) [Dramatic irony](#)

Mrs Birling

The respectable snob who condemns her own son.

What Priestley uses her for. The most powerful person in the family (a stage direction calls her “her husband’s social superior”) and the least willing to change. Priestley sets a trap: her harshest judgement lands on Eric.

“Girls of that class –”

Act 2

What it proves. Eva becomes a type, not a person. Class prejudice lets her feel no duty.

Zoom in. “That” creates distance; the dash trails off as if no explanation is needed.

“I used my influence to have it refused. And I’m glad.”

Act 2

What it proves. She abuses her place on the charity committee to refuse help to a desperate, pregnant girl.

Zoom in. The short sentence “And I’m glad” is cold pride. Irony: a charity worker refusing charity.

“I blame the young man who was the father of the child she was going to have.”

Act 2

What it proves. She demands the father be punished, not knowing it is Eric.

Zoom in. Dramatic irony. The long clause builds the trap she walks into.

“I did nothing I’m ashamed of or that won’t bear investigation.”

Act 2

What it proves. Denial dressed up as honour. Her image matters more than Eva’s fate.

Zoom in. Negative phrasing; “ashamed” versus reputation. Her confidence is undone moments later.

“I was the only one of you who didn’t give in to him.”

Act 3

What it proves. She is proud of refusing to learn. The older generation is shown as closed.

Zoom in. Pride in “only one”. Contrast Sheila: “It frightens me the way you talk.”

Say it like a Grade 9

Mrs Birling’s demand that “the young man who was the father of the child” be blamed is a trap of her own making: Priestley’s dramatic irony lets her prejudice condemn her own son, showing how class privilege blinds the older generation.

Trap

Don’t just say “snobby”. Show her power: as a leading figure on the charity committee, her refusal is an abuse of authority.

Test yourself

Who is “the young man who was the father of the child”?

Links to: [Class](#) [Gender](#) [Age](#) [Responsibility](#)

Sheila

The one who learns, and refuses to un-learn.

What Priestley uses her for. Priestley's hope for the future. She begins as a young woman "very pleased with life", accepts blame early, and by Act 3 is the family's conscience.

"But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people."

Act 1

What it proves. She is first to restore Eva's humanity, directly challenging her father's commercial language.

Zoom in. Contrast: "cheap labour" versus "people". The dash lands the point.

"I'll never, never do it again to anybody."

Act 1

What it proves. Immediate remorse and a promise to change. She accepts guilt quickly.

Zoom in. Repeated "never" for sincerity; "anybody" widens it beyond Eva.

"You mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl."

Act 2

What it proves. She rejects class barriers: Eva is not separate from them.

Zoom in. Metaphor of the "wall". It answers Mrs Birling's "girls of that class".

"Probably between us we killed her."

Act 2

What it proves. First step to collective responsibility: she shares the blame.

Zoom in. "Between us" = shared guilt; the blunt verb "killed" avoids euphemism.

"It's you two who are being childish – trying not to face the facts."

Act 3

What it proves. Role reversal: the "child" is now the mature one.

Zoom in. Accusation; "childish" flips her parents' patronising treatment of her.

Say it like a Grade 9

Sheila's journey is marked by a shift in pronoun and verb: from "I'll never, never do it again" to "between us we killed her", she moves from private shame to collective responsibility, embodying Priestley's hope in the younger generation.

Trap

Don't say she "changes overnight". Track the stages: shame (Act 1), understanding (Act 2), challenge (Act 3). Also learn: "It frightens me the way you talk." (Act 3)

Test yourself

Which word gives Eva her humanity in Sheila's Act 1 speech?

Links to: [Gender](#) [Age](#) [Responsibility](#) [Class](#)

Eric

The troubled son who tells the truth.

What Priestley uses him for. Flawed, and Priestley doesn't hide it, but he is also the one who exposes his parents' failings. His honesty makes him a bridge between guilt and change.

"Why shouldn't they try for higher wages? We try for the highest possible prices."

Act 1

What it proves. He spots his father's double standard before the Inspector pushes him.

Zoom in. Rhetorical question; parallel structure: "higher wages" / "highest possible prices".

"I don't think you people ought to talk about her as if she were a piece of dirt."

Act 2

What it proves. He defends Eva's dignity while his family stays cold.

Zoom in. Simile "piece of dirt" is the language of disposal; "you people" splits him from his family.

"You're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble."

Act 3

What it proves. He blames Birling's cold, business-first parenting. The family is broken at its core.

Zoom in. Colloquial "chap" is an upper-class voice; "kind of father" judges Birling's role.

"You killed her – and the child she'd have had too – my child ... damn you, damn you."

Act 3

What it proves. He finally accuses his mother. Guilt and anger collide.

Zoom in. Fragmented syntax and dashes mimic distress; repetition: "you killed ... damn you, damn you".

"It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters."

Act 3

What it proves. His priority is moral responsibility, not reputation: the opposite of his parents.

Zoom in. "We all" = collective guilt, in line with the Inspector.

Say it like a Grade 9

Eric's description of his father as not "the kind of father a chap could go to" exposes the emotional cost of Birling's business-first creed, suggesting Priestley sees irresponsibility as a failure that begins at home.

Trap

Handle Eva's exploitation maturely: he took advantage of her while drunk and treated her as an object. Don't excuse it and don't use slang.

Test yourself

What does "the kind of father a chap could go to" criticise?

Links to: [Age](#) [Class](#) [Responsibility](#) [Gender](#)

Gerald Croft

The charming gentleman who wants it all to go away.

What Priestley uses him for. The upper class at its most appealing. Gerald shows real emotion in Act 2, but Priestley lets him slide back into privilege the moment the "hoax" appears.

"I made her take some money to keep her going there, at least until she refused to take any more."

Act 2

What it proves. His "kindness" is control. The verb "made" reveals who held the power.

Zoom in. Verb "made"; "refused" signals Eva's pride.

"I didn't feel about her as she felt about me."

Act 2

What it proves. He admits the relationship was unequal: she gave more than he did.

Zoom in. Balanced sentence structure stresses the imbalance.

"She was young and pretty and warm-hearted – and intensely grateful."

Act 2

What it proves. He lists her qualities; "intensely grateful" shows he enjoyed being her rescuer.

Zoom in. Polysyndeton ("and ... and"); the dash delivers the damning word last.

"I'm rather more – upset – by this business than I probably appear to be."

Act 2

What it proves. Genuine shock. Gerald is complex, not a simple villain.

Zoom in. Dashes show hesitation; understatement in "rather".

"Everything's all right now, Sheila. What about this ring?"

Act 3

What it proves. As soon as the Inspector may be fake, he tries to restore normal. His learning stops.

Zoom in. Reassuring tone; the ring puts engagement and status back above Eva.

Say it like a Grade 9

Gerald's final question, "What about this ring?", shows how quickly privilege reasserts itself: Priestley contrasts his earlier broken, dash-filled admissions with this breezy reassurance to suggest the upper class would rather return to comfort than change.

Trap

Don't call him "the good one" because he helped Eva. Weigh the power imbalance, then notice he leads the "hoax" discovery that lets the family stop feeling guilty.

Test yourself

What does Gerald's last line about the ring show?

Links to: [Class](#) [Gender](#) [Responsibility](#)

Inspector Goole

The outsider who makes the family look at themselves.

What Priestley uses him for. He controls the pace and the moral argument. A stage direction gives him an impression of "massiveness" and "purposefulness"; he delivers Priestley's message, then vanishes, leaving his identity open.

"Public men, Mr. Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges."

Act 1

What it proves. He quietly sets the play's moral rule: power comes with duty.

Zoom in. Balanced structure; direct address "Mr Birling" is calm authority.

"It's better to ask for the earth than to take it."

Act 1

What it proves. He defends workers' demands and condemns those who take more than their share.

Zoom in. Contrast "ask" / "take"; it echoes Birling's own "asking for the earth".

"Each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it."

Act 3

What it proves. He insists on shared guilt rather than one culprit.

Zoom in. Blunt verb "kill"; short imperatives sound like a sentence being passed.

"One Eva Smith has gone – but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us."

Act 3

What it proves. Eva stands for the many. The problem is social, not personal.

Zoom in. Triple repetition of "millions"; "still left with us" keeps the audience involved.

"We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other."

Act 3

What it proves. The core message: society depends on shared responsibility.

Zoom in. Metaphor of the body; "we" includes the audience; contrasts Birling's "his own".

"...if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish."

Act 3

What it proves. Priestley's warning to a 1945 audience: ignore this and war follows again.

Zoom in. Violent triple ("fire and blood and anguish"); prophecy in a play set in 1912.

Say it like a Grade 9

The Inspector's shift from "we don't guess – we ask questions" to "fire and blood and anguish" lets Priestley widen the Birlings' private guilt into a warning to the whole 1945 audience: unless society learns to be "members of one body", it will relearn the lesson through war.

Trap

He isn't just a policeman: write about him as Priestley's mouthpiece and the open question of who he really is. Some readers link "Goole" to "ghoul": offer it as a possibility, never as fact.

Test yourself

What is the "lesson", and what happens if it isn't learned?

Links to: [Responsibility](#) [Class](#) [Age](#) [Time](#)

Themes map

Five themes cover almost any question. Pick two quotes from different characters and set them against each other.

Theme	What Priestley argues	Quotes to pair
Responsibility	We are all answerable for how we treat others.	Inspector, Act 3 <i>"We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other."</i> Sheila, Act 2 <i>"Probably between us we killed her."</i> Mrs Birling, Act 2 (the counter-view) <i>"I did nothing I'm ashamed of or that won't bear investigation."</i>
Class	Class prejudice makes cruelty sound reasonable.	Mrs Birling, Act 2 <i>"Girls of that class –"</i> Mr Birling, Act 1 <i>"...they'd soon be asking for the earth."</i> Gerald, Act 2 <i>"I made her take some money to keep her going there..."</i>
Age	The young can change; the old resist.	Mr Birling, Act 3 <i>"...the famous younger generation who know it all."</i> Sheila, Act 3 <i>"It's you two who are being childish – trying not to face the facts."</i> Eric, Act 3 <i>"You're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble."</i>
Gender	Women hold little power and are judged harshly. Eva never appears on stage: she is spoken about, not heard.	Mrs Birling, Act 1 <i>"I think I had better go into the drawing-room and leave you men."</i> Sheila, Act 2 <i>"I'm not a child, don't forget."</i> Gerald, Act 2 <i>"She was young and pretty and warm-hearted – and intensely grateful."</i>
Time and dramatic irony	1945 hindsight makes 1912 certainty look hollow.	Mr Birling, Act 1 <i>"The Titanic – she sails next week ... unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable."</i> Mrs Birling, Act 2 <i>"I blame the young man who was the father of the child she was going to have."</i> Inspector, Act 3 <i>"...fire and blood and anguish."</i>

The pairing trick

Take one quote that **shows** the problem and one that **answers** it. Example: Birling's "Community and all that nonsense" answered by the Inspector's "We are members of one body." Two quotes, two characters, one clear argument about Priestley's purpose.

Context in one page

Context earns marks only when it explains why Priestley wrote something. One clause per paragraph is enough.

1912 and 1945

The play is set in 1912 but was written in 1945. That 33-year gap lets the audience see what the characters cannot.

Writing in 1945, Priestley lets the audience know more than Birling does.

April 1912

The Titanic sank on her first voyage. Birling's "unsinkable" is a joke the 1945 audience already knows.

Pair with: dramatic irony, Mr Birling.

1914–1918 and 1939–1945

Two world wars. Birling says "there isn't a chance of war". The Inspector warns of "fire and blood and anguish".

Pair with: the Inspector's last speech.

J.B. Priestley (1894–1984)

A socialist who served in the First World War and believed society should look after everyone.

Pair with: "members of one body".

1918 and 1928

Some women won the vote in 1918 (over 30, with conditions) and equal voting rights came in 1928. Women in 1912 had little public power.

Pair with: Sheila, Mrs Birling, Eva.

1945 and 1948

In 1945 Britain elected a Labour government that went on to create the NHS in 1948. The mood favoured shared responsibility.

Pair with: why the play's message suited its first audience.

The one-clause template

"Writing in 1945, when [context], Priestley uses [method] in '[short quote]' to show that [idea]."

The exam page

What the paper asks, and a five-minute plan you can run every time.

What AQA asks (from the June 2023 Paper 2)

Section A is An Inspector Calls. You answer **one** question from a choice of two: 30 marks for the answer plus **4 marks for AO4**, which rewards “a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation”. There is no extract for An Inspector Calls. The whole paper is 2 hours 15 minutes and 96 marks.

The two questions in that paper were:

“How does Priestley present what life is like for women in ‘An Inspector Calls’?”

“How does Priestley present the different ways older and younger characters respond to the Inspector?”

The five-minute plan

1. Argue

One sentence that answers the question and names Priestley's purpose.

2. Pick

Three points. Each uses a quote from a different character or act.

3. Zoom in

Name the word or technique in each quote. Say what it suggests.

4. Zoom out

One clause of context per point (1912 vs 1945).

5. Link

Finish each point by linking back to the question and to your argument.

What the examiner wants to see

A01 A clear, personal argument that answers this question, supported by well-chosen quotes.

A02 Analysis of language, form and structure, using subject terms accurately.

A03 Context used to explain Priestley's choices, not pasted in as facts.

A04 Accurate spelling, punctuation and varied vocabulary. Leave two minutes to proofread.

Practise

Pick a question. Using only this pack, spend five minutes building the plan above. Then compare your plan with the themes map on page 9. Do this once a week and the exam will feel familiar.

For parents: ten minutes, no reading required

You do not need to have read the play. You only need this page.

Ask

"Pick a character and read me one quote."

Probe

"What does that quote prove about them?" Listen for a reason, not just a summary.

Link

"Which other character would disagree with that?" Use the themes map to check.

Six quick questions (answers included)

Mr Birling. Why does Priestley give Birling the Titanic and war lines?

Answer: Dramatic irony: the audience's hindsight discredits his views, so we distrust his morals too.

Mrs Birling. Who is "the young man who was the father of the child"?

Answer: Eric, her own son.

Sheila. Which word gives Eva her humanity in Sheila's Act 1 speech?

Answer: "People" ("they're people").

Eric. What does "the kind of father a chap could go to" criticise?

Answer: Birling's cold, business-first parenting.

Gerald Croft. What does Gerald's last line about the ring show?

Answer: He wants to return to normal and has learned little.

Inspector Goole. What is the "lesson", and what happens if it isn't learned?

Answer: We are "members of one body"; if not, "fire and blood and anguish" (war).

What good looks like

A confident answer names a quote, says what it shows, and gives a reason Priestley wrote it. If your child can do that for one character a day, they are revising well. Praise the reasoning, not just the right answer.

Want one of these every week?

The free pack gives you the quotes. The weekly emails show you how to use them under exam conditions.

Each week we send an exam-style question for your text, a five-minute plan, a model paragraph, and a sentence-by-sentence breakdown of why it earns marks, plus a plain-English summary for parents.

See this week's breakdown

Find out how the weekly GCSE Ninja emails work and how to join.

[**gcseninja.co.uk/join**](https://gcseninja.co.uk/join)

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