

CAMBRIDGE

Brighter Thinking



An Inspector Calls

GCSE English Literature for AQA
Student Book

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Series editor: Peter Thomas

8

Parents and problems

How does Priestley present conflict between the generations?

Your progress in this unit:

- explore and characterise the relationship between Eric and Birling
- explore the conflict between the older and younger generations
- write about the relationships between parents and their children within the Birling family.

GETTING STARTED - THE PLAY AND YOU

Generation gap

Discuss the following questions in a small group, or make your own notes and discuss them with a partner. You could create spider diagrams to help you.

- 1 Why do the older and younger generations argue so much?
- 2 What are the main differences in attitudes and outlook between the younger and older generation?
- 3 How much do you think we are influenced by our childhood and upbringing?
- 4 What kind of father do you think Eric would have been?

GETTING CLOSER - FOCUS ON DETAILS

The conflict between the generations

Read from the beginning of Act Three to the point where the Inspector intervenes between Birling and Eric ('Stop!').

One of the key themes in the play is the conflict between the generations. This is represented in the family by the rift between Mr and Mrs Birling - who want to keep things the way they have always been - and Sheila, who is led by the Inspector into questioning their attitudes. Eric is also drawn towards the idea of change. The argument builds until Birling seems to be about to hit Eric. The Inspector intervenes to stop him. This incident suggests the kind of father Birling has been.

- 1 Identify any quotations from this section of the play that illustrate the conflict between the generations.
- 2 When Eric tells the story of his relationship with Eva, his language suggests that things were not clear to him: '**And I didn't even remember - that's the hellish thing**'.
 - a Identify two other examples of Eric seeming uncertain about the situation.
 - b What does this suggest about his relationship with Eva?

At the start of Act Three, Eric realises that the family knows about his relationship with Eva. Sheila says that she has told her mother tonight about his drinking, but reminds Eric that she could have told her months ago.

Eric admits to having had a sexual relationship with Eva after meeting her at the Palace bar, although he says '**I wasn't in love with her or anything**'.

Birling orders Sheila to take her mother out of the room. Eric says that later Eva told him she was going to have a baby. '**She didn't want me to marry her. Said I didn't love her - and all that.**' As she didn't have a job, Eric insisted on giving her 50 pounds, which he stole from the office of the family firm.

Sheila comes back into the room. Birling becomes very agitated about getting the money back and wants to cover it up in the accounts.

Sheila and the Inspector tell Eric that Eva had been to his mother's committee and that his mother refused to help her. Eric is angry and accuses his mother of having killed Eva and the child she would have had - his child and her own grandchild.

Father and son

Read through the extract and then answer the questions that follow.

Mrs B. *(shocked)* Eric! You stole money?

Eric No, not really. I intended to pay it back.

Birling We've heard that story before. How could you have paid it back?

Eric I'd have managed somehow. I had to have some money –

Birling I don't understand how you could take as much as that out of the office without somebody knowing.

Eric There were some small accounts to collect, and I asked for cash –

Birling Gave the firm's receipt and then kept the money, eh?

Eric Yes.

Birling You must give me a list of those accounts. I've got to cover this up as soon as I can. You damned fool – why didn't you come to me when you found yourself in this mess?

Eric Because you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble – that's why.

Birling *(angrily)* Don't talk to me like that. Your trouble is – you've been spoilt –

Inspector *(cutting in)* And my trouble is – that I haven't much time. You'll be able to divide the responsibility between you when I've gone. *(To ERIC.)* Just one last question, that's all. The girl discovered that this money you were giving her was stolen, didn't she?

Eric *(miserably)* Yes. That was the worst of all. She wouldn't take any more, and she didn't want to see me again. *(Sudden startled tone.)* Here, but how did you know that? Did she tell you?

Inspector No. She told me nothing. I never spoke to her.

Sheila She told mother.

Mrs B. *(alarmed)* Sheila!

Sheila Well, he has to know.

Eric *(to Mrs Birling)* She told you? Did she come here – but then she couldn't have done, she didn't even know I lived here. What happened?

MRS BIRLING, distressed, shakes her head but does not reply.

Come on, don't just look like that. Tell me – tell me – what happened?

Inspector *(with calm authority)* I'll tell you. She went to your mother's committee for help, after she'd done with you. Your mother refused that help.

Eric *(nearly at breaking point)* Then – you killed her. She came to you to protect me – and you turned her away – yes, and you killed her – and the child she'd have had too – my child – your own grandchild – you killed them both – damn you, damn you –

Mrs B. *(very distressed now)* No – Eric – please – I didn't know – I didn't understand –

Eric *(almost threatening her)* You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried – you –

Sheila *(frightened)* Eric, don't – don't –

Birling *(furious, intervening)* Why, you hysterical young fool – get back – or I'll –

Inspector *(taking charge, masterfully)* Stop!

They are suddenly quiet, staring at him.

- 1 Write a paragraph describing how Priestley presents the relationship between Eric and Birling in this extract. Identify at least one quotation from the extract to support your comments.
- 2 When Eric says he intended to pay the money back, Birling responds with '**We've heard that story before.**' Write a short paragraph to interrogate this quotation. Remember – when you 'interrogate' a quotation or an action you look into the detail and ask searching questions. For example 'What does this imply about the relationship between father and son?'
- 3 Birling says: '**You must give me a list of those accounts. I've got to cover this up as soon as I can.**' Write a paragraph in the **first person** in which Birling explains his reasons for wanting to cover this up. You could begin like this:

I can't believe this – my own son, my own flesh and blood. There will be a scandal because ...
- 4 Eric says that Birling is '**Not the sort of father a chap would go to in trouble.**' Write three bullet points analysing why he says this. For example:

- The only way in which Birling speaks to Eric is to tell him off or express disappointment.



Find out more about themes and ideas in the play in Unit 14.



Key terms

first person: a way of writing that tells a story through the eyes of one of the characters, using the pronouns 'I', 'my' and 'me'.



You must give me a list of those accounts. I've got to cover this up as soon as I can.

Birling: Act Three

Eric’s role

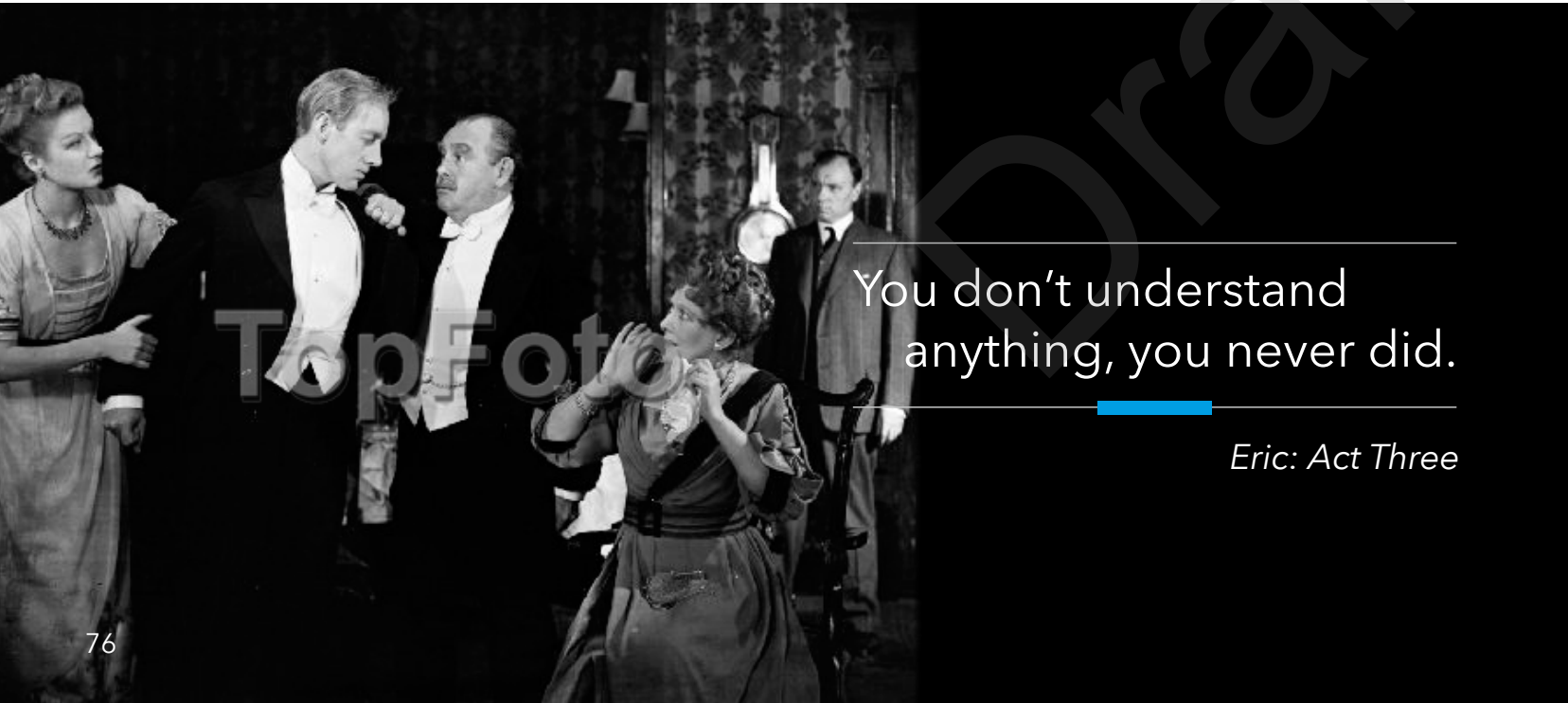
- 1 Eric says to his mother ‘**Then - you killed her.**’ Write a paragraph exploring why this is a key moment in the play. You could begin like this:
- Since the beginning of the play we have seen that Eric is in conflict with his parents. This builds to the point when he accuses his own mother of murder. His statement is ...
- 2 Eric says ‘**You don’t understand anything, you never did.**’ What does this tell the audience about the family?
- 3 ‘Eric has done wrong, but he is also a victim.’ Write a paragraph either **for** or **against** this statement.

Chart the break up of the family

- 1 Copy the following table, then add to it to chart the break-up of the Birling family in the play so far.

Disagreement	Quotation
Eric and Birling argue when Birling tells the story of Eva being sacked.	Birling: She was one of my employees and then I discharged her. Eric: Is that why she committed suicide? When was this father? Birling: Just keep quiet Eric and don’t get excited.
Sheila feels her father’s action may have led to Eva Smith’s unhappiness.	Sheila: I think it was a mean thing to do. Perhaps that spoilt everything for her. Birling: Rubbish!

Continue to add to the table as you read through to the end of the play.



Learning checkpoint

Look back over the extract, then write two or three paragraphs describing and explaining your interpretation of the relationship between Eric and Mr Birling. Here are some examples to get you started:

- Eric’s line ... suggests ...
- When Mr Birling ..., it suggests that ...
- Priestley uses language to show that ...

How will I know I’ve done this well?

Check your answer to make sure you have:

- ✓ used at least one quotation from the text to support the points you make
- ✓ shown how Priestley uses language and dramatic devices to present everything that Eric and Mr Birling say and do
- ✓ used accurate spelling and clear, well-punctuated sentences.

GETTING IT INTO WRITING

Writing about character and language

In previous units you have developed your skills to plan and write a literature essay. You have thought about:

- how to understand the task
- how to do a detailed essay plan
- how to work with quotations.

You have practised bringing these together to produce a piece of sustained writing and have had the opportunity to write under timed conditions.

Remember – in the exam you will have to write about the whole play, not just an extract. You will have 45 minutes to write your essay.

For the following writing task you can write about the play up to the extract in this unit. You will need to focus on:

- character
- characterisation (the methods used by Priestley to build the characters)
- the language the characters use
- the structure (the way the events in the scene, act or the whole play are put together).

Use your work from this unit, but trying to widen it by looking back at your notes and ideas from previous units.

1 Choose **one** of the following writing tasks.

How does Priestley present relationships within the Birling family?

Write about:

- the conflict between the generations
- how Priestley presents the relationships to an audience.

How does Priestley use the Inspector to bring the family into conflict?

Write about:

- how the Inspector’s questions and language bring about the disagreements
- how Priestley presents these conflicts to the audience.

How and why does Eric change in *An Inspector Calls*? Write about:

- Eric’s relationship with his parents and his treatment of Eva
- how Priestley presents Eric’s character to an audience by the way he writes.

GETTING FURTHER

The world beyond the play

1 Look back to the notes you made in Unit 3 about Priestley’s views on society. What does Priestley’s examination of the conflict between the generations suggest about his wider view of society?

2 Look at this list of objects that might be found in the Birling’s house:

- Mr Birling: a painting of a racehorse in a gilt frame
- Sheila: a rocking horse, old and battered
- Mrs Birling: a photo of Birling as a young man
- Eric: a boy’s cricket cap that has fallen behind a dresser.


Use your knowledge of the play so far to imagine the world of the characters beyond the text.

- a Imagine why each of the objects might be significant for the named character.
- b In small groups, discuss the objects.
- c Think about the stories that might lie behind the objects and how they could be significant to the character.
- d Prepare a monologue spoken by the character in which they tell the story behind the object.

3 Prepare a dramatic reading of the extract in this unit.

- a In groups, decide who will read which character.
- b Before you start the read-through, work on your own, studying your character’s words.
- c In each of your speeches find two or three key words – the ones that seem most important. This will help you with **emphasis** and **expression**. It is important to understand what your character is saying and why they are saying it. If you don’t understand your words, your audience won’t either.
- d Make sure you understand your character’s speeches, motivations and relationship to the other characters.
- e Read the extract to yourself as if you are acting it, thinking carefully about how you will say each line. You might find it helpful to practise saying your lines quietly to yourself.
- f Work with a partner and coach each other by going through your lines and speaking them aloud. Discuss the meaning of your words.
- g When you feel you have prepared, get together with the other actors in your group and read through the extract. Remember to make the read-through dramatic – think of it as a performance.

4 Afterwards, discuss how your reading of the extract has helped you to understand the characters, and what they say and do.

Key terms

emphasis: the extra force given to a word or phrase when a writer wants it to make a particular impact.

expression: the way that a word or phrase is spoken to show feeling or emotion.

GCSE English Literature for AQA

An Inspector Calls Student Book

Written for the AQA GCSE English Literature specification for first teaching from 2015, this Student Book provides in-depth support for studying *An Inspector Calls*. Exploring J. B. Priestley's play act by act and as a whole text, this resource builds students' skills and confidence in understanding and writing about this classic 20th-century drama.

- Encourages skills development and progression based on GCSE English Literature assessment objectives and study focus areas, including structure, contexts, characterisation and language.
- Part 1 units explore each act of the play in detail; Part 2 units consider the play as a whole.
- Each Part 1 unit includes a 'Getting it into writing' task to build focused writing skills and confidence.
- Includes an exam preparation section with guidance and practice, including example answers.
- The Cambridge Elevate-enhanced Edition features additional rich digital content, including brand-new videos of performances of key scenes, character and language explorations, and much more.

This book has been approved by AQA.

About the authors

Jon Seal is an experienced teacher who has worked as a Head of English and teacher of Media Studies. He has written teacher guides published by NATE and is an award-winning filmmaker, having won a Jerwood Film Shorts Prize for *Back to Earth*.

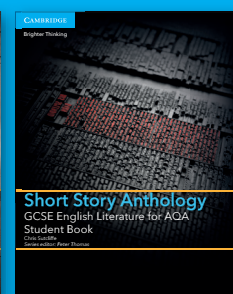
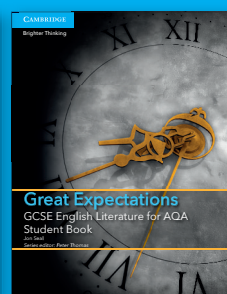
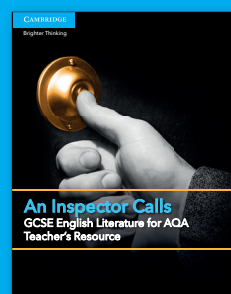
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