

Plot

- Act 1** The Birling family celebrate their daughter Sheila's engagement. Inspector Goole arrives to investigate the death of a young woman named Eva Smith, who has taken her own life. Mr Birling fired Eva Smith from his factory because she wanted higher wages. Sheila Birling used her influence to have Eva Smith sacked from Milwards. The Inspector informs the family Eva Smith changed her name to Daisy Renton. Sheila notices immediately that her fiancé, Gerald Croft, reacts to the name.
- Act 2** Gerald admits he had an affair with Eva/Daisy. He offered her a place to stay and gave her money. Sheila breaks off her engagement to Gerald. Mrs Birling eventually admits she used her influence to make sure Eva was refused help from a charity. Mrs Birling blames the father of Eva's unborn child and wants to see him made an example of.
- Act 3** Eric Birling is the father of Eva's child. He gave her money stolen from his father's business and offered to marry her, but she refused both. The Inspector's final speech warns people to care for everyone or they will be taught to in a painful way. In a final plot twist the family question whether the Inspector was real. The younger and older generation react differently when reflecting on their actions. Sheila and Eric change and show regret but their parents do not, and events repeat themselves.

Themes

Class	Consequence	Remorse
Prejudice	Family	Responsibility
Capitalism	Injustice	Redemption
Socialism	Supernatural	Hypocrisy

Assessment Objectives

- AO1** Respond to texts critically and imaginatively; select and evaluate relevant textual detail to illustrate and support interpretations.
- AO2** Explain how language, structure and form contribute to writers' presentation of ideas, themes and settings.
- AO4** Relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts; explain how texts have been influential and significant to self, and other readers in different contexts and at different times.

Vocabulary

Act	Stage directions	Exclamatory tone	Gender bias
Narrative	Simile	Dialogue	Suspense
Dramatic irony	Symbolism	Genre	Cliff hanger
Characterisation	Foreshadowing	Social hierarchy	Drama
Metaphor	Interrogative tone	Equality	

Context

Priestley served in the army during WW1 1914-1918 and wrote 'An Inspector Calls' in the winter of 1944-1945 as the 'world was suffering' at the end of WW2.

The play is set in 1912 and exposes the 'rotteness behind the façade' of the families like the Birlings. The play is a social criticism of 'middle-class prosperity and apparent respectability'.

Priestley exposes the irony of 1912 attitudes. The dramatic irony of Mr. Birling's claims: 'there isn't a chance of war' and that the Titanic is 'absolutely unsinkable' reflect his ignorance and pre-war complacency. Birling's speech at the beginning of the play also dismisses the idea of community 'as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive'. The idea that 'a man has to make his own way' is interrupted by the Inspector's arrival to counter this message.

The Inspector's final warning would resonate with the audience who had lived through two world wars. Priestley highlights the way Europe moved towards the 'fire and blood and anguish' of the 1914-1918 War because society did not appreciate that 'We are members of one body' responsible for each other.

The concept of 'Time' inspired this and other works by Priestley. 'An Inspector Calls' allows the characters to examine the consequences of their actions. They are given an opportunity to change and act differently to break this cycle. The final climax of the play shows that lessons have not been learned just as they were not from WW1 and repeated in WW2.

Tips

- Support points with reference to characters and events and refer back to the question set.
- Refer to social, cultural and historical context in the essay question only.

Character

- Mr. Arthur Birling** The head of a middle-class family and a prosperous business owner. He is selfish, boastful and self-important. He puts profit above people. Aspires to a knighthood and is unchanged by the events of the evening. He believes he has been hoaxed.
- Mrs. Sybil Birling** She is a cold, unsympathetic woman who lacks compassion. She supports her husband, believes her actions are completely justified and refuses to help Eva Smith. She is prejudiced towards 'women of that class'. She is unchanged at the end of the play.
- Inspector Goole** The Inspector highlights the importance of social responsibility and community. His role helps structure the play 'one line of enquiry at a time'. He explores how each character contributed to Eva Smith's death. He warns the characters and audience of the consequences of their actions.
- Sheila Birling** She is initially 'very pleased with life and rather excited'. She is shocked by the way Eva has been treated. She becomes more independent as the play progresses. She breaks off her engagement to Gerald. She is incredibly sorry for her behaviour.
- Gerald Croft** The upper-class son of Lord and Lady Croft. He claims he was kept away from Sheila due to business while he was having an affair with Daisy/Eva. He sides with Mr. and Mrs. Birling at the end of the play in claiming the Inspector was a hoax.
- Eric Birling** He is young, drinks heavily and works for the family business. He threatens to 'make a row' when he goes home with Eva. He steals money to support pregnant Eva and offers to marry her. He is ashamed of himself and his parents' actions at the end of the play.
- Eva Smith/ Daisy Renton** Eva Smith represents ordinary working-class women. She has no one to turn to when unemployed and pregnant. She highlights the need for the Welfare State established after WW2.

Structure and Form

- Written in three Acts. Each act ends with on cliff hanger.
- The play is cyclical in nature; the last Act directly linking to the events of the first.
- By the end of the play Sheila and Eric have learned important lessons and are ashamed of their previous behaviour. Mr and Mrs Birling believe their actions were right and justified.

You are advised to spend about 40 minutes on this question.

What do you think of Eric and the way he is presented to an audience? Remember to support your answer with reference to the play and comment on its social, cultural and historical context. [20]

Eric must enter into the play as definitely the outcast of the family. He doesn't seem to be loved or cared about by anybody. He is thought of as the embarrassment and uncontrollable infant of the group who instantly embarrasses himself as he says inappropriate things 'she's got a nasty temper sometimes'. He is definitely alone with no alliances.

He is given no respect. His mother treats him like a child yet wants him to be a man, 'Eric, don't you think you've had enough'. His mother doesn't really care for his happiness as she is only concerned with 'saving face' by keeping up appearances so he doesn't embarrass her or the family.

Gerald teases him constantly and instead of treating him as a grown young man, he treats him more like an irritating younger brother, 'sounds fishy to me'. Eric is disconnected from his father and lacks a male role model whom he can confide in and look up to. Gerald is closer to Mr Birling than Eric, as they share the same capitalistic and selfish attitudes to business and the lower classes. Eric shows himself to be more liberal and socialist in his view of the strike at the works. Mr Birling doesn't really know Eric or understand his concerns and needs, 'Why didn't you come to me when you were in trouble?'

Due to the lack of communication Mr and Mrs Birling don't realise the extent to which Eric's drinking has gotten out of hand. This problem he has is a great burden on him and has led him to do some really foolish things, stealing from his father's company 'you stole money?' and getting Eva Smith pregnant. While his parents do reprimand him for his mistakes, they are only really concerned about how bad it will make them look – and Eric knows that.

While Sheila is aware of Eric's compulsive drinking and does sympathise with his predicament, she merely pities him which not only affects his confidence but also is not constructive when it comes to addressing the situation and solving it.

From the very beginning of the play, it's obvious that Eric is hiding something. His on-edge persona intrigues the audience as they want to discover what the secret is. The Inspector purposely leaves Eric's interrogation until last as he is aware that Eric got Eva pregnant, adding to the pressure upon her and resulting in her death. The Inspector wants a climactic build up to the discovery that Eric fathered the child. He wants to show Mrs Birling how very little she knows of her son as she was the one all along blaming the child's absent father for playing the main part in Eva Smith's death.

Typically, as she discovers the truth, she blames her son, 'I'm ashamed of you Eric' and doesn't realise her lack of compassion and motherly nature was one of the key factors that led to the outcome of the situation.

The audience sympathises with Eric because along with Sheila, they, as the younger generation, realise and understand that their actions contributed to her demise and they used their status and power to exploit Eva Smith for their own selfish gain.

The audience respects that development and realisation and feels sympathy toward Eric. When addressing his mother and perhaps his biggest obstacle in life, he shows independence by standing up to her. 'you don't understand anything – you never even tried'. He doesn't blame her directly as he realises his part contributed greatly, 'that's the hellish thing' and he feels remorse and regret for that.

When confronting his mother, despite screaming at her, 'God damn you!' which shows child-like immaturity, he is screaming out like a neglected child. However, he has come to learn about social responsibility and the perils that follow if you neglect to think about others. While Mr and Mrs Birling may wish to continue as normal and pretend that nothing has happened, Sheila and Eric will not follow them and their relationship with their parents may not be repaired.

Commentary

The opening sentence shows a clear focus on the question and addresses the character of Eric. The candidate brings in relevant points and discusses the issues that are encompassed by the character. There is appropriate direct references from across the text, used to support the candidate's points. Overall this response shows secure and thoughtful understanding of the demands of the question.

You are advised to spend about 20 minutes on this question.

With close reference to the extract, show how J.B. Priestley creates mood and atmosphere for an audience here. [10]

Mrs Birling: If you think you can bring any pressure to bear upon me, Inspector, you're quite mistaken. Unlike the other three, I did nothing I'm ashamed of or that won't bear investigation. The girl asked for assistance. We were asked to look carefully into the claims made upon us. I wasn't satisfied with the girl's claim – she seemed to me to be not a good case – and so I used my influence to have it refused. And in spite of what's happened to the girl since, I consider I did my duty. So if I prefer not to discuss it any further, you have no power to make me change my mind.

Inspector: Yes I have.

Mrs Birling: No you haven't. Simply because I've done nothing wrong – and you know it.

Inspector: (very deliberately) I think you did something terribly wrong – and that you're going to spend the rest of your life regretting it. I wish you'd been with me tonight in the Infirmary. You'd have seen –

Sheila: (bursting in) No, no, please! Not that again. I've imagined it enough already.

Inspector: (very deliberately) Then the next time you imagine it, just remember that this girl was going to have a child.

Sheila: (horrified) No! Oh – horrible – horrible! How could she have wanted to kill herself?

Inspector: Because she'd been turned out and turned down too many times. This was the end.

Sheila: Mother, you must have known.

Inspector: It was because she was going to have a child that she went for assistance to your mother's committee.

Birling: Look here, this wasn't Gerald Croft –

Inspector: (cutting in, sharply) No, no. Nothing to do with him.

Sheila: Thank goodness for that! Though I don't know why I should care now.

Inspector: (to Mrs Birling) And you've nothing further to tell me, eh?

Mrs Birling: I'll tell you what I told her. Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility.

Inspector: That doesn't make it any the less yours. She came to you for help, at a time when no woman could have needed it more. And you not only refused it yourself but saw to it that the others refused it too. She was here alone, friendless, almost penniless, desperate. She needed not only money but advice, sympathy, friendliness. You've had children. You must have known what she was feeling. And you slammed the door in her face.

Sheila: (with feeling) Mother, I think it was cruel and vile.

Birling: (dubiously) I must say, Sybil, that when this comes out at the inquest, it isn't going to do us much good. The Press might easily take it up –

Mrs Birling: (agitated now) Oh, stop it, both of you. And please remember before you start accusing me of anything again that it wasn't I who had her turned out of her employment – which probably began it all. (Turning to inspector.) In the circumstances I think I was justified. The girl had began by telling us a pack of lies. Afterwards, when I got at the truth, I discovered that she knew who the father was, she was quite certain about that, and so I told her it was her business to make him responsible. If he refused to marry her – and in my opinion he ought to be compelled to – then he must at least support her.

Inspector: And what did she reply to that?

Mrs Birling: Oh – a lot of silly nonsense!

Inspector: What was it?

Mrs Birling: Whatever it was, I know it made me finally lose all patience with her. She was giving herself ridiculous airs. She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.

Inspector: (very sternly) Her position now is that she lies with a burnt-out inside on a slab. (As Birling tries to protest, turns on him). Don't stammer and yammer at me again, man. I'm losing all patience with you people. What did she say?

Mrs Birling: (rather cowed) She said that the father was only a youngster – silly and wild and drinking too much. There couldn't be any question of marrying him – it would be wrong for them both. He had given her money but she didn't want to take any more money from him.

Inspector: Why didn't she want to take any more money from him?

Mrs Birling: All a lot of nonsense – I didn't believe a word of it.

At this point in the play, the Inspector is trying to make Mrs Birling aware that like all the other characters, she also played a vital part in the death of Eva Smith. However, Mrs Birling is determined that she is not at fault and so argues completely against the Inspector's moral viewpoint.

Straightaway, a very tense mood and atmosphere is created by the various stage directions. Words such as 'horrified' and 'cutting in sharply' really emphasise the dispute that is going on between the various characters and are all feelings and words that someone would experience when they think they are being hard done by. This gripping and tense mood that the audience feels, continues throughout the entire extract as the 'stern' and 'dubious' mood is kept constant.

The audience would also feel as if Mrs Birling and the Inspector are two different sides of right and wrong, creating a further tense environment. Mrs Birling is convinced that she has done nothing wrong, and at the start of the extract, she makes a speech trying to explain how she isn't guilty of Eva Smith's death. A good example of this is when she says 'I did nothing I'm ashamed of' and 'I consider I did my duty'. For the audience here, they would feel disgust for Mrs Birling as not only what she did was wrong, but the fact that she strongly feels that she has nothing to be blamed for. The inspector disagreeing with her creates this sense of disgust even more for the audience, especially when he uses very emotive and descriptive language such as, 'she lies with a burnt out inside on a slab'. The harsh description makes the audience feel a strong sense of pathos here for Eva Smith, and understand the shallowness of Mrs Birling more, creating an even more tense atmosphere.

Also the audience will have recognised that the Inspector is a key role in displaying moral authority, especially in the passage when he creates a further sense of pathos in the audience for Eva, 'she was alone... penniless'. This would again create an apprehensive atmosphere and furthermore a mood of suspense for the audience as they realise how wrong Mrs Birling is.

Commentary

This response maintains focus on the question and follows the mood and atmosphere throughout. There is sustained focus of analysis of language and stage directions. Overall, a confident and assured response.