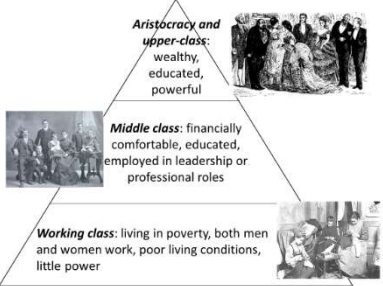


An Inspector Calls Knowledge Organiser (GCSE English Literature – AQA)

Characters

<p>Inspector Goole: presents himself as a police inspector investigating the reasons for Eva Smith's suicide.</p> 	<p>Eva Smith: a working-class girl in her early twenties who commits suicide. It becomes clear that her death has been caused by the Birlings' thoughtless actions.</p> 	<p>Mr Arthur Birling is the father of a middle-class family. An arrogant businessman, he aspires to become upper-class and only thinks about money and reputation.</p> 	<p>Mrs Sybil Birling was an upper-class lady but married beneath herself. She is cold and haughty, with little time for others.</p> 	<p>Sheila Birling is initially a childish young lady who is blind to reality. Yet she grows in integrity and empathy as the play progresses.</p> 	<p>Eric Birling is impulsive and reckless, but is also inclined to be empathetic towards others. Like his sister, he transforms by the end of the play.</p> 	<p>Gerald Croft is an aristocrat engaged to Sheila Birling. He appears to be gentlemanly, but is actually hiding hedonistic behaviour. He and Sheila break up during the play.</p> 	<p>Edna is frequently on stage, but speaks little. She is the Birlings' servant and is a constant reminder of how they ignore the working-classes.</p>
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		Plot and character development	Symbols	Quotations	Vocabulary	Historical context
Act 1	Opening Stage Directions	AIC was written in 1945, but set in 1912. The play opens in the Birling family's dining room. They are clearly a wealthy family, but there are hints that not everything is as it seems. The setting is rather oppressive, and gives the impression of entrapment within an upper-class milieu. Priestley also introduces the characters.	The solid furniture symbolises the apparent stability of the family and their place in the social hierarchy. The closed doors and curtained windows suggest blindness to the realities of the world outside this upper-class context. The dining-room is "fairly large", suggesting the family are not as wealthy as they wish to be.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Arthur Birling is a "heavy-looking, rather portentous man...with fairly easy manners but rather provincial in his speech." Sybil Birling is "a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior." Sheila Birling is a "pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited." Gerald Croft is a "well-bred young man-about-town." Eric Birling is "half shy, half assertive." 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Political diatribe: a political attack Microcosm: a small group of people who represent sections of society Façade: an appearance Capitalism: a system of organising society by which businessmen control money and keep it for themselves Socialism: a system of organising society by which money is shared equally Collectivist: the group is more important than the individual Individualist: the individual is more important than the group 	<p>Edwardian social class system:</p> 
	Celebrating the engagement	The family celebrate Sheila and Gerald's engagement, but Eric's tipsiness and Sheila's questioning of Gerald hint at cracks in the family's façade. Gerald's parents are absent, suggesting they disagree with his engagement. Mr B. makes several speeches articulating his capitalist viewpoint. Eric tries to question this, but is silenced by his father. The servant – Edna – circulates throughout as a visual reminder that the upper-classes ignore the working-classes. Then the ladies leave the room.	Engagement ring: not only does this symbolise Sheila and Gerald's engagement, but is also represents Sheila's social success at securing a wealthier husband. It represents stability, affluence, and acceptance into the upper-classes. Mr B's possible knighthood represents progression from middle to upper-class.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Sheila: "Oh – it's wonderful! Look – Mummy – isn't it a beauty?" Mr B: "we're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity." Eric: "What about war?" Mr B: "nobody wants war." Mr B: "as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense." 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Dramatic irony: the audience know more than the characters Arrogant: self-important, believing that one is superior to others Morality: the code of right and wrong Reputation: how an individual's character is seen by other members of society Discredited: disgraced, having a damaged reputation 	Life in 1912 meant class divisions and government by the capitalist Conservative Party. Industrial progress meant that Britain was more affluent. However, despite this optimism there were whispers of a possible war. Then the sinking of the Titanic in April 1912 revealed the short-sightedness of the upper-classes, who depended on technology and money. The deaths of many in the third class, and few in the first class, highlighted the unfairness of the class system. The world wars (1914-18, 1939-45) drastically changed society, so by the time AIC was written in 1945 , the class system was less rigid and women had more opportunities to work. In 1945 a Labour (socialist) government was voted in and the welfare state established.
	Goole questions Mr Birling	Inspector Goole rings the doorbell, interrupting Mr Birling's capitalist speech and therefore showing how socialism can replace capitalism. The Inspector tells Mr Birling, Gerald and Eric that there has been a suicide: a young woman (Eva Smith) has died. The audience discover that Eva used to work for Mr Birling, but was fired when she was part of a group asking for higher pay.	Eva Smith's name: "Eva" alludes to the Biblical character of Eve, who was the first woman made by God. Therefore Eva represents all women. "Smith" is one of the most common surnames, again indicating that Eva is the embodiment of all working-class women.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Insp: "burnt her inside out." Mr B: "If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody we'd had anything to do with, it would be awkward." Mr B: "If you don't come down sharply on some of these people, they'd soon be asking for the earth." Insp: "It's better to ask for the earth than to take it." Eric: "Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?" 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Hypocrisy: pretending to believe in something you don't agree with Obstinate: stubborn, unwilling to change Overbearing: domineering, asserting power over other people Materialistic: interested only in money and things 	During the Victorian and Edwardian eras, conditions for the working-classes were poor. Health and safety regulations were limited, with many workers being injured, becoming ill or dying as a result of their employment. Pay was low, with employers taking most of the profits. Workers' strikes were not uncommon. Across England many workers went on strike during "The Great Unrest" (1910 and 1914). In 1926, the country was brought to a standstill again during the General Strike.
Goole questions Sheila	Sheila enters and is shocked to hear about the suicide. We learn that when Eva left the factory, she gained employment in a clothes shop called Millwards. Sheila was shopping there one day, and became angry at Eva; she insisted that Eva were fired. Unlike her father, Sheila shows remorse for what she has done.	The dress Sheila tries on symbolises her desire to conform to a stereotype of femininity which values beauty, fashion, and sophistication above intelligence.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Sheila: "But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people!" Mr B: "We were having a nice little family celebration tonight. And a nasty mess you've made of it now." Inspector: someone's made a "nasty mess" of Eva's life. Sheila: "I felt rotten about it at the time and now I feel a lot worse." 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Infantilised: treated like a child Moral epiphany: a sudden realisation that one has made a mistake Receptive: willing to listen to others Remorseful: guilty, regretful 	Expectations of women in a patriarchal society: Middle and upper-class women occupied the domestic sphere – they were expected to marry (preferably a man or equal or higher class), raise children, and run a household. Women were considered to be the 'weaker' sex – not just physically but emotionally and mentally also. It was believed that they should be 'protected' from any aspects of life that were 'distasteful'. Things were, however, starting to change... the Suffragettes were campaigning for votes for women (granted in 1918), and lower-class women were increasingly working.	

	Plot and character development	Symbols	Quotations	Vocabulary
Act 2	Goole questions Gerald Start of Act 2. Inspector Goole turns his attention to Gerald, who reveals that he met Eva at the Palace Bar the previous summer. Eva was homeless and penniless, so Gerald gave her a place to live. They had an affair. In the autumn, Gerald ended the relationship and gave Eva some money. She went to stay at the seaside. Sheila returns the engagement ring to him.	The hedonistic behaviour at the Palace Bar reveals the darker side to upper-class behaviour. It shows how hypocritical Gerald is; he expects Sheila to remain innocent, but he seeks out working-class women for entertainment. Eva's changing names	20. Sheila to Mrs B: "You mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl." 21. Gerald: "I hate those hard-eyed, dough-faced women." 22. Gerald: "I've suddenly realised – taken it in properly – that she's dead." 23. Gerald: "She was young and pretty and warm-hearted – and intensely grateful." 24. Insp: "Your daughter isn't living on the moon. She's here in Brumley too." 25. Sheila: "You were the wonderful Fairy Prince."	U. Aristocratic: member of the ruling class V. Evasive: avoiding questioning W. Unscrupulous: lacking morality and integrity X. Exploitative: prepared to use other people Y. Vulnerable: weak and easily hurt
	Goole questions Both Gerald and Eric have left the room. Mrs Birling asks to see the photograph of Eva, and Inspector Goole questions her. Reluctantly and haughtily, Mrs Birling admits that she met Eva at her charity (the Brumley Women's Organisation). Eva came to the charity asking for help because she was pregnant; Mrs Birling refused to help on the basis that Eva was unmarried. Sheila becomes increasingly angry with her parents. It soon becomes clear that it the father of Eva's child was Eric.	reveals her desire to reinvent herself after each disaster. As "Daisy" she is innocent, but "Renton" hints at employment as a prostitute. As "Mrs Birling" she attempts to gain respectability and security.	26. Inspector: "Public men...have responsibilities as well as privileges." 27. Mrs B: "Damned impudence!" 28. Mrs B: Eva "only had herself to blame." 29. Mrs B: "I did nothing I'm ashamed of... You have no power to make me change my mind." 30. Mrs B: "I blame the young man... He ought to be dealt with very severely."	Z. Unempathetic: lacking understanding of others AA. Intolerant: unwilling to accept the opinions of others BB. Haughty: proud CC. Callous: uncaring DD. Wilfully blind: deliberately ignoring the truth
Act 3	Goole questions Eric returns at the start of Act 3. He reveals that he met Eva at the Palace Bar after her relationship with Gerald had ended. Eric returned to Eva's flat, and may have pressured her into having sex. Their affair continued, and Eva became pregnant. Eric tried to support her financially, but when Eva found out that he had stolen the money from his father's business, she refused this help.	The fifty pounds Eric steals from his father's business cause his parents to be more angry than the revelation about the sexual assault of Eva. This reveals their skewed morality and focus on money rather than people.	31. Eric: "I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty." 32. Eric: Eva "was pretty and a good sport." 33. Mrs B: "You stole money?" 34. Eric to Mrs B: "You killed them both - damn you, damn you." 35. Insp: "used her for the end of a stupid drunken evening, as if she was an animal, a thing, not a person."	EE. Euphemism: using a better word to cover up the harsh reality FF. Impulsive: acting without thinking GG. Hedonistic: indulging in pleasurable activities HH. Resentful: holding a grudge II. Disgraced: lost one's good reputation
	The denouement Now that the truth has been revealed, Inspector Goole takes centre stage and explains what we have learnt: that we are all part of one community and should take responsibility for other people. He leaves abruptly. Gerald returns, and suggests that the Inspector was a fraud. After some investigation, it turns out that there was no Inspector Goole on the Brumley police force. Most of the family are relieved, but Eric and Sheila think that this revelation changes nothing. The phone rings. Birling answers and hears that a policeman is on his way; a girl has committed suicide. The play ends, but there is a sense that the Birling family will be doomed to repeat the evening's events until they are able to learn their lesson.	The fixed setting throughout the play reveals the older generation's inability to change their opinions and become more empathetic. This setting becomes a symbol of Eric and Sheila's entrapment, and Sheila looks towards the door at the end as she considers escaping her oppressive upbringing.	36. Insp: "There are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us." 37. Insp: "We are members of one body." 38. Insp: "If men will not learn that lesson, they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish." 39. Sheila: "The point is, you don't seem to have learnt anything." 40. Mr B: "Look at the pair of them – the famous younger generation who know it all."	JJ. Moralistic: excessively concerned with right and wrong KK. Intimidating: imposing, frightening LL. Didactic: teaching MM. Omniscient: knowing everything NN. Strong-minded: determined OO. Malleable: changeable PP. Ambiguous: unclear

Concepts and ideas

Characters	Mr Birling	Mr Birling is the epitome of capitalist businessmen; he is prepared to sacrifice morality in order to gain affluence and social power. Priestley uses dramatic irony to alienate the audience from Mr Birling and his capitalist views.	Themes	Capitalism vs socialism	Priestley criticises the selfishness of capitalism and desires a fairer, socialist future after the horrors of two world wars.
	Eva Smith	Eva Smith is the embodiment of young, working-class women who were oppressed by the middle/upper classes. Priestley creates pathos and sympathy for her predicament, as well as paralleling her with Sheila to show that it social class is only an accident of birth.		Generations	Priestley demonstrates that the older generation are set in their ways, while the younger generation are more malleable and open to change for the future
	Mrs Birling	Mrs Birling symbolises the pride and callousness of the upper-classes, and her coldness towards her family demonstrate the discontent which comes from such haughtiness.		Responsibility	Priestley prompts the audience to examine their individual and collective responsibility to society in order to promote the idea of a socialist welfare state.
	Sheila and Eric	Sheila and Eric represent the possibility for a positive change in society, as they move from blindness to understanding and empathy. Does their sheltered upbringing mean that they are as much victims of society as Eva is? And does Sheila really understand the impact that she has had on another person, or is she upset that she has suddenly been plunged into knowledge of the real world?		Hypocrisy	The hypocrisy of middle-class Edwardian society is uncovered; the façade of respectability matter more than morality.
	Gerald	Gerald embodies the double-standards of the aristocracy, who present a respectable façade but in reality indulge in unscrupulous, hedonistic behaviour. Yet is Gerald the only character who truly feels distressed about Eva's death?		Sinfulness	It has been argued that the characters represent the Seven Deadly Sins. Thus, Priestley uses them to reveal universal character flaws and mankind's tendency to immorality.
	Inspector Goole	Inspector Goole is Priestley's mouthpiece, and is used to articulate Priestley's ideas about the morality and justice of socialism. Yet, ultimately, is Goole too didactic and domineering to gain the audience's trust?		Gender	Through his presentation of Eva and Sheila, Priestley reveals how unfairly women were treated in the Edwardian period. Yet, as Sheila transforms into a determined, outspoken individual, Priestley also shows the potential women have for transforming the society around them.
	Edna	An almost constant presence on stage, Edna reminds the audience that the upper-classes consistently ignore the working-classes. The audience is very much aware that Edna's place in the Birling household is dependent on her continued politeness and respect for her employers.			