

Worksheet 2 – Historical Context: Politics and Society in Edwardian Britain

Review: Lecture 1

In the previous lecture of the unit, Prof. McRae gave an introduction to the play, *An Inspector Calls*.

- ✓ What year was *An Inspector Calls* first performed? What major event had taken place in the years before its performance?

Recall: Lecture 2

Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.

1. What were the dates of World War One?
 - a) 1912-1914
 - b) 1914-1918
 - c) 1912-1918
 - d) 1916-1918
2. Read the statements below, are they true or false?
 - a) 'Priestley sets his play in 1912, because he was nostalgic for a better time.'
 - b) 'Industrialisation made most people in England wealthy.'
 - c) 'Priestley is interested in the different layers of society.'

Analysis

3. In his lecture [4:36-4:58], Prof. McRae's argued that:

‘[*An Inspector Calls* is] a highly political play. It is about the political layers of society and how responsibility for our own actions becomes key to societal self-awareness.’

Explain what you think each of these phrases mean, in your own words:

- a) 'a highly political play'
- b) 'about the political layers of society'
- c) 'how responsibility for our own actions becomes key to societal self-awareness'

Evaluation

4. Imagine that you are writing **copy** for a theatre website, for a production of *An Inspector Calls*. How would you summarise the play's themes for an audience?

Write a summary of maximum 50 words.

Your **copy** should:

- ✓ capture the play's main themes;
- ✓ explain a very basic plot premise;
- ✓ help the audience understand why the play is still important to see today.

Hint: To understand what **copy** for a play may look like, see the examples below:

Hortense yearns for a new life away from rural Jamaica, Gilbert dreams of becoming a lawyer and Queenie longs to escape her Lincolnshire roots.

Small Island follows their lives through the Second World War until the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush at Tilbury, where hopes for the future soon meet the stubborn reality of post-war Britain.

This 'resonant, funny and moving' play brings to life the tangled history of Jamaica and the UK.

<https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/>

Oklahoma! tells a story of a community banding together against an outsider, and the frontier life that shaped America. Seventy-five years after Rodgers & Hammerstein reinvented the American musical, this visionary production is funny, provocative and probing, without changing a word of the text.

<https://www.youngvic.org/>

Glossary

- **Copy (n.)** – an imitation or reproduction of an original work; written text, especially of an advertisement.
- **Disenfranchised (adj.)** – deprived of a right or privilege.
- **Industrialisation (n.)** – the process of a country or area becoming industrial; the widespread shift towards the production of goods on a larger scale, using increasingly mechanised means, for instance through development of factories.
- **Inferno (n.)** – a place that resembles hell.
- **Political (adj.)** – relating to politics and the organisation of power within a community.
- **Politics (n.)** – the organisation of power within a given community or group of people.