

Worksheet 8 – Act 1: An Inspector Calls... and Interrogates Mr Birling

Review: Lecture 7

In the previous lecture of the unit, Prof. McRae explored the second section of Mr Birling's speech about Gerald's family in Act One.

- ✓ In his monologue, Mr Birling calls Gerald's family 'landed people'. What does this phrase mean?

Recall: Lecture 8

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

1. Why did Mr Birling fire Eva Smith from his factory?
 - a) For getting pregnant outside marriage.
 - b) For asking for a pay rise.
 - c) For being late to work.
 - d) For being inefficient at her job.
2. Why does Mr Birling consider to be his 'duty'?
 - a) To protect his family.
 - b) To be a fair employer.
 - c) To keep down labour costs.
 - d) To ensure justice is served.

Analysis

3. Reread the lines preceding the Inspector's entrance. Answer the questions below to explore their significance.

EDNA enters
EDNA
Please, Sir, **an Inspector's called**.
BIRLING
An Inspector? What kind of Inspector?
EDNA
A police Inspector. He says his name's **Inspector Goole**.
BIRLING
Don't know him. Does he want to see me?
EDNA
Yes, Sir. He says it's important.
BIRLING
All right, Edna. Show him in here. **Give us some more light**.
EDNA does, then goes out.

- a) Edna is given a line which echoes the title of the play: '**an Inspector's called**'. Why do you think Priestley gives this line to Edna?
- b) Why is it significant that the verb *to call* is changed to the past tense (e.g. '**called**')?
- c) The Inspector's **name** is sometimes read as a **pun on 'ghoul'**. What might this suggest about his character?
- d) What is the significance of Birling's line: '**Give us some more light**'?

Evaluation

4. Read the stage directions describing the Inspector below.

- a) For each phrase in **bold**, explain what it suggests about the Inspector as a character;
- b) Consider how this passage as a whole might link to the two key adjectives Prof. McRae used to describe the Inspector: **insidious** and **implacable**.

*The INSPECTOR need not be a big man but **he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness**. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period. He **speaks carefully, weightily**, and has a **disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking**.*

Extension task: In his lecture, Prof. McRae discusses how the Inspector normally gets directed as a character in performances of *An Inspector Calls*:

‘In most productions that I have seen or heard of [the Inspector] has his back to the audience a lot of the time because he’s looking at the other characters. He’s slightly side on but such that when he does turn his face to the audience it’s significant, because he’s looking directly at us as well.’ [4:07-4:25]

- a) Imagine you are directing a production of *An Inspector Calls*. Explain how you would choose to have the Inspector standing on stage during the lines below:

BIRLING (*thoughtfully*)

Eva Smith?

INSPECTOR

Do you remember her, Mr Birling?

BIRLING (*slowly*)

No – I seem to remember hearing that name – Eva Smith – somewhere. But it doesn't convey anything to me. And I don't see where I come into this.

INSPECTOR

She was employed in your works at one time.

BIRLING

Oh – that's it, is it? Well, we've several hundred young women there, y'know, and they keep changing.

INSPECTOR

This young woman, Eva Smith, was out of the ordinary. I found a photograph of her in her lodgings. Perhaps you'd remember her from that.

- b) Why would you choose to direct this dialogue in this way? How do you feel it would add to the overall impact of the Inspector as a character?

Glossary

- **Alderman (n.)** – a member of a local council, next in status to a mayor.
- **Aspersions (n.)** – an attack on the reputation or integrity of someone or something.
- **Disconcert (v.)** – to unsettle.
- **Edifice (n.)** – a large, imposing building; a system of beliefs.
- **Implacable (adj.)** – unstoppable; relentless.

- **Insidious (adj.)** – proceeding in a gradual way, but with harmful effects.
- **Interpose (v.)** – to place or insert between one thing and another.
- **Magistrate (n.)** – someone who administers the law in minor local cases; a magistrate would hear local cases, a little like a judge, and make decisions on them.
e.g. My new neighbour was arguing about the boundary line between our gardens, so we had to go to a magistrate to decide where the fence should be placed.
- **Portentous (adj.)** – carrying lots of meaning; of huge significance; something done in an overly serious manner to impress other people.