AN INSPECTOR CALLS

eduqas

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 Milward's. 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, their parents do not, and events repeat themselves.

Themes

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

Assessment Objectives

AO1, AO2 are equally weighted for this question

AO1 Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- use textual references, and quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.

AO2 Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3 5 marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentence structures in Section A.

Characters

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. He aspires to a knighthood. He is unchanged by the events of the evening and 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 the 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.

Vocabulary

- Act
- Narrative
- Dramatic Irony
- Characterisation
- Hyperbole
- Metaphor
- Stage Directions
- Simile
- Symbolism
- Foreshadowing
- Interrogative Tone
- Exclamatory Tone
- Satire
- Allegory
- Listing
- Naturalistic
- Dialogue
- Genre

Structure and Form

Written in three Acts. Each act ends with on cliff hanger.

The play is cyclical in nature, with 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.

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 "rottenness 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.
- The provided extract can be useful for language analysis (AO2).

‘An Inspector calls’ Sample Exam Question

An Inspector Calls

You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this question.

You should use the extract below and you knowledge of the whole play to answer the question.

Write about the theme of responsibility in *An Inspector Calls* and how it is presented at different points in the play.
In your response you should:

- refer to the extract and the play as a whole
- show your understanding of characters and events in the play. [40]

5 of the question’s marks are allocated for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and the use of vocabulary and sentance structure.

INSPECTOR *(taking charge, masterfully)* Stop!
They are suddenly quiet, staring at him.
And be quiet for a moment and listen to me. I don’t think to know any more. Neither do you. The girl killed herself - and died a horrible death. But each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it. *(He looks from one to the other of them carefully.)* But I don’t think you ever will. Remember what you did —

ERIC *(unhappily)* My God — I’m not likely to forget.

INSPECTOR Just used her for the end of a stupid drunken evening, as if she was an animal, a thing, not a person. No you won’t forget. (*He looks at* SHEILA.)

SHEILA *(bitterly)* I know. I had her turned out of a job. I started it.

INSPECTOR You helped — but didn’t start it (*Rather savagely*, *to* BIRLING.) You started it. She wanted twenty-five shillings a week instead of twenty–two and sixpence. You made her pay a heavy price for that. And now she’ll make you pay a heavier price still.

BIRLING *(unhappily)* Look, Inspector — I’d give thousands - yes, thousands —

INSPECTOR You’re offering the money at the wrong time, Mr Birling. *(He makes a move as if concluding the session, possibly shutting you notebook, etc. Then surveys them sardonically.)* No, I don’t think any of you will forget. Nor that young man, Croft, though he at least had some affection for her and made her happy for a time. Well, Eva Smith’s gone. You can’t do her any more harm. And you can’t do any good now, either. You can’t even say ‘I’m sorry, Eva Smith.’

SHEILA *(who is crying quietly)* That’s the worst of it.

INSPECTOR But just remember this. One Eva Smith has gone — but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all interwined with our lives, and what we think and say and do. We don’t live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that if the time will soon come when, men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.
Good night.
He walks straight out, leaving them staring, subdued and wondering.

Exemplar response

Responsibility is central to ‘An Inspector Calls’ because the play revolves around the death of a young woman, Eva Smith, and to what extent the Birling family and Gerald Croft are responsible for this. Priestley also emphasizes the tragic consequences of the Birling’s actions because “we are responsible for each other” and yet Eva Smith became so desperate she took her own life. The play is set in 1912 and exposes the “rottenness behind the façade” of the families like the Birlings. The play is a criticism of “middle-class prosperity and apparent respectability”.

We first encounter the theme of responsibility directly when Mr. Birling gives a speech to his family as they celebrate his daughter’s engagement. Mr. Birling states that a man “has to look after himself” and dismisses ideas of community as “nonsense” encouraged by “cranks”. It is at this point that Inspector Goole arrives to challenge Mr. Birling’s ideas and investigate Eva Smith’s death.

As the first Act continues Priestley presents the lack of responsibility evident in capitalist values as Mr. Birling claims it is his responsibility to keep profits high and labour costs down. He is also keen to ensure his daughter’s marriage to Gerald Croft in order to secure a merger for his business and avoid any potential scandal. He is, however, reminded by the Inspector that public men “have responsibilities as well as privileges”. Sheila’s sense of responsibility is clear in her guilt for turning Eva ”out of a job” is in direct contrast to her father’s lack of responsibility and capitalist solution stuttering an offer of “thousands” to end the matter.

Priestley highlights the lack of responsibility for others as the Inspector reveals how Gerald tries to avoid responsibility for his affair with Eva at first denying he knew her. The theme is highlighted most cruelly in Act 2 by Mrs. Birling who admits her prejudice against “girls of that class. Mrs. Birling is reminded “masterfully” by the Inspector that she used her position and influence to deny an unemployed, pregnant Eva “even the pitiable little bit of organized charity”. Mrs. Birling’s refusal to accept any responsibility also leads to the dramatic irony of her demand to hold the “father” responsible and make an “example” of him.

In Act 3 the theme builds to it’s peak. The Inspector’s exclamative “Stop!” brings a distinct focus to the key message on this theme as the focus of responsibility shifts from the Birling family to a general message to society. Priestley uses the Inspector as a mouthpiece for a more Socialist reminder that all our lives are “intertwined”. Priestley emphasizes the number of working class, ordinary people in need of support from the more advantaged in society by repeating the enormous number “millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths”. The Inspector’s speech warns of “fire and blood and anguish” if society does not take responsibility for “each other”.

Overall, the younger generation take responsibility for their actions , learn the Inspector’s lesson and provide hope for the future. The older generation’ however refuse to acknowledge their responsibilities or adapt which results in the final plot twist where events repeat themselves.

Commentary

The opening sentence shows a clear focus on the question and addresses the theme of responsibility. The candidate brings in relevant points and discusses Priestley’s purpose in writing the play. The second paragraph keeps the focus firmly on the theme in the play. The response makes some clear AO2 points about technique – e.g. dramatic irony. The candidate also uses the extract. There are appropriate direct references from the extract and other parts of the text, used to support the candidate’s astute points. Overall this response shows assured understanding of the demands of the task and covers all the Assessment Objectives in a sustained, integrated way.