

CONTEXT

CONTEXT - 1912

1.	The Edwardian era, named after Edward VII, ran from 1901 to 1910, after which George V ascended the throne. However, the year 1912, when the play is set, is often described as belonging to the Edwardian era, because the mood was similar. For many, this mood was one of peace, prosperity and power for Britain. The British empire still spanned huge areas of the world.
2.	Just two years later, World War One would rip through Europe. This was, as its name suggests, the first global war, in which modern weaponry brought about widespread destruction. Like many nations, Britain lost substantial power and wealth.
3.	On April 10th, 1912, one week before the action of the play, the Titanic, the largest passenger ship built at that time, set sail. Its impressive size, power, facilities – and class divisions onboard – made it a symbol of Britain at that time. As did the arrogant boast that it was unsinkable. The ship sank 5 days into its maiden voyage.
4.	Trade unions had been forming since the second half of the nineteenth century. These represent the coming together of workers in order to claim better conditions (salary, benefits, etc.) from their employers. Some employers saw this empowerment of workers as a threat to their authority. The formation of the Labour Party in 1900 gave workers greater political representation.
5.	The push for improved workers' rights was matched by a claim for greater rights for women. The Suffragettes led this campaign, achieving the vote for married women over 30 in 1918. Despite this, the country remained deeply patriarchal.
6.	Britain was also still characterised at this time by rigid class divisions, with stark disparities between the aristocracy, bourgeoisie (middle class) and proletariat (working class).
7.	Russia in 1912 was a monarchy, but tensions between factions were starting to build – and would erupt with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.
8.	The Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw, and the English novelist, H.G. Wells, were known for their socialist views.
9.	Socialism is a political ideology which challenges the emphasis on profit and individualism promoted by capitalism in favour of greater equality.

CONTEXT - 1945

1.	The Wall Street Crash of 1929 tipped the USA into a deep economic recession called The Great Depression, which continued until 1935. Britain's dependency on America meant that its finances were further depleted.
2.	1945 marked the end of World War Two. After two world wars in quick succession, Britain was a very different place: exhausted, and saddled with massive national debt. Its empire had also narrowed substantially.
3.	Class divisions had been partially loosened by war, and women had achieved a more valued place in society. But the patriarchy was still evident and social inequality stubbornly remained. Following WW2, in 1945, the Labour Party, led by Clement Attlee, promised social reform, and won a landslide victory over Winston Churchill and the Conservatives.
4.	From the ruins of World War Two, America was the dominant superpower, but Russia wasn't far behind. In Churchill's phrase, a new 'iron curtain' fell between the Soviet Union and the West, and tensions escalated into a tense and dangerous 'cold war', with, as the years passed, the threat of an apocalyptic nuclear exchange.
5.	J.B. Priestley was a socialist, deeply concerned with the extend and adverse effects of social inequality in Britain. He became involved with the Labour Party in 1945, and was influential in developing the idea of the Welfare State which began to be developed at this time. Priestley believed that further world wars could only be avoided through international cooperation and mutual respect.

CHARACTERS		VOCABULARY	DEFINITION
1. Inspector Goole	A mysterious man claiming to be a police inspector investigating the death of Eva Smith. Priestley’s mouthpiece to promote Priestley’s own Socialist views. Goole advocates social justice . Omnipotent , moralistic , righteous, intimidating and imposing .	1. Proletariat	Working-class people regarded collectively who sell their labour to survive (often used with reference to Marxism). Exploited by the bourgeoisie.
2. Mr. Arthur Birling	A self-made , successful, respected businessman (new-money) with Capitalist views. Owns a factory and is head of the Birling family. Arrogant , foolish, prejudice , ignorant , selfish , stubborn, vainglorious .	2. Bourgeoisie	Capitalists who own the means of production and have most of the wealth in society. Exploit the proletariat to make the most profit possible by keeping costs and wages low .
3. Mrs. Sybil Birling	Mr. Birling’s wife and social superior . Obsessed with maintaining social etiquette, class and status in society. Arrogant , cold-hearted , insincere, prejudice , naïve, conformist, bitter , controlling, remorseless .	3. Dramatic irony	Where the audience know information that the characters do not. This form of irony is used within this play to criticise the way the Birling family view society around them. Birling’s speeches, Mrs. Birling’s witless implication of Eric.
4. Sheila Birling	The Birling’s young daughter (in her early twenties). Initially immature and childish, Sheila gradually becomes more sensitive, strong-minded and Socialist . Sheila eventually feels regret and remorse .	4. Social responsibility	Personal responsibility for our own actions and our collective responsibility to society , to take care of one another through a shared responsibility
5. Eric Birling	The Birling’s alcoholic son who is set to inherit the family business, Birling and Co. Reckless , immature , deceitful , irresponsible , disgraced .	5. Foreshadowing	Hints at something that is going to take place later in the plot . :Symbolism (The Titanic), Mr. Birling’s “knighthood”, war, etc.
6. Gerald Croft	Upper-class, aristocratic businessman from old money. About 30 years old. Engaged to Sheila . Shares Mr. Birling’s Capitalist views. Secretive, dishonest , disingenuous and privileged .	SYMBOLS/MOTIFS	
7. Eva Smith	Working-class victim who is unseen in the play. Repeatedly suffers social injustice . Suffragist, allegorical , vulnerable, desperate , socialist , moralistic, principled .	1. Photograph	6. The Inspector 'calls'
8. Daisy Renton	Eva Smith changes her name to Daisy Renton.	2. Engagement ring	7. The Palace Bar
9. Edna	The Birling’s parlour maid . Welcomes Inspector Goole into the Birling’s house in Act 1. The only working-class character that appears on stage and only has a few lines.	3. Alcohol consumption	8. Respectability
		4. Disinfectant	9. Responsibility
		5. Doorbell	10. Money
THEMES			
		1. Socialism versus Capitalism	4. Younger versus older generation
		2. Social responsibility	5. Gender
		3. Class	6. Morality versus legality

ACT 1

1.	Set in April 1912, Brumley, Midlands, UK . The Birling family and Gerald Croft are celebrating Sheila Birling's engagement to Gerald with a dinner . Mr Birling lectures his son, Eric Birling, and Gerald about the importance of every man looking out for himself if he wants to get on in life. Edna (the maid) announces that an inspector has arrived . Inspector Goole says that he is investigating the death of a young woman who committed suicide, Eva Smith . Mr Birling is shown a photograph of Eva, after initially denying recognising the woman in the photo, he remembers firing her in 1910 for organising a strike over workers' pay. Sheila recalls also having Eva sacked about her manner when served by her in an upmarket department store. The Inspector reveals that Eva Smith changed her name to Daisy Renton . Gerald reveals to Sheila he had an affair with Daisy Renton.
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CHARACTER	QUOTATION
1. Inspector Goole	"The lighting should be pink and intimate until the inspector arrives, and then it should be brighter and harder"
2. Mr Birling	"A man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own"
3. Mrs Birling	"Men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on their business"
4. Mr Birling	"I'm talking as a hard-headed practical man of business and I say there isn't a chance of war"
5. Sheila	"Oh – it's wonderful! Look – mummy – isn't it a beauty? Now I really feel engaged"
6. Mr Birling	"As if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense"
7. Inspector Goole	"She swallowed a lot of disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course"
8. Sheila	"But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're <i>people</i> ."

VOCABULARY	DEFINITION
1. Tension	Builds up throughout the play <i>e.g. interrogation of characters, personal relationships, secrecy</i> .
2. Stage directions	Information in a play script that directs actors in the way a character acts or behaves or how the staging should look at particular moments in the play. This helps to understand and interpret Priestley's intentions in the play.
3. Protagonist	The leading character or one of the major characters in a play, film, novel, etc.
4. Cliff hanger	A dramatic and exciting ending, leaving the audience in suspense and anxious <i>e.g. Eric's reappearance in Act 3; the ending allows the audience to make up their minds</i> .
5. Tragedy	A play dealing with tragic events and having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character.
6. Hubris	Excessive pride or self-confidence.

SYMBOLS/MOTIFS	
1. Alcohol consumption	The play begins with a party for Sheila and Gerald . Arthur offers everyone port , and they drink. Eric, accustomed to heavy drinking , has more than his fair share, and throughout the play the subject of his possible alcoholism arises. But every character has had at least something to drink by the time the Inspector arrives—except for the Inspector himself, who refuses because he is "on duty." Alcohol marks events of social importance in the family, and moments the family might rather forget.
2. The Inspector 'calls'	Calls, in-person and over the phone , announce important events in the novel. The Inspector, of course, "calls" on the family, and he does so in person, allowing the story of Eva's death to unfold over many hours .
3. The Photograph	The photograph carried by Inspector Goole symbolizes revelation and judgment . When each of the characters sees the photograph, they are confronted by their own misdeeds . Even though Eva is dead, she is still watching them . People have different reactions when they are caught in a crime, and these responses reveal aspects of their character. In the same way, the characters' varied reactions to the photograph uncover elements of their true personalities.

ACT 2

PLOT	ACT 2	CHARACTER	QUOTATION
2.	Gerald explains to The Inspector that he had an affair with Eva but hasn't seen her since he ended their relationship back in Autumn 1911 . Sheila gives her engagement ring back to Gerald. The Inspector turns his attention to Mrs Sybil Birling , she confesses that she also had contact with Eva, but Eva gave herself a different name to Mrs Birling. Eva approached a charity chaired by Mrs Birling to ask for help . Eva was desperate and pregnant , but help was refused by Mrs Birling because she was offended by the girl calling herself 'Mrs Birling'. She tells Eva that the baby's father should be made entirely responsible . She also tells Inspector Goole that the father should be held entirely responsible and should be made an example of .	1. Sheila	"And I know I'm to blame – and I'm desperately sorry"
		2. Inspector	" (Coolly) we often do on the young ones. They're more impressionable.
		3. Sheila	"(rather wildly, with laugh) No, he's giving us the rope –so that we'll hang ourselves"
		4. Gerald	"I hate those hard-eyed, dough-faced women. But then I noticed a girl who looked quite different. She was very pretty – soft brown hair and big dark eyes - "
		5. Inspector Goole	" (<i>Sharply</i>) Your daughter isn't living on the moon. She's here in Brumley too."
		6. Sheila	"You were the wonderful Fairy Prince. You must have adored it, Gerald."
		7. Mrs Birling	"As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!"
		8. Mrs Birling	"I'm sorry she should have come to such a horrible end. But I accept no blame for it at all."
		9. Inspector Goole	"No hushing up, eh? Make an example of the young man, eh? Public confession of responsibility – um?"

VOCABULARY	DEFINITION
1. Denouement	The final part of a play, film, or narrative where the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are explained or resolved .
2. Cyclical structure	When a text begins and ends in the same place or with the same idea .
3. Microcosm	Translates to 'small world'. Where one situation represents many similar situations within society. <i>E.g. The Birling family were not the only family in society to act the way that they do.</i>
4. Dramatic monologue	An extended speech delivered by one character containing an important message or information <i>e.g. The Inspector's final speech would represent a dramatic monologue.</i>
5. Lighting	The way lighting is used within the play to reflect moods and establish an atmosphere .
6. Pompous	A sense of self-importance and arrogance .
7. Materialistic	To be excessively concerned with material possessions ; money-oriented

SYMBOLS/MOTIFS	
1. Identity	Eva changes her name from Eva Smith to Daisy Renton, a name that is suggestive of forced happiness and the idea of being 'for rent'/ prostitution .
2. The Palace Bar	The Palace Theatre is a 'variety theatre', where a mixture of comedy, song and dance routines would be performed for mixed audiences. The bar is frequented by prostitutes or 'women of the town' and rich , often married, men , such as 'Alderman Meggarty' and Gerald. The double standards in this society are clear, as men are permitted the freedom to behave immorally , while the same behaviour from a woman would destroy her reputation .
3. Respectability	In the Edwardian era, it was vital that wealthy families, particularly social climbers such as the Birlings , has a stainless character and appeared to be completely respectable . However, the outward appearance of respectability in most families often hid a range of vices , all seen in the Birling family: drinking, prostitution, gambling, infidelity, greed. These were traits commonly associated with the working classes, as proof of their lack of respectability.

ACT 3

PLOT	ACT 3
3.	Eric is revealed as the father . He stole money from Mr Birling's office to provide and give money to Eva. The Inspector delivers his final speech . After he leaves, the family begin to suspect that he was not a genuine police inspector . A phone call to the Chief Constable confirms this. Next, they phone the infirmary to be informed that no suicide case has been brought in. Mr Birling, Mrs Birling and Gerald congratulate themselves that it was all a hoax and they continue can continue as before. This attitude upsets Sheila and Eric . The phone rings. Mr Birling announces to the family that a girl has just died on her way to the infirmary , a police inspector is coming to question them.

VOCABULARY	DEFINITION
1. Symbolism	The use of images to suggest or represent something else.
2. Remorse	Deep regret or guilt for a wrong committed.
3. Condescending	Having or showing an attitude of patronising superiority e.g. <i>when he meets the inspector he informs him 'I was an alderman for years – and Lord Mayor two years ago – and I'm still on the Bench – so I know the Brumley officers pretty well' to show his importance.</i>
4. Unrepentant	Showing no regret for one's wrongdoings.
5. Grandiose	Extravagantly or pretentiously imposing in appearance or style e.g. <i>The description of the Birlings' residence in the opening stage directions.</i>
6. Ostentatious	Characterised by pretentious or showy display e.g. <i>When celebrating the engagement he refers to the port as being the one Gerald's father drinks, and therefore boasting.</i>
7. Dogmatic	Expressing opinions very strongly as facts .

CHARACTER	QUOTATION
1. Eric	"(miserably) Could I have a drink first?"
2. Eric	"I was in a state when a chap could easily turns nasty – and I threatened to make a row."
3. Mr Birling	"I've got to cover this up as soon as I can"
4. Inspector Goole	"But each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it."
5. Inspector Goole	"One Eva Smith has gone- but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us [...] We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other."
6. Sheila	"The point is, you don't seem to have learnt anything"
7. Gerald	"Everything's alright now, Sheila. (Holds up the ring.) What about this ring?"

SYMBOLS /MOTIFS	
1. Money	Eric gives Eva stolen money to 'keep her going' once she finds out she is pregnant with his child. He uses it as means to try to genuinely help, but when she finds out it is stolen, she refuses to take it. Eric, by stealing the money, fails to understand the significance of its immoral origin. This contrasts with Eva's strong moral compass . Eric upholds traditional patriarchal values by trying to 'keep' Eva as an inferior woman, whatever the cost. Additionally, in his parting lines before his final speech, The Inspector reminds Birling that Eva Smith wanting 'twenty-five shillings' instead of 'twenty-two-and-six' is what started all this.
2. The law/identity	When the older Birlings finally realise the likelihood that The Inspector was not a real police inspector, they suddenly believe that all their wrongdoings have been erased . The word of law takes precedence over that of morality . Birling believes that 'it matters a devil of a lot' if he was real, and that it 'makes all the difference' to the significance of what they did to Eva. The younger Birlings, however, grasp the message that 'he was our police inspector alright' even if he wasn't a real officer of the law, because his legal position (or lack of) makes no difference to the seriousness of their actions.
3. The photograph	After The Inspector has left, discussion returns to the significance of the photograph, and the fact that none of the family members saw it at the same time . The conclusion is reached that they could have all been looking at different girls, tying into the theme of identity.
4. The Inspector 'calls'	As at the very end of the play, Mr Birling's bragging is once again interrupted by an inspector 'calling' - this time on the telephone . Its timing represents the authority of the 'call' over Mr Birling's arrogance , and how he must be taught the lessons he has so far failed to learn - that we are (in The Inspector's words) 'all responsible for each other' .