

BBC BITESIZE

Carl: Hello, and welcome to the Bitesize English literature podcast. If you want to hear all the episodes in this podcast, make sure you download the BBC Sounds app.

Jean: In the BBC Sounds app, there's loads of other things you can use to help you with your revision. Full versions of some of the text you might be studying, revision playlists and other Bitesize podcast series to help with different GCSE subjects.

It's important to let you know that in this podcast, there will be discussions of suicide and sexual abuse.

Carl: In this series, we're going all the way back to 1912 and into a fictional town in the Midlands called Brumley to explore JB Priestley's play *An Inspector Calls*.

Jean: I'm Jean Menzies, an author and ancient historian.

Carl: I'm Carl Anka, an author and journalist.

Jean: In this episode, we're going to be testing everything we've learned so far with a recap quiz. Are you ready?

Carl: Question one. What is the name of the inspector that shows up at the Birling's dinner party:

- A. Inspector Brumley
- B. Inspector Renton
- C. Inspector Google

It's C. Inspector Google. Now a good way to remember this is to think about how at the end of the play, the characters aren't sure if the inspector was a real person, or a ghostly ghoul. You can listen back to episode two, about the all the characters in this play.

Jean: Question number two:

Extract:

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 intertwined 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.

Jean: What key theme is most prominent in this extract?

- A. Gender
- B. Class
- C. Social responsibility

And the answer is C. Social responsibility. This is a quote from the inspector before his final exit, where he tells the characters that each action they take can have an effect on somebody else. It's his way of reminding the characters and audience that we are all connected and have a responsibility to look after each other. If you want a quick recap on the themes of the play, including social responsibility, then go back to episode four, where we talk about each of the key themes.

Carl: Which of these genres does the play not fall into? Which one is the odd one out? Is An Inspector Calls...

- A. A well-made play
- B. A morality play
- C. A crime thriller
- D. An immersive play

Remember, I'm looking for the odd one out.

Have you spotted the one that should not be there? Because the answer is D. An Inspector Calls is a well-made play, a crime thriller and a morality play. But it is not an immersive play. So if you go and watch the play, please do not feel any reason to get up and enter the Birling's dining room.

Jean: In the final act of the play, it's revealed that Eric stole money to try to help Eva Smith. But where did he steal the money from?

- A. Sheila's savings
- B. His father's business
- C. Gerald's bank
- D. His mother's charity

If you answered B. His father's business then you would be correct. Eric doesn't really have a career of his own and spends most of his money on alcohol. So the fastest way he thought he could get money to help Eva and their unborn baby was to steal from his father's business. Eva refuses the money because of where it came from. To learn more about Eric and how he grows up over the course of the play listen to episode three about him, Gerald and Sheila.

Carl: Next question.

Extract:

Eric: whoever that chap was, the fact remains that I did what I did. And mother did what she did. And the rest of you did what you did to her. It's still the same rotten story whether it's been told to a police inspector or to

somebody else. According to you, I ought to feel a lot better - (*To Gerald.*) I stole some money, Gerald, you might as well know - (*As Birling tries to interrupt.*) I don't care, let him know. The money's not the important thing. It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters. And I still feel the same about it, and that's why I don't feel like sitting down and having a nice cosy talk.

Sheila: And Eric's absolutely right. And it's the best thing any one of us has said tonight and it makes me feel a bit less ashamed of us.

Carl: What does this extract teach us about how Sheila and Eric's transformation over the course of the play?

- A. That when the play ends, they're worried about the rumours that might come out about them
- B. That when the play ends, Sheila and Eric have taken responsibility for their actions and now they can't go back to how they used to be
- C. That she and Eric are embarrassed that the inspector told their parents about what they did to Eva Smith

The answer to this question is Option B. When the play ends, Sheila and Eric have taken responsibility for their actions, for the most part, and they can't go back to how they used to be. An Inspector Calls is a morality play, which is a type of play where a number of characters confess that what they did was wrong, and become better people through this. Priestley showed us his hopes for the younger generation. To learn more about morality plays and the form, structure and language of the play, go back and listen to episode five.

Jean: The inspector gets Sheila to reveal that she got Eva Smith fired from her job at a clothes shop. But what did she tell the manager that Eva had done to get her fired?

- A. Eva hadn't let her try on the dress
- B. Eva had been impertinent to her
- C. Eva had refused to give her a jacket in another colour

And the answer is number two, Sheila lied and accused Eva of being impertinent, which means rude and disrespectful to get Eva fired. But really, Sheila was just jealous of Eva and resented her for looking better in that dress. To learn more about Sheila and how she changes over the course of the play, head on over to episode three to learn more about the characters in the play.

Carl: In what year was An Inspector Calls set?

- A. 1908
- B. 1912
- C. 1945

The answer is B. 1912. The play was set just before the First World War, but was first performed in 1945, after both the First and Second World War, which would have had a really significant influence on what the first audience thought about it. Be sure to go back and listen to episode seven to learn more about the context of the play if you need more information.

Extract:

The way some of these cranks talk. And right now you think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive. Community, all that nonsense. But take my word for it. And I've learned in the good old Harvard School of Experience. A man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own.

Jean: Which character said this?

- A. Inspector Goole
- B. Gerald Croft
- C. Mr Birling

And the answer is C. Mr Birling. He says this to Eric and Gerald right at the start of the play, just before the inspector knocks at the door. Goole spends the rest of the play proving him wrong. So it's definitely one to try and remember. For a quick recap of the plot of the play, you can go back and listen to episode number one.

Extract:

The dining room is of a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a prosperous manufacturer. It has a good solid furniture of the period. The general effect is a substantial and heavily comfortable but not cosy and homelike

Carl: What do these stage directions not tell us about the Birling family?

- A. Their house is very comfortable
- B. They are working class
- C. The house doesn't feel like a home

B. They are working class. The Birling family are not working class. They're upper-middle class. Their house is very comfortable, but it doesn't really feel like a home which tells us a lot about the characters and what the family is like. To learn more about what's stage directions and props tell you about the play, why not go and listen to episode six, which is all about dramatisation.

Jean: Final question: Gerald comes back to the dining room to tell the family that he has a theory about the inspector. What is that theory?

- A. The inspector was supposed to interview their next door neighbours.
- B. The inspector had written a fake diary and said it was Eva's
- C. The inspector was not a real inspector
- D. The inspector had been hired by his parents to end his engagement.

And the answer is C, that the inspector wasn't a real inspector. And when Mr And Mrs Birling and Gerald find out the news, they are more relieved the story won't ruin their reputations than they are that the girl might not have actually died. To find out more about what happens in the final act of the play, go back and listen to episode one to get a recap of the plot.

Carl: And there you have it. That's the end of our recap quiz, and of our series on An Inspector Calls. Thank you so much for listening to the Bitesize English literature podcast all about this fantastic play.

Jean: Remember, you can listen back to any episode at any time on BBC Sounds if you need to.

Carl: And we'll also be exploring some more GCSE literary texts in the Bitesize English podcast, including Macbeth, Jane Eyre, and Blood Brothers. So we hope you join us for more. See you soon