

An Inspector Calls: Plot Summary

ACT ONE

- The play is set on a spring evening, 1912 (the play was written in 1945).
- The Birling family are having a party to celebrate Sheila and Gerald's engagement.
- Mr Birling (Arthur) gives a speech about business, and explains to Eric (his son) that every man should 'look after himself and his own'.
- An Inspector calls in on the family (we learn that his name is Inspector Goole). He says that a woman has committed suicide and he's investigating the circumstances of her death.
- The Inspector starts by questioning Mr Birling. It turns out that he fired this woman (Eva Smith) from his factory for trying to start a strike or protest about wages. Mr Birling refuses to accept responsibility for what happened to her after she left his employment.
- The Inspector turns to Sheila (Mr Birling's daughter). Sheila made sure that Eva was sacked from her next job at a department store, as she was jealous of her looks.
- The Inspector tells the family that after this, Eva changed her name to 'Daisy Renton'. Gerald looks shocked.

ACT TWO

- Daisy was forced to become a 'working girl' (a prostitute) in order to support herself.
- Gerald admits that he knew Daisy, and let her stay in his friend's apartment. It transpires that they had an affair.
- He finished the affair after they spent a summer together, offering her some money, but making it clear they couldn't continue forever. It seems that Daisy was in love with him.

- Sheila is shocked, as she's engaged to Gerald at this point (the evening is a celebratory engagement party for them). She's also glad of the confession.
- Gerald goes for a walk to clear his head, and the Inspector shows the photo to Mrs Birling, who denies knowing the girl.
- It turns out that Eva (calling herself 'Mrs Birling') had applied for help at a women's charity, which Mrs Birling managed at the time. Mrs Birling thought her insulting and dishonest, and so refused aid.
- Eva was pregnant and unsupported by the father, and Mrs Birling blames the father for her misfortune, stating that he should have been forced to marry her.
- It turns out that the father is Eric.

ACT THREE

- Eric tells his story: he met her in the same bar as Gerald, he was drunk and forced his way into her room. He got her pregnant and panicked, so he stole money from his father's business to give to her. She refused to accept any more money from him once she realised that it was stolen.
- Mr and Mrs Birling are disgusted with Eric. The family all now understand that they each contributed to Eva's suicide.
- The Inspector delivers his final sermon-like speech - saying how we should all be responsible for each other - and leaves.
- The family begins to consider the event, the older characters question what happened. Gerald calls the infirmary to check about Eva and is told there wasn't a suicide for months. The older Birlings are relieved. The younger ones still question their actions.
- The telephone rings, Mr Birling answers, it's a police inspector on his way to ask questions about the suicide of a young girl.