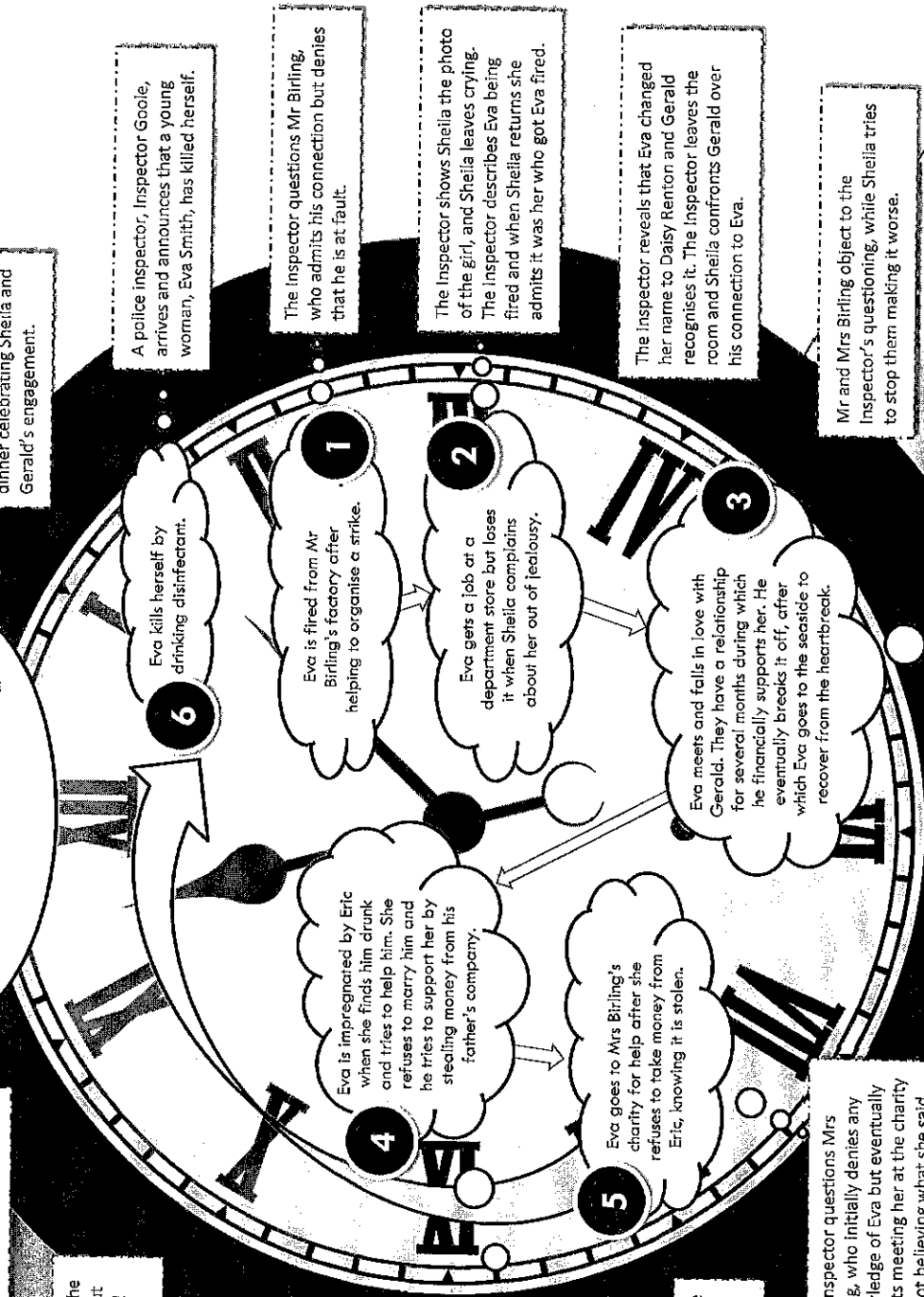


Plot Summary

Act 1

Through the play we learn about what has happened to Eva – but not always in the right order. The boxes around the outside show the events of the play while the thought bubbles show when we find out what about Eva.



The Birling family are having dinner celebrating Sheila and Gerald's engagement.

A police inspector, Inspector Goole, arrives and announces that a young woman, Eva Smith, has killed herself.

The inspector questions Mr Birling, who admits his connection but denies that he is at fault.

The inspector shows Sheila the photo of the girl, and Sheila leaves crying. The inspector describes Eva being fired and when Sheila returns she admits it was her who got Eva fired.

The inspector reveals that Eva changed her name to Daisy Renton and Gerald recognises it. The inspector leaves the room and Sheila confronts Gerald over his connection to Eva.

Mr and Mrs Birling object to the Inspector's questioning, while Sheila tries to stop them making it worse.

The Inspector questions Gerald, who describes his interactions with 'Daisy'.

Gerald leaves for a walk and Sheila returns her engagement ring to him.

Act 2

The phone rings: the family are told a girl has just committed suicide and a police inspector is on his way to ask some questions.

Questioning the existence of 'Eva' the family ring the infirmary and find out there have been no suicides. Gerald and Mr and Mrs Birling celebrate.

Gerald returns and says that a police officer has told him there is no Inspector Goole. Mr Birling confirms this by ringing the Chief Constable.

The inspector leaves, making a speech about social responsibility. The family argue, some changed by their interaction with the Inspector and others not.

The Inspector questions Eric, who is distressed and repents his treatment of Daisy, but does not regret stealing money from his father's company to try to support her.

It is revealed that Eric is the father of Eva's child and he appears at the door.

The Inspector questions Mrs Birling, who initially denies any knowledge of Eva but eventually admits meeting her at the charity but not believing what she said.

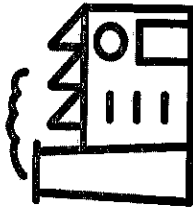
Act 2

Context

Factories and Work

The Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant many people moved from the countryside to the cities to work in factories. While some working rights protections had been brought in, conditions were still difficult and low paid. Working days were generally around 10 hours and workers only got Sundays off.

Unions were legalised in 1871. By organising together workers could use strikes and other industrial action to pressure employers to give them better pay and conditions.



Men and Women

At this time the majority view was that women were intrinsically inferior to men. Men could take part in the public sphere (politics, discussion, etc.) while women had to remain in the private sphere (looking after the home). While working-class women often worked – for example in factories – most middle-class professions were blocked or discouraged from women.

Women were a little more free than they were previously – in the play Sheila seems much more engaged with society than her mother. At the beginning of the twentieth century, women were fighting to be given the vote – suffragists engaged in public disobedience, protests and petitions to fight for enfranchisement.



1912–1945

Many social and political events happened between when *An Inspector Calls* is set and when it was written, which Priestley foreshadows during the play. These are very relevant to many of the themes of the play.

1912 Setting of *An Inspector Calls*

Sinking of the Titanic 1912
In Mr Birling's toast he gives the Titanic as a symbol of industrial progress

First World War 1914–1918

Referenced early in the play when Mr Birling claims that no one wants war. The war not only caused blood and anguish (as in the Inspector's speech) but also changed society, shifting power between classes and genders.

Representation of the People Act 1918

Granted all men over 21 and some women over 30 (dependent on property and education) the right to vote. Gave increased power to women and the working classes which they are lacking in the events of the play.



Equal Franchise Act 1928

This granted the vote to all men and women over 21, finally giving both an equal vote.

Second World War 1936–1945

The violence and suffering of the war led many to believe that a better society should be offered to those fighting after they returned home. Priestley advocated this on his popular radio show during the war.

An Inspector Calls Premiere 1945

1917 Russian Revolution
Communist overthrow of the Tsar leading to the creation of the USSR. Probably what is referenced in the Inspector's final speech when he claims that if people do not learn to look after each other 'they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish'. The first performance of *An Inspector Calls* took place in the USSR.

1924 First Labour Government
Labour had enjoyed a rapid increase in power after having only 42 MPs in 1912. Their victory showed the increase in political power of the working classes and ran on socialist policies, similar to the beliefs of the Inspector.

1926 General Strike
1927 Trade Disputes and Trade Union

These two events showed both the power of the unions at the time and legal measures to restrict them. Mr Birling claims in his toast that strikes will be easily defeated by employers and trouble is behind them. Eva was fired from his factory for helping organise a strike.

1945 Labour Landslide
Labour gained a massive majority in the election allowing them to follow their policy of creating a welfare state – including the NHS and state pensions.

Socialism

Priestley was a Socialist and the play advocates these ideas. Socialism believes that workers should control how products are produced (factories, etc.). One common description of the ideology is 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need'.

These quotes are examples of how Priestley explored politics in *An Inspector Calls*.

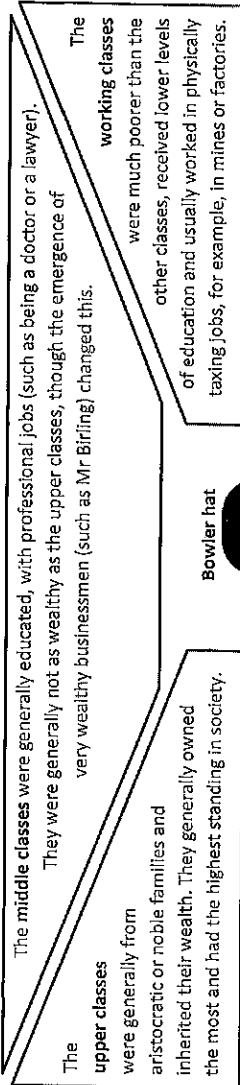
'We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other.'

'Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.'

'These girls aren't cheap labour – they're people.'

'You see we have to share something. If there's nothing else we'll have to share our guilt.'

'Go look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility' 'That doesn't make it any less yours.'



Top hat



Gerald

Mrs Birling

Eric

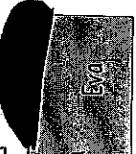
Mr Birling

Inspector Goole?

Bowler hat



Flat cap

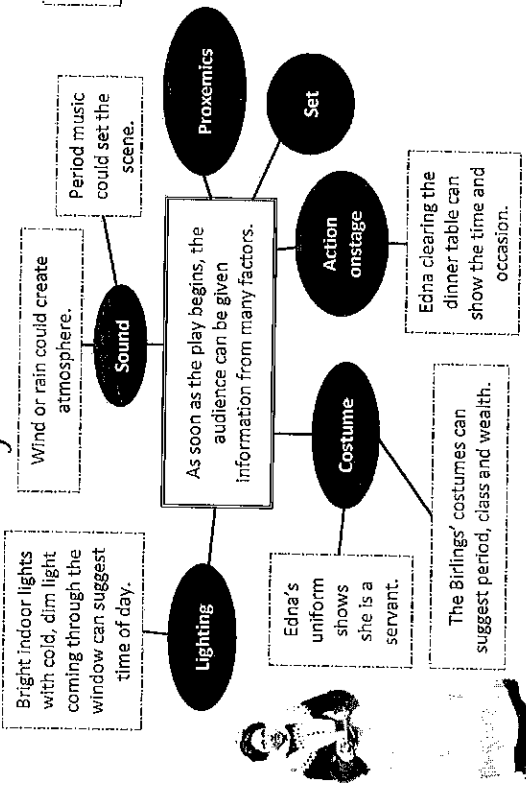


Edna

Eva

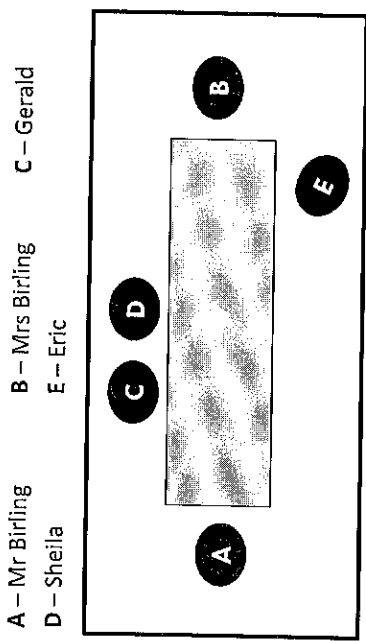
Act One

Setting the Scene



Proxemics and Relationships

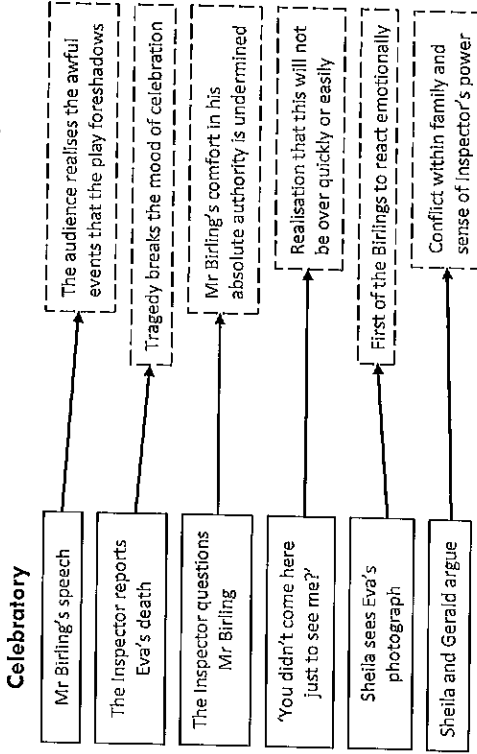
How characters sit in relation to each other can show the relationships between them. The way the room is positioned can also help establish a mood and atmosphere for the play. Even if the set is just a table which all the characters sit around, where they sit can say a lot to the audience.



- A and B – Mr and Mrs Birling sit at each end of the table to give them power.
- C and D – Gerald and Sheila sit close together to show their romantic attachment. Having them sit further away from Mrs Birling also adds to the impression she is cold.
- E – Eric sits slightly away from the table to show his separation from the family group and at an odd angle to show his drunkenness.

When Does the Atmosphere Change?

The tone of the Birlings' household changes a great deal between the beginning and the end of Act 1 – from celebrating Sheila and Gerald's engagement to defending themselves from the Inspector and suspecting each other. There are many steps on this route from one atmosphere to the other and each has a different reason why it changes the mood...



How Sheila Changes

Vocal performance can be used to show how Sheila changes from being light-hearted and careless to distraught and guilty. An actor performing a character will need to keep some elements the same in order to maintain a cohesive character, but change others to show changing emotions and attitudes.

- ### What Changes?
- Previously speaking with certainty, now stumbling over words and hesitating.
 - Previously speaking fast, now speaking slower.
 - Previously cheeky tone, now breathless and tearful.
 - Previously loud, now quiet.

What Stays the Same?

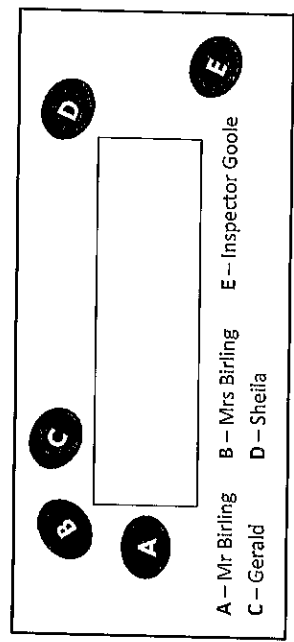
- Pitch – maintain a quite high pitch.
- Rhythm – speed up at the end of sentences as a character trait.

Exam-style Question:

Give two examples of how you would show Sheila's change of character. (4)

Proxemics and Power

Once the Inspector enters, he and Mr Birling enter a competition of power. One of the ways this can be shown is through proxemics. Where the characters stand and sit, and where they move through the scene can be an attempt to assert power. In the example below when Mr Birling offers the Inspector a seat, he sits as far away as possible, to show him resisting Mr Birling's attempts to influence him.

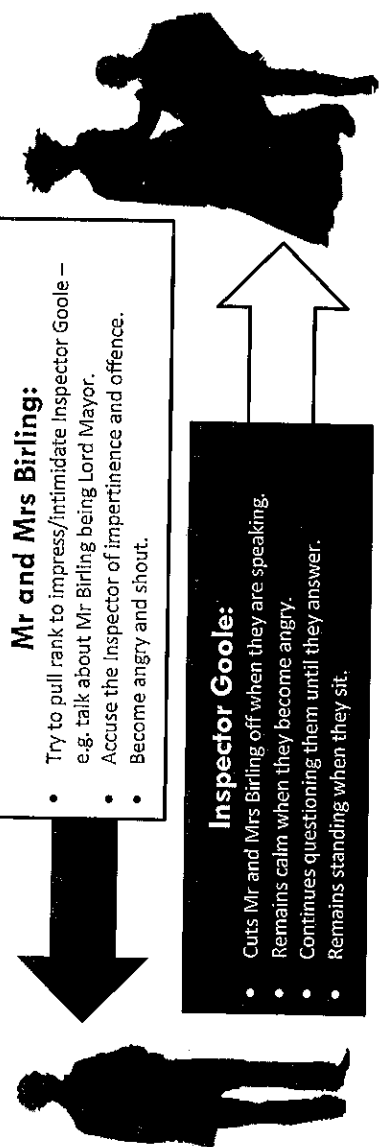


- A – Mr Birling
- B – Mrs Birling
- C – Gerald
- D – Sheila
- E – Inspector Goole

Tense

The Inspector vs Mr and Mrs Birling

Throughout this act Mr and Mrs Birling are competing with the Inspector for the upper hand of control and power. Below are some descriptions of how the two groups compete for control.



Reactions to Gerald's Story

While Gerald is telling the Inspector about his interactions with Eva we can learn a lot not only from what he is saying and how, but from how the other characters react...

Mr Birling

What do they think?
Annoyed and angry, more at the Inspector than Gerald.

How do they react?
Drawn brow. Lots of tension in body. Posture leans forward. Loud volume, low pitch, harsh tone. Moving foot impatiently when Gerald is telling his story. Standing up quickly as soon as he starts to speak.



Sheila

What do they think?
Annoyed at Gerald but unsurprised. Feels sorry for Eva. Conflicted.

How do they react?
Frowning. Switching between looking at Gerald and looking away. Fiddling with engagement ring. Switching between harsh tone and soft tone.



Mrs Birling

What do they think?
Shocked and surprised. Horrified.

How do they react?
Shaking head. Occasional gasps and tutting. Holding hand over heart. Wide eyes. Breathly tone. Glaring at Gerald. Walking away from other characters.



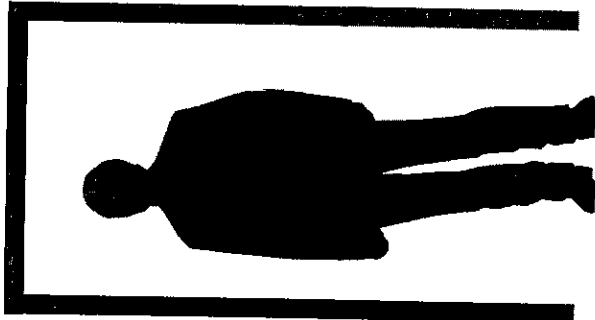
Inspector Goole

What do they think?
More positive towards Gerald than other characters.

How do they react?
Full focus on Gerald, making eye contact and leaning slightly forward in chair. Firm but kind tone, low volume. Occasional nod while Gerald is speaking.



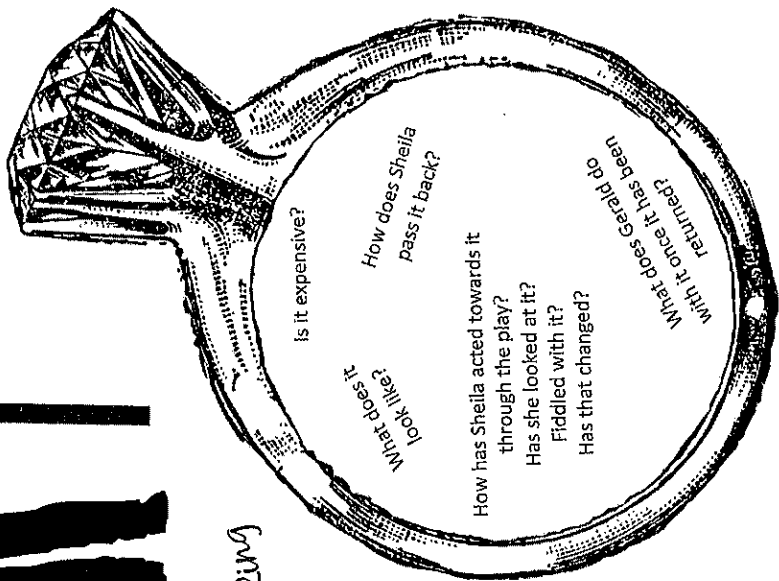
Eric in the Doorway



Eric returning at the end of Act 2 is a moment of high tension. This can be emphasised using:

- **Lighting** – having Eric silhouetted with backlight makes the moment more dramatic.
- **Sound** – having the clock strike the hour when Eric enters can create a shock and emphasise the passing of time.
- **Performance** – having all the characters turn as one to stare at Eric makes him the focal point of the scene.

Sheila's Ring



Questions to consider

- What does it look like?
- How has Sheila acted towards it through the play? Has she looked at it? Fiddled with it? Has that changed?
- Is it expensive?
- How does Sheila pass it back?
- What does Gerald do with it once it has been returned?

Act Three

5

The Inspector's Big Speech

The Inspector's speech can be seen as the climax of the play, where its major political points are asserted in a dramatic and passionate way.

Performance Suggestions for the Inspector:

- Making direct eye contact
- Upright posture
- Low pitch
- Exaggerated enunciation
- Drawn brow
- Serious facial expression
- Increasing volume

Performance Suggestions for Everyone Else:

- Eric grimacing guiltily
- Mr Birling looking away
- Sheila crying
- Mrs Birling glaring at the Inspector



Eric Returns

When Eric enters he is in an intense emotional state; he is guilty, distressed, he has been drunk but has now, at least partially, sobered up. The elements below are just a few that can help show this with physicality. Opposite options can often both be appropriate, showing slightly different interpretations of a character. For example, if Eric used short steps, that could show his hesitancy, but long steps could show his lack of control.

	Tense / Relaxed
Standing	Upright / Hunched
	Centred / Off-centre
	Still / Fidgety
	Heavy / Light
	Short / Long
	Fast / Slow
Walking	Direct / Indirect

Consider how the Inspector treats the different people he questions.

Does he treat all of them the same?

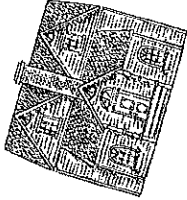
If not, why?

Is he harsh or gentle?

How does he get them to answer?

The House Collapsing

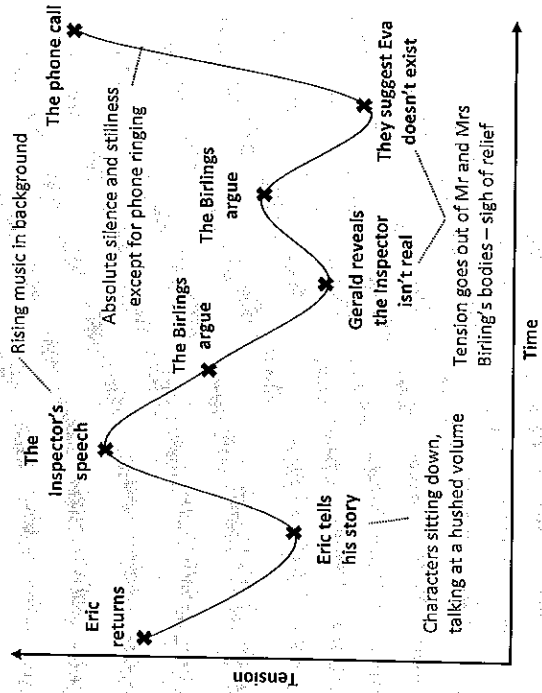
In 1992 a director called Stephen Daldry created a very popular and successful production of *An Inspector Calls*. In it one of the most memorable images happened at the moment of the Inspector's speech. The set suggested a cobbled street, complete with streetlamp, with a miniature house (the Birlings' home) taking up a third of the stage. This opened like a doll's house to reveal the dining room and the action spilled out onto the rest of the stage.



During the Inspector's speech the house 'collapsed' - falling forward on its platform. This represented the destruction of the Birlings' isolated, privileged world view. However, the house was righted again near the end of the play, representing some of the Birlings rejecting the ideas of the Inspector, and acting as if nothing had changed.

Tension

Below is a chart suggesting how the tension changes over the course of this scene and some examples of how a director could show this.



Has anything changed?

Although the Inspector's influence is great when he is present, some of the characters, especially Mr and Mrs Birling, start to dismiss what he has said almost as soon as he has left. This shows how quickly people will return to their comfortable ways of thinking, especially when it is in their best interests. However, Sheila and Eric are deeply changed by what has happened and feel that whether the Inspector can create other consequences for them or not he has greatly altered their lives. Their movement from being under the control of the Inspector to dismissing it is charted below, with suggestions of moments that can be used to show them.

Shock

Mr and Mrs Birling standing on the opposite side of the stage to Eric and Sheila, pointing accusingly at them.

Doubt

Looking back and forth between each other, getting closer to Gerald when he reveals what he has found out.

Mr Birling slapping Gerald on the back, both of them and Mrs Birling laughing. Sheila and Eric looking on with wide eyes.

Celebration

Whose Fault is It?

All the characters' actions helped lead to Eva's death, but some may be more at fault than others. Certainly, how bad their actual actions are differs, as does how badly they affect Eva. Different people may see different characters as being most at fault.

I think it is Mr Birling's fault as he is the one who started the sequence of events so without him Eva would have been fine.

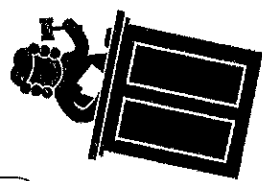
But Mr Birling didn't know what would happen to Eva. Mrs Birling is much more responsible because she knew the bad situation Eva was in and still refused to help her.

Well, Mrs Birling had to put the charity's money where she thought it would be most use. At least she had a reason for her actions - Sheila completely acted out of spite. Eva was at her happiest at the shop. The fact she has no excuse for her actions and took Eva away from where she was happiest means she's most guilty.

But Sheila's action was momentary and unplanned, everyone makes mistakes. However, Gerald got to know Eva over a long time and let her fall in love with him and STILL deserted her. He could have changed her life but instead helped destroy it.

At least Gerald made her happy for a while though. Eric forced her to sleep with him and then failed to look after her when she got pregnant. His actions are the worst.

He did try to help though. It's not his fault that he was too young and powerless to do anything. Really it should be the person with the most power in society who should take responsibility, and that is Mr Birling...



Part of the message of *An Inspector Calls* is that, although the characters may have done more or less wrong in their actions towards Eva, in one way they are all equally responsible as any of them acting differently would have stopped what happened to her. Priestley advocates the belief of **collective responsibility** - that everyone in a society is responsible for everyone else, so misfortunes caused by injustice are as much the responsibility of the society as a whole as an individual.

Age and Gender

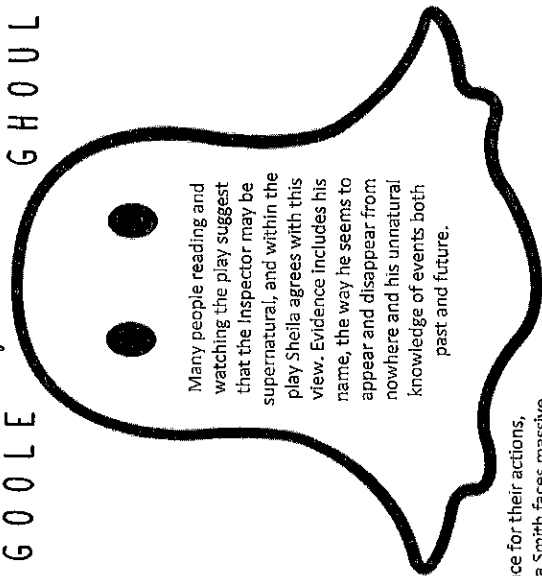
One notable element of *An Inspector Calls* is how characters act or are treated differently depending on their age or gender.

Whereas Mr and Mrs Birling and even Gerald brush off the Inspector's accusations once they discover he isn't a real police officer, Sheila and Eric continue to repent their actions and feel guilty about what they have done.

The women in the play have much less power than the men. This is most obvious in what happens to Eva but also in the fact that Sheila and Mrs Birling are told what to do by the men. An interesting contrast is that they are often told to leave the room to protect them from hearing about what happened to Eva - whereas Eva wasn't protected from those things happening.

The Supernatural

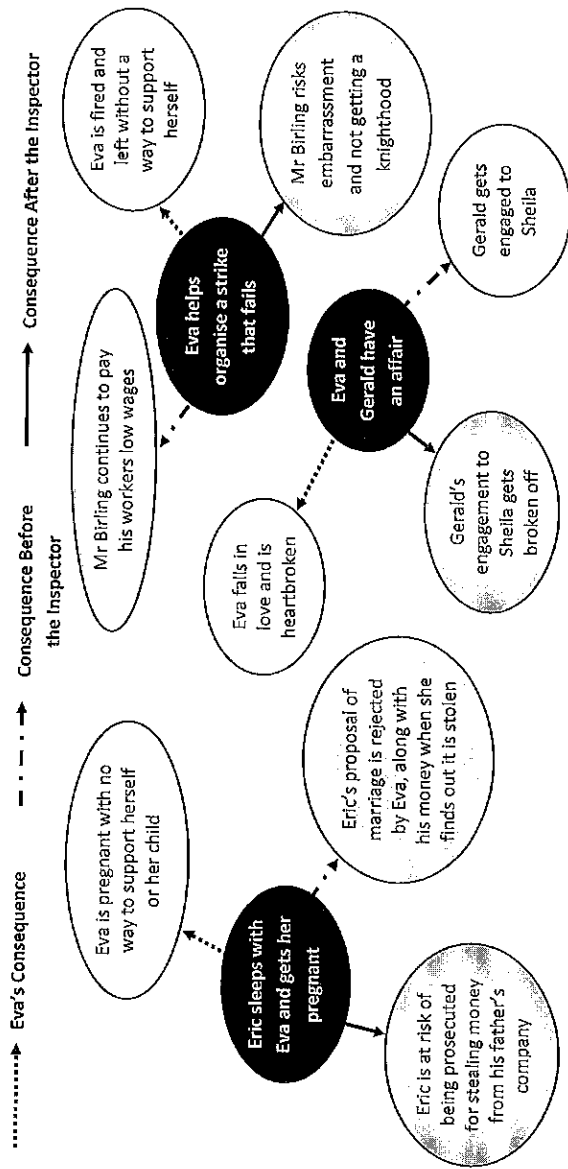
GOOLE GHOUL



Many people reading and watching the play suggest that the Inspector may be supernatural, and within the play Sheila agrees with this view. Evidence includes his name, the way he seems to appear and disappear from nowhere and his unnatural knowledge of events both past and future.

Consequences

One of the recurring themes in the play is what consequences people face for their actions, and how these can be unequal. Throughout the story told in the play Eva Smith faces massive consequences for her actions - whether they are mistakes, small wrongs or even attempts to do something good. However, whatever the Birlings do to Eva they never face any consequences. This is particularly true before they meet the Inspector but even after they meet him most of them aren't in danger of any serious punishment for their actions.



Body

Gaze

Where a character is looking can show whether they're trying to hide something, trying to win someone's approval and many other things. For example, once the inspector has left, the characters could keep looking at the door as if expecting him to return. In the first act, Eric could keep his eye level low, looking at the table, to show his discomfort.



Tension

How much tension someone has in their face can easily show emotions, and can sometimes be more visible to the audience than tension in other parts of the body. Mr Birling could have lots of tension when arguing with the inspector, with his eyebrows drawn and glaring. However, lack of tension can also show negative emotions. Mrs Birling could let her face go slack to show her shock when the inspector doesn't follow her orders.

Body Language

When a character is happy or confident they are more likely to have open body language, while those who aren't might hunch their shoulders over or cross their arms. For example, Sheila could start with open body language and then close off.

Gait

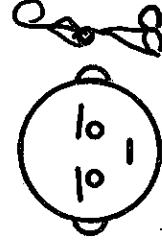
The inspector could enter with long, even-paced strides to show his command of the space while Eric could enter with short, slow, uneven steps to show his caution.

Gesture

Mr Birling could make sweeping motions with his arms to show his pomposity while Gerald could ring his hands when trying to avoid talking about Eva.

How would you use physicality and facial expression to show Edna's emotions in Act 3?

Low eye level – trying to keep out of trouble



Wide eyes – surprise at the events of the night

Tension around mouth – stressed and ensuring she doesn't say more than she should

Small, constrained gait – nervousness

Hands crossed neatly in front of body – closed body language and respect

Upright posture but with head slightly hanging down – appropriate to period and position

Voice

Pause can show a character is nervous or hesitant, for example, while answering the inspector. However, it can also show confidence, for example, the inspector waiting for people to answer.

Emphasising the important word in a sentence can subtly change its meaning and effect. This could be used in some of the political lines, highlighting that they apply to the audience as well as the characters.

Sheila's voice could rise in pitch as she becomes upset.

Director 1

I want the audience to be annoyed by Sheila and see her as trying to shift the blame.

Bitter tone to show she's angry at the fact she has been made a fool of in front of Gerald

Emphasis to show she's trying to imply she's better than Gerald

The inspector could use a commanding tone when questioning the Birplings.

Characters such as Mrs Birling can use over-enunciation to show they are trying to assert their class and education.

What accent the characters have can be debated. The Birplings come from the Midlands so could have an accent from there, but are posh so could speak in RP.

When characters argue with the inspector they could increase in pace and volume while the inspector stays slow, steady and quiet, showing he is in control of the situation.

Using different vocal techniques for the same line can often create different reactions to the character by the audience. Below is an example of how this can be put into practice.

Fast pace to show her losing her temper

Low volume and pitch to show shame and avoidance

Sheila: All right, Gerald, you needn't look at me like that. At least, I'm trying to tell the truth.

Director 2

I want the audience to feel sorry for Sheila and see her as genuinely repentant.

Emphasis to show difficulty of the attempt

Design 1: Set and Lighting

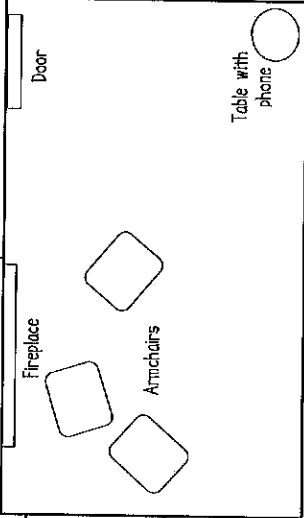
Set

When designing a naturalistic set there are many considerations you need to think of...

Naturalism

Historical Accuracy
The wallpaper would be a pattern used in the Edwardian period.

Materials
The door would be dark, polished, expensive-looking wood to show the Birling's wealth.



Proximities
Two of the armchairs would be closer together than the third, showing the audience character relationships by which they choose.

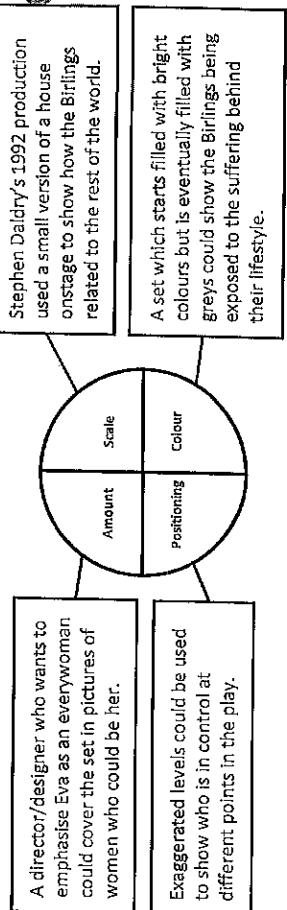
Sightlines
The door would be easily visible with only a low table in front of it.

Audience

Audience reference point
The armchairs and fireplace would immediately signal to the audience that it is a drawing room.

Symbolism

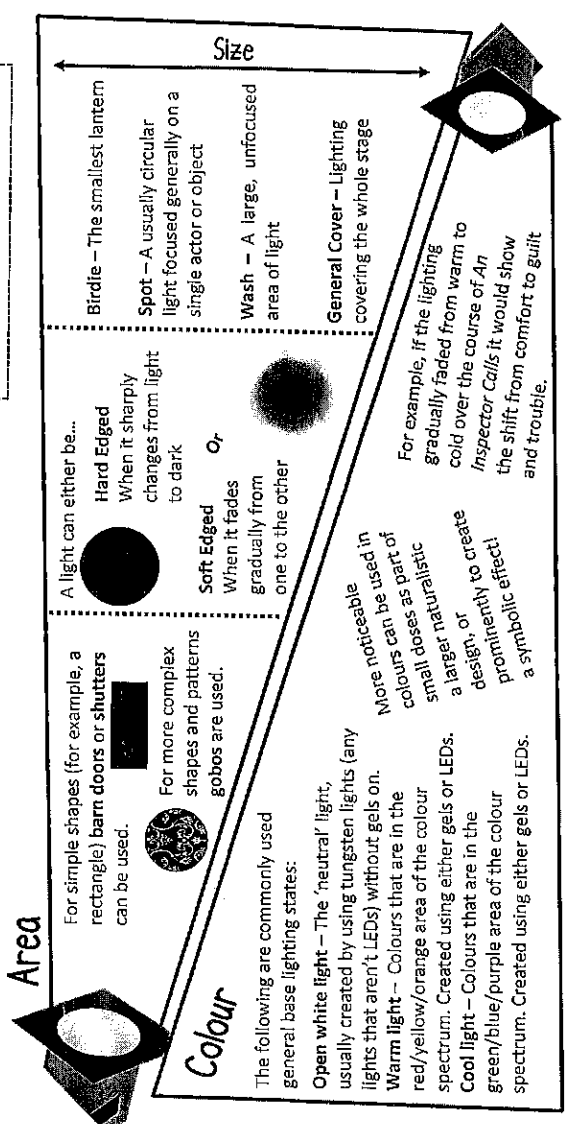
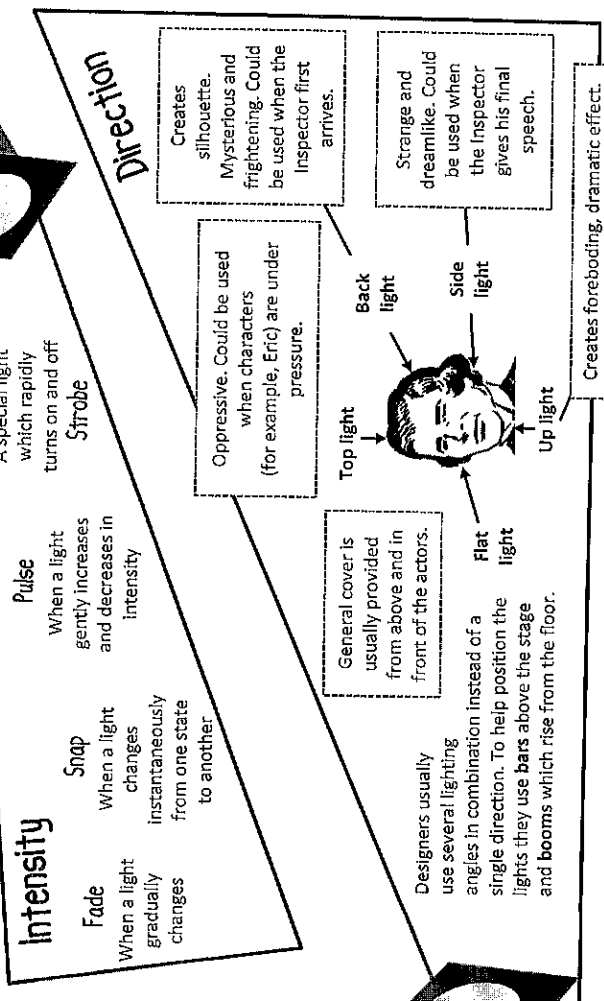
When designing a symbolic set a designer has to start by thinking about what theme or element in the play they want to emphasise. Once they have done that there are many aspects they could use to create these meanings ...



Exam-style Question:
How would you design a set to create an impression on the audience at the opening of Act 1? (14)

Lighting

These four elements can be used to simply describe each light you want to use. By using several lights together a lighting design can become more complex and effective.



Design 2: Costume and Sound

Costume

When designing costume you need to consider both

Character and **Context**

Eric's necktie could be loose and badly tied to show his drunkenness and get messier through the play showing his distress.

Men wore either a regular long tie or a bow tie.

Morning coats or tail coats (which both have long tails) were worn with formal dress.

Eric, Gerald and Mr Birling would all be wearing formal coats for the occasion.

Men in formal dress often wore spats - pieces of material fastened around the ankle to cover the top of the shoes.

Men usually wore hats out of the house. Top hats were the most formal, with bowlers being used for more informal situations. Both middle- and working-class men wore flat caps.

The Inspector could wear a bowler or flat cap to show that he is working while the Birlings are enjoying a semi-formal occasion.

Mrs Birling's dress could be darker than her daughter's to show that she is more serious.

Men often carried pocket watches; the chains of which were usually attached to buttons on a waistcoat or a belt loop.

Having characters check their watches throughout the play would draw attention to the theme of time.

One fashion of the time was the hobble skirt, which was narrow around the ankles, making it harder for women to walk fast.

Women generally wore hats outdoors, but rarely in their own homes.

Sheila could have a lower waistline and looser corset than Mrs Birling as she is younger and less traditional.

Dresses generally had high waistlines and women wore figure-shaping corsets but during the early twentieth century waistlines fell and corsets loosened.

As a servant Edna would be wearing a uniform.

Edwardian servants generally wore black dresses with a white full length apron and cap.

Sound

Music

When should it be used?

Music can be used to raise tension, create atmosphere and set location and time. Diegetic music is music that exists in the world of the play, for example, a character playing a piano, or a record playing.

Non-diegetic music is only audible to the audience, for example, most soundtracks in film.

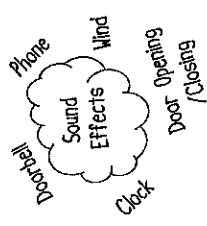
What should it be?

The following elements can all contribute to choice of music:

- Speed
- Key - major or minor?
- Style
- Instrumentation?
- Familiarity - popular or unknown?
- Volume
- Live or recorded?

If music was used for each transition in the play these are examples of what could be used and why...

Before Act 1	Jaunty, fast-paced, popular song from the era.	Set context and sense of celebration.
Between Act 1 and 2	Slow, sad ballad from the era in a minor key.	Mirror dampening of mood.
Between Act 2 and 3	Ominous orchestral music played by string instruments which starts slow and speeds up.	Reflect tension caused by Eric returning.
After Act 3	The same song from the beginning, slowly being drowned out by the sound of the wind.	Show looping of narrative, and how Birlings' lives have changed.



- Questions to consider for sound effects:
- Which direction is the sound coming from?
 - Where do the speakers need to be?
 - How loud is it?
 - How often is it heard?

Exam-style Question:

How would you use sound effects to create tension in Act 3? (9)