

## Stage Types and Stage Design

It's usually the director who chooses the stage type and decides how the production should look. Directors need to make sure that their choices are appropriate for the style of the production.

### The stage type needs to work for the whole play

- 1) A director should choose a stage type to suit the style of their production.
- 2) *An Inspector Calls* was written to be staged and performed in a naturalistic style (see p. 22). In naturalistic productions, the stage is often set back from the audience, which helps to maintain the 'fourth wall' (see p. 22). This adds to the illusion that the audience is observing real life playing out on stage.
- 3) Priestley suggests that the play should use a proscenium arch stage — he refers to the "rise" of a "curtain" in the stage directions. This helps to keep the sense that the play is real life — viewing the play through the arch can help the audience to imagine that they're looking into the Birlings' dining room.
- 4) Non-naturalistic productions (see p. 22) might use a stage type that brings the actors closer to the audience. This might make it easier for them to break the fourth wall, which would remind the audience that they are watching a play.
- 5) The director also needs to think about the practicalities of each stage type. This could include how the stage type affects the positioning of scenery and furniture, how actors enter and exit the stage, as well as the audience's sightlines (their view of the action on stage).



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A proscenium arch stage.

### Different stage types create different effects

- 1) **Proscenium arch** and **end-on staging** allow directors to use backdrops and large pieces of scenery without affecting the audience's sightlines. Since the action of *An Inspector Calls* only takes place in one setting, a director can use detailed scenery and stage furniture without having to worry about transitions between acts. Detailed scenery can also add to the play's realism.
- 2) A disadvantage of these stage types is that it's harder for audience members who are sitting further back to see the actors' facial expressions clearly. This could reduce the emotional impact of key moments, for example, when Sybil realises that Eva/Daisy was pregnant with Sybil's grandchild.
- 3) **Traverse staging**, where audience members are sitting opposite each other, can make the action feel less realistic, because it reminds them that they are watching a play. However, this stage type could be used to reinforce the play's idea that we are all responsible for each other in society.
- 4) **Theatre in the round**, where audience members are seated on all sides of a central stage, can create a claustrophobic atmosphere, which could show how the Birlings are trapped and cannot escape the consequences of their actions. It could also create the sense that the family is being examined and judged from all sides with nowhere left for them to hide.
- 5) **Thrust staging**, where audience members are sitting on three sides of the stage, can create an intimate atmosphere. Staging key emotional scenes, for example the Inspector's final speech in Act Three, on the apron would involve the audience more closely in the scene.
- 6) **Site-specific theatre** could be used effectively in *An Inspector Calls* — staging the play in the dining room of a country house could help to immerse the audience in the story.



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Using end-on staging allowed this production to use a detailed set.

# Stage Types and Stage Design

## Staging and performance space are linked

- 1) Directors need to think about how to use space on stage.
- 2) A director could choose a small performance space to reinforce the play's claustrophobic atmosphere (p. 23).
- 3) A larger space would make blocking easier. This would help make the actions and reactions of each character clearly visible to the audience members.
- 4) A director should also consider how different areas of the stage might be used effectively. Stages are often split into nine areas.
- 5) Stage areas are important when positioning actors. For example, in Act Three, Sheila and Eric could be positioned downstage right whereas Mr and Mrs Birling and Gerald could be standing upstage left. The proxemics would visually represent the growing distance between the characters' views.

Upstage Right (USR)	Upstage Centre (USC)	Upstage Left (USL)
Stage Right (SR)	Centre Stage (CS)	Stage Left (SL)
Downstage Right (DSR)	Downstage Centre (DSC)	Downstage Left (DSL)

AUDIENCE

When the audience is sitting on more than one side of the stage, one part of the stage is picked as 'downstage', and this is used as a reference for the other terms.

## Stage type affects entrance and exit points

- 1) Priestley's stage directions mention characters entering and exiting through a door to the dining room — at the end of Act One "*The door slowly opens and the Inspector appears*".
- 2) Priestley doesn't specify where this door should be, so its position needs to be decided by the director.
- 3) If the play is staged on a proscenium arch stage, a director may choose to incorporate the door upstage centre to focus the audience's attention on the Inspector's arrival in Act One.
- 4) A director may choose to have more than one entrance / exit point. However, in a naturalistic production, entrance and exit points would be restricted by the play's setting — a realistic dining room would only have a couple of doors.
- 5) A non-naturalistic production could use exits and entrances to reinforce the Inspector's supernatural characteristics. At the end of Act One, the Inspector may appear silently from the side of the stage, without using a door, while the audience's attention is focused on Sheila and Gerald.
- 6) Characters could also enter and exit through the aisles between the audience. Directing the Inspector to appear in the walkways as he makes his entrance in Act One would create the same feeling of surprise in the audience that is experienced by the characters on stage, reinforcing the unsettling feeling created by his arrival.



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This production incorporated a working door into the set.

REVISION TASK

## The thrust stage was mad when I broke its fourth wall...

Imagine that you are staging the play on a thrust stage. Draw a sketch that shows where you would position the entrance and exit points. Make sure you think about:

- 1) The style of the production (i.e. naturalistic, non-naturalistic).
- 2) What the audience would and would not be able to see.
- 3) The dramatic effects your design would create.

Tick list:

- ✓ specific design details
- ✓ limitations of stage types
- ✓ the effect on the audience

## Set Design

Set design is really important — it's vital for establishing the play's setting, context and style.

### Set design should support the style of the production

- 1) Priestley provides instructions for the set design in the stage directions. He describes the play as taking place in a “*dining-room of a fairly large suburban house*” and having a “*substantial and heavily comfortable, but not cosy and homelike*” atmosphere.
- 2) A director can choose to ignore the playwright's suggestions for set design. Priestley acknowledges that his ideas may not work for every production, and he suggests that some productions may wish to “*dispense with an ordinary realistic set*”. No matter what a director chooses, it's important that it suits the style of the production.
- 3) A naturalistic production might use a historically accurate set to recreate an early 20th-century, middle-class home. This would add to the illusion that the events the audience is watching are real.
- 4) A non-naturalistic production may use set design to highlight the themes of the play. For example, a silhouette of a large pair of unbalanced scales could be printed on the backdrop. This could be used to represent the unfair distribution of wealth and power in early 20th-century society.

### The details of a set design can reinforce the setting...

A naturalistic design might use authentic materials and colours to make the play's setting seem more realistic.

#### MATERIALS

- 1) In the 1910s, rooms which were ornate and highly decorative were a sign of wealth. A designer could show the Birlings' social position by using elegant wallpaper in the dining room.
- 2) Plastic wasn't widely used until the 1940s, so a naturalistic set would try to avoid plastics and synthetic materials in favour of natural materials, like wood and leather.
- 3) The stage directions mention a fireplace — fireplaces at the turn of the century were often made from cast iron. Cast iron is very heavy, so a set designer may want to use a more practical material, such as polystyrene, and paint it to look authentic.
- 4) Soft furnishings, such as curtains, might be made from thick fabrics, like velvet.

#### COLOURS

- 1) Deeper colours for walls and fabrics were popular at the time the play is set, so choosing a similar colour palette would add to the realism.
- 2) Bright, chemically enhanced colours, such as hot pink or lime green, would look out of place, so they should be avoided in a naturalistic set.

#### Set Designers

It's important that set designers consider the practicalities of their set. Some materials might be expensive or heavy, so it's the designer's responsibility to find alternatives that still suit the style of the production.

### ... and they can also create symbolism

- 1) Designers can use aspects of the set, e.g. the colours, to symbolise the themes and messages of the play.
- 2) Using a deep, dark red for the furnishings of the Birlings' home could suggest danger, death and blood to the audience. This could symbolise how the upper classes benefit from the exploitation of the lower classes.
- 3) Having dark curtains gradually move in from the side of the stage could symbolise how Eva/Daisy's death is starting to intrude on the Birlings' privileged lives.

#### Colour Symbolism

Colour symbolism uses the feelings and ideas that are associated with certain colours to create meaning for the audience.

# Set Design

## Levels can show character relationships or themes

Priestley's stage directions don't describe levels, but a designer could still include them in their set design.

- 1) Levels can be used to highlight key moments. For example, when the Inspector shows Sheila the photograph in Act One, the characters could be stood on a rostrum (raised platform).
- 2) Levels could be used to reinforce characters' personalities. When Mrs Birling first enters in Act Two, she could come down a set of stairs to emphasise how she feels above other people.
- 3) Levels can also show relationships between characters. Positioning the men on a lower level when the Inspector makes his first entrance could highlight how the Inspector takes control of the situation.
- 4) A director can use levels to show character development. A sloping stage could be used to show the difference in morals between the Inspector and the Birlings. As the play progresses, Sheila and Eric could gradually move up the stage towards the Inspector, suggesting that they want to change and learn from the Inspector's warnings.
- 5) Levels can help to emphasise the play's themes. The stage could be positioned lower than the audience, so that the audience looks down on the action. This would align the audience with the Inspector and encourage the idea that they are meant to judge the Birlings and their actions.



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## Technical features support the action on stage

Set designers need to make sure that any special effects fit in with the overall style of the production.

- 1) Technical features can make performances run more smoothly. Priestley suggests using a revolving stage to move the dining table after Act One. This creates more space on stage for the characters to move around, and allows the scene to transition without the interruption of stagehands.
- 2) Technical features can also be used to create special effects on stage:

Technical Device	Potential use in <i>An Inspector Calls</i>	Dramatic Effect
Projectors	A <u>window</u> looking onto the street could be projected onto the scenery, initially showing a light evening which <u>gradually changes</u> into a <u>dark, stormy night</u> .	This would help to show the <u>progression of time</u> as the play unfolds. The changing weather would emphasise the <u>mood</u> on stage, with the storm reflecting the <u>sinister nature</u> of the night's revelations.
Smoke machines	Smoke machines could release a <u>light mist</u> onto the stage as the Inspector enters in Act One.	The mist would reinforce the Inspector's <u>supernatural nature</u> as well as <u>creating tension</u> for the audience by <u>masking</u> his entrance.
Pyrotechnics	Pyrotechnics could be used to create a <u>fire</u> in the fireplace. The fire could <u>flare up</u> briefly when the Inspector says "they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish".	Having a <u>real fire</u> would make the setting feel more <u>realistic</u> . Making the fire flare up during the Inspector's closing speech would highlight the <u>intensity</u> of his words.
Film reels	In a <u>non-naturalistic</u> production, a <u>video flashback</u> of each character's treatment of Eva/Daisy could be <u>projected</u> onto the backdrop as they confess.	Showing a visual flashback could make the performance more <u>engaging</u> . It could also encourage an <u>emotional response</u> from the audience as they can witness <u>first-hand</u> how <u>unjustly</u> she was treated.

# Set Design

## Set design adds to the overall impact of the play

- 1) Each part of the set needs to complement the style of the production — a naturalistic set design that included non-naturalistic features could have a jarring effect on the audience.
- 2) Set designers also need to think about atmosphere. The overall atmosphere of the play is tense — the designer could make the setting of the dining room tall and imposing, with little space within the room, in order to emphasise the feeling of tension and claustrophobia felt by the characters.
- 3) Non-naturalistic set designs can be used to emphasise a particular theme or idea, adding to the play's impact and message. A designer could choose to acknowledge the context in which the play was written (Britain in the 1940s) by setting the play in an air-raid shelter.
- 4) If a director wanted to emphasise the theme of class inequality, they could stage the dining room on a raised level above a cramped factory floor filled with workers. This would emphasise the exploitation of the working class.
- 5) Stephen Daldry's production of *An Inspector Calls* (see p. 22) created a set in the style of an Edwardian doll's house. The doll's house eventually comes crashing down, which reflects how the characters' lives have been disrupted by the Inspector.



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## Include specific details about set design in exam answers

In the exam, it's important to include specific details when you're talking about the overall effect that you're trying to create through set design. Here's an example of how you could write about the design of a setting:

It's important the set design matches the style of the production.

This gives precise details about materials and colours.

For a non-naturalistic production of the play, I would include a room in Eva/Daisy's home on one side of the stage, which would be much smaller and more run-down than the Birlings' dining room. I would use polystyrene blocks painted to look like grey stone for the walls, cracked plastic in the windows to represent broken glass, and peeling brown wallpaper to show the state of disrepair. This would make it seem like an uncomfortable place to live. The split set would reflect the contrast in quality of life for lower and middle/upper-class people in 1912, and encourage the audience to feel sympathy for Eva/Daisy.

This explains the overall effect that you want to achieve.

This considers the symbolic effect of the set.

REVISION  
TASK

### A joke told in a lift works on so many levels...

Imagine you are staging a naturalistic production of 'An Inspector Calls'. Write a brief paragraph that describes the set design and scenery you'd use for the Birlings' dining room. Think about:

- 1) The materials, textures and colours you'd use.
- 2) The overall atmosphere you're trying to create.
- 3) Why your choices are suitable for a naturalistic production of *An Inspector Calls*.

#### Tick list:

- ✓ specific design details
- ✓ how historical context can influence design choices
- ✓ the effect on the audience

## Props and Stage Furniture

Props and stage furniture aren't just for decoration — they help the audience understand key details of the play.

### Props and stage furniture can communicate setting...

- 1) In a naturalistic production, a set designer would choose props and stage furniture that show the setting of a middle-class home at the start of the 20th century. For example, the use of electricity wasn't widespread at this time, so replica gas lamps would help to convey this time period.
- 2) Expensive, ornate furniture such as carved wooden chairs with velvet seat pads could suggest the Birlings' wealth to the audience.
- 3) Priestley refers to various props and furniture in his stage directions — at the start of Act One, "champagne glasses" should be on the table. These props help to establish the after-dinner setting. Using champagne glasses also reinforces the celebratory atmosphere, as well as hinting at the Birlings' extravagant lifestyle.
- 4) Stage furniture can also communicate the time of day. In Act One, the Inspector "moves nearer a light — perhaps standard lamp" to show the photograph to Sheila. Using lit lamps would suggest that the action is taking place in the evening.



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This naturalistic production of 'An Inspector Calls' uses historically accurate props and stage furniture.

### ... or help to drive the action

- 1) Some of the props are pivotal to the plot. For example, the Inspector's photo of Eva/Daisy is used to extract confessions from the characters.
- 2) The telephone in Act Three is also crucial — it enables the twist at the end of the play.

#### Set Design

The phone could be placed downstage and the performers on stage could be directed to gather around it when Birling answers the call. This would signal to the audience that the phone call is significant, and the family standing together in shocked silence would be a memorable final moment as the curtain falls.

### Personal props can reinforce characterisation

A personal prop is a prop that is used by an actor to add depth to their character.

- 1) Sheila's obsession with her ring in Act One shows her naivety — she's excited about the engagement even though she is suspicious about Gerald's behaviour. Sheila gives Gerald the ring back when she finds out about his past — this shows how much the Inspector's visit has changed her.
- 2) The actor who plays Eric could consistently hold and refill a whisky glass to hint at his "familiarity with quick heavy drinking".

#### Props

Props can also have symbolic meaning, for example any decanters and bottles of alcohol on stage could symbolise the Birlings' wealth and social status. When the Inspector arrives in Act One, Birling offers him a drink, which suggests that Birling is accustomed to using his wealth and position to influence others. The Inspector's refusal of the drink suggests that he won't be swayed by Birling's power.



### The content of this page is prop-erly important...

When you're writing about props and stage furniture that could be used for a production of *An Inspector Calls*, think about how the items you've chosen could help to send a particular message to the audience.

## Sound

Sound designers are in charge of all the sound in a play — apart from the audience's (inevitable) applause.

### Sound design should match the style of the production

- 1) Priestley doesn't include much information about sound in the stage directions for *An Inspector Calls*.
- 2) This gives sound designers the opportunity to be creative, but it's important that their sound plot is in keeping with the director's vision and the style of the production.
- 3) When creating a sound plot, a designer should think about how sound can:

- establish setting and context
- create tension and mood
- support action on and off stage
- aid characterisation

A sound plot is a plan of all the sounds and equipment used for a production. It also says when the sounds will be used.

### Sound can help establish the play's setting and context

- 1) The play begins as the Birlings finish an evening meal, so a naturalistic production might use a pre-recorded soundscape of cutlery scraping and glasses clinking to set the scene as the curtain rises.
- 2) If a fireplace has been included in the set design, the sound of the fire crackling could reinforce the feeling of comfort and the relaxed atmosphere of the dinner at the start of the play.
- 3) In Act Two, both Gerald and Eric leave the stage and the audience hears the front door "slam" each time. This sound effect would help to establish the setting as a room within the Birlings' house as well as implying that there's a world beyond the stage, which would add to the play's realism.
- 4) A gramophone could be placed on stage and used to play music from 1912, which would establish the play's setting in the early 20th century.

A soundscape is a collection of individual sounds that are layered up to give a strong sense of place.



#### Non-naturalistic Sound

A non-naturalistic production could use sound to reflect the context in which the play was written. Recordings of speeches by Hitler, who led Germany into the Second World War, could be played in the background as Mr Birling tells his family "The Germans don't want war." This would reinforce the dramatic irony of this line by reminding the audience of the historic events yet to take place.

### Sound can reinforce actions

- 1) Sound can be used to signal that something is happening on stage — these sounds are normally diegetic (heard by the characters) and can be made live or pre-recorded.
- 2) When the Inspector reappears at the end of Act One, a creaking noise could be played as "*The door slowly opens*". This ominous noise would draw the audience's attention to the Inspector's arrival as well as increasing the tension.
- 3) Sound can also be used to tell the audience about action happening off stage. The "*sharp ring of a front door bell*" in Act One signals the arrival of a visitor to the audience as well as the characters.
- 4) Sound can also highlight the importance of an action or event. At the end of Act Three "*The telephone rings sharply*." A sound designer may choose to amplify the harsh ringing sound in order to highlight the significance of the moment.

As well as thinking about what sounds to include, a sound designer also needs to think about how to create them.

#### Effect on the Audience

Diegetic sound effects that signal something happening off stage can make the play seem more believable. They encourage the audience to accept that there's a world beyond what they can see on stage.

# Sound

## Sound can create mood and tension

- 1) Non-diegetic sound can be used to reflect the mood on stage. Upbeat background music could be played at the start of Act One to emphasise the celebratory atmosphere in the house.
- 2) The Inspector's arrival in Act One could be accompanied by thunderclaps. This would signal an abrupt change in mood and rapidly build the tension for the audience.
- 3) In the final moments of Act Two, as the Inspector reveals that Eva/Daisy was pregnant, two sets of heartbeats could be played in the background to suggest the heartbeats of Eva/Daisy and her baby. These heartbeats could build to a climax as the characters realise the identity of the baby's father, stopping suddenly as Eric enters the room. This would symbolise how the actions of the characters have cut short the lives of both Eva/Daisy and her unborn child.

Non-diegetic sounds are sounds that don't exist in the world of the play and can't be heard by the characters.



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*The Inspector's arrival may be accompanied by a change in the sound.*

## Sound can aid characterisation

- 1) The sounds played when characters are on stage can help the audience to form opinions about them.
- 2) Underscoring Mr Birling's monologues in Act One with discordant music could emphasise his selfish and unpleasant nature.
- 3) During the Inspector's last speech in Act Three, a soundscape of explosions and bullets being fired could be played. This would reinforce his omniscience, by implying that he already knows about the terrible loss that war will bring over the next few years.

### Non-naturalistic Sound

*An Inspector Calls* can be viewed as a morality play (see p. 20), and the Birlings and Gerald could represent the seven deadly sins. A non-naturalistic production could emphasise this by using pre-recorded whispers to highlight the sin each character is guilty of as they confess. Playing whispers of 'envy' as Sheila admits her role in Eva/Daisy's dismissal would highlight how jealousy drove her to act as she did.

## Explain the effects of your design choices

When writing about sound in your exam, make sure you have a clear idea of how you would create each sound and the effect it would create for the audience.

In Act One, Mr Birling's speech to Eric and Gerald is interrupted by the "sharp ring" of the doorbell. To create this effect, I would use a recorded sound of an old-fashioned doorbell, edited to be particularly high pitched, and play this at a loud volume. This would cut through Mr Birling's speech and distract the audience's attention, illustrating the power that the Inspector holds over the other characters before he has even entered the stage.

This uses technical details to precisely describe creating the sound effect.

This includes further details with its intended effect.



## Gasps of horror reinforced the exam-hall setting...

When writing about sound design, you need to think about the balance of sound and dialogue — e.g. if a character is speaking quietly, any sound effects would also need to be quiet so the actor could be heard.



## Lighting

Lighting lets the audience see what's happening on stage, but it can also help deliver important messages.

### Lighting design should match the style of the production

- 1) Priestley provides very few details about lighting in the stage directions. This gives a designer a lot of freedom when choosing the lighting effects for a production of *An Inspector Calls*.
- 2) In a naturalistic production, the lighting should be as realistic as possible. This could be achieved by including light sources, such as lamps, on stage. When the lighting comes from a source within the set, it makes the setting feel more convincing for the audience.
- 3) In non-naturalistic productions, lighting doesn't need to be realistic, so designers can use lighting in more abstract ways for dramatic effect.

#### Non-naturalistic Lighting

Several Fresnel spotlights moving across the stage and over the audience could be used to create the effect of searchlights as the Inspector approaches the Birlings' front door in Act One. This would highlight the post-war context in which the play was written, and could also imply that the Inspector has arrived to seek out and reveal the family's secrets.



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*This production uses authentic wall lights to create naturalistic lighting.*

### Lighting can highlight action on stage...

Lighting is essential for making sure the audience can see what's happening on stage, but it can also be used to direct the audience's attention to key moments.

- The actor playing the Inspector could be backlit when he enters in Act One. Backlighting would cast the actor's face into darkness, which would make his entrance mysterious and dramatic.
- In Act Two, an uplight could highlight the moment that Sheila gives Gerald the ring back. The uplight would cast shadows across the actors' faces, which would reflect the bitterness felt by the characters.
- A spotlight could be shone over the phone when it rings in Act Three. The light could flicker in time with the ringing to highlight the significance of the phone call.

#### Effect on the Audience

Darkness can be just as effective as light for marking an important moment. When the Inspector exits the stage after delivering his warning in Act Three, a blackout could plunge the entire theatre into darkness for a few seconds. This would shock the audience and force them to think about what the Inspector has said. The pause in the action would also create tension, as the audience wonder what will happen next.

### ...and help to establish time and location

- 1) Mr Birling asks Edna to "Give us some more light," before the Inspector makes his first entrance in Act One. This suggests that the events of the play are happening in the early evening. If the lighting design includes onstage lamps, the intensity of the lamps could be increased.
- 2) If a fireplace has been included in the set, a Fresnel shone through an orange gel could be used to cast an orange glow into the room. Creating the impression that a fire is lit would also suggest that the events are happening in the early evening.
- 3) A 'window' could be projected onto the wall of the set using a gobo. The gobo could also include tree silhouettes, which would help to establish the location of the Birlings' house in a leafy suburb of Brumley.

# Lighting

## Lighting can help to support characterisation

- 1) A director could use lighting to emphasise the qualities of a particular character. For example, when Mr Birling tells Gerald and Eric how important it is for a man to “look after himself” in Act One, a parcan could cast cool blue washes of light on stage to reflect his uncaring, selfish nature.
- 2) Lighting can also be useful for revealing a character’s status. When the Inspector asks “Are you sure you don’t know?” in Act One, a downlight positioned at a shallow angle could be used to cast a large shadow behind him. This would emphasise the Inspector’s power over the Birlings, as well as his mysterious, shadowy nature.
- 3) Relationships between characters can be reinforced by lighting, for example, when Sheila teases Gerald about his behaviour the previous summer in Act One, a rose-tinted wash could suggest the initial affection between the couple. This light could then flicker when Sheila delivers the line “Yes, that’s what *you* say” to suggest that she is suspicious of Gerald, and hint at the cracks within their relationship.
- 4) Lighting can also be used to reveal a character’s emotions. When Mr and Mrs Birling realise Eric’s involvement with Eva/Daisy, they are both “frightened”. Side lights could be shone onto the actors’ faces to illuminate their features and make their frightened expressions more visible to the audience.

### Non-naturalistic Lighting

From the line “To do my duty.” until the end of Act Two, strobe lighting could be used to increase the intensity of the action. This style of lighting would also reinforce the fear and distress felt by the characters.

Using strobe lighting can make some people feel unwell. If strobe lighting is to be used, it’s important that audience members are made aware.

## Mood and atmosphere can be reinforced by lighting

- 1) Changes in lighting can indicate a shift in mood.
- 2) Priestley includes specific instructions about the lighting for before and after the Inspector arrives. The stage directions say that lighting should “be pink and intimate” at the start of Act One, and then become “brighter and harder” when the Inspector arrives.
- 3) The pink lighting creates a cosy, warm atmosphere, reflecting the comfortable and relaxed mood as the characters celebrate Sheila and Gerald’s engagement. The change to brighter, harder lighting when the Inspector arrives would create a tense atmosphere and emphasise the Inspector’s intrusion upon the family’s evening.
- 4) During Sheila’s confession in Act One, the lights on the rest of the stage could fade, leaving a single profile spotlight on Sheila that intensifies as she delivers her monologue. This would create a reflective atmosphere, isolating Sheila and implying that she is speaking to herself as she recalls the memory. A sudden change to the original lighting arrangement as she delivers the line “I couldn’t be sorry for her.” would give the impression that she is snapping back to reality.
- 5) When Mrs Birling first enters the stage in Act Two, lighting could be used to reflect how she is “quite out of key with the little scene that has just passed”. This could be done by shining a rose-tinted spotlight over Mrs Birling to represent her upbeat mood and to suggest that she is oblivious to the seriousness of Sheila and the Inspector’s conversation.



Candlelight creates an intimate atmosphere at the start of Act One.

© Simon Gough Photography

### Theatre of Cruelty

Theatre of Cruelty is a style of theatre which aims to make the audience feel extreme emotions through effects such as bright lights and loud noises. If a production of *An Inspector Calls* used this style of theatre, bright lights could be shone at the audience at the end of the play. This would be shocking, and may remind the audience that they might also be guilty of treating others badly, just like the Birlings.

# Lighting

## Lighting can be used symbolically

- 1) Lighting can be used symbolically to represent certain themes or ideas. As the Inspector recounts Eva/Daisy's death towards the end of Act Two, any lamps on stage could flicker and then go out, symbolising how Eva/Daisy's hopes were extinguished when Mrs Birling refused to help her.
- 2) In Act Three, from the line "There you are! Proof positive." until the end of the act, the lighting could gradually fade. The increasing darkness on stage could symbolise how some of the characters have failed to learn from their mistakes.
- 3) Coloured lighting can be used symbolically in non-naturalistic productions. For example, when Eric learns of his mother's involvement in Eva/Daisy's death at the start of Act Three, a light shone through a red gel would create a red wash across the stage. The colour red is associated with anger and danger, and this would emphasise Eric's loss of control as he angrily accuses his mother.



© Joan Marcus / ArenaPAL

Lighting from above could symbolise the theme of judgement.

### Practical Issues

When coloured lights mix with other colours on stage (for example, colours in the scenery, stage furniture or costumes) this may affect what the audience sees. For example, red lights can turn green objects grey, so a lighting designer needs to think carefully about the colours they use.

## Include details about equipment when writing about lighting

When writing about lighting, it's important to include information about technical equipment.

This considers how the lighting will suit the style of the production.

At the start of the play, Priestley intended for the lighting on stage to be "pink and intimate", until the Inspector arrives when it should be "brighter and harder".

This explains how the effect would be created.

In order to complement a naturalistic style, I would create the initial pink lighting by including authentic 1910s-style wall lights which use pink lampshades within the set. The light generated would reflect off the lampshades, helping to make the intimate, rosy lighting that Priestley suggested. To create the change in lighting as the Inspector arrives, I would include a large ceiling light within the set above the stage. This would provide a naturalistic source of hard, bright light, which Edna could switch on as the Inspector enters the room.

Give precise details about the lighting equipment you'd use.

REVISION TASK

## Still in the dark? Have a go at this revision task...

Imagine you're a lighting designer for a production of 'An Inspector Calls'. Write a paragraph about how you would use lighting to enhance the dramatic impact of the Inspector's warning just before he exits in Act Three. Remember to write about:

- 1) The atmosphere you are trying to create.
- 2) How you want the audience to feel during this scene.
- 3) What equipment you would use to create these effects.

### Tick list:

- ✓ correct use of technical language
- ✓ points explained clearly and thoroughly

# Costume

It's the costume designer's job to consider everything about a character's appearance.

## Realistic costumes can reflect the play's context

- 1) Priestley intended for the characters to be dressed in "*evening dress of the period*" with the men in "*tails and white ties, not dinner jackets.*"
- 2) A costume designer might not stick to Priestley's instructions exactly, but a naturalistic production should use historically accurate fashion styles to make the costumes seem authentic.
- 3) The play is set in 1912, so the younger characters (Sheila, Eric and Gerald) might wear clothing that was fashionable at the time. The older characters (Arthur and Sybil) may wear clothing that was more typical of the late Victorian period to highlight the difference in the characters' ages.

### Costume — Gerald

A director may dress Gerald in a costume that is more similar in style to Arthur's. This would emphasise how his views are similar to Arthur's.

	Victorian period	Early 20th century
Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dresses were often made from <u>heavy</u> fabrics like <u>velvet</u>. They were usually <u>floor length</u> and gathered around the waist with a <u>full skirt</u>.</li> <li>• <u>Necklines</u> were <u>square</u> or <u>rounded</u> and fairly <u>low</u>, and <u>large puff sleeves</u> were common.</li> <li>• <u>Small waists</u> were fashionable, so bodices (the part of the body of the dress above the waist) were <u>tightly fitted</u>.</li> <li>• Hair was <u>pinned up</u>, often with <u>curls</u> fluffed over the forehead. <u>Chokers</u> (tight necklaces) and <u>brooches</u> were very popular. Wealthy women might also wear <u>pearl necklaces</u>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Lighter</u> fabrics such as <u>tulle</u> and <u>chiffon</u> became popular. Dresses continued to be <u>floor length</u>, but skirts became <u>less full</u>.</li> <li>• <u>Necklines</u> were <u>low</u>, and bodices would often have <u>detailing</u> on them in a <u>V-shape</u> towards the waist. <u>Sleeves</u> were often <u>elbow length</u>.</li> <li>• Loose dresses with lots of <u>frills</u> and <u>lace</u> known as <u>tea dresses</u> were fashionable.</li> <li>• <u>Hair</u> continued to be piled on top of the head. Women often wore <u>elbow-length white gloves</u>.</li> </ul>
Men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal evening wear included <u>long, black tail coats</u> worn with a white shirt and black trousers. <u>Turned-up collars</u> with <u>thick knotted ties</u> or <u>cravats</u> (similar to scarves) were popular.</li> <li>• Men's hair was usually <u>short</u> and <u>well trimmed</u>. <u>Bushy sideburns</u> and a <u>short beard</u> were popular.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal evening wear remained <u>similar</u> to the Victorian period. <u>Stiff, turned down collars</u> (known as 'wing tips') were common, and ties were <u>thinner</u>.</li> <li>• Men's hair continued to be <u>short</u> and <u>well trimmed</u>. It became more popular for younger men to be <u>clean-shaven</u>, or to have a <u>moustache</u>.</li> </ul>

## Costume can show differences in status

- 1) The Birlings belong to the middle class, so their costumes should reflect their wealth and position in society by using fairly luxurious fabrics and expensive-looking accessories.
- 2) Gerald is a member of the upper class, so a costume designer may wish to hint that he is socially superior to the Birlings by making his costume grander than theirs — he could carry an elaborate pocket watch or wear an elegant pair of cufflinks.
- 3) As a servant, Edna would probably wear a simple, dark-coloured dress and a white apron. This would contrast with the Birlings' impressive costumes and show that she is a member of the working class.
- 4) The stage directions suggest that the Inspector should be dressed in "*a plain darkish suit of the period*". The Inspector is mysterious and doesn't seem to belong to a social class, so this costume would reflect this by not revealing much about him.



© Vishal Sharma/Altrincham Garrick Playhouse

# Costume

## Costumes often reveal information about a character...

- 1) Costume can reflect a character's age and personality. For example, Mrs Birling could be dressed modestly — her dress may have a higher neckline to reflect her maturity. Dressing Mrs Birling in darker colours could also reflect her sterner, less forgiving attitude.
- 2) In contrast, a designer might dress Sheila in a pale pink, frilly dress. This would make her appear youthful and feminine, as well as suggesting that she takes pride in her appearance. A designer may also give Sheila expensive-looking jewellery to hint at her materialistic nature.



© Vishal Sharma/Altrincham Garrick Playhouse

Sheila's floaty dress emphasises her femininity.

- 3) Costume designers should also consider how smaller details can convey information about the characters to the audience. Giving the actors playing Mr and Mrs Birling wigs with streaks of grey would help to convey their age to the audience. Including extra padding in their costumes to make them look larger might help to reflect their comfortable and extravagant lifestyle.

### Practical Issues

Designers also need to think about the practicalities of their costumes, including whether they allow easy movement on stage, and how comfortable they are for the actors.

## ... and might show how they change

- 1) At the start of the play, Sheila's hair could be immaculately styled in the fashion of the period — this hairstyle could loosen and fall down as the play progresses to show that she is finding the Inspector's questions stressful, as well as suggesting she is becoming less concerned about her outward appearance.
- 2) Eric's shirt could be pristine and tidy at the start of the play, but by the end of Act Three, it could become crumpled and untucked. This could show how he can no longer keep up appearances and hide his true character from his family.
- 3) Mr Birling could remove his jacket when the Inspector questions him to hint at his worry. After the phone call to the hospital in Act Three, Mr Birling could put his jacket back on to show how he thinks everything is back to normal.



© Donald Cooper photostage

At the end of this production, Mr and Mrs Birling's costumes are in disarray.

## Costume can have a symbolic meaning

- 1) Designers can use costume to symbolise something about a character for the audience.
- 2) Eric could wear a black bow tie which would contrast with the white bow ties worn by Gerald and Mr Birling. This would hint at Eric's rebellious nature, and could symbolise how he is a black sheep (someone who brings disrepute to their family).
- 3) The actor playing the Inspector could wear tap plates on his shoes to amplify the noise he makes when walking around the stage. This could be used to symbolise his authority and reinforce the way he commands the attention of the other characters.
- 4) Mr Birling's jacket could be stained with food and his shoes could be scuffed. This would symbolise how he is not the upstanding member of society that he thinks he is.

### Costume — Eva/Daisy

Some productions may choose to show Eva/Daisy on stage. A costume designer could use colour symbolism in her costume. For example, a white dress could highlight Eva/Daisy's innocence, whereas a drab, grey dress could symbolise how she has been disregarded and ignored by society.

# Costume

## Make-up can be used to add to a character's appearance

- 1) Make-up is an important part of a character's costume. It can highlight aspects of their physical appearance and personality or show changes in their emotions and attitudes.
- 2) Make-up could be used to show Mr and Mrs Birling's age, especially if they are being played by younger actors, for example by using latex wrinkles.
- 3) Dark eye shadow could be smudged under Eric's eyes to suggest his heavy drinking is making him unwell.
- 4) Sheila might at first have soft, pastel-coloured make-up to show her youth and femininity. Make-up could then be used to reflect her distress when she re-enters the stage after seeing Eva/Daisy's photograph in Act One. A make-up artist could use streaks of mascara around her eyes to create the impression that she has been crying.

## Non-naturalistic costumes can represent themes or ideas

- 1) Unlike naturalistic productions, non-naturalistic productions don't need to be historically accurate, so a designer can have more freedom over the choice of costumes.
- 2) A designer can use costumes to emphasise aspects of a character or highlight the play's themes.

- The Inspector could wear a bloodied military uniform to suggest he has witnessed the First and Second World Wars. This would reinforce the supernatural elements of the Inspector's character by suggesting that he has travelled back in time to warn the Birlings about their actions. This would also highlight the foolishness of Mr Birling's belief that war will not happen.
- Dressing the characters in plain clothes that don't suggest a particular time period could highlight how the play's themes and message could be relevant to any time period.

## In the exam, think about what costume says about a character

Here's an example of how you could write about Sheila's costume:

This explains how your choices reflect aspects of Sheila's character.

I would dress Sheila in a tea dress made of loose and lightweight fabrics. This would complement a naturalistic performance whilst simultaneously highlighting Sheila's wealth through her ability to follow current fashion trends. The lightweight fabrics would help to demonstrate her carefree attitude, whilst a pale colour such as light pink would help to emphasise her naivety and youth to the audience. Her hair could be elaborately styled on top of her head, emphasising her middle-class status as well as hinting at her vain nature by suggesting that she spends a lot of free time on her appearance, rather than having to work.

This shows you've considered the play's context.

This shows the effect on the audience.

It's good to show that you've considered smaller details in your costume design.



### Writing about costume is sew easy...

When you're writing about costume design, remember to think about how smaller details can convey meaning to the audience. You also need to make sure that your ideas match the production's style.

## Practice Questions

Imagine a play with no sound, lighting, costumes or scenery. Pretty boring, eh? Before you move on to Section Five, work your way through these questions to check you know your gobos from your rostra.

### Quick Questions

- 1) Name two practicalities that a director should consider when choosing a stage type for a production of *An Inspector Calls*.
- 2) Give two examples of how a non-naturalistic production could use entrances and exits to enhance a performance of *An Inspector Calls*.
- 3) Give one reason why a set designer might use levels in *An Inspector Calls*.
- 4) Give one example of how a prop is used to drive the action in the play.
- 5) What is the difference between diegetic and non-diegetic sound?
- 6) How might sound be used to represent an aspect of a character? Give one example.
- 7) What could a designer use to light the stage in a naturalistic production of the play?
- 8) What is the effect of the change in stage lighting when the Inspector enters in Act One?
- 9) Give one example of how a designer might use a character's costume to create symbolism.

### In-depth Questions

- 1) Choose a stage type and explain why you think it would be appropriate for staging a production of *An Inspector Calls*. Use examples from the play to back up your answer.
- 2) How might a set designer use colour symbolism in a non-naturalistic production of *An Inspector Calls*? Explain the reasons behind your ideas.
- 3) How might a sound designer contribute to the sense of triumph and excitement after the family find out the Inspector wasn't a real police inspector in Act Three? Explain your answer.
- 4) How might a lighting designer use colour symbolism in a non-naturalistic production? Explain why your ideas are appropriate.
- 5) How might a costume designer dress Gerald to show that he is an upper-class character?

## Practice Questions

What's that? You simply can't get enough of these hugely enjoyable questions and you'd like some longer exam-style ones to really stretch yourself on the subject of staging and design? Well, you're in luck...

### Exam-style Questions

Find the part of Act One where the Birlings and Gerald are talking after dinner. Read from Mr Birling "**raising his glass**" to where Gerald says "**I believe you're right, sir.**", then answer Question 1 below.

- 1) Imagine you're directing a production of *An Inspector Calls*. Explain how you would use props and stage furniture to portray this extract effectively on stage for the audience. In your answer, you should refer to the play's context.

Find the part of Act One where Mr Birling's speech is interrupted by the arrival of the Inspector. Read from where Mr Birling says "**But this is the point.**" to where the Inspector says "**Quite so.**", then answer Question 2 below.

- 2) Imagine you are a lighting designer working on a production of *An Inspector Calls*. Describe how you would use lighting design to add to the overall impact of this extract on the audience.

Find the part of Act Two where the Inspector says "**Where had he got it from then?**" to the end of the act, then answer Question 3 below.

- 3) Imagine you're directing a production of *An Inspector Calls*. Explain how you would use staging to portray this extract effectively for the audience. In your answer, you should refer to the play's context.

Find the part of Act Three where the Birlings are thinking about calling the hospital. Read from where Mr Birling says "**It will look a bit queer, won't it**" to the end of the act, then answer Question 4 below.

- 4) Imagine you are a sound designer working on a production of *An Inspector Calls*. Describe how you would use sound design to contribute to the overall impact of this extract on the audience.