

## “Do Now” Work

How does Priestley present Arthur Birling in 'An Inspector Calls'?

*Be able to identify relevant quotations and explore the effect on the audience.*

Arthur Birling is a dominant, patriarchal figure. He is seated at "one end" of the table to show his importance. He is wealthy and pleased with himself, but he wishes for greater social status. He believes he has wisdom and experience.

How does Priestley **undermine** this view of Arthur in act 1?

In Silence Please



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How does Priestley undermine this view of Arthur in act 1?

Priestley undermines this view of Arthur in act 1 by using dramatic irony to make Birling wrong about historical events: The Titanic, war and labour. Priestley makes Birling look foolish as he doesn't want the audience to trust his viewpoint. Also, he gets cut off by the doorbell ringing.

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At the start of the play, Birling shows off his wealth and experience. He is presented as a selfish, capitalist business man. Priestley interrupts him to show he's wrong.

Because he expects to be respected, Birling is regularly angered by the way the Inspector interrupts or ignores him. He reminds the inspector of his status by saying that he used to be on the "bench".

Birling refuses to accept responsibility for Eva's death. He is relieved when he thinks it was a "hoax" and a "joke". He is concerned about his status and reputation. He is interrupted again.

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"Rather portentous [...] rather provincial in his speech"

"Exactly the same port your father gets."

"Good dinner too, Sybil. Tell cook from me."

Mrs B (reproachfully) "Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things"

"Crofts and Birlings [...] working together - for lower costs and higher prices."

"I speak as a hard-headed business man."

"Titanic [...] and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable."

"Just a knighthood, of course."

"A man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own - and -"

We hear the sharp ring of a front door bell

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(Rather impatiently) "Yes, yes. Horrid business."

"Obviously it has nothing to do with the wretched girl's suicide."

"They wanted [...] twenty five shillings a week. I refused, of course."

"It's my duty to keep labour costs down."

"She had a lot to say - far too much - so she had to go."

"If you don't come down sharply on some of these people, they'd soon be asking for the earth."

"Get into trouble? Go on the streets?"

"I was quite justified."

"Perhaps I ought to warn you that he [Colonel Roberts] is an old friend of mine."

"And then she got herself into trouble there, I suppose."

"There must have been something wrong."

(To Mrs Birling) "What's the matter with that child?"

"I'm a public man -"

(Massively) "Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges."

"I've got to cover this up as soon as I can."

"Look, Inspector - I'd give thousands - yes, thousands."

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(Angrily) "There's every excuse for what your mother and I did - it turned out unfortunately, that's all-"

"There'll be a public scandal [...] and who here will suffer from that more than I will."

"Probably a Socialist or some sort of crank."

"The famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke -"

The telephone rings sharply.

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Stick in this paragraph and label PETER:

At the start of the play, Birling is presented as a dominant figure as he controls conversation: "Now you three young people, just listen to this". He is a traditional patriarch, with the imperative "listen" showing that he's in charge. This is emphasised by the discourse marker "Now" and his use of the second person to demand their attention. On stage, this is reinforced by the dramatic pause before he continues his speech. Birling's use of the patronising adjective "young" also suggests that he's trying to enhance his sense of experience and wisdom.

When Inspector Goole challenges Mr Birling, the stage directions show Birling is "surprised" as he isn't used to being challenged...

