Why does Priestley use dramatic irony?
Be able to identify examples of dramatic irony and explore the effect.

Task:
Read the opening stage directions, and answer the following questions:

• What is the lighting like at the start of the play?
• When does the lighting change?
• How does the lighting change?

Include a quotation in each answer.

Challenge: What might the lighting suggest?
Why does Priestley use dramatic irony?  
Be able to identify examples of dramatic irony and explore the effect.

**Answers:**

Read the opening stage directions, and answer the following questions:

- What is the lighting like at the start of the play?  
  The lighting is “pink and intimate” at the start of the play.
- When does the lighting change?  
  The lighting changes when the inspector arrives.
- How does the lighting change?  
  The lighting becomes “brighter and harder”.

**Challenge:**

Pink lighting hides people's flaws; it also has connotations of warmth, romance and happiness. When the inspector arrives, he exposes their flaws. The brighter lighting implies that he is putting them and their capitalist views under a spotlight.
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**Task:**

Read the play up until the doorbell rings on page 10.
Why does Priestley use dramatic irony?
Be able to identify examples of dramatic irony and explore the effect.

Priestley uses **dramatic irony** to make Mr Birling look unreliable and foolish as he is wrong about the Titanic, war and labour. Priestley does this to make the audience distrust Mr Birling. If Mr Birling is wrong about history, his capitalist views may also be wrong. By making Birling look stupid, Priestley also belittles the views of capitalists.
There’s a good deal of silly talk about these days – but – and I speak as a hard-headed business man, who has to take risks and know what he’s about – I say, you can ignore all this silly pessimistic talk. When you marry you’ll be marrying at a very good time. Yes, a very good time – and soon it’ll be an even better time.
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Last month, just because the miners came on strike, there's lots of wild talk about possible labour trouble in the near future. Don't worry. We've passed the worst of it.
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We employers at last are coming together to see that our interests – and the interests of Capital – are properly protected. And we’re in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity.
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Glad you mentioned it, Eric. I’m coming to that. Just because the Kaiser makes a speech or two, or a few German officers have too much to drink and begin talking nonsense, you’ll hear some people say that war’s inevitable. And to that I say – fiddlesticks! The Germans don’t want war. Nobody wants war, except some half-civilised folks in the Balkans. And why? There’s too much at stake these days. Everything to lose and nothing to gain by war.
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Glad you mentioned it, Eric. I’m coming to that. Just because the Kaiser makes a speech or two, or a few German officers have too much to drink and begin talking nonsense, you’ll hear some people say that war’s inevitable. And to that I say—fiddlesticks! The Germans don’t want war. Nobody wants war, except some half-civilised folks in the Balkans. And why? There’s too much at stake these days. Everything to lose and nothing to gain by war.
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Look at the progress we’re making. In a year or two we’ll have aeroplanes that will be able to go anywhere. And look at the way the auto-mobile’s making headway – bigger and faster all the time. And then ships. Why, a friend of mine went over this new liner last week – the Titanic – she sails next week – forty-six thousand eight hundred tons - forty-six thousand eight hundred – New York in five days – and every luxury – and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable.
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Why does Priestley use dramatic irony?
Be able to identify examples of dramatic irony and explore the effect.

In twenty or thirty years' time – let's say, in 1940 – you may be giving a little party like this – your son or daughter might be getting engaged – and I tell you, by that time you'll be living in a world that will have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations and all these silly little war scares. There'll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere – except of course in Russia, which will always be behindhand naturally.
Why does Priestley use dramatic irony?
Be able to identify examples of dramatic irony and explore the effect.

In twenty or thirty years’ time – let’s say, in 1940 – you may be giving a little party like this – your son or daughter might be getting engaged – and I tell you, by that time you’ll be living in a world that will have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations and all these silly little war scares. There’ll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere – except of course in Russia, which will always be behindhand naturally.
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Be able to identify examples of dramatic irony and explore the effect.

But this is the point. I don’t want to lecture you two young fellows again. But what so many of you don’t seem to understand now when things are so much easier, is that a man has to make his own way – has to look after himself – and his family, too, of course, when he has one – and so long as he does that he won’t come to much harm. But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you’d think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we’re all mixed up together like bees in a hive – community and all that nonsense. But take my word for it, you youngsters – and I’ve learnt in the good hard school of experience – that 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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Why does Priestley use dramatic irony?

Be able to identify examples of dramatic irony and explore the effect.

- Selfish
- Socialists
- interrupted
- Priestley wants the audience to think he’s wrong.
- Timing is important
- Doesn’t think he should care about others
- Self-confident
- Like an alarm – shows he’s saying something wrong

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We hear the sharp ring of a front door bell.
“Do Now” Work

• On page 10, **who or what** interrupts Mr. Birling?

• **What** is he talking about when he’s interrupted (include a quotation in your answer)?

• **Why** do you think Mr. Birling is interrupted at this moment?

**Challenge:**

• **Why** do you think Mr. Birling is interrupted by this character (prediction)?

• **Would** the audience trust Mr Birling? Why?

• **Why** might J. B. Priestley want Birling to look foolish?

In Silence Please
On page 10, **who or what** interrupts Mr. Birling?
The "sharp ring" of the doorbell (inspector).

**What** is he talking about when he's interrupted (include a quotation in your answer)?
"a man has to look after himself and his own and -" Selfish, capitalist view - he only cares about himself.

**Why** do you think Mr. Birling is interrupted at this moment?
Priestley disagreed with this view as he was a socialist, so he cuts him off to show it's wrong.

**Challenge:**

**Why** do you think Mr. Birling is interrupted by this character (prediction)?
The inspector is a socialist. He interrupts Mr Birling as he will disagree.

**Would** the audience trust Mr Birling? Why?
No, because the dramatic irony means he is wrong about historical events.

**Why** might J. B. Priestley want Birling to look foolish?
If he's wrong about history, his political views may also be wrong. Priestley doesn't want the audience to trust Birling.
Why does Priestley use dramatic irony?
Be able to identify examples of dramatic irony and explore the effect.

How does Priestley present Arthur Birling in *An Inspector Calls*?  
[30 marks]  
AO4 [4 marks]

How does Priestley present selfishness in *An Inspector Calls*?  
[30 marks]  
AO4 [4 marks]
Why does Priestley use dramatic irony?
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Birling</th>
<th>Quotation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worried about his social status</td>
<td>&quot;provincial in his speech&quot; and his wife is his &quot;social superior&quot; but tells Gerald he may get a &quot;knighthood&quot;. He worries that Lady Croft thinks Gerald may have done &quot;better&quot; than marrying Sheila. He &quot;clearly relaxes&quot; when Edna leaves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sycophantic</td>
<td>&quot;it's exactly the same port as your father gets.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-important</td>
<td>Repetition of &quot;I&quot; - &quot;I'm talking as a hard, headed practical man of business.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfish</td>
<td>&quot;A man has to look after himself...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No sense of responsibility</td>
<td>&quot;Community and all that nonsense.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personifies capitalism</td>
<td>The engagement is &quot;one of the happiest nights&quot; of his life, but it is because &quot;Crofts and Birlings&quot; will be &quot;working together&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patronising</td>
<td>&quot;You two young fellows&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension with Eric, his son</td>
<td>Eric: Yes, I know - but still - Birling: Just let me finish, Eric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong about history (dramatic irony)</td>
<td>&quot;Titanic... unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable.&quot;</td>
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</table>
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Through his selfishness and self-important nature, Birling personifies capitalism. When speaking of Gerald and Sheila’s engagement, he says that this is “one of the happiest nights of [his] life” but this is actually because it will mean the merging of “Crofts and Birling” rather than the joy a marriage would naturally bring to the family. Birling describes himself as “a hard-headed practical business man” (notice the similarity to hard-hearted) and believes a “man has to make his own way”. Priestley uses dramatic irony to make Birling look stupid and therefore belittle the views of capitalists. He says that the Titanic is “unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable”, that war is “impossible” and “nonsense” and there will be no more “Capital versus labour agitations”- all of these happened and so makes Birling’s view unreliable. This would have been particularly powerful with the original 1946 audience who had just lived through two world wars and the strikes and Titanic sinking would have been, for some of the audience, in their lifetime. Priestley is criticising this complacent mind set and Birling represents a section of society that thought it was indestructible.