

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

J.B. Priestley



A young woman is dead

On the face of it, An Inspector Calls is a detective story. And, to a certain extent, as with others of that genre, it keeps us guessing. Whodunnit? Well, not quite. This was a suicide, after all, not a murder. But who bears the moral responsibility for this girl's death? As the Inspector conducts his investigation, interviewing first one member of the Birling family, then another, we discover that they all seem to have played a part in leading this young woman to take her own life.



Morality

So, more than a detective story, this is also a morality play. JB Priestley wrote the play in 1945, right at the end of the Second World War. This was a time when everyone was looking towards a new beginning. The war had brought the country together in a common cause, and perhaps people had grown more aware of bearing a responsibility towards one another. The word responsible or responsibility occurs no less than seventeen times throughout the play.

Society about to change

An Inspector Calls is not set in 1945, however. The events of the play occur in 1912. The First World War is looming. Priestley knows this. We know this. The characters in the play do not. They are complacent in their comfortable world of Edwardian England. Class divisions are distinct and seemingly permanent.

This easy existence is about to be shaken by war, just as our comfortable family is to be shaken by the arrival of Inspector Goole. And, finally, as he is about to leave, Goole's parting shot is a warning: **'We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.'** Do we hear the words of the socialist author in those lines?

The Globe Players' production

This production presents key scenes from the play, and examines the willingness, or otherwise, of the various members of the family to take responsibility for the death that, according to Inspector Goole, has occurred. We also look at the play's **structure**, the use of **language**, and the different **character types** represented.

We also examine the wider social responsibility referred to by Inspector Goole, that has a bearing on the message that Priestley is trying to give us.

