

# Amazing Openings

In Priestley's enigmatic morality play 'An Inspector Calls', the writer uses **Gerald's** moral stagnation and refusal to change from a selfish capitalist to compassionate socialist (like Eric and Sheila Birling) as a metaphor for how moving post-war Britain's ideology forward will be a momentous task.

Priestley's enigmatic morality play 'An Inspector Calls' explores the pronounced differences between the **older and younger** generations. The contrast between the two (the younger as optimistic, reflective and willing to embrace change – the older as selfish, uninformed and obstinate – an unpleasant hangover from the Victorian era) is manifested most clearly in the characters of...

Priestley uses the characters of Gerald and Sheila to explore the pronounced differences between **men and women** in Edwardian England, particularly in the middle and upper echelons. As a keen advocate of women's rights, Priestley uses Sheila to underscore female vulnerability across society and the urgent need for personal and collective change.

In J. B Priestley's post-war, enigmatic morality play, **Mr Birling** is crucial; he is a hateful emblem of a self-seeking, capitalist state which, Priestley believes, requires urgent dismantling.

In 'An Inspector Calls', Priestley uses the character of the **Inspector** to highlight corruption in a pre-war, hierarchical **society** and how a change from capitalist to socialist values are urgently needed. Throughout the play, Priestley employs the Inspector as his own mouth piece, delivering his message of social improvement through the Inspector to respective post-war audiences.

If the question was on...

**Inspector**

I would say...



omniscient

**"impression of massiveness, solidity"**

- ✓ Makes it appear that he controls the stage
- ✓ Adjective "massiveness" shows his ideas are key

**"pink and intimate" AND "brighter and harder"**

- ✓ Makes him appear more powerful
- ✓ Juxtaposition between the classes
- ✓ Calm, blissful, romance – rose-tinted glasses
- ✓ Interrogation and seeing clearly
- ✓ Inspector exposes the characters

**"Public men have responsibilities too as well as privileges"**

- ✓ Makes him appear critical
- ✓ He is accusing Birling of having a careless attitude
- ✓ Undermines Birling by reminding him of how he should behave as Lord Mayor etc.
- ✓ wealthy neglect their duty to support less fortunate

**"Never forget it. (He looks from one to the other of them carefully)"**

- ✓ Makes him appear intimidating
- ✓ Imperative verb 'never' is commanding them
- ✓ Adverb "carefully" suggests he will expose their sins

**"we are members of one body (...) fire and blood and anguish"**

- ✓ Makes his socialism clear
- ✓ Collective pronoun 'we' shows his values
- ✓ Metaphor 'body' shows we don't work alone
- ✓ Semantic field of hell
- ✓ Referring to wars that have passed
- ✓ Rule of three emphasises their future

Motto

"We don't live alone"

Priestley's  
mouthpiece

"One line of enquiry"

"I don't play golf"

Simple quotes:

"of course, he knows"

"he was frightening"

If the question was on...

## Mr Birling

I would say...



### *“provincial in his speech”*

- ✓ Makes him appear uneducated/ narrow-minded
- ✓ Adjective to describe his background
- ✓ From outside the city – trying to fit in to his role

### *“hard-headed practical man of business”*

- ✓ Makes him appear obsessed with money
- ✓ Adjective “hard” - Resilience and entitlement
- ✓ Unintelligent and obstinate
- ✓ Capitalist greed – seven deadly sins
- ✓ Like hard-hearted? No feelings?

### *“unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable” AND “the Germans don’t want war”*

- ✓ Makes him appear foolish
- ✓ Dramatic irony and repetition emphasise this
- ✓ Titanic is a metaphor for the fall of capitalism
- ✓ Arrogant views from 1912 upset the 1946 audience

### *“Still, I can’t accept any responsibility”*

- ✓ Makes him appear unwilling to take blame
- ✓ Unremorseful
- ✓ Adverb “still” – can’t tolerate the Inspector

### *“wretched girl’s suicide”*

- ✓ Makes him appear heartless
- ✓ Adjective “wretched” is derogatory
- ✓ Dehumanises Eva and what happened

Motto

“Lower costs and higher prices”

Egotistical

Patriarch

Dogmatic

First and last person to speak

If the question was on...

## Mrs Birling

I would say...



### *“rather cold woman”*

- ✓ Makes her appear ruthless
- ✓ Adjective “cold” implies she has no feelings
- ✓ Not motherly towards her children

### *“Girls of that class”*

- ✓ Makes her appear elitist
- ✓ Lower class people are inferior to her
- ✓ Collective plural noun “girls”
- ✓ She’s prejudiced to all “girls”
- ✓ “that class” proves her judgemental nature

### *“I used my influence to have it refused”*

- ✓ Makes her appear cruel and proud (7 deadly sins)
- ✓ Abstract noun “influence” proves she has exploited her authority and position
- ✓ She rejected Eva but could have helped her
- ✓ Betrays her own gender

### *“I didn’t like her manner”*

- ✓ Makes her appear vindictive and judgemental
- ✓ Her tone is condescending
- ✓ Eva’s got herself to blame for getting pregnant

### *“He ought to be dealt with severely”*

- ✓ Makes her seem cruel
- ✓ Adverb “severely” shows her confidence
- ✓ Ironic as she places the blame on Eric
- ✓ She’s hypocritical as she changes her mind

Knows her role  
“Men with important work to do”

contemptuous

callousness

hypocritical

Myopic view

### Simple quotes:

“social superior”

“build a wall”

“frightened glance”

### Simple quotes:

“scandal”

“public man”

“knighthood”

“Lord Mayor”

If the question was on...

Gerald

I would say...



**“easy well-bred young man-about-town”**

- ✓ Makes him appear to have had an easy life
- ✓ “well-bred” symbolises his upbringing
- ✓ He has a good reputation within society

**“We can keep it from him”**

- ✓ Makes him appear deceitful
- ✓ Verb “keep” has connotations of secrecy
- ✓ Low sense of responsibility
- ✓ Collective pronoun “we” encourages deception

**“wonderful fairy prince”**

- ✓ Makes him appear like he is trying to be helpful
- ✓ Sheila is furious at his behaviour
- ✓ Fairy tale reference shows it isn’t reality

**“So pretty and intensely grateful”**

- ✓ Makes him seem arrogant
- ✓ Shows how vulnerable and lonely Eva was
- ✓ Believes Eva was dependent on him
- ✓ Did Eva feel she owes Gerald? Seven deadly sins - lust

**“Everything’s alright now, Sheila. (Holds up the ring)”**

- ✓ Makes his appear to have changed nothing
- ✓ Cyclical structure
- ✓ Frees himself of any responsibility
- ✓ Capitalist life continues

**Simple quotes:**

“of Croft’s limited”

“triumphantly”

“Sir George and Lady Croft”

REPRESENTS

Difficulty of breaking the cycle

Moral stagnation

egotistical

privileged

complacent

If the question was on...

Eva Smith

I would say...



**“Eva Smith” AND “Daisy Renton”**

- ✓ Makes her apply to every woman
- ✓ “Eva” linked to Eve – first woman
- ✓ “Smith” – most common surname
- ✓ “Daisy” – pure? Fresh? Once picked → die?
- ✓ “Renton” – available to rent by upper classes

**“alone, friendless, almost penniless, desperate”**

- ✓ Makes the audience sympathise with her
- ✓ List emphasises her plight

**“pretty” AND “agony”**

- ✓ Makes her death appear unnecessary
- ✓ Adjective “pretty” shows her looks are the most important party
- ✓ Inspector juxtaposes her beauty with noun “agony” to illustrate that her life was taken by them

**“drank some disinfectant”**

- ✓ Makes her death appear brutal
- ✓ “disinfectant” used to get rid of germs
- ✓ Who is the germ? Her or the upper classes?

**“Each of you helped to kill her”**

- ✓ Makes her seem abused by the upper classes
- ✓ Verb “helped” proves not one person is to blame
- ✓ It was collective actions that killed her

**Simple quotes:**

“wretched girl”

“girl”

“grateful”

REPRESENTS

Struggle for women and treatment of lower classes in 1912

victim

demise

vulnerable

Never seen – unimportant?

If the question was on...

Sheila



I would say...

**“pretty girl...very pleased with life”**

- ✓ Makes her appear to be happy and content
- ✓ Also described as “pretty” like Eva
- ✓ Antithesis of Eva

**“But these girls aren’t cheap labour – they’re people”**

- ✓ Makes her show her initial family disagreement
- ✓ Frustrated tone shows her annoyance
- ✓ Challenges her father’s capitalist views
- ✓ Sympathises and recognises their hardship

**“(taking out the ring) Oh – it’s wonderful”**

- ✓ Makes her appear shallow/ materialistic
- ✓ Initially happy and carefree – in love with Gerald
- ✓ Adjective “wonderful” highlights sheer happiness
- ✓ Ring symbolises the expectations of women

**“I’ll never, never do it again to anybody”**

- ✓ Makes her appear to have learnt her lesson
- ✓ Reveals her social awareness
- ✓ She has accepted responsibility
- ✓ Repeated adverb “never” suggests learnt her lesson
- ✓ Represents guilt from the seven deadly sins

**“we are all in it – up to the neck”**

- ✓ Makes her encourage collective responsibility
- ✓ Metaphor “up to the neck” alludes to images of them drowning in their sins
- ✓ Pronoun use of “we” shows all should feel regret

**Simple quotes:** “mummy” AND “mother”  
“you fool. Of course he knows” “a rotten shame”

REPRESENTS  
The ability to change

Socialist

Progressive

Subverts stereotypes

If the question was on...

Eric



I would say...

**“half shy, half assertive”**

- ✓ Makes him appear uncomfortable
- ✓ An outsider/ black sheep of the family
- ✓ He is a confused character
- ✓ Alcohol makes him confident

**“I left them talking about clothes again... women are potty about ‘em”**

- ✓ Makes him appear dismissive of women
- ✓ Suggests women are materialistic
- ✓ Adjective “potty” describes their obsession
- ✓ Adverb “again” suggests women aren’t important

**“Why shouldn’t they try for higher wages?”**

- ✓ Makes him appear the antithesis to his father
- ✓ Goes against capitalist views
- ✓ Questioning the views of his family

**“that’s the hellish thing. Oh – my God!”**

- ✓ Makes him appear remorseful
- ✓ Juxtaposition of hell and God – he has sinned
- ✓ Realisation he has acted badly now wants forgiveness
- ✓ Exclamation marks show his shock

**“I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty”**

- ✓ Makes him appear two-sided
- ✓ Alcohol has controlled him – violent
- ✓ Seven deadly sins - gluttony

REPRESENTS

Conflicted role in the upper classes

reckless

immoral

obnoxious

wild

**Simple quotes:**

“guffaws”

“damn you, damn you”

“silly boy”

“good sport”