

## What does Mr Birling say and do?

- Mr Birling is a **wealthy, middle-aged factory-owner**, who is a **magistrate** and has been **Lord Mayor** of Brumley.
- He sees marriage into the Croft family as an **opportunity** to advance his own **business interests**.
- His **judgement** is **misguided** (for example, he sees no possibility of war).
- He does not believe in **social responsibility** and claims that an individual's responsibility is only to **himself** and **his family**.
- He uses his **status** to impress the Inspector, and when this fails he tries to **threaten** him.
- He tries to take **control**, but is constantly **undermined** by the Inspector.
- He becomes **agitated** at the possibility of a **scandal** – for example, when he discovers that Eric has stolen money.
- He is **not ashamed** of his part in Eva's suicide when he thinks the Inspector is a hoax.



## Q Three key questions

1. How does Priestley present Mr Birling?
2. In what ways does Arthur Birling represent ruthless self-interest?
3. How does Mr Birling react to Inspector Goole?

## Answers

1. Priestley presents Birling as someone who likes to be in charge and who preaches about his views, but who is often misguided.
- 2a. We see his self-interest in his attitude towards Sheila's engagement, which he regards as a business opportunity.
- 2b. He also has little sense of responsibility to his workers, believing his responsibility is only to himself.
- 3a. Mr Birling tries to impress and then bully the Inspector, but loses control of the situation as the play develops.
- 3b. His views oppose Inspector Goole's, and he does not change them.

## Learn

Now learn these key quotations to enhance your skills.

1. Man of business: **'I speak as a hard-headed business man'** (Act One)
2. Ambition: **'there's a fair chance that I might find my way into the next Honours List'** (to Gerald, Act One)
3. Reputation: **'when this comes out at the inquest, it isn't going to do us much good'** (about his wife's refusal to help Eva, Act Two)

## Think

How could you use one of the quotations above to complete this paragraph?

Mr Birling reveals his *concern* for his reputation and his lack of compassion .....

## How is gender explored in the play?

- The play examines the relationship between **men and women**.
- Mr Birling sees **marriage** as a means of **social advancement**.
- Sheila and Gerald's relationship is, first and foremost, a **love match**.
- Eva/Daisy appears to have loved Gerald, although he **did not return** that strength of feeling.
- Sheila and Gerald are aware of **men's attitudes to women** in Brumley society – for example, **Alderman Meggarty's** predatory behaviour.
- Sheila becomes more aware of **gender inequality**, and questions Gerald's attitude to her after she discovers he has been **unfaithful**.
- Eric is troubled by his **abuse of Eva**, but how far he will change his attitude to women is uncertain.
- The **consequences** of Gerald's relationship with Eva/Daisy do not seem to **change his attitude** to Sheila.



## Q Three key questions

1. Which characters does Priestley use to present ideas about marriage?
2. What differences do we see in attitudes towards women of different classes?
3. How are women exploited by men in the play?

## Answers

1. Priestley presents ideas about marriage through Mr and Mrs Birling and Sheila and Gerald's engagement.
2. Gerald shows a different attitude towards the middle-class Sheila than he does to the lower-class Eva/Daisy. He seems to love Sheila. He is kind to Eva/Daisy, but essentially just uses her.
3. Both Eric and Gerald exploit Eva/Daisy for their own ends. In the wider Brumley community, poor women are exploited by men of a higher social class, such as Alderman Meggarty.

## Learn

Now learn these key quotations to enhance your skills.

1. Edwardian traditions: **'I think Sheila and I had better go into the drawing-room and leave you men'** (Mrs Birling, Act One)
2. Men and women: **'And you think young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?'** (Inspector Goole to Gerald, Act Two)
3. Sheila's awareness: **'A girl I know had to see him at the Town Hall one afternoon and she only escaped with a torn blouse'** (about Alderman Meggarty, Act Two)

## Think

How could you use one of the quotations above to complete this paragraph?

Sheila demonstrates an awareness of how lone women could be targeted for sexual abuse .....