**CANDIDATE ONE**

**An Inspector Calls**

*Explore how Priestley presents power in An Inspector Calls.*

In the play, An Inspector Calls, Priestley primarily presents the theme of power

through the words and actions of his characters. He constructs the wealthy

Birling family and, to a certain extent, the Inspector, to show audiences how power needs to be handled carefully as it can destroy everyone’s lives. He

clearly shows how the Birling family ruin the lives of the less powerful and

privileged, but also how their misuse of power destroys them too.

The first powerful character we are introduced to is Arthur Birling who

describes himself to his family as a ‘hard-headed, practical man of business’.

Priestley uses this description and the alliterative ‘hard-headed’ to show the

audience his view of the bourgeoise and turns Mr Birling into a representation or caricature of capitalism. Mr Birling show his ‘hard headedness’ at work as he is the owner of a large factory and can therefore exploit his workers. He is always demanding ‘lower costs and higher prices’ and this shows that he wants to exploit his workers just so he can make more money and therefore rise in power and beat his rival firm, ‘Crofts’. He does not think about the impact of his workers and their lives in this rivalry but instead worries about his own power and status as he wants the factory to succeed so he can gain a knighthood. He takes pride in his ‘practical’ and ‘hard-headed’ nature and refuses to let emotions influence any of his decisions.

By making Arthur Birling this way, Priestley shows power as a negative,

corrupting factor. He is a purely practical man and is terrified of losing power

over his workers and his family as it will mean he loses his social status which is his whole life. He explains to the Inspector that he had to fire Eva Smith as she asked for a pay-rise and had ‘far too much’ to say for herself. This could be seen as an abuse of power and an unhealthy way of trying to retain his power over his workers by setting his wages however he wants. When he is

questioned by the Inspector about this, he becomes very defensive and refuses to take any responsibility for the horrible death of Eva Smith.

Although Arthur Birling is very strongly opinionated and has strong,

capitalist views about how to run and business and control his workers, it can be argued that the Inspector is just as powerful, but in a different way. Whereas Mr Birling can measure his power by his social status and the amount of money he has, The Inspector is always in control of the room and controls and manipulates people with his powerful words and ordered thinking. From the

minute he walks into the Birling home, The Inspector disrupts and controls their lives and their conversations. He has the power of making the family talk in the order he wants them to and make them feel uncomfortable. When they try to interrupt, he tells them sharply that they will take ‘one line of inquiry at a time’. He also seems to be omniscient in that he knows Eva is dead before it is actually revealed to the audience and seems to know exactly what each character did to her before he questions them and forces them to give them the answer he wants to hear by using short, direct words at the end of his questions such as ‘well’?

The fact that he knows all of these things and the fact that it is revealed

at the end of the play that he is not a real inspector leads the audience to

believe that he may be a supernatural being. This is further emphasised by his

name ‘Inspector Goole’ which Mrs Birling even spells out ‘G-O-O-L-E’ so that the audience are left in no doubt about the potential supernatural or ‘ghoul’ like nature of the inspector. The Inspector has all the power in the play in that he essentially dictates the pace of it. Aside from Mrs Birling, he makes each

character feel some sort of remorse, especially Sheila, Eric and Gerald. He ends up having the power to impose his views on Sheila as well, almost making her a surrogate inspector.

It is interesting that Priestley allows two very different characters – with

very opposing views – to be powerful in his play. While Mr Birling has the view

that ‘a man should look after himself and his own’, the Inspector has the view

that ‘we are all part of one body’. Mr Birling therefore has the idea that power

can only rest with an individual whereas The Inspector suggests that everyone

should work together and every man should be equal to each other. Even

though The Inspector himself is a powerful man, he exerts that power for good in that he wants the whole family to take responsibility for what they have done.

The last character I want to focus on in relation to power is Mrs Birling.

Whereas it is implied that Mr Birling has worked his way up the social classes

through his work and through exerting his power, his wife was born into power

and wealth. She uses her perceived social superiority to try and undermine the

Inspector and feels he should not be in her house questioning her. She calls his

questioning ‘a trifle impatient’ and agrees that his manner was ‘so rude – and

assertive’ which indicates that she expects to be treated differently from

everyone else and is not used to be questioned at all.

In the same way that she looks down on the Inspector, she looks down on

those of lower class and asserts her power over them. Much like her husband,

she does not show any empathy towards anyone she considers to be beneath

her and even claims that they have no emotions when she accuses Eva of

‘claiming elaborate and fine feelings and scruples’ which were ‘simply absurd in a girl of her position’. This shows that she did not respect the lower classes, but liked to have power over them as she is head of a charity and in some ways,

holds their fate in her hands. She abuses her power as the Chair of the women’s charity by declining cases that she doesn’t seem worthy. She refuses to help Eva Smith just because she had called herself ‘Mrs Birling’ and she saw this as a case of ‘gross impertinence’ and this ‘prejudiced’ her against the case. However, unlike the others, she is not repentant and even tells the Inspector that ‘you have no power to make me change my mind’. However, her children and the audience can clearly see this as an abuse of her power and that it was another element which caused the death of Eva Smith.

To conclude, Priestley uses his characters to show how power is corrupting

and it should be used for good. The whole of the Birling family and Gerald

grossly abused their power and Priestley was trying to make unsympathetic

towards the Capitalist ideas they represent as well as making both his

characters, and the audience aware that misusing power can have major

consequences.

*This is a well structure response which shows an assured knowledge and understanding of the text. The candidate has chosen to discuss the use and abuse of power as shown by three of the main characters in the play. Each character has been chosen to epitomise a certain aspect of power. The contrast between Birling and the inspector is confidently presented and well argued. As is the analysis of Mrs. Birling. The form and structure of the dialogue between each pair of characters is discussed and comments are supported by short and relevant quotations. There is an assured personal engagement with the text and the themes it presents. Overall, a response that covers the requirement of both AO1 and AO2. It was awarded full marks: level 5 mark 30*

**CANDIDATE TWO**

**An Inspector Calls**

***How does Priestley explore ideas about gender in the play?***

According to traditional gender expectations, which would have been popular at the time that Priestley wrote the play in 1945, men were expected to be brave, strong, intelligent and outspoken and women are expected to be weak, fragile and submissive. In ‘An Inspector Calls’, none of the female characters behave in this way. Mrs Birling is cold and cruel rather than warm and maternal and both Eva Smith and Sheila Birling are strong and outspoken. The male characters pretend to be gentlemen. However, Priestley shows a darker side to each of them.

Priestley obviously uses Eva Smith to represent all working class women. This is particularly clear from her name: “Eva” is similar to Eve, the first ever woman according to the Christian bible, and “Smith” is the most common surname in the English language. Priestley deliberately selected these names to hint to Edwardian audiences that Eva is much more than just a character. She is a symbol of the working class women. In Act 1 we learn of Eva Smith’s strength as a woman. Sick of being seen as “cheap labour” she goes on strike for higher wages. Arthur Birling refers to her as “the ringleader” and as a result fires her from his company. The word ‘ringleader’ has definite connotations of control. It paints a picture of a woman who was strong, commanding and authoritative not weak and submissive. Further evidence of Eva Smith’s strength as a woman is in the job she obtains in Milwards, immediately after being fired from Birlings. And when she is fired for a second time, the resilience she shows in through her work at ‘The Palace Bar’ is impressive. While some readers may see Eva’s work as a prostitute at the palace bar as a sign of Eva’s weakness, I think Priestley presents it as a sign of strength, resilience and independence. Unfortunately, as a result Eva’s strength of character (speaking up against Mr Birling) Eva ended up destitute and “Burnt out on a slab”. Perhaps Priestley is using Eva to criticise Edwardian society and the way that it treated outspoken women like Eva. He seems to suggest that the only way for working class women to survive in this era was if they kept their mouths shut.

Another female character who challenges traditional gender expectation is Sheila Birling. At the start of the play she is presented vapid and superficial character who was delighted with her ‘wonderful’ engagement ring. Her joy shows how happy Sheila is to be accepted into the patriarchal institution of marriage where she will be forever subordinate to her husband. However, as the play progresses Priestley shows us a very different side to Sheila as she challenges her family’s closed mindedness and arrogance. Her language totally changes, too. She confronts her mother’s behaviour towards Eva Smith with the words “Mother I think it was cruel and vile” The monosyllabic language here is much more similar to the direct and assertive language of the inspector than the language of a spoilt little girl. Priestley presents a very strong female character in Sheila – someone who modern audiences can respect and admire. Unlike Eva she gains in strength as the play continues. Maybe Priestley is suggesting that it was easier for middle class women to be outspoken than it was for working class women to be outspoken.

Finally, Priestley’s presentation of the male characters, particularly Eric and Gerald is very unpleasant. In Edwardian society, the social expectation was for men to behave in gentlemanly way. They were expected protect women. There are some examples of this kind of protection in the play, for example when Gerald asks the Sheila to leave the room so she doesn’t have to hear about his affair. However, Priestley does not present this in a positive light. Instead, he points out the hypocrisy of a man who doesn’t want his wife to hear about such an “unpleasant and disturbing” affair but is willing to have an “Unpleasant and distrurbing affair” with a poor and destitute Eva Smith. Eric is even more ungentlemanly. In act three we learn that the night that Eric had sex with Eva smith he was “in the mood where a chap gets nasty”. Many readers see this as an indication that Eric raped Eva Smith. The casual use of language in the words “chap” and “nasty” suggest Eric is trying to conceal his immoral behaviour. Alternatively, it could suggest he sees nothing wrong with such violence and that “Nasty” behaviour towards women was acceptable to him. Whichever is true, Priestley is obviously highlighting that the idea of the Edwardian gentleman was a facade that was used to conceal terrible behaviour. He highlights the abuse and exploitation of women by men in an era where women’s rights were not like they are today.

Overall, Priestley presents both genders in an unexpected way. His female characters, on the whole are far more likeable than his males, who appear naive, arrogant and exploitative. It is clear that Priestley wanted a society that gave women like Eva Smith a voice because as the Inspector says “There are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths” in the world.

*Commentary:*

*This is a comprehensive essay, which addresses the question. To move forward more subject terminology should be integrated more carefully into the response. Subject terminology would include words like ‘playwright’, ‘protagonist’, ‘static’, ‘dynamic’, ‘juxtaposition’, ‘euphemism’, ‘hyperbole’ ‘irony’ ‘foreshadowing’ or any other terminology relating to Priestley’s methods. There would also be more specific analysis of Priestley’s choices too, for example, of language he uses.*

*Level 4 23*

**CANDIDATE THREE**

**An Inspector Calls**

***How effective is Priestley’s use of dramatic sequences to engage the audience?***

Priestley bases the play at around 1912 as he makes Mr Birling say “the Germans don’t want to go to war,” and he also mentions the Titanic, “They’ve made unsinkable ships. This adds dramatic irony to the play as the people watching the play know that the German did go to war with the world and that the Titanic actually did sink. Priestley makes Mr Birling say this not only to add dramatic irony but also to give us an idea what time the play was based

around. From the beginning of the play, Priestly has engaged the audience of the play with his reference of the key historic moments.

The Birlings are sitting at home and the maid come in to let Mr Birling know that the inspector is at the door. This creates tension for the audience as it is unexpected and they do not know what it is for. By now the audience have realised that the Birlings are upper class, wealthy, complacent and don’t expect to be in trouble with the police. “All right Edna. Show him in here. Give us some more light. I’m still on the bench. It may be something about a warrant.” Because Priestley has set up such a calm environment, the inspector’s first allegation shatters this and causes tension and drama to rise. “Yes, she was in great agony. They did everything they could fort her at the infirmary, but she died. Suicide, of course.”

Structurally, Priestley creates one of the most dramatic scenes in the play between the Inspector and Mrs Birling and Mr Birling. This is when the Inspector snaps and talks to Mrs Birling in a very rude manner, “You’re not telling the truth.” This engages the audience as this is a display of powerful emotions and the audience know the Birling’s are upper class

and should be treated with respect at all times. A modern audience might find this part of the play not as thrilling as an older audience because of our current attitude to upper classes.

Towards the end of the play, Eric gets spoken to last as we’ve just found out that Mrs Birling had denied Eva/Daisy of help and she blamed the boy for her mistakes, “And if you’d take some steps to find this young man and then make sure that he’d compelled to confess in public his responsibility – instead of staying here asking unnecessary questions – then you would really being your duty.” Sheila at this point knows that the boy they are talking about is Eric and can’t stop her mother from talking about how the ‘young man’ should be found.

She doesn’t realise until the Inspector says, “Not yet, I’m waiting.” And Mrs Birling says, “waiting for what?” for the Inspector to say, “to do my duty”. The audience then definitely know it is Eric and they want to know what happens so they then become even more engaged at this point as they want to know what happens next.

This builds tension in the audience as earlier they start to guess something is happening and who the young man is, however when Mrs Birling finds out that is Eric she soon retracts her statement and Sheila say that she tried to stop her, “Mother – stop – stop!” At this point of the play Eric walks in and the tension and stress in the theatre audience would have increased massively. The curtains then close and show that it the end of Act 2, this leaves the audience on a cliff hanger and they start to debate what will happen to Eric.

When Act 3 starts Eric admits to what he did and they are not impressed as he stole money to keep her going to get enough food for her, he stole money from his Father’s office. We are not certain for sure but we do believe that Eric forced her into having sexual intercourse both of them under the influence of alcohol, this making him a rapist. “I’m not very clear about it, but afterwards she told me she didn’t want me to go in…2 this makes the audience

dislike Eric as he is a rapist and a thief.

Priestley maintains the dramatic effects on the audience till the end of the play and especially at the end of the play. At the end of the play the Inspector leaves and they find out that he wasn’t actually an inspector, Gerald finds this out. “That man wasn’t a police officer.” This makes tension rise as the audience do not know what will happen next. At the end of the play Priestly leaves the audience on the biggest cliff hanger in the entire play.

This is when they get a phone call from the infirmary and it is to let them know that Eva/Daisy had been found dead and they called beforehand and they were told that they hadn’t found her. This makes the audience want to know what happens next.

*Commentary.*

*The response offered is structured with a very good focus on the question. The candidate’s strength is the analysis and comment on the form and structure of the play. More analysis of language would have benefitted this response. Personal engagement is evident and the candidate supports comments with relevant textual references. The response fulfils the criteria for a mid- level 3 response. Level 3 mark 15*