**GRADE 9 RESPONSE**

**Explore how Sheila Birling is presented across the play.**

  As a prominent member of the The Common Wealth Party and later a member of the Labour party, Priestley did not look favourably on the privileged upper classes – something that is extremely clear in his presentation of the Birling and Croft families in ‘An Inspector Calls’ However, his presentation of Sheila Birling goes beyond the stereotype of a spoilt little rich girl as she actually becomes the play’s unlikely heroine.

  In the play’s exposition our first glimpse of Sheila is of a spoilt little rich girl who is immensely privileged. She has recently been engaged to Gerald Croft – heir to the Croft family fortune.  Upon receiving the engagement ring from Gerald she comments on its “beauty” and then utters the phrase “Now I really feel engaged” which allows Priestley to suggest that she is a materialistic character who needs ostentatious symbols of wealth in order to validate her existence. Here, Priestley is criticising the way that wealth was passed around rich families in Edwardian England, through carefully designed marriages which would create allegiances between families. He makes the rich seem calculated. They were willing to share their wealth and privilege with each other but with no one else. The way she is keen to take part in these exchanges make her appear to be a vain and vacuous.

  However, our initial impression of Sheila is soon changed due to the immense transformation that she goes through during  the Inspector's visit. After she has learnt about Gerald’s part in Eva Smith’s death, Sheila returns her engagement ring to Gerald saying "Don't interfere please father" Handing back  a ring that was once so important to her is symbolic of Sheila regaining control of her life. It also suggests that the material possessions she once valued so much are now unimportant to her. The imperative nature of her words shows that she is no longer a little girl willing to be dominated and controlled by her father and fiancé and that, for her, morals are more important than material possessions and status. This shows what a profound impact the Inspector has had on Sheila and completely changes the way we see her as a character.

  As well as rejecting Gerald, Sheila also rejects some of her father’s ideas, which is a fundamental part of her development from a spoilt little girl into a strong minded woman. At the start of the play,  Sheila refers to her mother as father as “mummy” and “daddy” which implies she is childlike and feeble minded . However, when she learns of her father’s treatment of Eva she declares “But these girl’s aren’t cheap labour – they’re people”. This is an explicitly socialist point of view and not something you would not expect to come out of the mouth of a pampered member of the middle classes.   She is just as eager to stand up to her mother: “you mustn’t try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl”. This warning can be read in two ways: the first is as a warning to her mother (who is trying to fool the Inspector). However, the second is as a metaphor for the “wall” that upper class families tried to build between themselves and the lower classes. Indeed, Edwardian society was very divided. Upper middle class families like Sheila’s lived very separately from their lower class counterparts, far away from the inner city terraces occupied by the working class. Sheila’s statement, here, suggests that Sheila thinks society should change – which is something we know that Priestley wanted.

  Toward the end of the play, Sheila is almost unrecognisable. She argues with her family that they must listen to the Inspector’s warning and she repeats his message of “fire and blood and anguish”. By repeating his words like this Sheila makes sure the inspector’s presence is still felt by the Birling family long after the Inspector himself has left the stage. It is for this reason that some people see Sheila as a proxy for the Inspector in the final scene. She is one of the only members of the Birling family to see that the Inspector was “anything but a joke” and ends the play feeling incredibly solemn as a result of what she has learnt about the role she and her family played in the death of Eva Smith.

  Sheila’s solidarity with Eva Smith and the end of the play is the most impressive thing about her character – and it is a far cry from the spoilt little rich girl who was responsible for getting Eva sacked at the beginning of the play. She sides with this poor woman from the working classes over her own family. Perhaps Priestley had been influenced by the solidarity and sisterhood that was shown by members of the Suffragette movement in his presentation of Sheila. Someone who, like Priestley, thought that society should work as “one body”.

**34/34. This is a full mark response because it presents a critical, exploratory and well-structured argument. It takes a conceptualised approach to the full task supported by a range of judicious references. There is evidence of fine-grained and insightful of methods supported by judicious use of subject terminology. There is also convincing exploration of one contextual factors.**

**3. How does Priestley use the character of Mr Birling to explore ideas about class?**

Priestly presents the character of Mr Birling as an upper-class, selfish snob who is “heavy looking, portentous man”, implying that he is quite well off. The adjective “portentous” has connotations with pompousness and self-importance, both of which describe Mr Birling’s actions throughout the play well. This is shown when he “can’t accept any responsibility” for Eva Smiths death simply because he believes that if everyone was responsible for “everything that happened to everybody… it would be very awkward.” This is done to show what the attitudes of the ruling class in the Edwardian era are; if it might have a negative effect on their lives, then they are almost certain to refuse to accept to have had any hand in it. Priestly wrote it this way because after the second world war, he was concerned with the lower classes’ lives since there was no way for them to receive any support, money, food or clothing-wise.

Mr Birling is shown to see the lower-class as nothing but a way to make his own money. This is shown through his dismissal of Eva Smith and his refusal to raise the women’s wages as it would have “added 12% to [his] labour costs”. This is a very small amount of money per each woman but enough so that they can ensure that they have enough for food, rent and clothing. He also refers to the women as “these people”, showing his disassociation from fellow human beings and says that he must “come down sharply on them”, giving the reader the feeling that he views them as nothing but bugs to be stepped on. Priestly shows this to show that this is the wrong attitude to have to the lower-class as the rich can’t be rich without all of their hard work- you can’t expect them to work as well if they aren’t treated well as shown through the strike.

However, Mr Birling doesn’t quite fit in with upper-class society. We are told that Mrs Birling is his “social superior” which is unusual in the Edwardian times as it was a patriarchal society. This is our first indication that everything isn’t what it seems with Mr Birling. He also shows off to Gerald with the port they are served by Edna, telling him “It’s the same port your father gets”. This shows a desire to fit in with the upper-class, as we are told that Mr Birling is “provincial in his speech” which indicates that Mr Birling isn’t all what he seems: that he may instead be from a lower class and married into an upper role, and instead of actually being this way, he is playing a role. This is actually worse than if the upper-class actually thought this way, because this shows that, to him and therefore the upper-class that he caricatures, it is more important to follow the example set by the social superiors than be a better person and help the poor like Eva Smith. On the other hand, it also shows a potential to change, the exact thing that Priestly wants.

Overall, Mr Birling is used as a tool to criticise the upper-class and to let them know that changing for the better is a necessity through the outcome of his inaction- the death of Eva Smith.

**Examiner Comment:**

20/34. Some thoughtful, detailed and developed analysis. It takes a considered approach to the full task with references integrated into interpretation; there will be a detailed examination of the effects of language and/or structure and/or form supported by apt use of subject terminology. There is some examination of some ideas and contextual factors and beginning to explore multiple interpretations.

**4. How does Priestley present Inspector Goole in *An Inspector calls*?**

Upon his entrance, the inspector is described as creating an “impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness”. The list of three creates a dramatic first-impression, as well as foreshadowing the inspector’s intentions with the abstract noun “purposefulness”. This implies that he is determined to receive the information he wants. The name “Goole” sounds similar to ghoul; a spirit or someone with a morbid interest in death. This is more closely examined at the end of the prose, when his entire existence is questioned by the Birlings, when they discover “there’s no Inspector Goole on the police”.

The inspector creates a shift in the mood of the prose; his sombre presence prompts a bleak atmosphere during the celebration of Sheila and Gerald’s engagement. He is also presented as a figure of authority during the play. He works systematically by dealing with “one person and one line of enquiry at a time”. This ultimately leads to each character admitting their role in Eva Smith’s death, as Sheila interpreted, “he’s giving us the rope so that we’ll hang ourselves”.

Despite seeming harsh with the family, the inspector also seems determined to teach the Birlings a valuable lesson. During his interrogation, he insists “each of you helped kill [Eva Smith], remember that”. The use of the term “each of you” confirms that each member of the family played a role in the young girl’s suicide. This implies that he is urging everyone to accept responsibility for Eva, which some are reluctant do to.

Regardless of his title “Inspector”, Mr Goole seems more concerned with moral law than criminal law. He doesn’t attempt to arrest any of the family, but instead tries to make them realise their role in Eva Smith’s death. This is confirmed by the quote “ let’s leave office out of it, shall we?”. This subtly demonstrates how inspector Goole’s dismissiveness regarding his “duty” as a member of the police force, instead preferring to encourage a change in the Birling’s irresponsible nature. In many ways, Priestley uses the Inspector as a catalyst, as he creates an opportunity for people to accept responsibility for their actions, which they wouldn’t have done without his input. The Inspector also represents Priestley’s strong moral beliefs by expressing his desire for truth and justice, as well as the need for everyone to become responsible for each other. This is demonstrated when the inspector warns “ if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish”. Here not only does the character foreshadows future world wars, as well as threatening the Birlings that their irresponsible natures will have grave ends.

**EXAMINER COMMENT:**

18/34. This response is clear and straight-forward. It takes a considered approach to the full task with references integrated into interpretation; there will be a detailed examination of the effects of language and/or structure and/or form supported by apt use of subject terminology. There is some examination of contextual factors including alternative interpretations/deeper meanings.

**5. How does Priestley use Gerald to explore ideas about responsibility?**

Priestley Represents Gerald as a character who is reluctant to take responsibility. Gerald is seen to be a very shallow character right from the start as he says” I hate those hard –eyed, dough- faced women. But then I notice a girl who looked quite different. She was very pretty” This suggests that he thinks he can pick and choice who he insults. The adjectives “Hard- eyed” and “Dough-face” highlight that he is misogynistic and prejudice towards women of lower class who are uglier. The noun “women” implies he is aiming what he is saying at all women and not just one. But he is contradicting as he then says “she was very pretty” which connotes that he feels like he believes he has the authority to pick and choose who he mocks and when it best suits him. This shows he does not take responsibility for his actions that cause women to be embarrassed.

We are also under the impression that Gerald is very Suspicious of Eric’s drinking when he quotes” I have gathered that he does drink plenty” which reveals that him and Birling appear to share knowledge of Eric’s Drinking but are withholding it from the women. Priestly use of words makes the women seem a lot less perceptive ad the men. The adverb “Plenty” backs this up as it shows he has been doing it a lot yet they have not realised that this is a problem. This is a true display of the patriarchal society and how not even family would take responsibility of their younger members if they were struggling or had a problem. Besides this we see Gerald being very patronising towards Shelia through the use of imperatives when he declares “Don’t look like that Shelia “which shows he is trying to control her, this is very conventional as in the 20th century women supposed to be submissive and subservient. She also says “She’s had a long exciting and tiring day” when explaining why Shelia should go out of the room. The Adjective “Tiring” conveys that women can’t last as long as men as they are delicate and fragile. This shows Gerald being responsible for Shelia’s wellbeing even though he is doing it in an unfair way.

**Examiner Comment:**

12/34. Explanatory in parts. It focuses on the full task with a range of points exemplified by relevant references from the text; there will be identification of effects of a range of writer’s methods supported by some relevant terminology. Explanation of some relevant contextual factors.

**6. How is Eva Smith significant in the play? (34)**

Even Though Eva smith does not specifically have any lines in the play she has significance to the plot.

Priestley makes this obvious when the inspector uses emotive to empathise the tragedy of her death which is backed up by the dialoge”Her position now is that she lies with burnt-out inside on a slab” and “She’d swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant.” The use of shocking and disturbing language suggests he is trying to disrupt how the characters are feeling emotionally. The noun “disinfectant” is normally referred to as something that gets rid of unwanted organisms or germs which could be a metaphor for the inspector cleaning up the conventional society represented by the Birling Family.

The way Priestley uses the name Eva smith indicates a symbolic importance. This is obvious when the inspector says” One Eva Smith has gone – but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva smiths left with us. The repetition of “Millions” suggests that the inspector wants the Birling’s to understand and feel for Eva smith. The name “Eva” is first in the bible which links to Priestley’s religious message to be kind to each other. Furthermore the name “smith” is one of the most common names which highlights how she represents all the women in the same position is was in more so the women un the lower classes.

Later on in the play, Eva’s is seen to personify how workers were unhappy with their pay and demanded higher wages.” This is most seen when Mr birling says “I told them to clear out…. Wretched girl.” The phrases “wretched girl” and “clear out” shows how ignorant and disrespectful Mr Birling is towards the younger class and in specific Eva. This shows how Mr Birling is pretentious he is towards the lower class. The way society (mostly shown through the Birling family’s actions) are made responsible for Eva’s Smith. This is seen through the use of dialog when the inspector says ”what happened to her afterwards and may have driven her to commit suicide” which highlights that the inspector is keen to point out that no one person is responsible and that it was all of their actions combined that is responsible for her death.

The play highlights the terrible way women such as Eva were treated by society. When Mrs Birling says” it sounded ridiculous to me so I was not perfectly justified in advising my committee not to allow her claim for assistance”. This shows she was turned down by women, people of the same gender that she believed she could turn to and people who should have understood more about what she was going through and how frightened may have been to be a single parent. Eva smith is a victim of stereotyping. The dialogue “Get into trouble, go on the streets” which is said by Mr Birling suggests that Mr Birling stereotypes Eva by making the assumption that she turned to prostitution. This shows how unimportant Mr Birling viewed the lower classes.

**EXAMINER’S COMMENT:**

20/34. Clear and consistent. It takes a focused response to the full task which demonstrates clear understanding. It uses a range of references effectively to illustrate and justify explanation; there will be clear explanation of the effects of a range of writer’s methods supported by appropriate use of subject terminology. Clear understanding of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors.

**7. 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.

EXAMINER’S COMMENT

27/34. This is a high performing essay that is classic of grade 8 performance. To achieve a grade 9, 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 “fine grained” analysis of Priestley’s choices too, for example, of language.

**8. How does Priestley present Sheila as a character who learns important lessons about herself and society? Write about:**

**• some of the things Sheila learns in the play**

**• how Priestley presents Sheila as a character who learns important lessons about herself and society.**

Priestley presents Sheila as a happy, carefree and responsibility-free member of the upper class. She's “very pleased with life” telling us that she is comfortable with the way her life currently is with her considerable wealth and engagement which will lead to her rising in Edwardian society. The adverb “very” creates the emphasis to her contentment and contrasts with Eva's life. The noun “life” could be used as further juxtaposition and foreshadowing to what will be revealed in the play; Eva Smiths unhappiness in her life and subsequent death. The audience is also told that Sheila believes her life is “perfect”, which gives implies that she is very spoilt and privileged, and, again, foreshadows the disruption to her “perfect” life. Sheila’s life is an abnormality in the Edwardian era as women were viewed as lesser beings and property-such as when Mr Birling is happy with Sheila and Gerald's engagement. However, most women wouldn't be born into money and the lower classes would have to scrape by on their weeks wages, with many turning to prostitution to get enough for food.

Sheila is also displayed as a dynamic character with the potential to change for the better. Upon realising her role in Eva's demise, she “gives a half-stifled sob, and runs out.” This tells us about the horror she feels and the verb “run” shows her reacting as a member of the upperclass would – refusal to face her actions. The adverb “half-stifled” confirms this idea as she is trying to hide her emotions and refrain from reacting as she would be taught to do in an upperclass household. However, she is shown to change when she returns and promises to “never, never do it again.” The repetition of the word “never” emphasises her belief in her words and her determination to follow them. This shows her regret and responsibility; her acceptance of her wrongdoing.

Sheila's change is finalised with her condemnation of her parents actions towards Eva Smith. The fact that “it frightens [her] the way [they] talk” shows us that she is aware that her actions has consequences and is afraid for the poorer society as her parents are unwilling to change when they realise that Eva Smith hadn't committed suicide and may not have ever existed at all. She reminds them o ft he inspectors words “fire and blood and anguish” if they don't contribute to the change in society. As Edwardian society was, in general, Christian, this could be implying that without change they will be judged and sent to hell. It could also reference to world war two which the audience is aware will happen soon. Sheila and Eric are used as Priestley’s mouthpiece; the younger generation are key to changing the classes’ opinions and society.

**Examiner comment:**

18/34. This is clear and consistent. It takes a focused response to the full task which demonstrates clear understanding. It uses a range of references effectively to illustrate and justify explanation; there will be clear explanation of the effects of a range of writer’s methods supported by appropriate use of subject terminology. There is a clear understanding of ideas, perspectives and some contextual factors.

**8. How does Priestley use Mrs Birling to present ideas about class?**

At the beginning of the play *AIC,* Mrs Birling is presented as a pretentious woman. For example: "Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things." Mrs Birling's character immediately disciplines her husband's behaviour after he has complemented the chief for the meal. This indicates that she has been raised to never compliment the servants of the house. Moreover, she has had a strict and harsh upbringing where you were reprimanded for not adhering to the social etiquette expected of the upper classes.

Later, we see that Mrs Birling is very traditional: "When you're married you'll realise that men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on their business. You'll have to get used to that, just as I did." This lecture shows that she wants her daughter to be aware of the social responsibilities of being a good wife showing that she believes women must accept the work that men do and know their place. This is ironic as later in the play we see that Mrs Birling has to acknowledge the negative actions of the men in the household.

In the play we see that her upbringing in the wealthy classes means that she is a very confident woman (due to her high status). The first time that this confidence is shaken is when Mrs Birling discovers some of the secrets of the family. She becomes 'staggered' on the discovery of Eric's drinking habit, and refuses to believe the information that she is told. Mrs Birling refuses to believe the secrets of her children, showing that she does think of them as children and not as adults.

Mrs Birling is in denial when it comes to her children. For instance: "it isn't true. You know him Gerald - and you're a man - you must know it isn't true." This shows how she seeks reassurance off Gerald who she respects because he is an authoritative, intelligent male who she feels must see sense and confirm her protestations that Eric does not have a drink problem. However, we soon learn that Mrs Birling is in denial when it comes to any immoral act committed by high society. For example: "women of the town…don't talk nonsense Sheila...” Mrs Birling immediately patronises her astute daughter when she finds that Gerald Croft was also associated with the girl Daisy Renton who committed suicide. Furthermore, this highlights Mrs Birling’s conceited naivety as she clearly believes that her status absolves her of any immortal acts.

At the end of the play we see that Mrs Birling is unrepentant. For example: “I have done nothing to be ashamed of.” This shows how she has returned to being a very cold and unappreciative woman, who is aware of her social class and others around her and uses this power to affect others.

**Examiner Comment:**

19/34. This response contains some thoughtful, detailed and developed analysis. It takes a considered approach to the full task with references integrated into interpretation; there will be a detailed examination of the effects of language and/or structure and/or form supported by apt use of subject terminology. There is some examination of contextual factors and some awareness of the need to explore multiple interpretations.