***An Inspector Calls* (1945) by J B Priestley (1894-1984)**

**How does Priestley prepare the audience for the arrival of the Inspector?**

**Exemplar Essay**

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**How does Priestley prepare the audience for the arrival of the Inspector?**

**Introduction**: The Inspector has come to teach the Birlings a lesson. Priestley makes clear to the audience that they need one.

**My Notes:**

**Paragraph One:** Priestley creates a complacent mood using setting and lighting.

**My Notes:**

**Paragraph Two:** Priestley creates a complacent mood through Birling’s lectures, which are full of dramatic irony for the 1945 audience.

**My Notes:**

**Paragraph Three:** In order to achieve the greatest dramatic effect, Priestley places the Inspector’s arrival at just the right moment.

**My Notes:**

**Paragraph Four:** Before the Inspector’s arrival, Priestley drops dark hints that all is not well with the Birlings and Gerald.

**My Notes:**

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, Priestley effectively prepares the audience for the Inspector’s arrival using every means at the playwright’s disposal.

**My Notes:**

**How does Priestley prepare the audience for the arrival of the Inspector?**

J B Priestley uses the mysterious character of Inspector Goole as the mouthpiece for his socialist ideas. Like the ghosts who haunt Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, the Inspector has a deeply moral role. He has come to warn the Birlings and Gerald Croft that unless they change their selfish ways, disaster awaits. This disaster is not the sufferings of the afterlife, though, as it is in Dickens’ very Christian novel. The disaster awaiting capitalists such as the Birlings is violent social change that will throw them from their position at the top of society: the ‘fire and blood and anguish’ of the Inspector’s concluding speech. Because the Inspector is coming to teach the Birlings and Gerald a lesson, it is important that Priestley make clear to the audience that they are in need of one. Thus the opening scene of the play, with the family just having finished a celebration dinner, is vital as a contrast to what follows after the Inspector arrives. The mood amongst the family is primarily one of self-satisfied complacency, although there are darker hints which foreshadow what comes later.

Priestley creates this mood in a number of ways. Firstly, he creates a setting which shows the wealth and comfort of the Birling family. They have a servant who brings luxurious items such as cigars to the table, which would have been beyond the means of ordinary people in 1912, when the play is set. They have a cook to prepare a special dinner for them. They have ‘good solid furniture’ and live in a ‘fairly large suburban house’. The lighting also helps to create the mood, and the contrast when the Inspector arrives, as it is ‘pink and intimate’ prior to his arrival, but ‘brighter and harder’ afterwards. Pink lighting suggests an unrealistic view of the world, coloured by complacency, but the brighter lighting which comes with the Inspector will, it is implied, reveal the true state of affairs.

The after-dinner conversation is also a vital tool used by Priestley to prepare the audience for the arrival of the Inspector. Mr Birling dominates this conversation, using the opportunity of a speech in honour of his daughter’s engagement to pontificate about political and economic matters. Priestley uses dramatic irony to make Birling’s complacency very clear to the 1945 audience, who would have known that the Titanic turned out to be very far from ‘unsinkable’ and that the rumours of war turned out to be far more than just a ‘few German officers’ having ‘too much to drink’ and ‘talking nonsense’. Priestley creates this bubble of complacency to show how misguided is the confidence of capitalists such as Birling, who believe that the world will go on just as it has done, to the profit of himself and his family, in a ‘time of steadily increasing prosperity’. This allows Priestley to create a sharp contrast with the time after the Inspector has questioned the family. This contrast is based around the idea of learning. At the start of the play, Birling takes it upon himself to lecture his children, believing that they have ‘a lot to learn’ about the real world, with which he is very familiar, and giving them the ‘benefit of [his] experience’. But after the Inspector leaves, it is Sheila who is telling her father that he should learn his lesson: ‘You began to learn something. And now you've stopped.’

In order to achieve the greatest dramatic effect, Priestley places the Inspector’s arrival just at the moment when Birling has reached the height of his pontifications on the theme of self-interest: ‘a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own – and – ‘. The conjunction ‘and’ and the pause which follows it indicate clearly to the audience that Birling is not permitted to finish his sentence, because he is interrupted by the ‘sharp ring of a doorbell’. Thus Priestley shows how the Inspector has come precisely to undermine this notion of self-interest, and to propose instead what Birling calls ‘community and all that nonsense’. Again, the complacent lecturing of Birling creates a sharp contrast with what comes later. Indeed, Priestley makes this contrast all the stronger by reminding the audience of it after the Inspector has left, through the words of Sheila and Eric. Eric points out that the Inspector put a stop to Birling’s lecturing: ‘I didn't notice you told him that it's every man for himself’, and that he was precisely ‘one of those cranks’ who talk about ‘community’: in other words, a socialist.

But it is not all rosy before the Inspector arrives. Another way in which Priestley prepares the audience for the Inspector’s arrival is to drop dark hints about the problems which lie not far beneath the complacent surface of the Birlings’ lives. Sheila mentions, in a half-serious way, that Gerald didn’t come near her for a large part of the previous year. Birling and Gerald tease Eric about ‘what some of these boys get up to nowadays’ just after Birling has confided in Gerald that he hopes for a knighthood, so long as there is no ‘scandal’, and Gerald assures Birling that they ‘seem like a nice well-behaved family’. These hints of misbehaviour are emphasised most strongly with the verb ‘seem’. Priestley implies with this word that appearance is about to be replaced by reality; the bright light of the Inspector’s investigation will get beneath the superficially rosy surface.

In conclusion, Priestley effectively prepares the audience for the Inspector’s arrival using every means at the playwright’s disposal: through setting, lighting and dialogue that is full of irony and foreshadowing, he sets up the complacent Birlings and Gerald for the fall which awaits them, implying that those who believed in the triumph of capitalism and the continuation of the *status quo* in 1912 were just as misguided, selfish and arrogant as the family whose comfort the Inspector is about to destroy. Many who watched the play in 1945 in Russia, or in 1946 in London, would have agreed, given the turbulent events that had occurred since: two world wars, violent socialist revolution in Russia, and democratic socialist revolution in Britain.