

## Exam Task 1 - An Inspector Calls

How far does Priestley present Eric as an admirable character?

Write about:

- what Eric says and does in the play
- how Priestley presents Eric by the ways he writes.

**[30 marks]**  
**AO4 [4 marks]**

### Sample Answer

In “An Inspector Calls”, Eric is presented as a conflicting character that could be perceived as admirable but also presents some detestable qualities. Priestley uses him to show that although society has made errors, it’s possible to change, especially if you are open enough and caring enough to look after your fellow man. In order to show this message, Priestley initially creates a sense of Eric being weak, but in some ways, he becomes a role model – an emblem of the way forward.

Eric is presented as an uncommendable, slightly drunk and uncomfortable character and this is shown when at the start of the play he suddenly laughs for no apparent reason – “I just had to laugh” – which shows that he was a bit “squiffy” as told by his mother, Mrs Birling. It is also shown further on in the play that Eric is alcohol dependent as when he is about to explain everything to the inspector he says “Can I have a drink first?” This explains that to help him get through bad times, he relies on alcohol to push him through and not something else such as his family and friends. This is not a very commendable trait as drinking is not good for your health so this suggests that Priestley wanted to portray Eric as not very admirable and a suspicious character at the start of the play.

In Act Three, Eric is presented as a praiseworthy person in my opinion – this is because he confesses to every bad deed to his family (which would not have been easy) as well as the Inspector. “You haven’t made it any easier for me have you mother?” explains that point as it was already hard for Eric to gather the courage to tell everyone, but when his own family says that the person that had done the terrible things to Eva should go to jail, it would take a lot more bravery to confess all of his wrongdoings. This is a conflicting part of the play as the perception of this scene differs; on the other hand, it could be portrayed that Eric is not ashamed of his wrongdoings and feels no guilt in telling his family yet on the other hand, it could also be presented as Eric feeling very guilty and has been stressing about it ever since (this could explain the reason that he is drinking a lot – to drown his fears) and that he wants to come out to his family but is unable to as a result of his fear of his father and his bitterness to him which is shown later on in the play when Mr Birling seems to care about his money over his son. Eric’s involvement with Eva is told to the audience soon after him talking to his mother and this shocks his family.

Priestley presents Eric in many ways when he describes the despicable event of Eric forcing himself upon Eva using short simple sentences. Eric describes himself as in a “state where a chap easily turns nasty” which suggests that Eric did not do an ethical thing because he had the upper hand as if someone did something that did not please him, he would become violent which could become dangerous. Eva was forced to let Eric in her room and all that Eric says is “that’s when it happened.” This can be perceived as him being an incredibly horrible person as he isn’t ashamed of telling his family about the events of that day. This means that Priestley wanted Eric to be the villain of the story of Eva Smith, yet the quote can be viewed as Eric feeling so guilty and bad that he did not want to say anymore that could be why he said “that’s when it happened” and not “I did ... to Eva.” Priestley creates a conflicting point in this scene as it is up to the reader whether they perceive it as a good or bad thing that he is confessing everything and might want to change and become a more admirable character.

As a part of Eric’s confession, he states that he stole money from his father’s accounts which is against the law therefore making him a shameful person. As well as this, Eric also denies the fact that he did steal the money by saying “No, not really, I intended to pay it back.” This could just be a lie trying to cover up his crimes which would make him a more deceitful person or he could be genuinely telling the truth and wanted to pay back his father as he feared the consequences. Either way, it seemed that Eric was being presented as a coward and a criminal but as he is presented as contradictory, he may well change and present more admirable qualities.

Eric is seen to be changed and presents a more admirable personality after that scene as when Mr Birling asks about the money, Eric does not care about it but rather cares for Eva and about what happened to her – “The money is not the important thing. It’s what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters.” This shows that he has realised his mistake and knows that repenting is more important than the money that he stole. This is admirable as a person that cares more about money than humanity is a terrible person so Eric has presented himself as a contradicting person of many emotions.

Priestley uses brackets in front of speech to show Eric’s emotions. This presents Eric as admirable as well as disrespectful. Whenever Eric is being spoken to after his confessions, the tone of his voice suggests that he was not talking in a respectful way but rather aggressive (this is shown when (angrily) or (bitterly) is put in front of his speech.) This could be taken as Eric being an impolite and rude person which is not very admirable qualities to have. On the contrary, this threatening tone may also be linked to how he feels about himself; he may feel very bad after all he has done to Eva and might feel enraged at himself for doing all of the terrible deeds that he did.

All in all, Eric has been a contradictory character on the topic of being admirable. This is shown by his transition from the start of the play to the end of the play. At the start of the play, Eric is seen as a spoilt and drunk child of a rich businessman, which does not represent admirable characteristics. However, by the end of the play, Eric is seen to regret all of his mistakes and realises that he needs to change his perspective of life and does that therefore making him admirable.

### Sample Answer Commentary

There is a level of detail in this answer which makes it stand out. The question focus is good throughout, and although some of the phrasing could be better in places, the student is obviously thinking in some depth. The opening paragraph sets the essay in the context of the wider message of the play. It would have been nice to read more about this in the essay.

You will notice that as the essay progresses, many references are used by the student to support the ideas being made. The student acknowledges that Eric has his flaws and that some of his words and actions could be interpreted in different ways. There is a good sense of how Priestley shapes the character and it feels like a thoughtful, detailed essay.

This essay would have benefited from more links to the wider ideas in the play, but it still does enough to merit a mark in Level 5. Here is a student-friendly mark scheme:

- Level 1 (0-5 marks) – SIMPLE ANSWERS  
These are brief answers which don't really answer the question in any depth. They might be re-tellings of the stories. Often poorly phrased.
- Level 2 (6-10 marks) – RELEVANT ANSWERS  
These are answers which do answer the question in a basic way. They are often 'PE' answers – ie, there are several POINTS made, followed by EXAMPLES, but not much in the way of discussion or detail.
- Level 3 (11-15 marks) – EXPLAINED ANSWERS  
These are straightforward answers which make sense and have some detail. They are often a collection of PEE paragraphs (POINT-EVIDENCE-EXPLANATION).
- Level 4 (16-20 marks) – CLEAR ANSWERS  
These are essays which have some detail where several sensible points are being made. There is a bit more depth in the explanation of points. The phrasing makes clear sense.
- Level 5 (21-25 marks) – THOUGHTFUL ANSWERS  
These types of answer show the examiner that once or twice there are moments of genuine thought, where a really good point is being made. Phrasing is clear.
- Level 6 (26-30 marks) – DETAILED/PERCEPTIVE ANSWERS  
These answers have one or two moments of impressive points. They are conceptual – they link to the wider ideas of the text and argue points convincingly. Phrasing is fluent.

