

## The representation of the Birling family: power and class

1. ...a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a fairly prosperous manufacturer.
2. Arthur Birling...fairly easy manners but rather provincial in this speech. His wife is about fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior.
3. Finchley told me it's exactly the same port your father gets from him.
4. *Mrs Birling*: (reproachfully) Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things.
5. It's a pity sir George and – we – Lady Croft can't be with us, but they're abroad
6. You're just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted. Your father and I have been friendly rivals in business for some time now – though Crofts Limited are both older and bigger than Birling and Company.
7. We employers at last are coming together to see that our interests...are properly protected.
8. I have an idea that your mother – Lady Croft – while she doesn't object to my girl – feels you might have done better for yourself socially.
9. There's a fair chance that I might find my way into the next honours list. Just a knighthood, of course.
10. I was Lord Mayor here two years ago when royalty visited us.
11. More money to spend and time to spare than I had when I was Eric's age. They worked us hard in those days and kept us short of cash.
12. a man has to make his own way – has to look after himself.
13. I was an alderman for years – and lord mayor two years ago – and I'm still on the bench – so I know the Brumley police offices pretty well – and I thought I'd never seen you before.
14. Perhaps I ought to explain first that this is Mr Gerald Croft – the son of Sir George Croft – you know, Crofts Limited.
15. We were paying the usual rates and if they didn't like those rates, they could go and work somewhere else. It's a free country, I told them.
16. Eva Smith, was one of them, she'd had a lot to say – far too much – so she had to go.

17. If you don't come down sharply on some of these people, they'd soon be asking for the earth.
18. Perhaps I ought to warn you that he's an old friend of mine, and that I see him fairly frequently. We play golf together sometimes up at the West Brumley.
19. *Gerald*: After all, y'know, we're respectable citizens and not criminals.
20. I went to the manager at Milwards and I told him that if they didn't get rid of that girl, I'd never go near the place again and I'd persuade mother to close our account with them.
21. If she'd been some miserable plain little creature, I don't suppose I'd have done it. But she was very pretty and looked as if she could take care of herself. I couldn't be sorry for her.
22. Girls of that class--
23. Now, Sheila, I'm not defending him. But you must understand that a lot of young men..
24. Inspector: you're not telling me the truth. *Mrs Birling*: I beg your pardon!
25. Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.
26. Inspector: was it owing to your influence, as the most prominent member of the committee, that help was refused the girl? *Mrs Birling*: possibly.
27. If I prefer not to discuss it any further, you have no power to make me change my mind. *Inspector*: Yes I have.
28. She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.
29. There be plenty of time, when I've gone, for you all to adjust your family relationships.
30. Afterwards she told me she didn't want me to go in but that – well, I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty
31. *Eric*: (quietly, bitterly) I don't give a damn now whether I stay here or not.
32. *Sheila*: (tensely) I want to get out of this. It frightens me the way you talk.

## Exam Task 1

| How far does Priestley present Eric as an admirable character?

Write about:

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

### Sample 1

There are parts in the play when Eric is seen to be an admirable character and an unadmirable character, such as when Eric stole money from his father's textiles company to help care for his unborn child. Eric had good intentions to do with the money he stole, Eric then went on to explain why he didn't go to his father for help "my father is not the type of father you could go to when you're in trouble." Some people may think that even if he did have good intentions to do with the money, he still stole from his father so therefore is not an admirable character. However, I think that Eric is an admirable character for doing this because he was helping and looking after Eva and his unborn child. Also Eric told his father that his intention was to help Eva, but also pay the money back, even though he had no way to do so.

### Sample 2

Eric changes during the course of the play and appears a more admirable personality. In the scene 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. Eric is presented as a conflicted 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.

## Exam Task 2

| How does Priestley present ideas about responsibility in the play?

Write about:

- ideas about responsibility in the play
- how Priestley presents responsibility by the ways he writes.

**Notes**

**Opening paragraph**