

Social responsibility

The word, responsibility, echoes throughout Act 1. Like the Inspector, Priestley examines his characters' attitudes towards responsibility. There is the denial of responsibility from Mr Birling for his part in Eva's suicide and his refusal to accept responsibility for his workers. There is the acceptance of responsibility from Sheila and her empathy with Eva's plight. Eric is told by his father that he needs to 'face a few responsibilities' as Mr Birling shows that he is unwilling to take his own advice. The Inspector arrives just as Mr Birling is voicing his views on social responsibility.

DO IT!

Briefly explain some key things we learn in Act 1 about these two **themes**: secrets, lies and **hypocrisy**, and love.

Younger versus older generations

There are tensions between Eric and his father with Mr Birling dismissing Eric's 'public-school-and-Varsity life'. Both Eric and Sheila show that even at this early stage of the play, they are able to begin to change their ideas and values. Eric states that he would have let Eva stay on at the factory and Sheila understands that 'these girls aren't cheap labour – they're *people*'.



REVIEW



- 1 When is the play set?
- 2 What do the descriptions of the furniture in the stage directions tell the audience?
- 3 The family are in '*evening dress of the period*'. What does this 'evening dress' suggest to the audience?
- 4 Mrs Birling tells Mr Birling that he shouldn't congratulate the cook. Why does she do that?
- 5 Why are the Birlings celebrating at the start of the play?
- 6 Why does Mr Birling refer to the Crofts as 'friendly rivals'?
- 7 What is Mr Birling's view of the rumours about war?
- 8 How does Gerald react to Mr Birling's suggestion that his mother thinks Gerald can do better than Sheila?
- 9 What does Mr Birling say is going to happen to change the family's place in society?
- 10 When Gerald says, 'Sounds a bit fishy to me', what does he mean?
- 11 What is Mr Birling talking about when the door bell rings?
- 12 Name one aspect of the Inspector's questioning style that would strike the audience as unusual.
- 13 Why does Mr Birling refuse to pay the workers more?
- 14 What justification does Sheila give for complaining to the manager of Milwards?
- 15 What does Sheila notice about the behaviour of the staff at Milwards when she goes in now?
- 16 When Gerald reacts to the Inspector's words at the end of Act 1, what sets off his reaction?
- 17 What time of year does Gerald admit he was seeing Daisy Renton? Why is it important?
- 18 Why does Sheila laugh when Gerald says that they can keep the fact that he knew Daisy from the Inspector?
- 19 Why does Priestley have the Inspector exit shortly after he mentions the name Daisy Renton?
- 20 What is the Inspector's final word in the act? Why is this important?