

- The Birlings hold a dinner party to celebrate Sheila and Gerald's engagement. The family discuss the upcoming wedding.
- Mr Birling (Arthur) gives a long speech in which he explains how the marriage will be good for his business and how the country is set for a period of prosperity.
- Mr Birling is interrupted by the arrival of Inspector Goole, who reveals that a young woman – Eva Smith – has committed suicide.
- The Inspector tells the family that Eva worked at Mr Birling's factory two years previously. Eva was fired for leading a strike asking for higher wages.
- The Inspector then tells the Birlings that Eva found a new job in a shop (Milwards) but was fired a second time after a customer complained about her. Sheila Birling is revealed to be the customer. She made the complaint because she thought Eva was laughing at her. Sheila also admits she had been jealous of Eva's appearance.
- The Inspector informs the Birlings that Eva changed her name to Daisy Renton. Gerald is shocked as he clearly recognises the name.

Act 1

Key event 2: Mr Birling's speech

Think! What does Mr Birling's long speech tell you about his view of society?

Audience knows this prediction was wrong.

“ Nobody wants war...

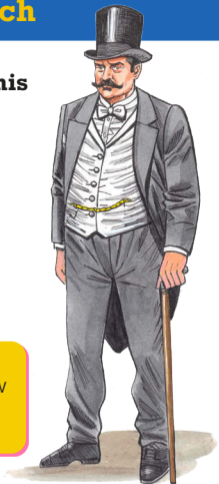
...this new liner... The *Titanic*...
unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable,

...like bees in a hive – community
and all that nonsense.

”

A metaphor for Mr Birling. He is convinced nothing can go wrong for him/his family.

A metaphor for socialism and the view of society Mr Birling rejects.



DO IT!

Find further examples of Mr Birling's views about society in Act 1.

Think!

Social class refers to different levels of society and depends upon how much wealth and power you have. What does Priestley want the audience to think about the class system?

The Inspector believes that everyone is linked together.

“

We are members
of one body.

”

Mr Birling is an individualist. He does not see that he has any connection to other classes.

“

...community and
all that nonsense.

”



Draw a diagram to show which social class some of the main characters belong to.



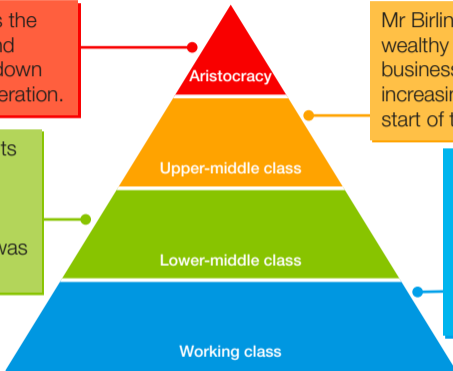
Answers

Gerald Croft represents the **aristocracy**: wealth and influence was passed down from generation to generation.

The Inspector represents the educated **lower-middle class**: they worked in professional jobs. Priestley himself was from this background.

Mr Birling represents the wealthy **upper-middle class**: businessmen who became increasingly powerful at the start of the 20th century.

Eva/Daisy represents the **working class**: people who worked in tough, low-paid jobs with little opportunity to improve their standard of living.



Priestley was a critic of the class system. The Birlings and Gerald all misuse the power their social class gives them and between them they drive Eva/Daisy to suicide. The Inspector's questioning of the Birlings shows the audience how the class system exploits workers.

1. How did Eric treat Eva/Daisy the first time he met her?
2. How do the Birlings discover Inspector Goole is not really a policeman?
3. How and why does Priestley present differences between the older and younger generations?
4. What is the purpose of the Inspector's final speech?
5. At the end of the play, the Birlings are left staring '*guiltily and dumbfounded*' as the curtain falls. Why?

**STRETCH IT!**

Sheila says after the Inspector leaves that he '*inspected us all right*'. What is meant by this line?