

Questions on the opening of the play

1. Why do you think Mrs Birling says, 'Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things –' on page 2. What is wrong with what Birling has said?
2. What is it on page 3 of the play that implies there is some underlying tension between Sheila and Gerald? Look at the stage directions as well as the dialogue.
3. On page 4 what is 'odd' or inappropriate about Birling's congratulatory speech?
4. Looking at page 5, what sort of character does Eric seem to be?
5. On pages 6 and 7 make a list of comments and forecasts Birling makes that we as an audience know to be false? We call this 'dramatic irony', where the audience knows something that the characters in the play do not.
6. What does Birling try to reassure Gerald about on page 8 and what is it that Priestley is trying to make the audience aware of in this conversation?
7. Eric does a number of things on page 9 which highlight to the audience that he is not as 'innocent' and 'naïve' as his parents think he is. What does he do?
8. What is Birling telling the two young men about when Edna announces the Inspector's arrival and why might it be significant?
9. Why are the stage directions for the arrival of the Inspector and his appearance so important on page 11?
10. At the end of page 13 Birling tells Eric he has drunk enough. What might this signal to the audience about Eric's character?
11. On page 14, why does Birling say he can't accept any responsibility for Eva Smith's death?

12. On page 17 Birling calls the Inspector 'officious'. Why might this speech be important?
13. On page 22 Gerald tells the Inspector, 'We're respectable citizens and not criminals.' Write down what Priestley might be trying to imply to an audience.
14. Compare the way in which Birling and Sheila react to the revelations about their involvement in the death of Eva Smith.

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