

Welcome to English Literature!

In this booklet, you will find some helpful websites, along with some key information, that will help you to prepare for your English Literature course.

The English Literature GCSE includes:

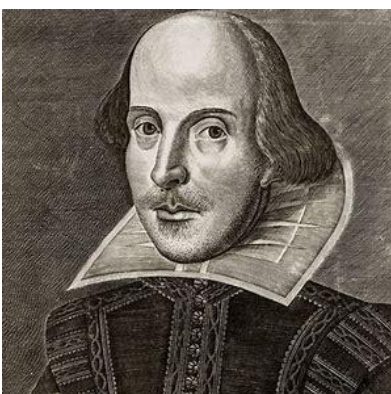
Paper 1:

- **Macbeth** by William Shakespeare
- **A Christmas Carol** by Charles Dickens

Paper 2:

An Inspector Calls by J.B Priestley*

**You have studied this in HT6 of Y9, so this section will help you revise the content you already know!*



Paper 1 Recommended Reading List:

Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol'

Weblink to the resource: [Context - A Christmas Carol - Edexcel English Literature GCSE](#)

Dickens' Life

Charles Dickens, who was born in Portsmouth on 7th February 1812 and died on 8th June 1870, is credited with being one of the greatest writers from the Victorian era. Dickens **wrote 'A Christmas Carol' in 1843**, 6 years into his career as a novelist.

Similar to many other writers of his time he began his literary career as a journalist, then moved on to become a **parliamentary journalist in 1833**. As part of his job he was required to report factual events and so some have argued that the experiences he had during this time may have made him more socially aware - giving him the inspiration he needed to include numerous areas of **social commentary** within his work, such as his **exploration of poverty** within society through 'A Christmas Carol'.



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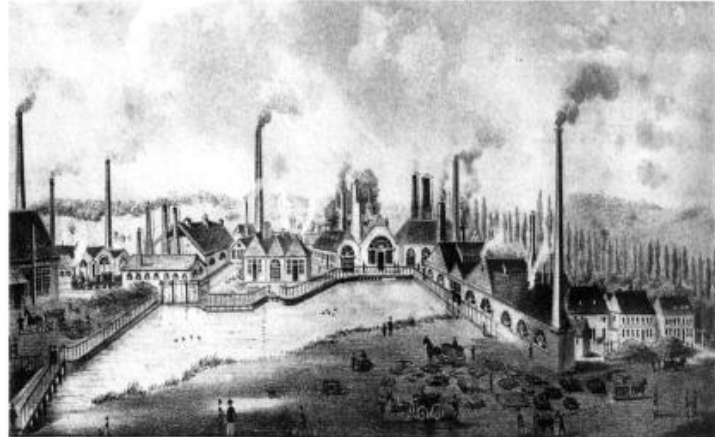
The novella can also be read as a piece of literature which is based on the experiences in Dickens' life as it is widely accepted that Dickens was socially conscious and sympathetic towards the lower-class, ideas which are synonymous with the conclusions drawn on in the novella.

The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution took place between the **18th-19th century** and was an event which characterised the Victorian era. Here, a large percentage of the rural population migrated from the countryside to the city to work in industry (e.g. factories) rather than agriculture.

Instead of farming being the biggest mode of production in the UK machines were worked which meant faster production of goods which meant higher profits.

Alongside agriculture, the industrial revolution also impacted the textile industry as textile production moved from the home to large factories and became more commercial. In addition to this, the need for energy to fuel the factories created a greater need for coal mining as coal was used to power the machines used in these industrial processes.



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Dickens wrote 'A Christmas Carol' in what was widely acknowledged as the **end of the Industrial Revolution**. The mechanisation of industry meant less demand for workers as machines were able to do their jobs. While this meant that Britain was going through an **economic boom**, it had a detrimental impact on the working class as it meant that they were no longer needed. In some ways, unlike the start of the industrial revolution, the end of the revolution exacerbated (meaning exaggerated) the inequalities within society. This is because it became increasingly difficult for the working class to earn enough to support themselves and their families.

Society's responses to Poverty

'A Christmas Carol' was **written in a post-Industrial Revolution society**, a time where poverty had become more and more distinct. The novella tries to show the reader that society needed to collectively try to tackle the issue of poverty before it spiralled out of control. Some of the most prominent responses to poverty at the time included:

- **Workhouses** - In 1834 **'The New Poor Law'** was introduced which stated that for the poor to receive money or support they must go to the **workhouses** which were essentially harsh and unforgiving prisons. The rich believed this was a viable option, as represented through Scrooge's happiness to hear that the "prisons" and "union workhouses" were in **"full vigor"**. Scrooge's tone here is cruel, and Dickens uses him as a voice to reflect the apathetic beliefs of the rich and how truly problematic they are, challenging the law and reader's own views surrounding the workhouses.



- **Charity** - Some thought that a way to fix poverty was through charity. The Victorian era produced one of the most intense times of philanthropy and charity, reflected in the novella by the two **"Portly gentlemen"** who ask Scrooge for a donation in the opening stave. However, many also believed that charity made poverty worse as it was rewarding 'bad behavior'. People believed that poverty was a choice and as they believed that poverty was a choice. to live in poverty you chose to live in it.

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Religion

From a religious standpoint, Victorian society is considered very conservative and in some respects 'strict' as they had many rules in order to consider themselves *good* Christians. Some of the rules included going to church every Sunday, giving to charity and not working on Sunday – an expectation known as **Sabbatarianism**.

Dickens disagreed with **blue laws** (laws prohibiting leisure on Sundays). This can be seen in Scrooge's conversation with the Ghost of Christmas Present, who arguably represents Dickens' **authorial voice**. When Scrooge points out that it is unjust for shops to be closed on Sunday as it **"deprives"** the working class from their means of making money, the Ghost is critical of societies misplaced religiosity. He informs Scrooge that there are some **"who lay claim to know us"** but instead they act out of **"passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name"**. The **collective pronoun** of **"us"** and **"our"** is used because Scrooge perceives the Spirit as a representation of God, and assumed because of its relationship to God it would be in support of the blue laws.

By having a **religious and morally superior character highlight the hypocrisy of some of the religious expectations imposed on Victorian society**, Dickens powerfully and effectively challenges the idea of Sabbatarianism. The Spirits act as a social commentary within the novella.

Christian beliefs are also present in the novel, as Scrooge's story is one of **redemption which is a foundational belief of Christianity**. Through Marley's Ghost who lives in **purgatory** the reader is able to see the consequences of not being a good person.

Paper 1, William Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'

Weblink to full text: [Context - Macbeth - AQA English Literature GCSE](#)

Witchcraft

King James I, had a great interest in the supernatural and witchcraft, so much so that he wrote a book called '*Daemonologie*' (1597), meaning 'the science of demons'. The book was published in 1603 when he became the King of England, and was reprinted twice during his reign. James I firmly believed that witchcraft was an act of Satan and the way one became one was by making a deal with the devil to get some sort of supernatural power.

Daemonologie may have also been a source for Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, as many of the practices of the witches in the play agreed with the beliefs which king James had.

The book was a dialogue in which James extensively explained his beliefs on witchcraft, aiming to bring to light evidence which would warrant the claim and also justify the death penalty as a punishment for witchcraft. The book was split into three parts:

- Magic and necromancy
- Witchcraft and sorcery
- Spirits and spectres

The purpose of the book was not just to provide evidence for witchcraft for those who did not believe; it was also for those who did believe to inspire them to carry out witch hunts. Witch-hunting was known and accepted practice in the time of Elizabeth I's reign, however, the number of trials and executions were not very high.

Witch-hunt: The term witch-hunt in modern terms can have a different meaning. It is sometimes used to describe situations in which the larger public harasses those with unpopular opinions, particularly in the context of politics

In contrast, Scotland had severe laws against witchcraft. After James published his book the cases of witchcraft skyrocketed by 53%. After James became the king of England he increased the severity of the law regarding witchcraft. He enacted a new law in 1604 a year after he became king, the name of the act was '*An Act against Conjuratioun, Witchcraft and Dealing with Evil and Wicked Spirits*'. This act made witchcraft a felony punishable by death and removed interference from the clergy.

Divine right of kings

James I believed in the divine right of kings, so he believed that he was chosen by God to be the king of England and the righteous judge of England. He believed in witch trials and witch hunts not only out of a moral conviction, but also, due to the fact that he was ordained by God, he had a supernatural duty to complete witch-hunts. Furthermore, in the Great Chain of Being, the king is the closest being to God on Earth. Because of this close relationship, it was the role of the king to enact the will of God - which James believed was to rid the earth of witchcraft, and therefore witches.

Before this, in 1589 when James was just the King of Scotland (rather than King of Scotland and England), his soon-to-be wife, Anne of Denmark, was supposed to set sail to meet him.

Witchcraft in Macbeth

Witchcraft plays a large part in *Macbeth* and provides a basis for the events of the play. King James's beliefs definitely played a role in this, **influencing Shakespeare's literary decisions**. For example, the expedition which James took is incorporated into the play, the line **'Though his bark cannot be lost/Yet it shall be tempest-tossed'** is potentially a reference to the storm that James experienced on his way to Denmark.

The witches in the play serve many purposes. Not only do they set the pace for the play, but they also serve as a **warning against witchcraft, evil and bloodshed**. There are **parallels** in the tragedy between the witches and the **three Fates in Greek mythology** who were in charge of the destinies of mortals and who spun the weave of the lives of humans. Similarly, **Hecate** in *Macbeth* who was the witches' mistress, in **Greek mythology she was the goddess of witchcraft**.

Great Chain of Being

This was an ideological belief circulating this time, which originated from the ancient Greek **philosophers Aristotle and Plato**. The Great Chain of Being was a conception of the universe in which everything, plant, animal or mineral, had a fixed place, according to its important and spiritual nature. This hierarchy started with God, under whom came then the king. At the bottom of the Great Chain of Being were the rocks. The Great Chain of Being explains why the sin of regicide and the resulting punishment was perceived as such a serious sin. When Lord and Lady Macbeth conspired and killed King Duncan, not only did they commit a carnal sin, and a sin against the state, but also a sin against the order of the universe. According to the Great Chain of Being, the King should rule commoners, who should accept their place. Macbeth's actions distort the natural order of the universe, setting off **chaos** and **bloodshed**.

An Inspector Calls revisions

Extracts from An introduction to An Inspector Calls – Part 1

Priestley's play revolves around a central mystery, the death of a young woman, but whereas a traditional detective story involves the narrowing down of suspects from several to one, *An Inspector Calls* inverts this process as, one by one, nearly all the characters in the play are found to be guilty. In this way, Priestley makes his larger point that society is guilty of neglecting and abusing its most vulnerable members. A just society, he states through his mysterious Inspector, is one that respects and exercises social responsibility. Social responsibility is the idea that a society's poorer members should be helped by those who have more than them. Priestley was a socialist, and his political beliefs are woven through his work. There are many different types and degrees of socialism, but a general definition is as follows: an ideal socialist society is one that is egalitarian – in other words, its citizens have equal rights and the same opportunities are available to everybody; resources are shared out fairly, and the means of production (the facilities and resources for producing goods) are communally owned. Therefore, socialism stands in opposition to a capitalist society, such as ours, where trade and industry is mostly controlled by private owners, and these individuals or companies keep the profits made by their businesses, rather than distributing them evenly between the workers whose labour produced them.

An Inspector Calls is a three-act play with one setting: the dining room of 'a fairly large suburban house belonging to a fairly prosperous manufacturer'. The year is 1912, and we are in the home of the Birling family in the fictional industrial city of Brumley in the North Midlands. In the dining room five people are finishing their dinner: four members of the Birling family and one guest. Arthur Birling is a factory owner; his wife Sibyl is on the committee of a charity, and is usually scolding someone for a social mistake. Their adult children are Sheila and Eric, and their guest is Gerald Croft, Sheila's fiancé, who is from a wealthier manufacturing family than the Birlings. One other person is present: Edna the maid, who is going back and forth to the sideboard with dirty plates and glasses. Priestley's description of the set at the beginning of the play script stresses the solidity of the Birlings' dining room: 'It is a solidly built room, with good solid furniture of the period'. But a later section of this scene-setting – on the walls are 'imposing but tasteless pictures and engravings', and the 'general effect is substantial and comfortable and old-fashioned but not cosy and homelike' – suggests that although the Birlings have wealth and social standing, they are not loving to one another or compassionate to others. The setting of the play in a single room also suggests their self-absorption, and disconnectedness from the wider world

Extracts from An introduction to An Inspector Calls – Part 2

Priestley has some fun using this opening section to show how wrong Arthur Birling's opinions are, thus positioning the play as anti-capitalist. He does this through the use of dramatic irony, having Arthur state opinions that the audience, with the advantage of hindsight, knows to be incorrect. He goes on to describe an ocean liner that is clearly meant

to be the Titanic (which sank in April 1912) as 'unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable', and suggests that in time, 'let's say, in the forties', 'all these Capital versus Labour agitations and all these silly little war scares' will be long forgotten. In fact, as audiences in 1945 would have been keenly aware, the period between 1912 and 1945 saw a huge number of strikes, including the monumental General Strike of 1926, and not one but two global conflicts, the second of which had only recently ended. Dramatic irony is rarely a subtle technique, but Priestley's use of it is exceptionally blunt. This could be considered clumsy, but it underlines the fact that *An Inspector Calls* is a play with a point to make, and a character whose sole job is to make it.

When Inspector Goole arrives everything changes. He tells the Birlings and Gerald that a young woman, Eva Smith, has committed suicide by drinking disinfectant, and he has questions about the case. Over the course of the next two acts he will lay responsibility for Eva Smith's death at the feet of each of the Birlings and Gerald Croft, showing how their indifference to social responsibility has contributed to the death of this young woman. Or is it young women? He shows each person an identifying photograph of the dead woman one by one, leading Gerald to later suspect they were all shown photographs of different women.

But who is the Inspector? In the play's penultimate twist, he is revealed not to be a police inspector at all, yet, as Eric states, 'He was our Police Inspector, all right'. Details about him are scant. He says he is newly posted to Brumley, and he is impervious to Arthur Birling's threats about his close relationship with the chief constable 'I don't play golf', he tells Birling. 'I didn't suppose you did', the industrialist replies: a brief exchange that makes a clear point about class, and the battle between egalitarianism and privilege. Beyond these sparse biographical details, the Inspector seems less like a person and more like a moral force, one which mercilessly pursues the wrongs committed by the Birlings and Gerald, demanding that they face up to the consequences of their actions. His investigation culminates in a speech that is a direct expression of Priestley's own view of how a just society should operate, and is the exact antithesis of the speech Arthur Birling made in Act I.

Extracts from An introduction to *An Inspector Calls* – Part 3 Throughout the course of the Inspector's investigation, and the testimony of Gerald and each of the Birlings, the supposedly respectable city of Brumley is revealed to be a place of deep class divisions and hypocrisy. As Arthur Birling's behaviour towards Eva makes clear, it is a place where factory owners exploit their workers as a matter of course – part of his 'a man has to look after himself' philosophy. Eric accuses his father of hypocrisy for sacking the dead girl after she asked for higher wages, because the Birling firm always seeks to sell their products at the highest possible prices. This exploitation is not limited to the factories. In the testimony of Gerald, and later Eric, the Palace Theatre emerges as a place where prostitutes gather, and where the supposedly great and good of the town go to meet them. When Gerald first met Eva, as he describes it, she was trapped in a corner by 'Old Joe Meggarty, half-drunk and goggle-eyed'. Sibyl Birling, scandalised, asks 'surely you don't mean Alderman Meggarty?' An

unsurprised Sheila tells her mother 'horrible old Meggarty' has a reputation for groping young women: the younger characters are either more knowledgeable or frank about the dark secrets of the city, whereas the older Birlings live in a dream world of respectability, or hypocritically turn a blind eye to any disreputable behaviour by supposedly respectable people.

The play begins with the characters' corrupt, unpleasant natures safely hidden away (a respectable group in a respectable home, enjoying that most respectable event, an engagement party); it ends with naked displays of hypocrisy. When it is confirmed that Goole is not really a policeman, Arthur, Sibyl and Gerald immediately regain an unjustified sense of outrage. 'Then look at the way he talked to me', Arthur Birling complains. 'He must have known I was an ex-Lord Mayor and a magistrate and so forth'. Once it is confirmed, in the play's penultimate twist, that there is no suicide lying on a mortuary slab, they forget the immoral, uncharitable behaviour they were recently accused of – things, remember, that they undoubtedly did – and begin talking about getting away with things. Only Sheila and Eric recognise and resist this hypocritical behaviour. 'I suppose we're all nice people now!' Sheila remarks sarcastically. Earlier she broke off her engagement to Gerald, telling him 'You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner here'. Likewise, Eric angrily accuses his father of 'beginning to pretend now that nothing's really happened at all'. Priestley's vision is cautiously optimistic insofar as the youngest characters are changed by the Inspector's visit, while the older Birlings and Gerald appear to be too set in their beliefs to change them.

The play leaves open the question of whether Eva Smith is a real woman (who sometimes uses different names, including Daisy Renton), or multiple people the Inspector pretends are one. There is no right answer here, and in terms of Priestley's message it is beside the point: because his socialist principles demand that everyone should be treated the same, in his opinion abusing one working-class woman is equivalent to abusing all working-class women. Eva Smith is, therefore, not an individual victim, but a universal one. This helps explain the effectiveness of the play's final twist. Having discovered that Inspector Goole is not a real policeman, and that there is no dead woman called Eva Smith at the Brumley morgue, a phone call announces that a woman has killed herself, and an inspector is on his way to question the Birlings. The invented story Inspector Goole related has now come true. This seems a bizarre coincidence with which to end the play, but if we consider *An Inspector Calls* as a moral fable, and not as naturalistic theatre, it begins to seem much more like a logical, even inevitable, conclusion. The characters have been confronted with the error of their ways; some have repented, some have not. Now is the time for judgement, and for the watching audience to ask themselves, according to Priestley's design, are any of these people like me

I. What is the significance of the furniture in the room? How does it reflect the Birlings and their personality?

2. The article states the play is a 'battle between egalitarianism and privilege'. What does this mean? (Hint: The definition of 'egalitarian' can be found in the first section of the article)

3. The article describes the Inspector as a 'moral force'. What are they saying about the Inspector?

4. The article says the Inspector's final speech is the 'very antithesis' of Mr. Birling's speech at the beginning of the play. 'Antithesis' means opposite. Explain how the Inspector's speech is the antithesis of Mr. Birling's speech. Re-read the speeches to help you.

5. The article says Eva Smith is not an 'individual victim but a universal one'. What does this mean? (Use the third section of the article to help you)

6. The article states 'An Inspector Calls' is a 'moral fable'. What does this mean?

7. The article ends by saying some characters have 'repented'. If you have 'repented', what have you done?