



Eric

Eric is the son of a family who seem to be more interested in social status and money than being parents. Eric is the only character who commits what we would think of as a crime (raping Daisy/Eva and stealing money). But he is also the one who tries hardest to help her, until she refuses his help on moral grounds. (Gerald helps her more in terms of money and material things, but drops her when it suits him.)

Before the Inspector arrives

Eric is in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive.

1. What do these stage directions reveal about Eric at the beginning of the play?
2. Why might Eric be "not quite at ease" (what might he be uneasy about)?
3. What do the contrasting adjectives "shy" and "assertive" suggest about Eric and his upbringing?

Sheila: (severely) Now – what's the joke?

Eric: I don't know – really. Suddenly I felt I just had to laugh.

Sheila: You're squiffy.

Eric: I'm not.

4. What do these lines suggest about Sheila and Eric's relationship at the start of the play?
5. How has their relationship changed by the end of the play?
6. Why has their relationship changed?

"What about war?"

7. To whom does Eric address this line?
8. What kind of response does he get?
9. What is Priestley hoping to show through Eric's question and the answer he is given?

During the Inspector's visit

"Why shouldn't they try for higher wages? We try for the highest possible prices."

10. Who is Eric addressing here?
11. Who is Eric referring to when he uses the pronouns "we" and "they"?
12. How do Eric's attitudes to "we" and "they" change?
13. How might his recent relationship with Eva/Daisy have his attitudes?

Mr Birling criticises Eric's "public school and varsity ways."

14. Why did Mr Birling send Eric to public school and university?
15. What's ironic about Birling's criticism of Eric?

"(nearly at breaking point) Then – you killed her. She came to you to protect me – and you turned her away – yes, and you killed her – and the child she'd have had too – my child – your own grandchild – you killed them both – damn you, damn you-"

16. Who is Eric addressing here?
17. Look at how this speech builds up to a climax. How does Priestley use this speech to present Eric's understanding of social responsibility?
18. How does Priestley use this speech to present the difference between the generations?

The Inspector's final words

"We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Good night."

After the Inspector leaves

"Oh – for God's sake! What does it matter now whether they give you a knighthood or not?"

19. How does Priestley indicate Eric's anger here?
20. Why does Priestley give Eric a rhetorical question here,
21. Who is he trying to persuade?
22. What is he trying to persuade them to do?

"The money's not the important thing. It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters."

23. Who is Eric addressing here?
24. What "money" is he talking about?
25. What is significant about Eric's use of the pronoun "we" here?
26. How does this line show the contrast between the generations?

"And I agree with Sheila. It frightens me too."

27. How has Eric's relationship with Sheila changed during the play?
28. What is symbolic about their changing relationship?
29. What "frightens" Eric and Sheila?
30. Why would Priestley's first audience (in 1946) feel that Sheila and Eric were right to be frightened?
31. What happens when Mr Birling teases Eric and Sheila ("the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke-" at the end of the play?