

# An Inspector Calls Eric ★

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Eric and themes</b></p> <p><b>The younger generation vs the older generation</b><br/>Eric represents the younger generation (like Sheila) and their greater sense of responsibility.</p> <p><b>Eric and Sheila</b><br/>At the start they bicker like children. By the end they agree about their responsibility and together they oppose the older generation. They show greater maturity and responsibility than their parents and Gerald.</p> <p>At the end of the play Eric says: <b>"And I agree with Sheila. It frightens me too."</b> What <b>"frightens"</b> them is that the older generation won't accept their responsibility.</p> <p><b>Context</b><br/>The 1945 audience would know the <b>"frightening"</b> consequences of the irresponsible ruling classes in 1912: WW1, the depression, WW2 (<b>"fire and blood and anguish"</b>). The 1945 audience would know that Sheila and Eric were right to be <b>"frightened"</b> of their parents' attitudes.</p> <p>When Eric asks his father: <b>"What about war?"</b> at the start of the play and Birling says there won't be one, the 1945 audience will be aware of how many young men like Eric would die in the trenches in WW1</p> | <p>★ <b>Eric's internal conflict</b></p> <p><i>First description (in the stage directions)</i></p> <p><b>"Eric is in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive."</b></p> <p>The adjectival phrases <b>"half shy, half assertive"</b> imply he is made up of opposites or has internal conflict. But he becomes fully <b>"assertive"</b> by the end of the play and stands up against his parents, especially when they try to wriggle out of their responsibility.</p> <p>The 1945 audience need to be assertive and make sure everybody is responsible for each other.</p>   |
| <p>★ <b>Eric as a child rather than a man</b></p> <p>His parents continually refer to him as a <b>"silly boy"</b>. They tell him to <b>"get to bed."</b><br/>They tell him to be <b>"sensible"</b><br/>Mrs Birling doesn't believe he drinks until Gerald confirms it.</p> <p>Priestley creates irony, because the audience realise that Eric and Sheila show more maturity in the end. They are being <b>"sensible"</b> - and sensitive too.</p>  | <p>★ <b>Attitudes to Eric</b></p> <p>Priestley suggests his father wants Eric to be like Gerald by sending him to public school and university but then criticises him for his <b>"public school and varsity ways."</b></p> <p>In the end it looks like Eric will be a more responsible employer than his father or Gerald. Eric learns more from his experiences with Eva Smith and his interrogation by the Inspector than he learns from the education his father paid for. Unlike his father who looks up socially, Eric learns to look down.</p>   |
| <p>★ <b>Eric cares more about responsibility than reputation or money</b></p> <p><b>"Oh – for God's sake! What does it matter now whether they give you a knighthood or not?"</b><br/>Use of <b>rhetorical question</b> and use of pronoun <b>"you"</b> are <b>persuasive devices</b>. He tries to make his father see the truth and accept his responsibility.</p> <p><b>"The money's not the important thing. It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters."</b><br/>The <b>inclusive pronoun "we"</b> reflects his attempt to get them to accept their social responsibility.</p>   | <p>★ <b>Eric's anger at his mother</b></p> <p><b>"(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-"</b></p> <p>Eric tries to get his mother to understand her responsibility towards a stranger is just as important as her feelings for her own son.</p> <p>His speech highlights the tragic irony of Mrs Birling being responsible for the death of her own grandson, suggesting that everyone is a kind of family. He echoes the Inspector's lines: <b>"We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other."</b></p> |