

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

EVA SMITH:

Eva Smith, also known as Daisy Renton, is a pivotal character in J.B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*, despite never appearing on stage. Her character is used to reveal the moral shortcomings of the Birling family and Gerald Croft, serving as a vehicle for Priestley's social critique. Eva represents the struggles of the working class and the impact of social inequality, as well as the consequences of the callous actions of the upper class.

Background and Social Standing

Eva Smith is a young working-class woman in her early twenties. She is described as attractive, lively, and hard-working, but her life is marked by a series of unfortunate events and exploitation by those in positions of power.

- **Working-Class Background:** Eva's struggles are emblematic of the difficulties faced by working-class individuals, particularly women, in early 20th-century Britain. She is employed at Birling & Company, where she works diligently but is underpaid and undervalued. Her experience at Birling & Company highlights the exploitation of the working class by the industrial elite, represented by Arthur Birling.
- **Key Quote:** "She was a lively good-looking girl - country-bred, I fancy - and she'd been working in one of our shops."

This quote, from Mr. Birling, gives a brief description of Eva's appearance and background, emphasizing her youth and the fact that she was a diligent worker before being dismissed.

Moral Integrity and Strength

Despite her difficult circumstances, Eva Smith is portrayed as a woman of strong moral integrity. Throughout the play, even as her situation becomes increasingly desperate, she maintains her dignity and refuses to compromise her principles.

- **Refusal to Accept Stolen Money:** When Eric Birling offers her money to support herself, Eva refuses it upon realizing that it is stolen. This decision reflects her honesty and moral strength, even when faced with extreme poverty and the prospect of raising a child alone.
- **Key Quote:** "She wouldn't take any more and she didn't want to see me again."

Eric's account of Eva's refusal of the stolen money underscores her moral integrity. Even though accepting the money would have alleviated her financial struggles, Eva's principles prevent her from doing so.

Victim of Social Inequality

Eva Smith's life is a series of injustices that illustrate the harsh realities faced by the working class. Each member of the Birling family and Gerald Croft contributes to her downfall, showing how systemic inequality and the indifference of the privileged can destroy lives.

- **Exploitation by Mr. Birling:** Eva is first exploited when she leads a strike for better wages at Birling & Company. Arthur Birling, valuing profits over people, dismisses her for her involvement, demonstrating the power imbalance between employer and employee.
- **Dismissal by Sheila:** Eva's next misfortune comes when she is dismissed from her job at Milward's due to Sheila's jealousy. Sheila, using her social power, ensures that Eva is fired, revealing the casual cruelty that those with privilege can exercise over those without it.
- **Exploitation by Gerald Croft:** Gerald Croft's relationship with Eva is more personal but still exploitative. Gerald provides Eva with temporary support and affection, but ultimately abandons her when it becomes inconvenient, leaving her heartbroken and more vulnerable than before.
- **Rejection by Mrs Birling:** Finally, when Eva seeks help from the Brumley Women's Charity Organization, Sybil Birling denies her assistance, refusing to empathize with Eva's plight and further pushing her towards despair.
- **Key Quote:** "She was here alone, friendless, almost penniless, desperate."

This quote from the Inspector sums up Eva's tragic situation, emphasizing her isolation and the desperation that led her to seek help from Mrs. Birling's charity.

Symbol of the Working Class

Eva Smith represents more than just one individual; she is a symbol of the working class as a whole. Through her character, Priestley criticizes the social system that allows the wealthy to exploit and discard those beneath them. Eva's fate serves as a powerful indictment of the lack of social responsibility among the upper classes.

- **Namelessness as Symbolism:** The fact that she is known by different names (Eva Smith, Daisy Renton) throughout the play highlights her symbolic role as a representative of all the marginalized and voiceless people in society. The Inspector's suggestion that "there are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us" further emphasizes this point.
- **Key Quote:** "She was young and pretty and warm-hearted—and intensely grateful."

This quote from Gerald reflects the positive qualities of Eva that make her fate even more tragic. She is portrayed as someone who, despite her hardships, remains kind and appreciative of the little help she receives, making her eventual death all the more poignant.

Tragic Victim

Eva's story is ultimately a tragedy. Her life is shaped by the actions of others, and despite her strength and integrity, she is unable to escape the cycle of exploitation and mistreatment. Her suicide is the result of the cumulative effects of the Birlings' and Gerald's actions, serving as a stark reminder of the consequences of social negligence.

- **Key Quote:** "A girl died tonight. A pretty, lively sort of girl, who never did anybody any harm. But she died in misery and agony—hating life—"

The Inspector's description of Eva's death underscores the tragedy of her life. It serves as a powerful condemnation of the society that allowed her to suffer and die in such a manner.

Conclusion

Eva Smith is a central, though unseen, character in *An Inspector Calls*. She symbolizes the exploitation and suffering of the working class, serving as the moral core of the play around which the story revolves. Through her tragic story, Priestley critiques the social inequalities of the time and calls for greater empathy and responsibility from those in power. Eva's strength, dignity, and ultimate victimhood make her one of the most significant characters in the play, embodying Priestley's message about the need for social change and the dangers of ignoring the humanity of others.

HOW CHARACTERS LINKED WITH EVA SMITH MURDER:

In "An Inspector Calls" by J.B. Priestley, the responsibility for Eva Smith's tragic death is shared among multiple characters. Each member of the Birling family and Gerald Croft, in their way, contributes to the circumstances that lead to Eva's suicide. Here's a breakdown of their responsibilities:

1. **Mr. Arthur Birling:**

- Mr Birling is responsible for Eva's downward spiral due to his decision to dismiss her from her job at his factory. He fires her for participating in a strike to demand better wages and working conditions, illustrating his disregard for the welfare of the working class.

2. **Mrs. Sybil Birling:**

- Mrs. Birling plays a significant role in Eva's tragedy through her involvement with a charity organization. When Eva seeks help from the organization, Mrs. Birling denies her assistance and judges her harshly. This rejection exacerbates Eva's desperate situation.

3. **Sheila Birling:**

- Sheila is responsible for Eva's dismissal from her second job at Millwards. Sheila's jealousy and resentment lead her to complain about Eva, resulting in her losing her position. Although Sheila later expresses remorse, her initial actions contribute to Eva's hardship.

4. **Gerald Croft:**

- Gerald's affair with Eva Smith, whom he knows as Daisy Renton, is a crucial part of the chain of events leading to her tragedy. While his relationship with Eva is more consensual than some of the other character's actions, it still contributes to her vulnerability and despair.

5. **Eric Birling:**

- Eric's involvement with Eva Smith leads to her pregnancy. He is responsible for the child Eva is expecting. His actions reflect the exploitation and mistreatment of a vulnerable woman, adding to the layers of tragedy in Eva's story.

The collective actions of these characters, driven by their prejudices, selfishness, and lack of empathy, create a series of events that ultimately lead to Eva Smith's suicide. The Inspector's purpose in the play is to expose the interconnectedness of their actions and emphasize the shared responsibility of the upper class for the plight of the working class. Each character's role in Eva's tragedy highlights societal issues such as class prejudice, exploitation, and the consequences of individual and collective moral choices.

THEMES LINKED WITH EVA CHARACTER:

1. Social Responsibility

Theme Overview: Social responsibility is a central theme in the play, critiquing the lack of moral duty that the upper classes exhibit towards the less fortunate.

Eva Smith's Portrayal: Eva Smith represents the working class and the broader social issues of the time. Her experiences highlight the lack of social responsibility among the wealthy and the devastating effects of neglect and exploitation on the vulnerable.

- **Exploitation and Neglect:** Eva's plight is a direct result of the exploitation and disregard by those in power. Her dismissal from Birling & Company after leading a strike, her subsequent job loss at Milward's due to Sheila's jealousy, and her eventual rejection by Mrs. Birling's charity all underscore how the upper classes fail to recognize their social responsibilities.
 - **Quote:** "She was here alone, friendless, almost penniless, desperate."

This quote from the Inspector emphasizes Eva's dire situation and the societal failures that led to her downfall. It illustrates the lack of support and empathy she received from those in positions of power.

2. Class Inequality

Theme Overview: Class inequality examines the disparities between the upper and working classes, revealing how social stratification affects individuals' lives and opportunities.

Eva Smith's Portrayal: Eva Smith's life and death expose the harsh realities of class inequality. Her interactions with the Birling family and Gerald Croft demonstrate how class prejudice and economic disparity shape her experiences and ultimately lead to her tragic end.

- **Victimization by the Upper Class:** Eva's encounters with each member of the Birling family and Gerald Croft illustrate the systemic nature of class inequality. Her struggles are exacerbated by her lower social status, making her vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.
 - **Quote:** "She told me she'd been happier than she'd ever been before—but that she knew it couldn't last—hadn't expected it to last."

Gerald's statement reflects Eva's awareness of her precarious position in society. Despite finding temporary happiness, her lower social status ultimately dictates her fate.

3. The Illusion of Self-Sufficiency

Theme Overview: The illusion of self-sufficiency is the belief that individuals can succeed or fail on their own, without external factors influencing their lives.

Eva Smith's Portrayal: Eva's life challenges the notion of self-sufficiency. Her dependence on others for support and how her fate is dictated by the actions of those more powerful highlight the interdependence of society and the limitations of individualism.

- **Dependence on Others:** Eva's reliance on Gerald for temporary support and her seeking help from Mrs Birling's charity illustrate her lack of control over her circumstances and the external factors that significantly impact her life.
 - **Quote:** "She wouldn't take any more and she didn't want to see me again."

Eric's recount of Eva's refusal of stolen money reveals her unwillingness to compromise her principles, despite her need for help. It underscores the disparity between her ideals and her reality, driven by the power dynamics of her interactions with others.

4. The Consequences of Indifference

Theme Overview: The consequences of indifference explore how a lack of concern or empathy for others can lead to negative outcomes, particularly for those who are already vulnerable.

Eva Smith's Portrayal: Eva's story is a powerful illustration of the consequences of indifference. Her treatment by the Birling family and Gerald Croft reveals how apathy and lack of empathy from those in power can have dire effects on individuals' lives.

- **Inaction and Neglect:** Each character's indifference to Eva's suffering contributes to her ultimate fate. Her rejection by Mrs. Birling's charity and her dismissal by Sheila and Arthur Birling reflect the broader societal disregard for the suffering of the working class.
 - **Quote:** "She was young and pretty and warm-hearted—and intensely grateful."

Gerald's description of Eva highlights her vulnerability and the gratitude she expressed for any kindness, making her eventual treatment all the more tragic. It reflects the profound impact of the lack of compassion and support.

5. Gender Inequality

Theme Overview: Gender inequality explores the disparities in treatment and opportunities based on gender, particularly the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society.

Eva Smith's Portrayal: Eva Smith's experiences highlight the gender-based discrimination and exploitation that women faced. Her vulnerability as a young woman in a male-dominated society underscores the broader theme of gender inequality.

- **Exploitation and Objectification:** Eva's relationships with men like Gerald Croft and Eric Birling reveal how women were often objectified and used by men in

positions of power. Her dependence on men for support and her ultimate exploitation reflects the gender biases of the time.

- **Quote:** “She’d been working in one of our shops.”

This description from Mr Birling reflects her lower status and the limited opportunities available to her as a woman from the working class.

6. The Impact of Economic Hardship

Theme Overview: Economic hardship examines how financial instability affects individuals and their ability to live with dignity and security.

Eva Smith's Portrayal: Eva’s life and death are deeply impacted by economic hardship. Her struggle to find and keep work, coupled with her eventual descent into poverty, underscores the severe effects of financial instability on individuals’ lives.

- **Struggles for Survival:** Eva’s continuous struggle to secure stable employment and her eventual reliance on charity illustrate the precarious nature of life for those without economic security.
 - **Quote:** “A girl died tonight. A pretty, lively sort of girl, who never did anybody any harm. But she died in misery and agony—hating life—”

This quote from the Inspector encapsulates the impact of economic hardship on Eva’s life, highlighting her suffering and the broader implications of financial instability.

Conclusion

Eva Smith’s character in *An Inspector Calls* is integral to the exploration of themes such as social responsibility, class inequality, the illusion of self-sufficiency, the consequences of indifference, gender inequality, and the impact of economic hardship. Her story serves as a vehicle for Priestley’s critique of the societal and moral issues of the time, urging a reflection on how individuals and society can address and rectify these injustices.