

What is the role of the Inspector and - focusing on one of the 'interviews' with a member of the Birling family - what aspects of his character would you need an actor to highlight in performance for the benefit of an audience?

A. 'INSPECTOR GOOLE': WHAT'S IN A NAME?

1. What does the title of 'Inspector' suggest that this character's role within the play will be? (Hint: what is an inspector?)

2. The name of 'Goole' is the same as the seaport town of Goole at the mouth of the River Humber, in East Yorkshire. Why might this be relevant to the Inspector? What does it suggest about his possible role? (Hint: think of the verbs 'fish' and 'trawl' – how can these be applied to a seaport town and to the Inspector?)

3. The Inspector's name sounds like 'ghoul'.

Ghoul (noun)

- 1: someone who takes a morbid interest in death
- 2: a ghost
3. a spirit which is said to take fresh life from corpses

Why might this be relevant? What does it suggest about the reasons behind the Inspector's presence at the Birling household? (Hint: think about the connection the Inspector has to death)

B. THE INSPECTOR'S ARRIVAL

1. The Inspector arrives just after Mr Birling has been setting out his view of life: every man must only look out for himself. The Inspector's role is to show that this is not the case. Throughout the play he demonstrates how people are responsible for how they affect the lives of others and his views are summed up in his dramatic final speech. It is the Inspector who makes things happen. Without him, none of the secrets would ever have come out into the open. He seems to know what each character has done and his probing questions lead them to confess in their own way.

From the moment of his arrival, he seems different. His sombre appearance and the news he brings are a contrast with the happy and elegant air of celebration.

- Bearing in mind the above, If you were directing the arrival of Inspector Goole, what instructions would you give? Think about what the Inspector is wearing, how he moves and speaks, lighting, sets etc. Remember to refer to – and include – the stage prompts in the play itself.
- How was this contrast/arrival shown in the stage and film versions of the play? Do you think the directors of these versions did a good job? Why/why not?

2. The Inspector is described as creating “*an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness*” (Act 1, p. 11)

- What do you think this means?
- How does it apply to the Inspector as a character? (i.e. do you think it is true?)
- How would you direct an actor to bring this out in his performance as the Inspector? (Hint: think about tone of voice, movement etc.)
- How did Alastair Sim portray this in the film version you watched?
- How did Niall Buggy portray this in the stage version you watched?
- Did these actors do a good job? Why/why not?

3. Consider each of the following words and how they might apply to the Inspector as a character. How would you direct an actor to bring them out in his performance as the Inspector? How did the actors in the stage/film version portray these characteristics? Did they do a good job?

- Mysterious
- Imposing
- Sombre
- Determined
- Calm

C. THE INSPECTOR'S METHODS

Despite the importance in the local community of people like Gerald and the Birlings, the Inspector controls the development of events: who will speak and when; who may or may not leave; who will or will not see the photograph. He even seems to control what people say.

Shiela: “somehow he makes you” (Act II, p. 37)

- Focusing on your chosen interview with one of the members of the family, make notes on how the Inspector does this. Look particularly at:
 1. The Inspector's method of questioning – what questions does he ask? What is the effect of these questions?
 2. What sort of language does he use?
 3. Does he use short or long sentences?
 4. Open or closed questions?
 5. List some quotes that you can use in your essay as examples of the Inspector's methods.
 6. Look carefully at the stage directions in your chosen section – how does the Inspector use the photograph or other props?
- How would you direct an actor playing the Inspector during this interview? (Hint: think about tone of voice, movement, lighting etc.)
- How did Alastair Sim portray this in the film version you watched?
- How did Niall Buggy portray this in the stage version you watched?
- Did these actors do a good job? Why/why not?

D. THE INSPECTOR AS A MORAL FIGURE

The way that the Inspector uses the information he has creates an impression of someone who is both an outsider and an all-knowing creature. This makes him appear mysterious and powerful. Yet J.B. Priestley can only use him as a catalyst, as someone who creates the possibility for others to face up to what they have done. They must decide for themselves whether to change or not. He is a character who represents J.B. Priestley's strong moral view. His comments show a compassion which extends to those who recognise the wrong they have done. He does not forgive what they have done, but when they freely admit their faults he allows them to see that they can find forgiveness through future good behaviour. This moral dimension makes him different from an ordinary policeman. He is more concerned with right and wrong than with what is or is not legal. His lack of fear or favour, his determined question and control of events may be what is expected of a policeman, but towards the end of the play it is those same qualities (which Mrs Birling identifies as 'rudeness') which fuel suspicions about him. He is perhaps too abrasive, and he is clearly someone for whom social conventions count for nothing when weighed against the desire for truth and justice.

- Focusing on your chosen interview with one of the members of the family, make notes on how this applies to the Inspector. Look particularly at:
 1. Places where you think the Inspector focuses more on what is right than what is legal.
 2. What sort of language does he use? When is he harsh or kind to the person he is interviewing?
 3. Does he say anything which could be classed as rude?
 4. When does he show a disregard for social conventions (consider status/class) or a lack of fear?
 5. List some quotes that you can use in your essay as examples of the Inspector's methods.
 6. Look carefully at the stage directions in your chosen section – how does the Inspector use the photograph or other props?
- How would you direct an actor to bring this out in his performance as the Inspector? (Hint: think about tone of voice, movement etc.)
- How did Alastair Sim portray this in the film version you watched?
- How did Niall Buggy portray this in the stage version you watched?
- Did these actors do a good job? Why/why not?

E. THE INSPECTOR'S LANGUAGE

1. We are told that the Inspector speaks '*carefully, weightily*' (Act 1, p.10). Find an example of the Inspector speaking this way in your chosen interview.
2. The Inspector uses a lot of questions and instructions. What effect do you think this has on his position of power/control? Find an example of the Inspector speaking this way in your chosen interview.
3. The Inspector frequently interrupts characters who are not going in the direction he wishes them to go in. How does this help the Inspector stay in control and shape the interviews? Find an example of the Inspector speaking this way in your chosen interview.
4. The Inspector uses matter-of-fact words, as we would expect from a policeman, but his tone of voice is commanding and even threatening. What effect does this have on the Inspector's position? How does it help him fulfil his role? Find an example of the Inspector speaking this way in your chosen interview.
5. There are times when the Inspector produces dramatic results by the use of a short and isolated sentence – or even a single word. Find an example of the Inspector speaking this way in your chosen interview.
6. At other times, he speaks in long sentences which are broken up to produce a rhythm which gives what he says extra emphasis and makes what he says profoundly logical: e.g. "*Because what happened to her then may have determined what happened to her afterwards, and what happened to her afterwards may have driven her to suicide*" (Act 1, p.14) Those words are followed by the terse comment, "*A chain of events*" (Act 1, p. 14) and we can see that the logical sequence links up just like the links of a chain. Find an example of the Inspector speaking this way in your chosen interview.

What is the effect of this way of speaking? How does it help to show the Inspector's role in the play?

- How would you direct an actor to bring this out in his performance as the Inspector? (Hint: think about tone of voice, movement etc.)
- How did Alastair Sim portray this in the film version you watched?
- How did Niall Buggy portray this in the stage version you watched?
- Did these actors do a good job? Why/why not?

F. THE END OF THE PLAY

How do the revelations at the end of the play affect our view of the Inspector's role? Who is he? What was he doing at the Birling household? List as many possibilities as you can think of and decide which you think are the most likely – or which you believe to be true. Try to give evidence (particularly quotes) to back up your ideas.