

An Inspector Calls



Revision Guide

This booklet includes:

- Summaries of characters**
- Summaries of themes**
- Revision tasks**
- Essay questions**

The more tasks you complete, the better your understanding of the play will be.

This will help you get a better mark in the exam.

Context

J.B. Priestley was **born into a working class family in 1894**. After the war, he got a degree from Cambridge University and moved to London to become a **writer**. A lot of his writing had **strong political messages**.

Priestley uses the play to present his ideas on **social responsibility** and society. He uses the **character of the Inspector as a mouth-piece for his ideas**. For example the Inspector exclaims 'We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other'. **Priestley is suggesting that we should all look after one another**, and that those who have power over others should use it for the common good, not just for their own benefit. It is clear by the end of the play that these are Priestley's views.

An Inspector call is set in 1912		An Inspector calls was written in 1945
<p>World War I would start in 2 years. Birling's optimistic view that there would not be a war is completely wrong.</p>		<p>World War II ended on 8 May 1945. People were recovering from nearly 6 years of warfare, danger and uncertainty.</p>
<p>There were strong distinctions between the upper and lower classes. 87% of all the money in England belonged to 5% of the population. There was no minimum wage and people worked an average of 65 hours a week.</p>		<p>Class distinctions had been greatly reduced as a result of two world wars. A lot of people had been thrown together and started to feel responsible for each other.</p>
<p>Women were subservient to men. All a well off women could do was get married; a poor woman was seen as cheap labour. Women couldn't vote.</p>		<p>As a result of the wars, women had earned a more valued place in society.</p>
<p>The ruling classes saw no need to change the status quo.</p>		<p>There was a great desire for social change. Immediately after World War 2, Labour's Clement Attlee won a landslide victory over the Conservative Winston Churchill.</p>

The plot

The Birling family are spending a happy evening celebrating the engagement of Sheila Birling to Gerald Croft - a marriage that will result in the merging of two successful local businesses. Yet, just when everything seems to be going so well, they receive a surprise visit from Inspector Goole who is investigating the suicide of a young girl

Act 1

1. When is the play set?

2. From the initial stage directions, how do we know that the Birlings have an affluent lifestyle?

3. Quote how the lighting is described at first, then when the inspector arrives.

4. Who is a 'heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties'?

5. Who is 'not quite at ease, half-shy, half-assertive'?

6. Who is 'very pleased with life'?

7. Who is 'very much the easy well-bred young man-about-town'?

8. How is Mrs Birling described?

9. What are they celebrating?

10. Name the maid.

11. What type of businessman does Mr Birling think he is?

12. What does Sheila's engagement to Gerald mean to Arthur?

13. Name 2 major events that Birling predicts incorrectly in his long speech.

14. Why does Priestley script the doorbell to ring when it does?

15. On arrival, quote two words/phrases that illustrate the inspector.

16. Why was Eva dismissed from Birling and Co.?

17. Where does Eva get a job afterwards?

18. How does Eva die? (be specific!)

19. Who says: 'the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive.'

20. Who says: 'You seem to be a nice, well-behaved family.'

21. Who says: 'She was very pretty and looked as if she could take care of herself. I couldn't be sorry for her.'

Act 2

1. Who was harassing Eva/Daisy in the Palace Bar?

2. What phrase is later used to describe him, much to the disgust of Mr and Mrs Birling?

3. Who expresses very definite views as to who is 'entirely responsible' for Eva's death?

4. What does Sheila give to Gerald before he leaves?

5. Why does Mrs Birling remain nonchalant (casual/detached) even when she has seen the photograph?

6. How does Gerald attempt to defend the affair initially?

7. How does the Inspector claim to know so much about her life?

8. The Inspector claims that the girl needed more than money. He lists three things - what are they?

9. What does the Inspector's visit expose about Eric that Mrs. Birling claimed not to be aware of?

10. In what 3 ways does Gerald describe Daisy when he first meets her that made her look 'totally out of place' at the Palace Bar? _____ and _____ and _____
11. Quote the line in which the Inspector attempts to make Mr. Birling realise that Sheila isn't a dreamy little girl.

12. When Gerald has confessed his role in knowing Eva, why does Mr. B intervene and begin defending him in _____ front of Sheila?

12. The Inspector is angered by Mr. B's inability to accept any responsibility for his actions. The Inspector tells him 'Public men, Mr Birling, have _____ as well as _____.' Complete quote.
13. What is the term used in a play when the audience know more about the plot and how it seems to be _____ unfolding than the characters on stage?

Act 3

1. What is the mood in the dining room at the start of this act?and why?

2. What effect do this evening's events have on the Birling family and their relationships?

3. Why does it 'not much matter' to Sheila whether the Inspector was a real policeman or not?

4. Why does it matter a 'devil of a lot' to Mr Birling?

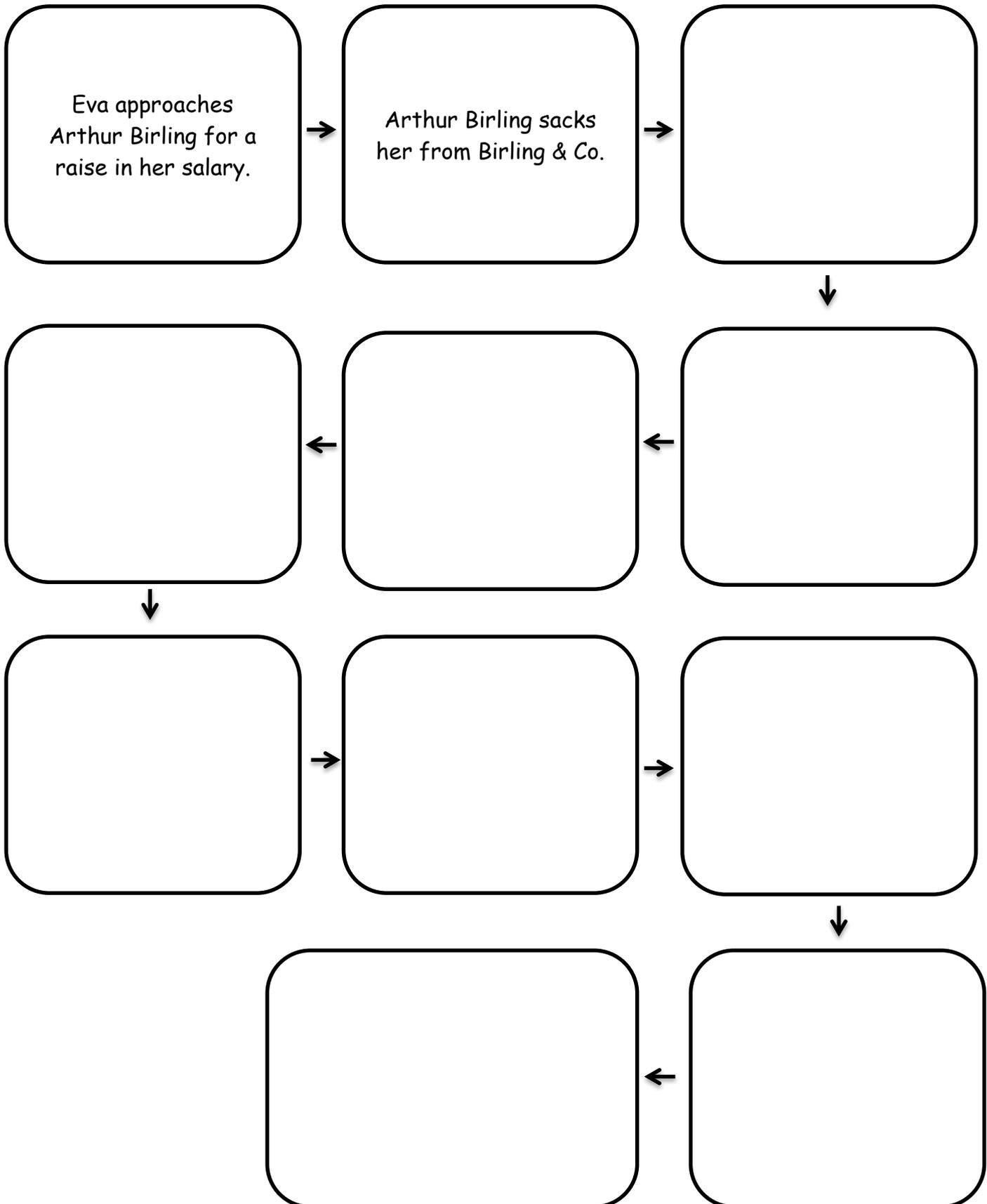
5. Who says 'It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters'?

6. How do the final stage directions instruct the actors to 'stare' as the curtain falls? _____ and _____

Chain of events

The Inspector refers to the family's behaviour as a 'chain of events'.

Task: Complete the 'chain' below to show how each of them contributed to Eva's suicide.



Characters

Task: Think of **5 adjectives** to describe each character

Mr Arthur Birling

Mrs Sybil Birling

Sheila Birling

Gerald Croft

Eric Birling

Eva Smith

Inspector Goole

What do we know about Edna? Who is she? What does she represent?

**Mr
Arthur
Birling**

1. He is described at the start as a "heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties but rather provincial in his speech."

2. He has worked his way up in the world and is **proud** of his achievements. He boasts about having been Mayor and tries (and fails) to impress the Inspector with his local standing and his influential friends.

3. He is aware of people who are his social superiors, which is why he shows off about the port to Gerald, "it's exactly the same port your father gets." Proud that he is likely to be knighted, as that would move him even higher in social circles.

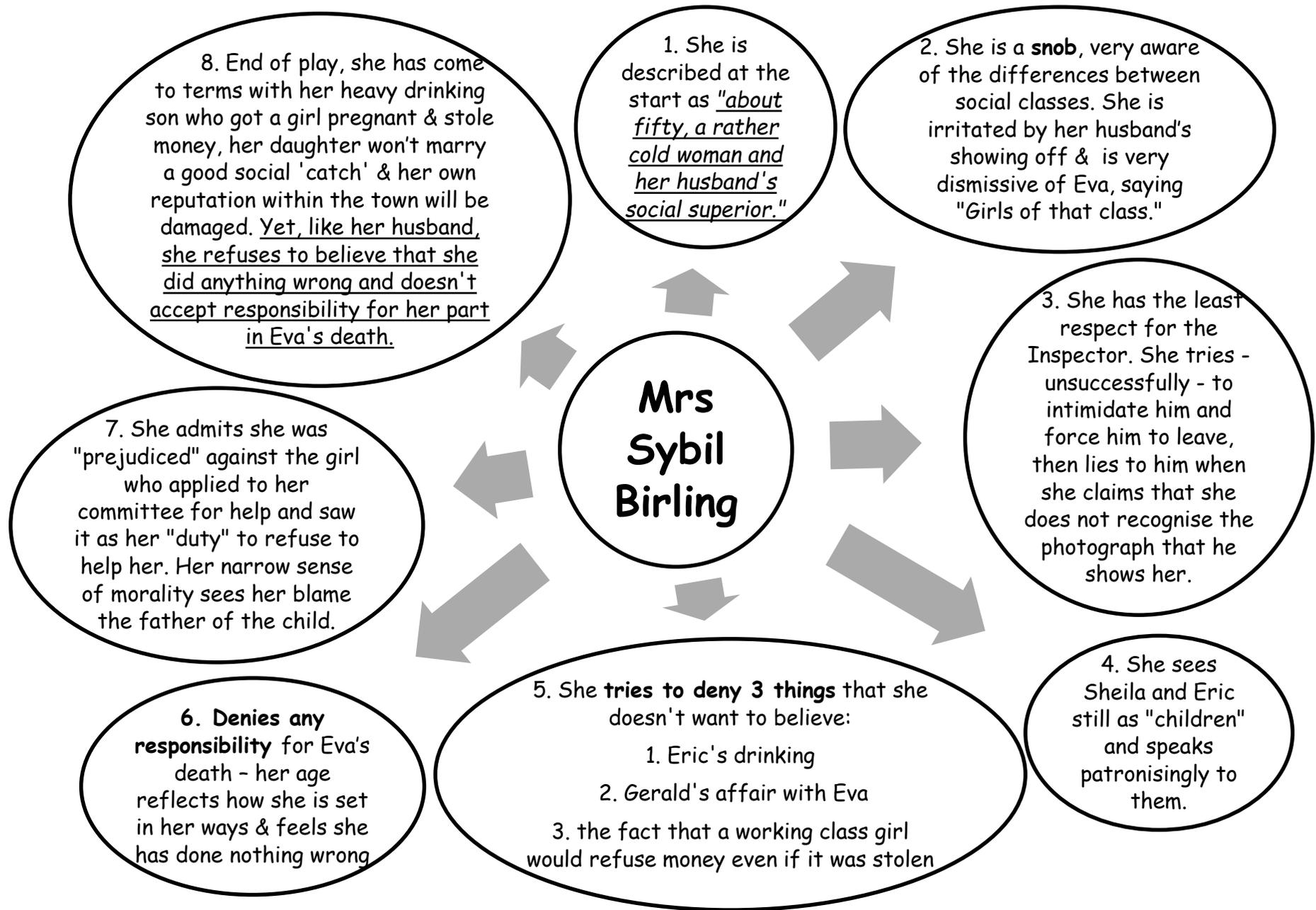
4. Claims the engagement is "one of the happiest nights of my life" - only because a merger with Crofts Limited will be good for business - nothing about his daughters' happiness

5. Extremely selfish character:

1. Accuses Sheila of being disloyal, end of Act III
2. He cannot see that he did anything wrong when he fired Eva Smith - he was just looking after his business interests.
3. Wants to protect his reputation. "I've got to cover this up as soon as I can." (Eric's money stealing scandal)

6. End of the play, he knows he has lost the chance of his knighthood & his reputation but he is unable to admit his responsibility for his part in Eva's death.

7. Optimistic for the future & says there won't be war - he was totally wrong



Sheila Birling

1. She is described at the start as "a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited."

2. Immediately in the play, she has had suspicions about Gerald when she mentions "last summer, when you never came near me." Suggests she isn't as naive and shallow as she first appears.

3. Shows **compassion** immediately when she hears of her father's treatment of Eva Smith: "But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people." Already, she is starting to change - she's never thought of their working conditions before now

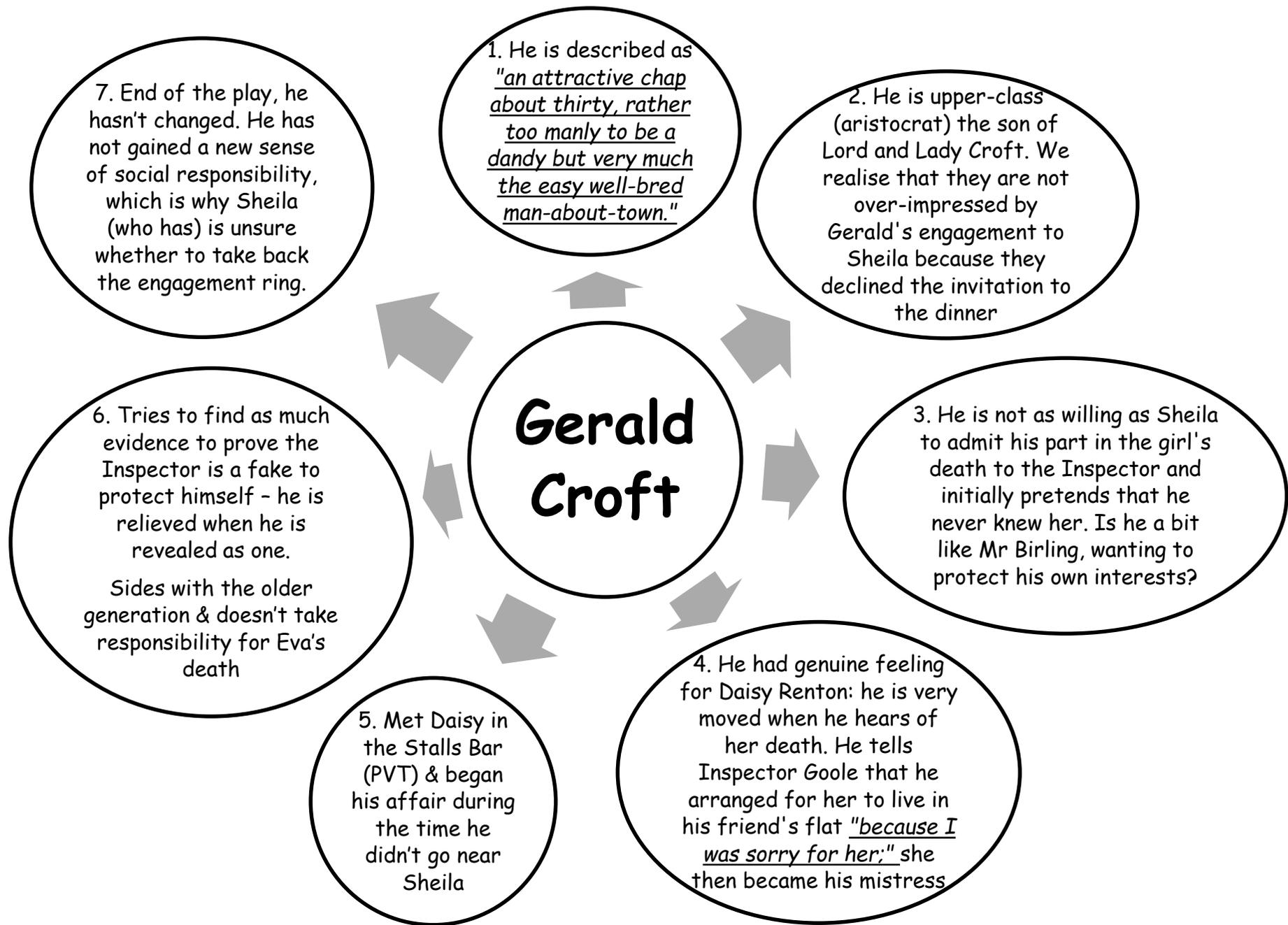
4. Horrified by her own part in Eva's story. She feels full of **guilt** for her jealous actions and blames herself.

5. She is very **perceptive**: she realises that Gerald knew Daisy Renton from his reaction, the moment the Inspector mentioned her name. At the end of Act II, she is the first to realise Eric's part in the story.

6. She is **curious**. She genuinely wants to know about Gerald's part in the story. It's interesting that she is not angry with him when she hears about the affair: she says that she respects his honesty. She is becoming **more mature**.

7. She is **angry** with her parents in Act 3 for trying to "pretend that nothing much has happened. She cannot understand how they cannot have learnt from the evening in the same way that she has. She is seeing her parents in a new, unfavourable light.

8. End of the play, she is much **wiser**. She judges her parents and Gerald from a new perspective. Her social conscience has been awakened and she is aware of her responsibilities



Eric Birling

1. He is described at the start as "in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive."

2. Awkward & embarrassed right from the start - doesn't like his 'varsity lifestyle' (upper class)

3. Soon becomes clear to us (although it takes his parents longer) that he is a **hardened drinker**. Gerald admits, "I have gathered that he does drink pretty hard."

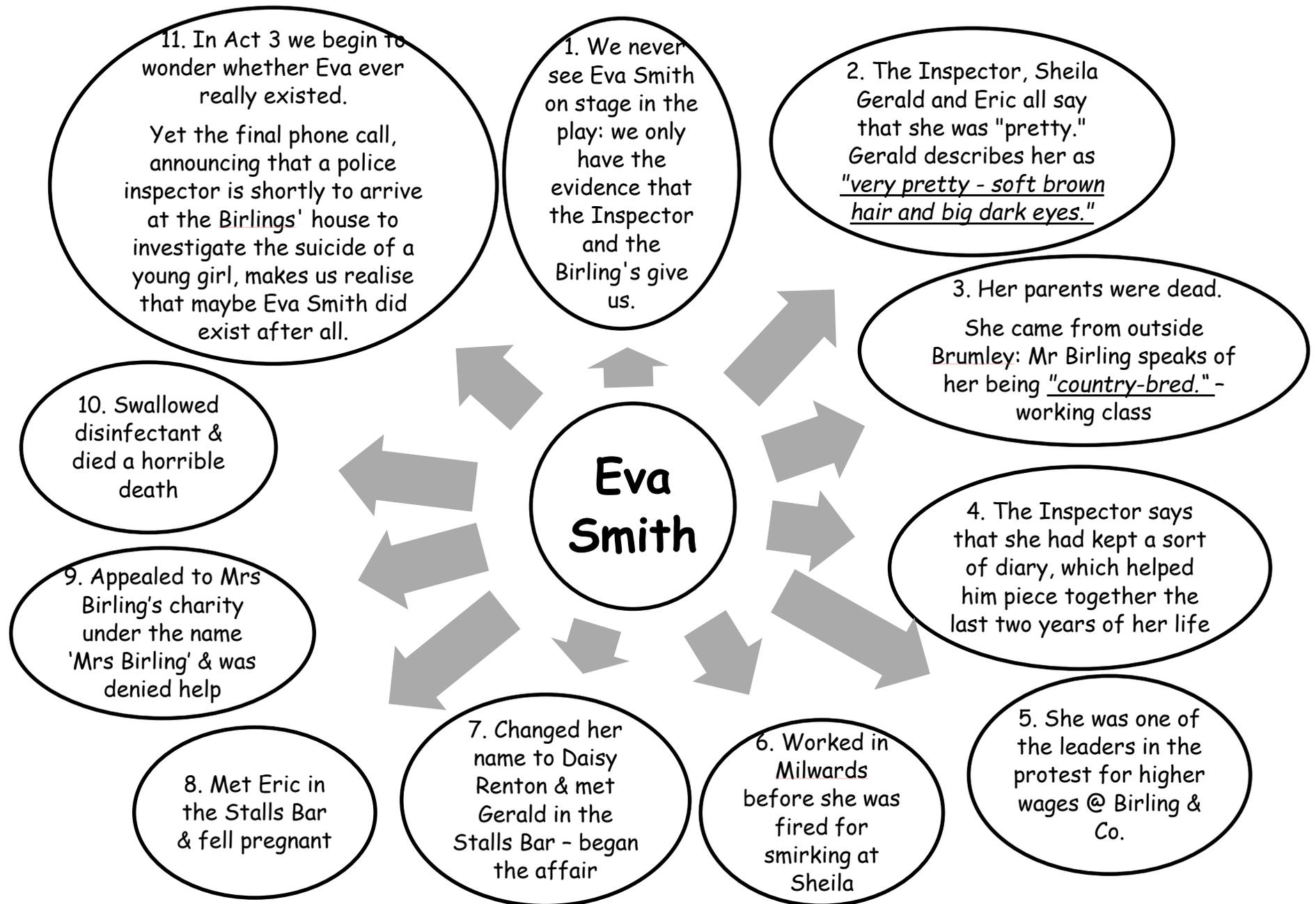
4. When he hears how his father sacked Eva Smith, he supports the worker's cause, like Sheila. "Why shouldn't they try for higher wages?"

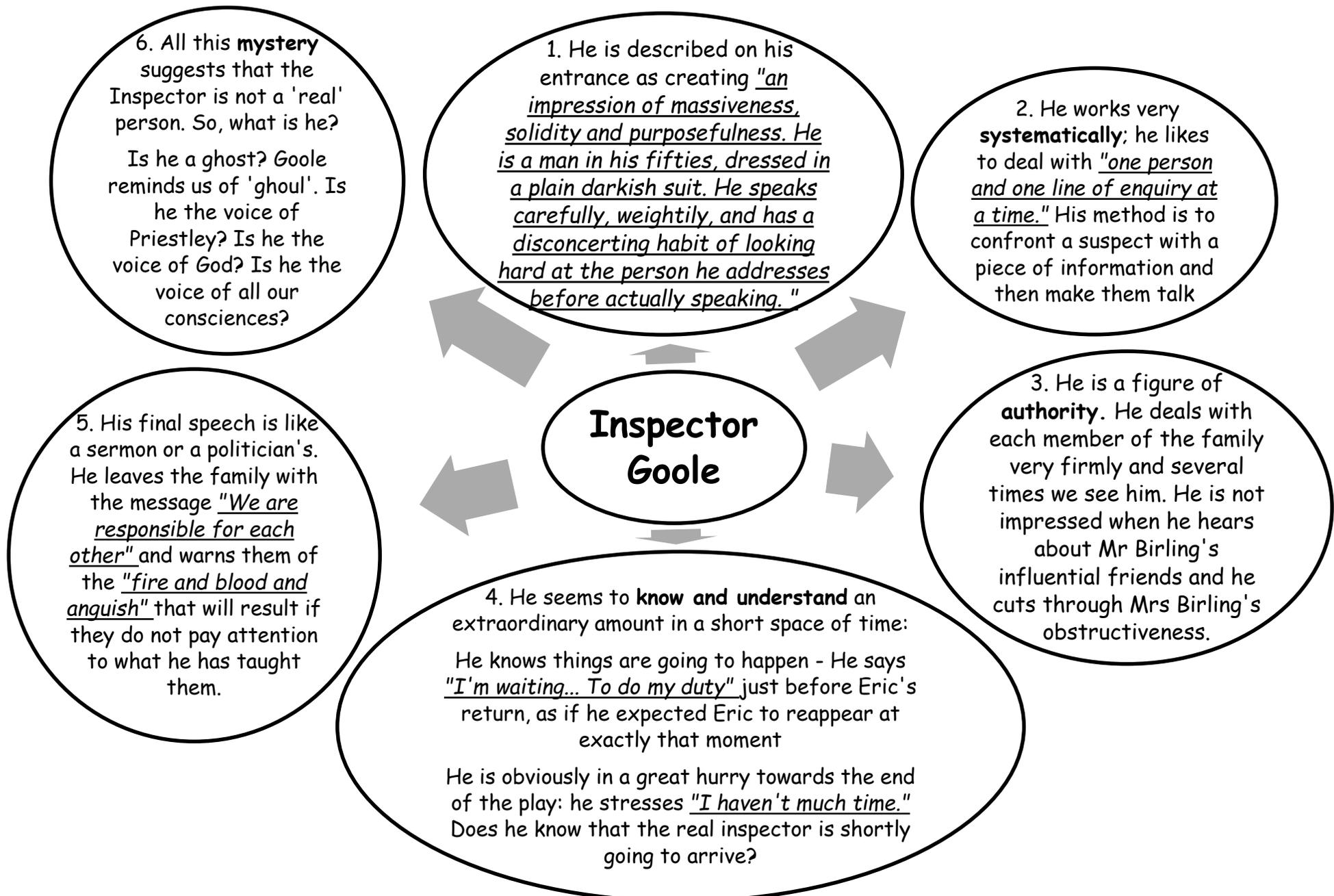
5. He feels **guilt and frustration** with himself over his relationship with Eva.
He is horrified that his thoughtless actions had such consequences.

6. He had some innate **sense of responsibility**, he was concerned about the pregnancy enough to give her money. He was obviously less worried about stealing (or 'borrowing' from his father's office) than he was about the girl's future.
So, was Eric, initially, the most socially aware member of the Birling family?

7. He is appalled by his parents' inability to admit their own responsibility. He tells them forcefully, "I'm ashamed of you."
Stands up to his father when Birling tries to threaten him in Act III

8. End of the play, like Sheila, he is fully aware of his **social responsibility**. He is not interested in his parents' efforts to cover everything up: as far as he is concerned, the important thing is that a girl is dead.





Characters

Task: Taking a different coloured pencil for each character, colour in the names below. Then select words from the boxes that describe the character and colour the boxes.

SELFISH	ARROGANT	MANIPULATIVE	VICTIMISED	INSENSITIVE
SENSITIVE	CUNNING	NAIVE	RESPONSIBLE	POMPOUS
IMPATIENT	SUPERIOR	POWERFUL	DECEPTIVE	MYSTERIOUS
LYING	VILLIAN	FRUSTRATING	CONSIDERATE	MATURE
IMPOSING	CARING	INSISTENT	MISERABLE	DISTRESSED
FORCEFUL	BITTER	PANICED	GUILTY	PLAYFUL

Arthur
Birling

Sheila
Birling

Eric Birling

Sybil Birling

Eva Smith

Gerald Croft

How well do you know the characters?

1. Do you think the change in Sheila reflects J.B. Priestly's ideas? How?
2. Why do you think the audience never meet Eva Smith? What effect does this have?
3. How does the younger generation differ from the older generation?
4. What do we discover about family relationships in the play?
5. What are the different attitudes of the characters towards Eva Smith?
6. What is the significance of Inspector Goole interrogating Mrs Birling before Eric?
7. How does the relationship between Sheila and Gerald develop during the play?
8. To what extent do you feel sympathy for Mrs Birling?
9. Who do you think is the most responsible for Eva Smith's death? Why?

Dramatic Tension

With the arrival of Inspector Goole, **tension** mounts. The following quotations/comments are relevant to the opening moments (p10-13).

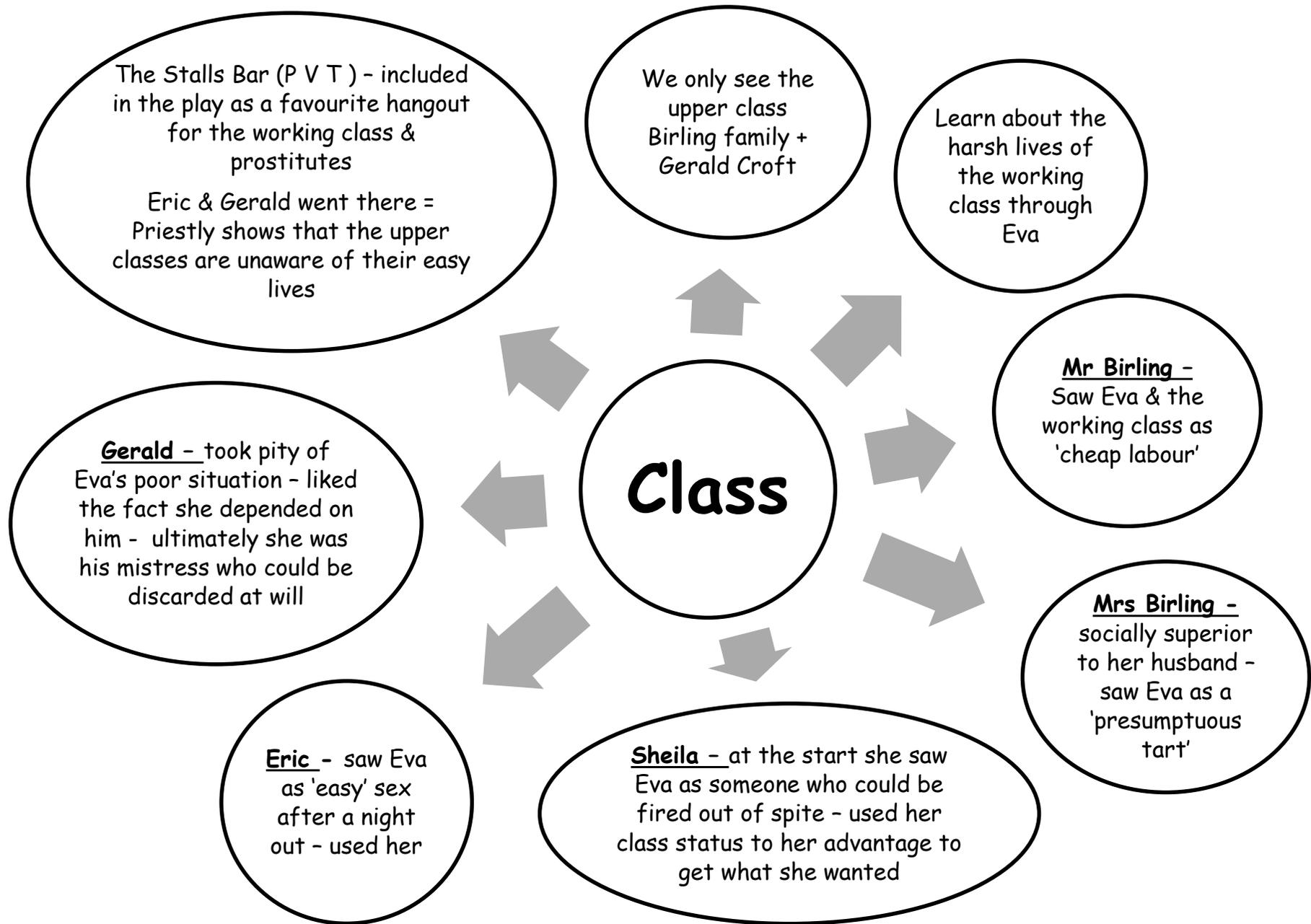
Task: Put the events into the **correct order** starting with the least tense moment. Put numbers in the boxes to show which order they happen.

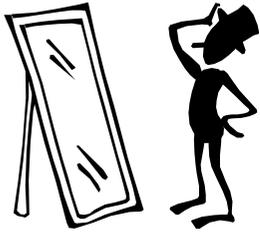
	<p>Birling's boasts about his many positions in society fail to impress the Inspector. Birling realizes, almost immediately, that the Inspector is not like the other 'Brumley police officers' and he reacts with a 'touch of impatience'.</p>		<p>Both Eric and Gerald are 'surprised and rather annoyed' when the Inspector stops them from seeing the photograph. Birling shares their feelings.</p>
	<p>The Inspector announces that 'a young woman' - Eva Smith - has committed suicide.</p>		<p>'Give us some more light.' (Priestley's earlier stage directions are written into the script. The brighter light suggests that an interrogation is about to begin.)</p>
	<p>Before the entrance of the Inspector, Birling and Gerald share a 'joke' and Eric is then described as speaking 'sharply' and feeling 'uneasy'.</p>		<p>The commanding tone and control of the Inspector unnerves Birling, and he takes his frustrations out on Eric - which reveals cracks in the family circle and its underlying tensions.</p>
	<p>We find out that Eva Smith used to work for Birling.</p>		<p>The Inspector enters, is welcomed and offered a drink, which he refuses.</p>
	<p>Edna enters to announce that there's an Inspector at the door: 'Please, sir, an inspector's called.'</p>		<p>Birling recognises the woman in the photograph.</p>

Themes

Task: Summarise what you know about these themes in *An Inspector Calls*.

Class/Status/Power
Responsibility
Gender
Age





Class and Status

<p>Mr Birling has advanced himself socially through his marriage to Mrs Birling. Gerald is marrying 'beneath' him as the Crofts are a wealthier, older family than the Birlings.</p>	<p>Mrs Birling doesn't see the lower classes as having rights, dismissing Eva's refusal to accept stolen money from her unborn baby's father. Her actions could potentially bring scandal to the family and lower its status.</p>	<p>Sheila's pride causes her to have Eva Smith sacked after she was jealous of her. Her pride was wounded when the dress suited Eva more than her.</p>	<p>Mr and Mrs Birling both take offence at the Inspector's methods and tone, believing that they should be treated with more respect.</p>
<p>Alderman Meggarty is revealed to be a womaniser - people in power are shown to abuse their status.</p>	<p>Mr Birling frequently tries to assert his own status. He was previously Mayor of Brumley and name drops influential friends. He hopes to be included on the next Honours list so that he can be knighted.</p>	<p>Scandal is revealed in terms of Gerald's relationship with Daisy/Eva. It was seen as inappropriate for a man of his class to marry a woman from the lower classes, so the relationship would never have become serious for him.</p>	<p>Scandal is revealed in the family when they learn of Eric's drinking, theft and fathering Eva's child. Mr and Mrs Birling worry about how that will affect people's perception of the family.</p>

Themes

Class, Status and Power

Task: Complete the table with quotes and explanations to help understand the themes of class, status and power

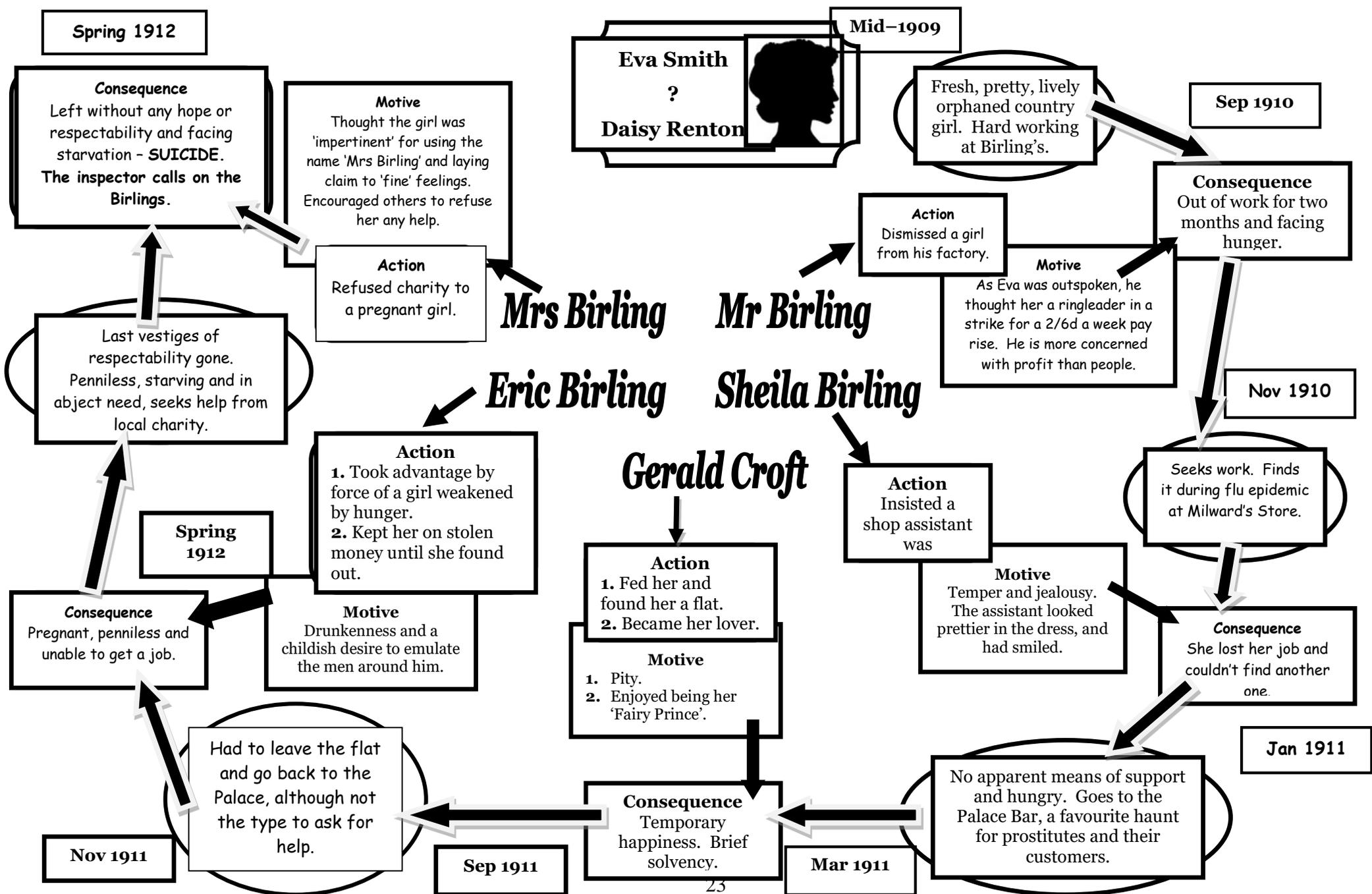
	CLASS What hints are we given about their social class?	STATUS Is this character concerned about their status and reputation? How do you know?	POWER What power does this character have? Do they use their power well or do they abuse it?
Arthur Birling			
Sheila Birling			
Gerald Croft			
Eva Smith			
Eric Birling			
Sybil Birling			

ATTITUDES TO THE LOWER CLASS:		ATTITUDES TO THE UPPER CLASS:
To this character, Eva was...		At the start of the play, this character was:
cheap labour	Mr Birling	keen to be knighted to cement his hard-fought rise to the upper class
someone who could be fired out of spite	Sheila	happy spending a lot of time in expensive shops
a mistress who could be discarded at will	Gerald	prepared to marry Sheila, despite her lower social position
easy sex at the end of a drunken night out	Eric	awkward about his 'public-school-and-Varsity' life
a presumptuous upstart	Mrs Birling	socially superior to her husband, and embarrassed at his gaffes



Responsibility

<p>Two views of society - individuals versus responsibility for each other.</p>	<p>The Inspector's aim is for each member of the family to accept responsibility for their actions in their dealings with Eva Smith.</p>	<p>Mr Birling accepts no responsibility for his actions. He believes that every man is responsible for himself and his family - the Inspector arrives immediately after this speech to challenge this view.</p>	<p>Mrs Birling takes no responsibility for her own actions regarding Eva Smith, and in fact tries to pass the blame on to others (the father of the unborn baby - Eric!).</p>
<p>Sheila takes responsibility for her actions and is immediately remorseful.</p>	<p>Gerald accepts responsibility at first, but when the Inspector is believed to be a fake, he is unconcerned about what has happened.</p>	<p>Eric accepts responsibility for his role. He also blames his mother for failing to help and is angry and resentful.</p>	<p>Age - the older generation is set their ways and less likely to accept responsibility. The younger characters are more accepting of responsibility and more willing to change.</p>

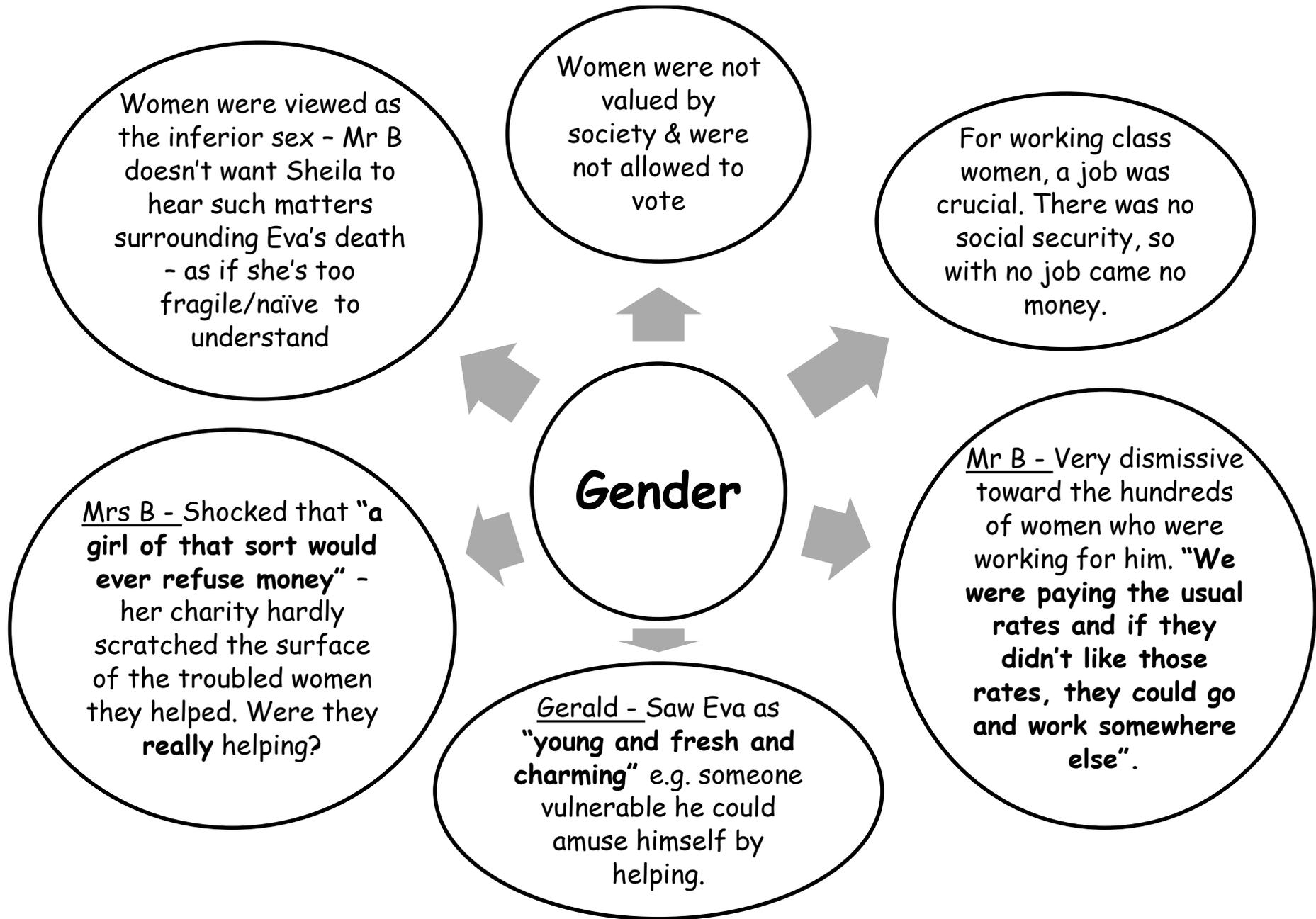


Themes

Responsibility

Task: Complete the table to show how each of the characters is involved in Eva's suicide and how they react to the inspector.

Character	What involvement did they have in Eva's suicide?	How does the inspector treat them? (language, tone, manner)	Reaction to the crime/inspector? (Accept responsibility? Change tone? Tactics?)	Have they learned anything? (How do we know?)
Arthur Birling				
Sheila Birling				
Gerald Croft				
Sybil Birling				
Eric Birling				

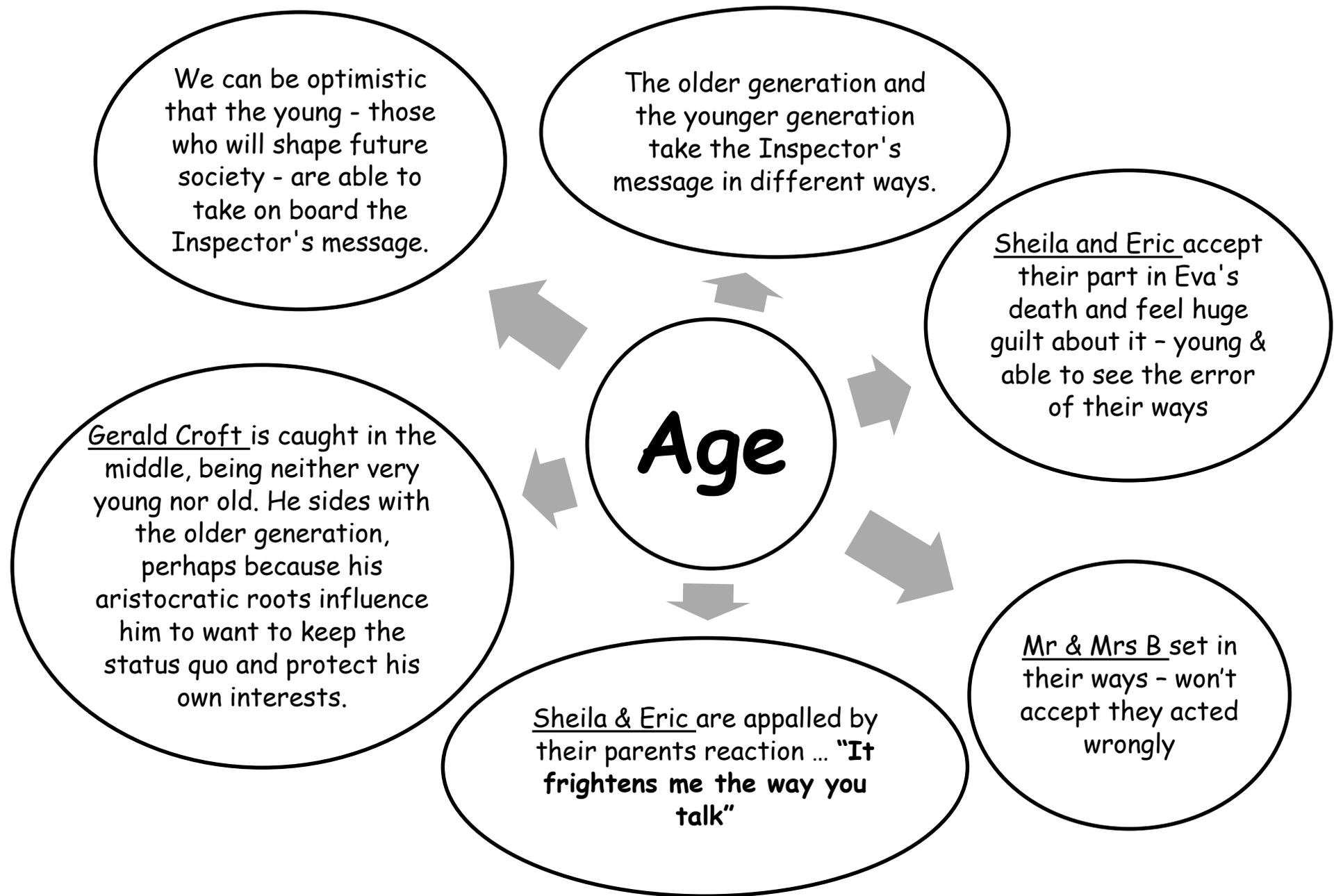


Themes

Gender

Task: Find quotes to show how J.B. Priestly illustrates gender in *An Inspector Calls*.

	Gender	Quotes
Arthur Birling	Takes a traditional view on the roles of men and women. Treats his daughter like a little girl.	
Sybil Birling	Tells Sheila that wives must accept coming second place to their husband's work. Expects her husband to take command.	
Eric Birling	He admits he has exploited Eva but feels guilty about it. He hasn't lived up to his father's expectations of what a man should do/be.	
Sheila Birling	Sheila doesn't accept her mother's attitude and asserts herself.	
Gerald Croft	Gerald has exploited Eva, even if it was unintentional.	
Eva Smith	Her gender made her vulnerable and a victim.	



Themes

Age

The older generation and the younger generation take the Inspector's message in different ways. While Sheila and Eric accept their part in Eva's death and feel huge guilt about it, their parents are unable to admit that they did anything wrong.

The Old (Mr and Mrs Birling)	The Young (Sheila and Eric)
The old are set in their ways. They are utterly confident that they are right and they see the young as foolish.	The young are open to new ideas. This is first seen early in Act 1 when both Eric and Sheila express sympathy for the strikers - an idea which horrifies Birling, who can only think of production costs and ignores the human side of the issue.
The old will do anything to protect themselves: Mrs Birling lies to the Inspector when he first shows her the photograph; Mr Birling wants to cover up a potential scandal.	The young are honest and admit their faults. Eric refuses to try to cover his part up, saying, " <i>the fact remains that I did what I did.</i> "
They have never been forced to examine their consciences before and find they cannot do it now - as the saying goes, 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks.'	Sheila and Eric see the human side of Eva's story and are very troubled by their part in it. They <i>do</i> examine their consciences.
Mr and Mrs Birling have much to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they know they will lose everything.	Sheila and Eric have nothing to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they have already admitted what they have done wrong, and will change

Gerald Croft is caught in the middle, being neither very young nor old. In the end he sides with the older generation, perhaps because his aristocratic roots influence him to want to keep the status quo and protect his own interests.

Ultimately, we can be optimistic that the young - those who will shape future society - are able to take on board the Inspector's message.

Task: Find quotes from the play that demonstrate the theme of 'age'.

Key Quotes Challenge

Quote	Who is speaking to whom?	What does it show about the speaker?
Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things -		
I was awfully busy at the works all that time		
You're squiffy		
We hard-headed practical business men must say something sometime		
You seem to be a nice well-behaved family -		
A man has to make his own way - has to look after himself...		
Yes, she was in great agony.		
If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody we'd had anything to do with, it would be very awkward...		
But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're <i>people</i>		
You've been through it - and now you want to see somebody else put through it		
A nice little promising life there, I thought...		
You see, we have to share something. If there's nothing else, we'll have to share our guilt		
It's the way I like to work. One person and one line of enquiry at a time.		

Quote	Who is speaking to whom?	What does it show about the speaker?
I feel you're beginning all wrong.		
I never take offence		
I think it was cruel and vile		
I must say, we are learning something tonight		
Fairy prince		
You're just the kind of son in law I wanted. Your father and I have been friendly rivals in business for some time.		
I know I'm to blame - and I'm desperately sorry.		
I did nothing I'm ashamed of. I consider I did my duty.		
You're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble.		
In some odd way, I rather respect you more than I've ever done before. .. You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner.		
If you don't come down sharply on some of these people, they'd soon be asking for the earth.		

Essay questions

You will get 4 marks for your spelling, punctuation and grammar in this question

a) Inspector Goole says, "We are all responsible for each other". How does Priestley present this theme in the novel?

[30+4]

b) Inspector Goole says, "We are all responsible for each other". Which character do you think is most responsible for Eva's death and why?

[30+4]

c) Each member of the Birling family and Gerald Croft is guilty of abusing their position or power. Who would you consider the most guilty of abusing his or her power, and why?

[30+4]

d) Eric and Gerald both had an affair with Eva Smith/Daisy Renton. With which of these two men do you have more sympathy for?

[30+4]

e) *An Inspector Calls* has been described as a play about deception, hypocrisy and lies. How does J.B. Priestley present this in the play?

[30+4]

f) How is Mrs Birling presented in the play?

[30+4]

g) The play is centred on secrets. Which character's hidden secret is the most surprising to an audience and why?

[30+4]

h) How is gender reflected in the play?

[30+4]

i) Sheila's character changes after she realises her part in Eva's death. How is her character presented throughout the course of the play?
[30+4]

j) How does Priestley present age in the play?
[30+4]

k) How is Mrs Birling's character shown in the play?
[30+4]

l) How is Eric Birling presented throughout the play.
[30+4]

m) How are gender differences reflected through the character of Eva/ Daisy?
[30+4]

n) Inspector Goole is a mouthpiece for J. B. Priestley. What are Priestley's views on class and society?
[30+4]

o) How does Priestley explore wealth and power in *An Inspector Calls*?
[30+4]