**English Literature Revision Mat: An Inspector Calls**

**Priestley’ message: Writing in 1945,** Priestley asks the audience to consider their sense of social responsibility and the way that we, as a society, collectively take responsibility for each other. It also sends a strong message to the capitalist, exclusive upper classes: that their society based on the progress of the individual and the reinforcement of established societal boundaries (gender, class race…) must go in place of a more collective, fair, socialist society.

**Context**

**Capitalism vs. Socialism:** Arthur Birling and Gerald Croft represent capitalism and business. Priestley, a firm socialist, portrays capitalism as selfish and elitist.

**Set in 1912, performed in 1946/WWI and WWII:** Priestley’s audience had experienced two world wars (possibly losing family members and loved ones), therefore Birling’s absolute certainty that there will be no war makes him seem an arrogant, ignorant fool. When the play was first performed (in post-war Britain), the welfare state was introduced and the mood in Britain, after the suffering endured during both world wars, was that society should care for and look after each other.

**Russian Revolution:** workers united and rose up to rebel against Russian royalty in a brutal and bloody manner – gives grim undertones to the warning of “fire and blood and anguish” from the Inspector.

**Titanic**: famously sunk, contrary to Arthur Birling’s predictions…

**Treatment of women:** Definitely of a lower status to men, women in general were not respected and were expected to fulfil more trivial, domestic or menial roles, certainly not act in the assertive and independent way that Eva does. Their ideas were not taken seriously especially by men like Arthur Birling and Gerald Croft.

**Class:** the classes were firmly divided and strict social boundaries were in place. Sheila’s marriage to Gerald is not just a business decision, but a form of social advancement (the Crofts are a part of the aristocracy). Arthur Birling places great importance in rising up the ‘class ladder’ e.g. his desire for a knighthood. He and Sybil treat Edna as inferior to them and see themselves as better than Edna and Eva because of their social standing in society.

**Themes/ ideas**

Social responsibility, moral choices, social justice, older vs. younger generation, the rights of workers, prejudice, gender, class..

**Methods and quotations:**

**Dramatic irony:**

“The Germans don’t want war”, “unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable”, “you’ll be living in a world that’ll have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations and all these silly little war scares”.

**Coup de theatre (sudden dramatic turn of events):** “That was the police. A girl has just died – on her way to the Infirmary – after swallowing some disinfectant. And a Police Inspector is on his way here – to ask some – questions”

**Stage directions:** *(lighting)* “Pink and intimate”, “Brighter and harder” *(sound effectsI* “Telephone rings sharply”

**Charaternym:** Inspector Goole - ‘Goole’ is a play on words to represent his mysterious and slightly eerie nature. Is he a real Inspector? Is he even a real person? Is he God? Is he the embodiment of their conscience? Or is he a ‘ghoul’ (ghost)?

“but there are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths” The name “**Ev**a” links to the idea that she is meant to represent **ev**eryone. John Smith is a placeholder name (a general name to refer to anybody and everybody), a name that is meant to represent mankind.

**Greek chorus**: “It’ll be you next”, “You’re starting all wrong”. Sheila Birling acts almost as a Greek chorus in the play. A chorus’ role was to act as a narrator. It adheres to the Greek unities of time, place and action i.e. it happens in real time and the events unfold as they would in real life before the audience’s eyes.

**Setting**: all happens in one place and one room creating a claustrophobic and stifling atmosphere, adding to the tension of the plot.

**Quotations: Key characters**

**Mr Arthur Birling**: “As a hard-headed business man….I say you ignore all this silly pessimistic talk”, “I gather there’s a very good chance of a knighthood.”, “I can’t accept any responsibility.”, “community and all that nonsense”, “When this comes out at the inquest, it isn’t going to do us much good”, “There’ll be a public inquiry”, “Probably a socialist or some sort of crank”, “The famous younger generation who know it all”

**Mrs Sybil Birling:** “All right Edna, I’ll ring from the drawing room when we want coffee.”, “And I don’t suppose for a moments that we can understand why that girl committed suicide.”, “Girls of that class....”, “Go and look for the father of the child. It’s his responsibility.”, “She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.”, “You’re quite wrong to suppose I shall regret what I did.”, “I accept no blame for it at all.”, “In the morning, they’ll be as amused as we are.”

**Miss Sheila Birling:** “But these girls aren’t cheap labour – they’re people”, “If she’s been some miserable plain little creature, I don’t suppose I’d have done it.”, “We all started like that, so confident, so pleased with ourselves, until he started asking questions.”, “I’m not a child, don’t forget.”, “It’s you two who are being childish - trying not to face the facts.”, “It frightens me the way you talk.”, “You began to learn something. And now you’ve stopped**.”**

**Mr Eric Birling:** “Eric suddenly guffaws”, “He’s been steadily drinking too much for the last two years” (Sheila about Eric), “Why shouldn’t they try for higher wages?”, “I’m ashamed of you”, “You turned her away, yes and you killed her”, “ I don’t see much nonsense about it when a girl goes and kills herself”, “We did her in alright”

**Mr Gerald Croft:** “In fact, I insist upon being one of the family now”, “because I was sorry for her”, “We’re respectable citizens and not criminals”, ““She was young and pretty and warm-hearted – and intensely grateful”, “I didn’t feel about her as she felt for me”, “Everything’s alright now Sheila *(Holds up engagement ring)* What about this ring?”

**Inspector Goole:** “One person and one line of enquiry at a time”, "Her position now is that she lies with a burnt out inside on a slab." “I’m waiting…To do my duty”, “Of course he knows!” (Sheila, speaking him), “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.”

**Eva Smith/Daisy Renton:** “very pretty – soft brown hair and big dark eyes”, “country-bred”, “She was giving herself ridiculous airs”, “There wasn’t the slightest proof that this Daisy Renton really was Eva Smith”