**How does Priestley explore the theme of responsibility in An Inspector Calls?**

* **Introduction**

Start your essay by establishing the context of the play. Explain that it was written in 1945, but is set in 1912, which was a period of great social inequality. Highlight that Priestley wanted to encourage the audience to continue campaigning for a fairer society where support is given to those who need it.

1. **Birling’s Refusal to Accept Responsibility**

Highlight that Birling believes that the concept of community is ‘nonsense’ and make the point that the death of Eva Smith shows that this isn’t the case because each member of the family is connected to her.

From there, explore Birling’s role in her death and write about how he reacts to the Inspector’s questions. Finish by stating that Birling is very much a ‘public man’ who fails to take his ‘public responsibilities’ seriously because he’s too selfish.

1. **Mrs Birling’s Refusal to Accept Responsibility**

Make a link with Mrs Birling’s role in the death of Eva Smith and her refusal to accept responsibility. The two characters are very similar. Make the point that she demonstrates a startling lack of empathy by blaming Eva Smith for her own misfortune – something that undoubtedly makes her a figure of criticism.

Finish the paragraph by stating that both Birling and Mrs Birling hold views that are selfish and outdated.

1. **Contrast with the Younger Generation**

Contrast the attitudes of Birling and Mrs Birling with those of either Sheila or Eric, both of whom change significantly as the play progresses. Sheila becomes increasingly aware of her role in the suffering of Eva Smith and shows remorse and a willingness to change. Eric also accepts responsibility and recognises the urgent need to become a better person.

Make the point that the contrast between the generations raises the possibility of progress, which is something that Priestley was keen to emphasise. In this sense, the play is actually very optimistic.

1. **The Inspector as the Voice of Social Responsibility**

Discuss how the Inspector provides moral guidance by challenging the views of the older Birlings. Make sure that you provide at least one example. When you’ve done that, focus on the Inspector’s final speech and write about the warning he provides about the consequences of failing to take responsibility.

Finish by stating that Priestley uses the Inspector as a ‘mouthpiece’ for his own socialist ideals.

* **Conclusion**

Conclude your essay by explaining that Priestley was writing at a time of great political change, particularly given the election of a Labour government who promised to introduce the ‘Welfare State’. Finish by writing that Priestley’s message is clear: social responsibility is essential for a fairer world.