**Notes on Context**

1. **Society in 1912**

Society in 1912 was divided: there was a large gap between the rich and poor. Roughly 10% of the population controlled 90% of the wealth.

* *The Birling family in a large and comfortable house with ‘substantial’ furniture.*

1. **Society in 1945**

The World Wars had required people from different backgrounds to mix and this helped to change what were once firmly established conventions.

* *Society was becoming more equal and there was widespread desire for further change.*

1. **Dramatic Irony**

The play is set in 1912, but was written in 1945 (and first performed in England in 1946). This means the audience know far more than the characters on stage.

* *Birling makes a series of incorrect predictions that undermine his credibility.*

1. **The Aristocracy**

Gerald and Mrs Birling are part of the aristocracy, which means they are from families that have been wealthy for generations. In contrast, Birling has made his money more recently.

* *The difference in Birling’s social status is reflected in his anxiety about Gerald’s parents.*

1. **Socialism**

As a socialist (i.e. a believer in social equality) Priestley wanted to remind his audience about how bad things were in 1912 as a way of encouraging them to push for more change.

* *The Inspector is a ‘mouthpiece’ for Priestley in the sense that he conveys his views.*

1. **Capitalism**

Birling represents ‘hard-headed’ capitalism in the sense that he places the accumulation of personal wealth above the wellbeing of his workers and the wider community.

* *Birling refuses to grant his workers a moderate pay rise and fires Eva Smith.*