

Eric Birling

Eric is described as 'not quite at ease,' 'half shy' and 'half assertive.' 'Not quite at ease' suggests that Eric is hiding something, which foreshadows the rest of the play when we find out that he was the one to get Eva pregnant. This could also be hinting at the fact that Eric is hiding a drinking problem, and so is not very comfortable around drink or in social situations where he must control himself. 'Half shy' describes what he is like when sober. When he is with his family at dinner, he is not very loud or brash. He speaks and argues slightly with Sheila, but overall he appears to be a fairly quiet person. However, later in the play we find out that he is also 'half assertive.' This seems to be when he is drunk, like the way that he pressured Eva into sleeping with him. This shows that Eric has two very different sides to him, and this isn't made clear to his family until later when the Inspector brings it all out again.

Eric's relationships also change over the course of the play, but not quite as dramatically as some of the other characters. At the start of the play, Eric and Sheila argue and have quite a lot of sibling rivalry, but this comes across as more playful and joking than serious. By the end of the play they are a lot closer due to the fact they both have the same opinions on the matter of the death and how things should change. Sheila and Eric both have new found respect and a new alliance by the end of the play. Eric is not fond on Gerald from the beginning of the play. His father seems to favor Gerald over Eric, which makes Eric somewhat jealous of Gerald. Gerald does not respect Eric and is quick to throw him under the bus when the situation arises about his drinking. Eric and Mr Birling don't get along at the start or end of the play. In the beginning, Mr Birling suggests that he would rather have Gerald as a son than Eric, which of course makes Eric dislike his father. As the play progresses, their relationship gets steadily worse, the breaking point of which being when a shouting match breaks out between the men. Eric and Mrs Birling's relationship is not really explicit at the start of the play, and appears to be a normal relationship a mother and a son would have. However, by the end of the play their relationship is completely destroyed. Eric blames his mother for sending Eva away when she needed help, even accusing her of murdering her own grand-child. Mrs Birling has, by this point, already expressed her opinions of the boy that caused the pregnancy, and it is too late to take all of that back just because she has found out that it is her son. Both of them, by the end, have lost all respect they had for each other.

Themes explored through Eric

- Social Class- 'I don't see why she should have been sacked just because she'd a bit more spirit than the others. You said yourself she's a good worker.'
- Truth- 'You know, don't you?'
- Responsibility- 'The fact remains that I did what I did.'