

Inspector Goole

The Inspector is described as not a big man, but he 'creates at once an air of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness.' This foreshadows the dominance the inspector would have over the rest of the character throughout the rest of the play. He is a contrast from Mr Birling who is a 'heavy looking' man, and therefore large, but not 'solid or purposeful.' The inspector at once makes everyone aware that he is in charge of the whole situation, and immediately establishes dominance over Birling, who is stubborn and, until now, never questioned. The inspector has a 'disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking.' This foreshadows the idea that the inspector may have something almost paranormal and supernatural about him, as he seems to work out what the other characters have done before they even say anything. This creates the sense of fear that the other characters feel around him, and explains why the majority of the characters try to dodge the questioning right from the moment they meet him.

The inspector's relationships within the play vary between characters, but do not really change over the course of the play. The inspector and Mr Birling have a power struggle from the very moment they meet. Mr Birling tries desperately to make the inspector feel uneasy and threatened, but really it is him that ends up looking like a fool. Mr Birling dislikes the inspector, thinking that he is rude for questioning him. The inspector clearly does not think much of Mr Birling either, and does his best to discredit him in his investigation, making his whole capitalist ideology look ridiculous. The inspector and Sheila form an alliance fairly quickly in the investigation, when Sheila realises that the inspector's message of socialism makes a lot of sense. Eric, towards the end, also joins this team. This was the inspector's intention all along, as he says to Mr Birling that the younger ones are usually more impressionable. Mrs Birling and the inspector have a bad relationship from the beginning of her questioning. She is perhaps the least cooperative out of all of the characters, and refuses to admit any sort of wrong doing- even when the rest of her family agree that she was in the wrong. Mrs Birling goes as far as to call the inspector 'impertinent.' The inspector, once again, makes a fool out of Mrs Birling by making her inadvertently push her own son under the bus with her blaming. The inspector and Gerald have a fairly straightforward relationship in that he recognises he did something wrong but refuses to take all of the blame for what happened to Eva. Gerald does not trust the inspector and suspects that something is wrong from the very beginning of the investigation, but he is not overly rude to him.

Key themes explored through Inspector Goole

- Responsibility- 'We are all members of one body. We are responsible for each other.'
- Social Class- 'If there weren't, the factories and warehouses wouldn't know where to look for cheap labour.'
- Women- 'Used her for the end of a stupid drunken evening, as if she was an animal, a thing, not a person.'
- Age- "We often do [make an impression] on the young ones. They're more impressionable."