

between the lines

A lesson written for every student in the room

FREE LESSON SAMPLER

An Inspector Calls: A hard-headed man of business

How does Priestley make the audience distrust Mr Birling?

Lesson 3 of 24 from the scheme of learning

Teacher notes, slides and student pages at all three levels

Written for the AQA specification

What is in this sampler

This is one complete lesson from our An Inspector Calls scheme for Literature Paper 2, Section A. It comes exactly as it appears in the full scheme, so you can teach it next week and see how our lessons work.

Teacher notes	Timings with slide numbers, Do Now answers, the exploded quotation, the hinge question and what each answer tells you, the task at three levels, a model paragraph and notes on misconceptions and adapting the lesson (next pages).
Slides	The editable PowerPoint deck for Lesson 3, with teacher notes on every slide (separate file).
Student pages	The lesson's pages from the Securing, Strengthening and Soaring student packs: one question, three levels of support (at the end of this document).

How every lesson works

Know	Do Now from memory, vocabulary, then the reading.
Apply	Explode one quotation together; a hinge question checks understanding.
Master	One shared question answered as a What-How-Why paragraph, with Securing, Strengthening and Soaring support; then a model paragraph and an exit ticket.

In the full scheme

- 24 lessons like this one, with editable slides and a teacher handbook
- Student packs at three levels for every lesson
- Six weeks of deliberate practice homework at three levels
- Four Feedback Loop mini assessments with whole-class feedback sheets and improvement tasks
- An exam-style end-of-unit essay with level guidance and three annotated model answers

Lesson 3: A hard-headed man of business

SEQUENCE 1: CONTEXT AND THE OPENING • 60 MINUTES

How does Priestley make the audience distrust Mr Birling?

By the end of the lesson, students can

- Explain what Mr Birling predicts about the Titanic, war and the future, and why the audience knows he is wrong
- Analyse how Priestley uses dramatic irony to weaken Mr Birling's authority
- Write a What-How-Why paragraph on how Priestley makes the audience distrust Mr Birling

Lesson at a glance

Time	Phase	What happens	Slides
0–8	Know	Do Now: five quick questions on Lessons 1 and 2. Students self-mark from the answer slide.	2–3
8–18	Know	Pre-teach dramatic irony, capitalist, magistrate and knighthood. Students read Mr Birling's speeches in their own copies, using the scene guide, then list each prediction he makes and whether it came true.	4–6
18–28	Apply	Explode the quotation together. Think aloud about the repetition and the word "absolutely", then students annotate their copy of the play.	7
28–33	Apply	Hinge question on mini-whiteboards. Use the answers to decide who starts on which level of support.	8–9
33–53	Master	Students write one What-How-Why paragraph from memory using the student pack at their level. Share the model paragraph in the last five minutes and ask students to check the spelling of Birling, Priestley and Titanic (AO4).	10–11
53–60	Master	Exit ticket. Collect and sort into three piles to plan the start of Lesson 4.	12

Do Now answers

1	What mood does the lighting create at the start of Act 1?	Warm, cosy and comfortable: the family looks safe and pleased with itself
2	How do the opening stage directions describe Mrs Birling?	As a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior
3	On what date did the Titanic sink?	15 April 1912
4	What did the Beveridge Report of 1942 propose?	A welfare state
5	What does portentous mean?	Trying hard to sound important and serious

Vocabulary

dramatic irony	when the audience knows something that a character on stage does not
capitalist	someone who runs a business to make as much profit as possible
magistrate	a local judge who deals with less serious crimes

knighthood

an honour from the monarch that lets a man use the title Sir

Reading**Act 1: Mr Birling's speeches***In your copy, read from Mr Birling's toast to Sheila and Gerald to the sharp ring of the front doorbell.*

The family is celebrating Sheila's engagement to Gerald. In his toast, Mr Birling hopes that Crofts and Birlings will work together for "lower costs and higher prices". Notice how he turns a family celebration into a business deal.

Then he gives the young people advice. He calls himself "a hard-headed business man". Look for what he says about strikes and labour trouble, about war, and about the Titanic. Find the line where he calls the ship unsinkable, and the moment he names Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells as writers he disagrees with.

When Mrs Birling and Sheila leave the room, Birling tells Gerald privately that he may be in line for a knighthood, as long as the family stays out of trouble. Keep this in mind: trouble is on its way.

With Gerald and Eric listening, Birling gives one more speech. He mocks "community and all that nonsense" and the idea that everyone is connected, "like bees in a hive". Each man, he says, should look out for himself and his family.

In the middle of this speech the doorbell rings. Notice whose voice the play cuts off.

Word help **toast:** a short speech before everyone drinks to someone's health or happiness

Explode the quotation**Method**

Dramatic irony and repetition. Birling says the word twice to sound certain.

Zoom in

"absolutely" removes any doubt. Birling leaves himself no way out if he is wrong.

"unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable"

Effect

The audience knows the Titanic sank on its first voyage on 15 April 1912. His certainty makes him look foolish, and the audience may laugh or wince.

Purpose

Priestley wants his 1945 audience to stop trusting Birling early. If he is wrong about a ship, he may be wrong about how society should work.

Hinge question

Mr Birling says "there isn't a chance of war". Why does Priestley give him this line?

- A. To show that Birling understands politics, so the audience should trust his views.
- B. To make an audience who lived through two world wars doubt everything Birling says. (the right answer)**
- C. To tell the audience that the play is about the First World War.

What the answers tell you

A means the student has missed the dramatic irony: ask what happened in August 1914 and start them on Securing. C means the student has taken the context as the plot: remind them that the whole play takes place on one evening in 1912 in one room, then start them on Securing or Strengthening.

Why the answer is right

The audience knows war began in 1914, so Birling's confident prediction makes them distrust his other opinions too.

Master task**How does Priestley make the audience distrust Mr Birling in Act 1?**

Securing aiming for a 4 Quotations to choose from "unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable" "silly little war scares" "community and all that nonsense" Starters Priestley makes the audience distrust Mr Birling by _____. Birling says _____. The word _____ suggests _____. Priestley wants his 1945 audience to _____ because _____.	Strengthening aiming for grades 5 to 6 Prompts What: Make a clear point about why the audience stops trusting Mr Birling. How: Choose a quotation from one of Birling's speeches. Name the method (dramatic irony, repetition, a dismissive adjective) and zoom in on one word. Why: What did the 1945 audience know about 1912, 1914 and 1939 that Birling did not? Link this to what Priestley wants them to think about Birling's selfish views, inside your point.	Soaring aiming for grades 7 to 9 The debate <i>"Priestley makes Mr Birling a figure of fun, so the audience laughs at him more than it fears him. How far do you agree?"</i> Write two paragraphs. In the second, give an alternative reading that begins with Alternatively.
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Model paragraph

What	Priestley makes the audience distrust Mr Birling by giving him confident predictions that the audience knows are wrong.
How	Birling calls the Titanic "unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable". This is dramatic irony: the repeated adjective, made stronger by "absolutely", leaves no room for doubt, yet the audience knows the ship sank in April 1912. He also brushes aside "silly little war scares", and the word "little" shrinks a war that began two years later.
Why	Priestley wants his 1945 audience, who had lived through two world wars, to see that a man this sure of himself can be completely wrong. Once they stop trusting his predictions, they stop trusting his scorn for "community and all that nonsense", which is the very idea the Inspector arrives to defend.

Exit ticket

The audience stops trusting Mr Birling when...

Teacher notes**Subject knowledge**

Birling's Act 1 speeches are a run of confident predictions: no war, an end to labour trouble, an unsinkable Titanic about to sail the following week. The audience knew the Titanic sank on 15 April 1912, that a national coal strike took place in 1912 and that war began in August 1914. Birling names Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells as writers he disagrees with. He has been an alderman and Lord Mayor and is still a

magistrate, and he tells Gerald a knighthood is possible if the family avoids scandal. The doorbell cuts off his speech about looking after yourself, the philosophy the rest of the play argues against.

Common misconceptions

- Thinking Birling is simply stupid. He is successful and confident; his mistakes come from complacency and self-interest.
- Explaining dramatic irony as the audience knowing something, without saying what they know: the Titanic sank on 15 April 1912 and war began in August 1914.
- Saying Birling is lying. He believes every word, and the irony is that he is sincere and wrong.
- Misspelling Birling, Priestley or Titanic. AO4 marks are lost on names.

Adapting the lesson

Everyone answers the same question on the same speeches. Students who chose A or C in the hinge question start on Securing. Move anyone who completes the Securing frame in ten minutes to the Strengthening prompts for a second paragraph. Students who can already build a thesis start on Soaring. Students write from memory, as they will in the exam, so give two minutes before writing to say their chosen quotation aloud to a partner. Remind every level that four marks are for spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Homework

Learn “unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable”, “silly little war scares” and “community and all that nonsense” by heart. Next to each, write what the 1945 audience knew that Mr Birling did not, in one sentence with a capital letter and a full stop.

A hard-headed man of business

How does Priestley make the audience distrust Mr Birling?

Securing

aiming for a 4

Do Now: five quick questions

- 1 What mood does the lighting create at the start of Act 1?
- 2 How do the opening stage directions describe Mrs Birling?
- 3 On what date did the Titanic sink?
- 4 What did the Beveridge Report of 1942 propose?
- 5 What does portentous mean?

Vocabulary

dramatic irony	when the audience knows something that a character on stage does not
capitalist	someone who runs a business to make as much profit as possible
magistrate	a local judge who deals with less serious crimes
knighthood	an honour from the monarch that lets a man use the title Sir

Reading

Act 1: Mr Birling's speeches

In your copy, read from Mr Birling's toast to Sheila and Gerald to the sharp ring of the front doorbell.

The family is celebrating Sheila's engagement to Gerald. In his toast, Mr Birling hopes that Crofts and Birlings will work together for "lower costs and higher prices". Notice how he turns a family celebration into a business deal.

Then he gives the young people advice. He calls himself "a hard-headed business man". Look for what he says about strikes and labour trouble, about war, and about the Titanic. Find the line where he calls the ship unsinkable, and the moment he names Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells as writers he disagrees with.

When Mrs Birling and Sheila leave the room, Birling tells Gerald privately that he may be in line for a knighthood, as long as the family stays out of trouble. Keep this in mind: trouble is on its way.

With Gerald and Eric listening, Birling gives one more speech. He mocks "community and all that nonsense" and the idea that everyone is connected, "like bees in a hive". Each man, he says, should look out for himself and his family.

In the middle of this speech the doorbell rings. Notice whose voice the play cuts off.

Word help **toast:** a short speech before everyone drinks to someone's health or happiness

Explode the quotation

Annotate each box as your teacher explodes the quotation.

Method	Zoom in
“unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable”	
Effect	Purpose

Your task

How does Priestley make the audience distrust Mr Birling in Act 1?

Word bank

dramatic irony	when the audience knows something a character does not
complacent	too pleased with yourself to see danger coming
capitalist	someone who runs a business to make as much profit as possible
hindsight	understanding an event after it has happened

Choose your quotations

- “unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable”
- “silly little war scares”
- “community and all that nonsense”

Worked example

Priestley shows that Birling cares most about his own status. He tells Gerald “Just a knighthood, of course”, and the casual word “Just” suggests he is pretending to be modest while showing off.

The example uses a different quotation. Choose one from the list above for your own paragraph.

Your task

How does Priestley make the audience distrust Mr Birling in Act 1?

Write your paragraph

What: Priestley makes the audience distrust Mr Birling by ____.

How: Birling says _____. The word _____ suggests _____.

Why: Priestley wants his 1945 audience to _____ because _____.

Exit ticket

The audience stops trusting Mr Birling when...

A hard-headed man of business

How does Priestley make the audience distrust Mr Birling?

Strengthening

aiming for grades 5 to 6

Do Now: five quick questions

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How does Priestley make the audience distrust Mr Birling in Act 1?

What, How and Why

What	Make a clear point about why the audience stops trusting Mr Birling.
How	Choose a quotation from one of Birling’s speeches. Name the method (dramatic irony, repetition, a dismissive adjective) and zoom in on one word.
Why	What did the 1945 audience know about 1912, 1914 and 1939 that Birling did not? Link this to what Priestley wants them to think about Birling’s selfish views, inside your point.

Plan your paragraph

My point answers the question	
My quotation short and exact	
Method and zoom the method, and the one word I will explore	
Priestley’s purpose what he wanted readers to think or do	

Your task

How does Priestley make the audience distrust Mr Birling in Act 1?

Write your paragraph

Check your paragraph

- ☐ My point answers the question
- ☐ I use a short, embedded quotation from memory
- ☐ I explain the dramatic irony by saying exactly what the audience knows
- ☐ I link to Priestley's purpose and his 1945 audience inside my point
- ☐ I have spelt Priestley, Birling and Titanic correctly and used a range of punctuation (AO4)

Exit ticket

The audience stops trusting Mr Birling when...

A hard-headed man of business

How does Priestley make the audience distrust Mr Birling?

Soaring

aiming for grades 7 to 9

Do Now: five quick questions

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- 3 On what date did the Titanic sink?
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The debate

“Priestley makes Mr Birling a figure of fun, so the audience laughs at him more than it fears him. How far do you agree?”

Write two paragraphs. In the second, give an alternative reading that begins with Alternatively.

Think about

- How the dramatic irony of the Titanic line makes the audience laugh, then think again about what Birling says about workers
- How “lower costs and higher prices” turns an engagement into a business deal
- Why the knighthood depends on avoiding scandal, and what the doorbell is about to bring

Verbs to try

mocks • *undermines* • *exposes* • *satirises* • *foreshadows*

Plan your argument

My argument	An alternative reading

Your task

How does Priestley make the audience distrust Mr Birling in Act 1?

Write your answer

Exit ticket

The audience stops trusting Mr Birling when...