**Brief Notes on the Theme of Responsibility in An Inspector Calls**

**Context**

* Set in 1912 (Edwardian England) when there was a large gap between the rich and the poor
* Social mobility was limited and workers had few rights – this was particularly the case for women
* By 1946, when the play was first performed in the UK, there was greater social and gender equality

**Birling and Mrs Birling**

* Birling is wealthy enough to endure the workers’ strike; he arrogantly dismisses it as a ‘pitiful affair’
* Eva is described by the Inspector as ‘cheap labour’ and she is treated as such by Birling
* Birling lazily boasts that he was formerly Lord Mayor and is ‘still on the Bench’
* The Inspector reminds him that public men ‘have public responsibilities’
* Birling is relieved when the prospect of the Inspector being a ‘fake’ is mooted
* Mrs Birling refused Eva ‘the pitiable little bit of organised charity’ she had in her power to grant
* Under pressure from the Inspector, she suggests the father of the child should take responsibility
* Mrs Birling genuinely seems to have no idea about how irresponsible Eric has been
* Mrs Birling boasts that she was the only one ‘who didn’t give in’ to the Inspector

**Sheila and Eric**

* Both Sheila and Eric are shocked to learn of the suicide and empathise with Eva’s plight
* Eric highlights the hypocrisy of Birling’s actions: ‘Why shouldn’t they try for higher wages?’
* Sheila uses her social status to get Eva fired from Milwards, but feels deeply ashamed afterwards
* Sheila implores Gerald and Mrs Birling to accept responsibility and be truthful with the Inspector
* Eric attempts to take responsibility for his actions, but ultimately fails to truly do so
* As the play progresses, Sheila and Eric grow increasingly angry with their parents
* Sheila and Eric understand that it doesn’t matter if the Inspector was real or not

**Gerald**

* Gerald defends Birling’s decision to fire Eva by stating that he ‘couldn’t have done anything else’
* He attempts to hide the truth when it becomes clear he knew Daisy Renton
* Gerald behaved irresponsibly by offering Daisy false hope, although he did develop affection for her
* He eventually has to excuse himself when he (temporarily) becomes upset at the situation

**The Inspector**

* Promotes the importance of social responsibility: ‘We don’t live alone’
* Emphasises that there are ‘millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths’
* Warns of dire consequences if people do not learn they are responsible for each other