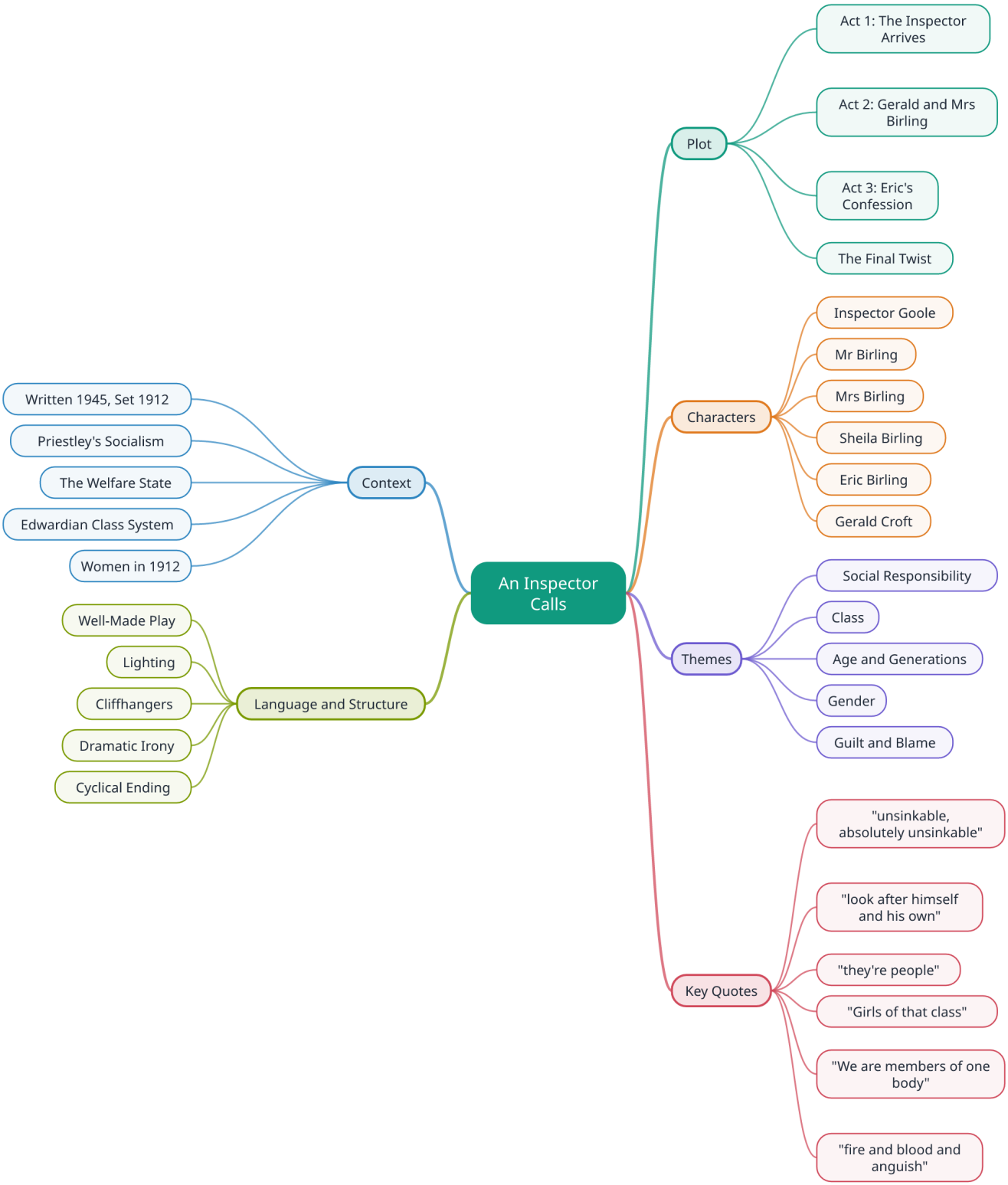
An Inspector Calls Mind Map (GCSE)

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An Inspector Calls mind map explained

Plot

The whole play takes place in one evening in the Birlings' dining room, as each character's link to Eva Smith is revealed in turn.

Act 1: The Inspector Arrives

The Birlings celebrate Sheila's engagement to Gerald Croft, and Mr Birling boasts that war will not happen and the Titanic is unsinkable. Inspector Goole arrives to investigate the suicide of Eva Smith. Mr Birling sacked her after she led a strike for higher wages, and Sheila had her dismissed from Milwards department store out of jealousy.

Act 2: Gerald and Mrs Birling

Gerald admits he had an affair with Eva, then calling herself Daisy Renton, and ended it. Sheila hands back the engagement ring. Mrs Birling admits she refused Eva's appeal to her charity, although Eva was pregnant, and blames the father of the child.

Act 3: Eric's Confession

Eric confesses he made Eva pregnant and stole money from his father's business to support her. The Inspector gives his final speech about shared responsibility and leaves.

The Final Twist

Gerald finds there is no Inspector Goole on the police force, and the infirmary says no girl has died. The parents relax, but Sheila and Eric stay changed. Then the phone rings: a girl has just died and a police inspector is on his way.

Characters

Eva Smith, also known as Daisy Renton, never appears on stage. She stands for every working-class person harmed by the selfishness of the powerful.

Inspector Goole

A mysterious moral authority who controls the questioning, dealing with one line of inquiry at a time. He speaks for Priestley's message of social responsibility, and his name, which sounds like "ghoul", hints that he may be something other than a real policeman.

Mr Birling

A self-important factory owner who cares about profit, reputation and a knighthood. His confident predictions about war and the Titanic are wrong, and he refuses to accept any blame.

Mrs Birling

Cold and snobbish, and socially superior to her husband. She refuses to accept responsibility and blames others, including, without realising it, her own son.

Sheila Birling

Begins as a spoilt young woman but accepts her guilt and changes the most. She grows sympathetic to the working class and represents hope in the younger generation.

Eric Birling

Drinks too much and treated Eva badly, but accepts responsibility after his confession and turns against his parents' attitudes.

Gerald Croft

An upper-class businessman engaged to Sheila. He shows some genuine feeling for Eva, but is quick to feel relieved when the Inspector seems to be a hoax.

Themes

The central ideas examiners expect you to explore, always linked to what Priestley wanted his audience to think.

Social Responsibility

We are all responsible for each other. The Inspector's message, and Priestley's socialism, stand against Mr Birling's belief that a man should look after only himself and his own.

Class

The upper and middle classes exploit and look down on the working class. Mrs Birling's "Girls of that class" shows her prejudice, while Eva embodies working-class suffering.

Age and Generations

The older Birlings refuse to change, while Sheila and Eric learn from what happened. Priestley places his hope for a fairer society in the young.

Gender

Eva is exploited by men with power. Sheila grows more independent through the play, while Mrs Birling upholds old expectations of women.

Guilt and Blame

Each character played a part in Eva's death, and each reacts differently to being blamed: the young accept it, the old deny it.

Key Quotes

Learn who says each line and which theme it supports. The play is in copyright, so revision guides quote it in short phrases like these.

"unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable"

Mr Birling, Act 1, about the Titanic. Dramatic irony: the audience knows it sank, so his confident views lose all authority.

"look after himself and his own"

Mr Birling, Act 1: "a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own". His selfish, capitalist outlook.

"they're people"

Sheila, Act 1: "But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people." Her growing sympathy for the working class.

"Girls of that class"

Mrs Birling, Act 2. Her snobbery and prejudice towards Eva.

"We are members of one body"

The Inspector, Act 3: "We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other." The central message of the play.

"fire and blood and anguish"

The Inspector, Act 3. A warning, written with hindsight in 1945, of the world wars to come if people do not learn.

Context

The gap between when the play is set and when it was written is the key to most of its meaning.

Written 1945, Set 1912

Written at the end of the Second World War and set before the First. The audience knows Birling's predictions are wrong. The play was first performed in Moscow in 1945 and in London in 1946.

Priestley's Socialism

Priestley wanted a fairer society. His wartime radio talks were hugely popular, and he helped found a socialist political party.

The Welfare State

Labour's 1945 election victory led to the welfare state and the NHS: a society built on the collective care the Inspector argues for.

Edwardian Class System

In 1912 Britain had a rigid class hierarchy. The wealthy held power and workers had few rights.

Women in 1912

Women could not vote, and working-class women had little protection at work, which left women like Eva especially vulnerable.

Language and Structure

How Priestley uses the form of the play to make his message land.

Well-Made Play

Three acts, one setting and continuous action, with revelations building one after another.

Lighting

The stage directions ask for lighting that is "pink and intimate" until the Inspector arrives, then "brighter and harder", as comfortable illusions give way to the truth.

Cliffhangers

Each act ends on a dramatic entrance or revelation, keeping the tension high.

Dramatic Irony

Birling's predictions about war and the Titanic make the audience doubt everything he says.

Cyclical Ending

The final phone call means the story could start again. The lesson has not been learned, and the consequences continue.

How to revise with this mind map

1. Write about Priestley, not just the characters. Exam questions ask how Priestley presents an idea, so explain what he wanted his 1945 audience to think, and how a character, a speech or a stage direction makes that happen.

2. Learn quotes from memory. For this play you usually answer an essay question with no extract to work from, so every quote you use has to come from memory. Use the Key Quotes branch, and link each one to a theme.

3. Use 1912 and 1945 together. Most strong answers show both dates at work: what the characters believe in 1912, and what the audience knows by 1945.

4. Compare the generations. Contrast how Sheila and Eric change with how Mr and Mrs Birling refuse to. It is one of the clearest routes into Priestley's message.

5. Make it yours. Build your own An Inspector Calls map in Mindmapi from your class notes, and ask the AI about any branch you are unsure of. The answer is saved into that branch's notes for next time.