

How far does Priestley present Mrs Birling as an unlikeable character?

Write about:

- what Mrs Birling says and does in the play
- how Priestley presents her by the ways he writes.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

Indicative content:

Examiners are encouraged to reward any valid interpretations. Answers might, however, include some of the following:

AO1

- What Mrs Birling says and does
- Sheila and Eric’s reactions to her throughout
- Her comments and reaction to the Inspector
- Her lack of progression even after the revelations OR her refusal to back down in the face of the Inspector’s questions

AO2

- Presentation of her high-handedness when dealing with the Inspector and her children
- Presentation of her snobbish approval of Gerald
- Presentation of her reactions to the revelation about her Committee
- The irony of her comments about the unborn child given that it would have been her own grandchild

AO3

- Ideas about social class and her superior class to her husband
- Ideas about non-acceptance of guilt/ blame
- Her loyalty to her husband’s view of the how the world works
- Her alacrity in welcoming the news about the non-existence of the Inspector and her imagined despair when final phone-call is made

Mark	AO	Typical features	How to arrive at a mark
Level 6 <i>Convincing, critical analysis and exploration</i> 26–30 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical, exploratory, conceptualised response to task and whole text • Judicious use of precise references to support interpretation(s) 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate’s response is likely to be a critical, exploratory, well-structured argument. It takes a conceptualised approach to the full task supported by a range of judicious references. There will be a fine-grained and insightful analysis of language and form and structure supported by judicious use of subject terminology. Convincing exploration of one or more ideas/perspectives/contextual factors/interpretations.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 5 and be starting to demonstrate elements of exploratory thought and/or analysis of writer’s methods and /or contexts.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of writer’s methods with subject terminology used judiciously • Exploration of effects of writer’s methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by specific, detailed links between context/text/task 	
Level 5 <i>Thoughtful, developed consideration</i> 21–25 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughtful, developed response to task and whole text • Apt references integrated into interpretation(s) 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate’s response is likely to be thoughtful, detailed and developed. It takes a considered approach to the full task with references integrated into interpretation; there will be a detailed examination of the effects of language and/or structure and/or form supported by apt use of subject terminology. Examination of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors, possibly including alternative interpretations/deeper meanings.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 4 and be starting to demonstrate elements of thoughtful consideration and/or examination of writer’s methods and/or contexts.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination of writer’s methods with subject terminology used effectively to support consideration of methods • Examination of effects of writer’s methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughtful consideration of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors shown by examination of detailed links between context/text/task 	

Level 4 <i>Clear understanding</i> 16–20 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, explained response to task and whole text Effective use of references to support explanation 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be clear, sustained and consistent. It takes a focused response to the full task which demonstrates clear understanding. It uses a range of references effectively to illustrate and justify explanation; there will be clear explanation of the effects of a range of writer's methods supported by appropriate use of subject terminology. Clear understanding of ideas/perspectives/contextual factors.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 3 and be starting to demonstrate elements of understanding and/or explanation of writer's methods and/or contexts.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear explanation of writer's methods with appropriate use of relevant subject terminology Understanding of effects of writer's methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear understanding of ideas/perspectives/ contextual factors shown by specific links between context/text/task 	
Level 3 <i>Explained, structured comments</i> 11–15 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some explained response to task and whole text References used to support a range of relevant comments 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be explanatory in parts. It focuses on the full task with a range of points exemplified by relevant references from the text; there will be identification of effects of a range of writer's methods supported by some relevant terminology. Explanation of some relevant contextual factors.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate will have Level 2 and be starting to explain and/or make relevant comments on writer's methods and/or contexts.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explained/relevant comments on writer's methods with some relevant use of subject terminology Identification of effects of writer's methods on reader 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some understanding of implicit ideas/ perspectives/contextual factors shown by links between context/text/task 	
Level 2 <i>Supported, relevant comments</i> 6–10 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported response to task and text Comments on references 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be relevant and supported by some explanation. It will include some focus on the task with relevant comments and some supporting references from the text. There will be identification of effects of deliberate choices made by writer with some reference to subject terminology. Awareness of some contextual factors.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate's response will have Level 1 and be starting to focus on the task and/or starting to show awareness of the writer making choices and/or awareness of contexts.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of writers' methods Some reference to subject terminology 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some awareness of implicit ideas/contextual factors 	
Level 1 <i>Simple, explicit comments</i> 1–5 marks	AO1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple comments relevant to task and text Reference to relevant details 	<p>At the top of the level, a candidate's response is likely to be narrative and/or descriptive in approach. It may include awareness of the task and provide appropriate reference to text; there will be simple identification of method with possible reference to subject terminology. Simple comments/responses to context, usually explicit.</p> <p>At the bottom of the level, a candidate's response will show some familiarity with the text.</p>
	AO2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of writer making deliberate choices Possible reference to subject terminology 	
	AO3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple comment on explicit ideas/contextual factors 	
0 marks	Nothing worthy of credit/nothing written		

Assessment of AO4

AO4 will be assessed on **Section A** only. The performance descriptors are provided below.

Performance descriptor	Marks awarded
<p>High performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with consistent accuracy, and consistently use vocabulary and sentence structures to achieve effective control of meaning.</p>	4 marks
<p>Intermediate performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with considerable accuracy, and use a considerable range of vocabulary and sentence structures to achieve general control of meaning.</p>	2–3 marks
<p>Threshold performance: In the context of the level of demand of the question, learners spell and punctuate with reasonable accuracy, and use a reasonable range of vocabulary and sentence structures; any errors do not hinder meaning in the response.</p>	1 mark

Where a candidate writes nothing or fails to meet threshold performance they should receive 0 marks.

Response 1

Priestley presents Mrs Birling as an unlikeable character quite often. Mrs Birling and two other workers decide if they can help people in need if urgent and if there is a reason too. Ms Smith Eva went to Mrs Birling for help because she was pregnant and she had no money to be able to take care of her and her son. Ms Eva explained her situation to Mrs Birling and Mrs Birling refuses to help a pregnant woman. Mrs Birling can be quite an unlikeable character in this situation because she refuses to help a poor woman and says that her drunk husband should now decide what to do next and that is his duty to take care of his family. In this situation Mrs Birling just killed an innocent woman and her child when they asked for help. This shows that she didn't care about her at all even though she has kids herself.

The next situation where Mrs Birling is shown as an unlikeable character is when inspector goole came to the house to speak about the death of Eva Smith and Mrs Birling acts in an aggressive and loud character towards inspector goole because she thinks that inspector goole is trying to blame them for the murder of Eva Smith. When the inspector gets to Mrs Birling's part, she then remembers that she told that girl to leave when she needed the most help. When Mrs Birling explains her side of the story, she says "girls of that class" don't deserve help. In this situation Mrs Birling acts in a very capitalist way. I say this because she is discriminating her class just because Mrs Birling is at an upper class. By her saying that quote shows that she has no right in having that job because she didn't help an innocent woman because of her class.

Priestley presents her as a character that had a lot of power in what she does and comes from a very high standard class and always needs to maintain that class. But at the same time Priestley describes her as not having much power at home because mostly the men are in power at home.

Mrs Birling also carries on trying to defend herself and her family by saying that it is not her fault that Eva Smith died even though she knows that she was a part of it. this just shows that she has no character what so ever and that she only cares about her own and doesn't have a heart to help people in urgent need.

Priestley also presents her (Mrs Birling) as having the most power at her job because she made the final decision and she spoke a lot more to Eva Smith than her partners and was also quite rude in the way she spoke to Eva Smith about her drunk boyfriend should deal with it.

[COMMENT] **[MARK]**

Response 2

In *An Inspector Calls*, JB Priestley uses the character of Mrs Birling to portray a typical higher-class woman. In multiple occasions in the play, Mrs Birling (Sybil) is presented as dismissive and a snob. This behaviour is evident from the very start of the play where she tells off her husband for thanking the chef in front of a guest, Gerald. She says "Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things." This authoritative tone of Mrs Birling shows that she takes pride in her social respectability and so wants her whole family to not ruin it. Mrs Birling is from a higher social status than Mr Birling so she is socially superior. This is a reason why she is telling off Mr Birling as well. We learn that she takes high responsibility in social etiquette, which are the ways society expects you to behave.

In the same conversation, JB Priestley presents Mrs Birling as traditional in the lines "Sheila, the things you girls pick up these days." Here it is clear that Sybil is quite ashamed of the language that her daughter is using because it is not sophisticated and not how the higher class should talk. The repeated telling off of two members in her family echoes and emphasises her social superiority. The collective noun "girls" shows that Mrs Birling is distancing herself from them and is appalled that Sheila is part of them, and not behaving traditionally. This again shows that Mrs Birling is a bit of a snob and so presents her as an unlikeable character.

When the Inspector arrives and begins interrogating the family members, both Mr and Mrs Birling tried to use a commanding tone and their social influence to get him to leave but he does not. As each character's acts are revealed, Mrs Birling repeatedly shows no sympathy for Eva Smith. This echoes her social class because she as a higher class woman was not expected to feel sympathy for the lower class person. This however contrast with the charity that Mrs Birling runs for woman in need. Therefore, the audience can think that Mrs Birling is not running the charity for the good of lower class woman but more to earn social respect and show off her status. This presents her as an unlikeable character because she is selfish, self centred and doesn't really care about the good of those in lower classes.

When Gerald confesses that he had Eva Smith, but at the time known as Daisy Renton (with Renton suggesting (renting and prostitution), as a mistress, Mrs Birling is appalled as says "that's disgusting". Here, Mrs Birling's dismissive attitude is showing that she is totally against the idea of men having mistresses but she doesn't further accuse Gerald, which could suggest that she is aware it happens with higher class men and so accepts it. When she is interrogated by the Inspector, Mrs Birling repeatedly lies and tries to avoid the truth but the Inspector starts asking deliberate questions to prevent her from doing this. This behaviour presents Mrs Birling as a snob and shows off her higher class attitude because she is trying to avoid the truth and make it suit her. When she finally does reveal that she "used her influence" to deny Eva Smith from receiving help at her charity she says "unlike the other three, I am not ashamed of what I did". Here Mrs Birling is distancing herself from the rest of the family to try and keep up her respectability. By doing this, she is once again presented as a snob and it suggests that Mrs Birling feels more strongly towards building up and protecting her social respect than her care for her family. This is further emphasised later in the play when Eric says "You never loved me". This quote provides evidence to Mrs Birling's attitude towards her family because it states that she never showed love towards her children. Therefore, due to her lack of motherly responsibilities and love that every child deserves to receive, she is presented as an unlikable character.

Mrs Birling tries to blame someone else to avoid her reputation being ruined. When she confesses that she prevented Eva Smith from receiving help, she begins blaming the father who "impregnated" Eva Smith. The Inspector's cleverness is showed in this part of the play because he has laid a trap for Mrs Birling and she has fallen straight into it. This suggests that Mrs Birling is not very smart, unlike Sheila who realises and tries to warn her but Sybil doesn't listen. Mrs Birling says that the father should make a "public confession" and that there should be "a scandal" about this. This echoes to her dismissive tone as she is again trying to blame someone else. She doesn't even think that the man could be her son and this is being she is of too high of a class that she can't even imagine that. When she does find out, she bursts into tears and can't bear what her son has done. In this situation, the audience will feel some sympathy towards her but others (especially lower class audience) will think that she deserves this for her unhumanly attitudes to the lower class. This attitude is evident when she says "a girl of that sort". Here she is referring to Eva but is distancing her and showing no sympathy to her situation by classing her in a group of people who are not appreciated by society. As a result of this, she is seen as an unlikeable character.

When Sybil finds out that the Inspector is a hoax, she instantly forgets all that had happened that evening and goes back to what she was doing earlier on. By showing no remorse for Eva Smith through the character of Mrs Birling, JB Priestley is suggesting that there is no chance that the higher class can change to be able to have equal rights and equal morals. He speaks to his audience through the voice of the Inspector where he says "We are all members of one body". This states that we are all the same kind, we are all human beings, so everyone needs to treat each other equally and as they would be liked to be treated. JB Priestley contrast Mrs Birling's character with Sheila's to show that there is hope in the younger generation for change. This is evident when Sheila says "between us we have killed a girl". This shows that Sheila feels strongly guilty for her actions and shows remorse but Mrs Birling doesn't accept this. In fact she criticizes Mr Birling for not interrogating the Inspector at the start, or letting her question him at the start of the evening. This emphasises how Mrs Birling has behaved throughout the course of the play and shows that she has not changed one bit. This presents her as unlikeable because she is showing no sympathy for Eva and JB Priestley has intentionally made the character of Mrs Birling unlikeable to show that there is no hope in the older generation for changing and accepting moral views, but there is hope in the younger generation.

[COMMENT] [MARK]