

**WILD
RICE**

WRITTEN BY
J. B. PRIESTLEY

DIRECTED BY
GLEN GOEI



LEARNING RESOURCE PACK

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ABOUT THE PLAY



Synopsis

In a comfortable middle-class home, a family sits down to a celebratory dinner. But their evening is cut short by the unexpected arrival of an Inspector. He brings news of the tragic death of a young woman.

As the Inspector investigates, tensions escalate – threatening to shatter the very foundations on which entire lives and identities have been built. What crime has been committed here? Who is guilty? And who isn't?

Written with startling prescience by J.B. Priestley in 1945, *An Inspector Calls* is more relevant than ever today. A riveting clash of murder and morality, class and conscience, Priestley's classic play asks its characters – and today's audiences – to take a good, hard look at the troubling disparities in the world brought about by power, privilege and poverty.

Join Wild Rice for this thrilling new production of *An Inspector Calls*, which has been daringly reimaged by director Glen Goei and his top-notch creative team of Singapore's finest theatre-makers. What more is there to this family than meets the eye?

Creative & Production Team

Playwright **J.B. Priestley**

Director **Glen Goei**

Composer & Sound Designer **Julian Wong**

Set Designer **Wong Chee Wai**

Lighting Designer **James Tan**

Costume Designer **Leonard Augustine Choo**

Prop Designer **Joyce Gan**

Hair Designer **Ashley Lim**

Make-Up Designer **Bobbie Ng**

Cast

Inspector Goole played by **Ghafir Akbar**

Mr Arthur Ling played by **Lim Kay Siu**

Mrs Sybil Ling by **Serene Chen**

Eric Ling played by **Dennis Sofian**

Sheila Ling played by **Yap Yi Kai**

Gerald Kuok played by **Benjamin Chow**

Edna played by **Siobhan Covey**

The Playwright: J.B. Priestley



John Boynton Priestley was pre-eminently a dramatist and a novelist. Many of his works have become 20th century literary classics, among them *The Good Companions*, *Angel Pavement*, *Lost Empires*, *When We are Married*, *An Inspector Calls* and *Time and the Conways*. But he was undoubtedly the most versatile writer of his time, producing essays, short stories, verse, literary criticism, social histories, travel books and film scripts, as well as an opera libretto and an autobiography. He was also a practitioner in, and an enthusiast for, painting and music.

Away from the arts Priestley played many roles as a political activist and commentator; a campaigner for nuclear disarmament and public lending right; a cultural ambassador; and a student of time and of dreams. He once, memorably, became an actor in one of his own plays and stood as a Parliamentary candidate in the 1945 General Election. It may be argued that in literary, social and political terms he was very much 'a man for all seasons'.

PLOT POINTS

These are the plot points from the show, revealed in sequence of the story.



Mr Arthur Ling

Mr Ling had Eva Sim fired from his factory – Ling and Company, after she was involved in a strike requesting for more wages. She was instrumental in leading the strikes, and because of that, Mr Ling fired her.



Sheila Ling

Sheila came across Eva at Milwards. Sheila thought that Eva Sim had smiled when she tried on the dress that didn't suit her. This made Sheila upset, and she had the manager fire Eva from the job.



Gerald Kuok

Gerald first met Eva Sim / Daisy Goh at the Palace Bar. Gerald supported her by finding her a place to stay and during the summer, they began having an affair. This was the reason why Gerald did not see Sheila during that time.



Mrs Sybil Ling

Mrs Sybil Ling refused to offer Eva Sim / Daisy Goh any support when she came to the Chinese Women's Charitable Association for help. Eva / Daisy had introduced herself as Mrs Ling when she first came to the charity. Mrs Sybil Ling was insulted at this, and pressed Eva / Daisy with questions. Mrs Sybil Ling eventually found out that Eva had lied about her name, and as such, Mrs Sybil Ling did not believe her story, and sent her away.



Eric Ling

Eric met Eva Sim / Daisy Goh when he was out drinking at the Palace Bar. They slept together, and Eva / Daisy became pregnant. They were not in love with each other, and knew that marriage was not an option for them. Nevertheless, Eric helped Eva / Daisy out by providing her with money. However, when she discovered that the money Eric provided had been stolen, she refused to accept any more money from Eric.

INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES

Call of Duty

Part murder mystery, part morality play, *An Inspector Calls* challenges us to think about our moral duties and obligations to one another. What inspired J.B. Priestley to write this psychological thriller with a social conscience? Read on to find out!

By Shawne Wang



Close to 80 years after its premiere in 1945, J.B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* has become one of the world's great dramatic classics – a play that continues to be widely read, studied and performed all over the world today.

There are many reasons for its enduring popularity. Some appreciate Priestley's sharp wit and keen insight in introducing audiences to the wealthy family whose

celebratory dinner is interrupted by the arrival of a mysterious Inspector. Others find the intriguing beginnings of a turn towards post-modern or absurdist theatre in Priestley's play, which daringly experiments with form, genre and the concept of time within the conventional structure of a drawing-room drama.

But, above all, *An Inspector Calls* remains deeply relevant because of the timelessness of the themes it explores. Through the Inspector's interrogations of one affluent family, Priestley challenged audiences then and now to think about issues like class, privilege, power, morality and social responsibility.

What inspired Priestley to write so powerfully about what we all, as individuals, owe one another? How did he come to believe, so passionately, that the best way forward is for us each to take better care of others - especially those who are less able to take care of themselves?

Priestley's life-long empathy for the less fortunate was shaped by his own experiences growing up in Bradford in West Yorkshire, England. He saw for himself the ravages of rapid, unchecked industrialisation. Within the span of just a few decades, Bradford had gone from being a rural market town in the early 1800s, to a populous city teeming with coal mines and textile mills. This meant the creation of a growing underclass of people who worked long hours for low pay, barely surviving in squalid conditions, while the rich got richer and inequalities deepened.

"I have tried to make myself - and other people - aware of the harsh economic realities of our time," Priestley wrote in 1949. "Having been brought up on the edge of it, I knew what life was like 'back o' the mill'... I watched the smoke thicken and the millionaires who made it ride away. I saw broken old women creep back to the mills, and young men wither because there was no work for them to do and nobody wanted them. I saw the saddest waste of all, the waste of human life."

At the same time, the concepts of social responsibility and public spiritedness - of



Jonathan Priestley (in apron) serving meals to students in 1907

Photo: Science Museum Group Collection

helping others, especially the less privileged - were driven home, quite literally, by Priestley's father. As the headmaster of Green Lane Elementary School in Bradford, Jonathan Priestley was at the forefront of improving the health and wellbeing of children across the county. In 1907, Green Lane became the first school in the United Kingdom to offer free school meals to needy students.

The death and devastation wrought by the First World War (1914 - 1918), which

Priestley experienced first-hand as a volunteer in the trenches, reinforced his frustrations with what those in positions of power and authority could get away with. While he emerged physically unscathed by the war, Priestley bore its scars for the rest of his life – particularly the loss of almost all of his friends who had enlisted, and been sent to their deaths by generals who viewed them as disposable cannon fodder.



Portrait of the playwright as a soldier
Photo: Bradford District Museums and Galleries CBMDC

"I still feel today and must go on feeling until I die, the open wound, never to be healed, of my generation's fate, the best sorted out and slaughtered," Priestley wrote in 1962. "The tradition of an officer class, defying both imagination and common sense, killed most of my friends as surely as if those cavalry generals had come out of the chateau with polo mallets and beaten their brains out."

After returning from the war and completing his studies at Cambridge University on a grant, Priestley began to

gain a reputation as a man of letters. In his prolific writings, and his subsequent stint as a popular radio broadcaster on the BBC, he continued to draw attention to the concepts of social justice and democracy.

"One must stop thinking in terms of property and power and begin thinking in terms of community and creation," he said in one of his broadcasts in July 1940. "Property is the old-fashioned way of thinking of a country as a thing, and a collection of things in that thing, all owned by certain people and constituting property; instead of thinking of a country as the home of a living society with the community itself as the first test. All of these concerns – the importance of



Priestley as the host of *Postscripts*, a hugely popular wartime broadcast on the BBC
Photo: BBC

each of us taking care of one another, of appreciating the intrinsic value of other human beings – came to the fore when Priestley wrote *An Inspector Calls* in the space of a week in the autumn of 1944.

In what has become his best-known play, as well as the cornerstone of his legacy, Priestley made a powerful appeal for a better, fairer society built on a foundation of collective responsibility:

*"We don't live alone.
We are all members of one
body. We are responsible
for each other."*
- An Inspector Calls (1945)

It is a clarion call that has resonated for generations, and remains profoundly pertinent today.

After all, we live in a world more sharply divided in terms of wealth distribution and income inequality than Priestley could ever have imagined. According to an Oxfam report published in January 2023, the richest one percent of the world's population laid claim to nearly two-thirds of all new wealth generated since 2020 (which amounts to approximately US\$42 trillion) – almost twice as much money as the bottom 99 percent.

"While ordinary people are making daily sacrifices on essentials like food, the super-rich have outdone even their wildest dreams," said Gabriela Bucher, Executive Director of Oxfam International. "Just two years in, this decade is shaping up to be the best yet for billionaires – a roaring '20s boom for the world's richest."

These stark socioeconomic truths serve to remind us that the questions Priestley asked throughout his life, the same questions that haunt and underpin *An Inspector Calls*, matter more than ever before.

What happens when the accumulation of wealth and comfort takes precedence over the preservation of human life and dignity? Can we really make meaningful progress as a society, as a civilisation, if we prize the individual over the common good? What does it say about us if we live in a way that leaves the most vulnerable among us behind?

And, if we don't learn the lesson of Priestley's masterpiece, will we – as the Inspector himself posits in the play – have to one day be "taught it in fire and blood and anguish"?

DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

General Discussion Points

Here are some questions that may help you organise your thoughts after watching the performance. You may even choose to respond to them through other means - like creating a tableaux (a frozen picture) to any of the questions below:

1. What are some of the most memorable moments in the play for you? What made these moments stand out?
2. What is the play's main message or theme, and how is it conveyed through the characters and plot?
3. Was the play how you expected it to be?
4. Do any of the characters in the play manage to redeem themselves or learnt a lesson from their actions? If so, who and why do you think so?
5. During the show, the characters brought up the fact that they were celebrating a happy occasion before the Inspector showed up. Why do you think the playwright, chose to set the story on this occasion?
6. Who (*or even perhaps what*) is Inspector Goole? What role does he play in the the story?
7. Think about how this play was staged - the set, props, lighting, sound and costumes. Why do you think the creative team made those decisions? How did it affect the atmosphere of the play?

Themes and Issues: Social Responsibility & Accountability

Discussion Prompts

1. "It is our responsibility to help and support others." Do you agree with this statement?
2. How does the play, *An Inspector Calls* explore the idea that social responsibility extends beyond individual actions to encompass broader societal issues such as poverty and inequality?
3. How can the message of *An Inspector Calls* be applied to our own lives and communities in Singapore?
4. Should students participate in Community Involvement Programmes (CIP) at school? Why?

Key Ideas

Social Responsibility

The concept of individuals (and businesses) taking the responsibility to act in the best interest of their society and environment while working for their betterment or profit.

Responsibility

The state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or of having control over someone.

Moral

The standards of behaviour, and principles of right and wrong.

Values

The principles that help you to decide what is right and wrong, and how to act in various situations.

Moral Obligation

A duty which one owes, and which he ought to perform, but which he is not legally bound to fulfil.

Social Impact

The effect that an individual or organisation has on society and the communities in which they operate.

Underprivileged

(Of a person or a group of people) not enjoying the same standard of living or rights as the majority of people in a society.

Social Welfare System

A system that offers assistance to individuals and families in need, with such programs as health care assistance, food stamps, and unemployment compensation.

Cultural Values

The core principles and ideals upon which an entire community exists and protect and rely upon for existence and harmonious relationship.

Community Involvement

The active participation of individuals and organisations in their local community, including volunteering, donating, and supporting local businesses and organisations.

Philanthropy

The practice of giving money or resources to support charitable causes and promote social responsibility.

Freedom of Choice

An individual's opportunity and autonomy to perform an action without constraint.

Consequences

A result of a particular action or situation, often one that is bad or not convenient:

Accountability

Being responsible for what you do and being able to give a satisfactory reason for it.

Sustainable Development

Balancing economic, social, and environmental factors to promote long-term growth and improve the well-being of current and future generations.

Suggested Activities

Debate: The Guilty Ones

Ask the class which character they think is the most responsible for what happened to Eva Sim / Daisy Goh. Group the students up based on their responses, and ask them to share their reasons. Inform the students that they will present their reasons to the entire class.

After each group has presented, ask the class again which character they think is most responsible and if anyone has changed their minds after the presentations.

Think and Share: The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility

Ask the students if they have heard of the term social responsibility and what it means to them. Write their responses on the whiteboard.

Explain that social responsibility refers to the ethical and moral obligations that individuals and organisations have to contribute to the betterment of society.

Provide the students with two case studies (listed below), and ask them to analyse them:

- The Body Shop: The Body Shop is a cosmetics company that is committed to ethical sourcing and fair trade. They source their ingredients from around the world in a way that supports local communities and protects the environment.
- TOMS Shoes: TOMS Shoes is a company that donates a pair of shoes to a child in need for every pair of shoes purchased. They also have programs that provide eye care, clean water, and safe births to people in need around the world.

Ask the class to think and reflect on the following questions:

- What are the actions taken by the company / organisation to demonstrate social responsibility?
- What impact have these actions had on society and the environment?
- How could these actions inspire others to be more socially responsible?
- How could they consider applying social responsibility in their own lives?

Themes and Issues: Class & Inequality

Discussion Prompts

1. In the play, the characters come from different social classes. How does each character's social class affect their behaviour, values and beliefs?
2. How do the characters from different social classes interact with each other? What are the power dynamics at play?
3. How does the play highlight the inequalities and injustices faced by the working-class characters, such as Eva Sim / Daisy Goh? Do these inequalities and injustices still exist in the world today?
4. What is the Inspector's role in the play, and how does he challenge the upper-class characters' sense of entitlement and superiority?

Key Ideas

Class

A group of people within a society that possess similar social and economic status. They are most often divided into a few strata or classes. The most common division uses the following terms: *upper class*, *upper-middle class*, *middle class*, *working class*, *lower class*.

Working Class

Often used in reference to the members of the working population who are employed in unskilled or semi-skilled manual or industrial work

Classism

Prejudice, discrimination or oppression based on a person's social class or perceived social status

Privilege

Any advantage that an individual has over others that could be due to various factors such as their race, gender, education level, family background, etc.

Social Privilege

The advantages and benefits that individuals receive in society based on their social status, identity, or background.

Social Connections or Social Networks

Relationships with others that help to maintain or enhance one's social status and reputation

Social Capital

Networks, relationships and social structures that give an individual access to resources, information, opportunities and support. These can come from family, friends, being a member of a club or alumni association, etc.

Social Mobility

The ability of any person to be able to move up or down the social hierarchy based on factors like education, occupation or income

Structural Inequality

Systemic patterns of inequality that are built into the social, economic and political structure of a society

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

The social standing or class of someone that is influenced by a combination of their family background, education, income and occupation.

Social Status

A person's position or rank that an individual holds within a society or social group - this is based on various factors such as income, occupation and education. In some cases, it can also be determined by one's family or background.

Intersectionality

The interconnected nature of social categories such as class, gender, race, and how they can compound and intersect to create experiences of privilege or oppression

Suggested Activities

Think & Share: How Do We Treat Our Service Staff?

From time to time, Singapore sees viral videos of customers mistreating service staff and exerting their power over them, much like what Sheila did to Eva in the play. These videos of course, only reflect the interactions that happened to be caught on camera. There are many more instances of these interactions that have gone undetected.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think these incidents take place?
2. What can we do to show more appreciation for our service staff?
3. What should we do when someone we know is being rude or mean to a service staff?
4. What are the appropriate channels of feedback that we can use in response to a service that we have received?

Debate: The Haves vs the Have Nots

In *An Inspector Calls*, the socioeconomic status and class of the characters had a big impact on the values, beliefs and behaviours of the characters. It shaped how they viewed the world and what they believed in.

Divide the class into two. One half will represent the 'Haves' or those in the upper class (such as the Lings and the Kuoks) and the other will represent the 'Have Nots' in the working class (such as Eva/Daisy, Edna and possibly the Inspector).

Imagine that you will be debating from the perspective of these characters on the quote,

'It is not where you start out in life that determines whether or not you will achieve success.'

Each of you will write a short speech on why you believe the above statement is true or not true. Remember to consider the perspectives, personal histories and motivations of the characters.

Find Out More: A Talk by Associate Professor Teo Yeo Yenn (recommended for Upper Sec and above)

Assoc Professor Teo Yeo Yenn is a sociologist whose research focuses on poverty and inequality. She wrote and published a collection of essays, *This Is What Inequality Looks Like*.

She also produced a video, *Growing Up in an Unequal Society* where she shares some of her key findings from her research on inequality in Singapore. Watch the video to find out more.

You can watch the video by clicking the image link below:



Source: Screen grab from 'Growing Up In An Unequal Society' by Teo Yeo Yenn on the ethos books YouTube Channel. Video link: <https://youtu.be/N9G5nKnpTWA>

After watching the video, share your thoughts and insights with your classmates. If you are interested to find out more, do consider reading her book, *This Is What Inequality Looks Like*.

For Drama Clubs

The Inspectors Final Speech

Near the ending of the play, the Inspector gives a speech to the other characters about what they did before he exits. Ask your students to take turns trying the speech themselves. Ask them to think about the delivery, tone and emotions they may use when delivering the speech.

"I don't need to know any more. Neither do you. This girl killed herself and died a horrible death. But each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it. (He looks from one to other, carefully.) But then I don't think you ever will. Remember what you did, Mrs. Ling. You turned her away when she most needed help. You refused her even the pitiable little bit of organised charity you had in your power to grant her. Remember what you did.

Just used her for the end of a stupid drunken evening, as if she was an animal, a thing, not a person. No, you won't forget. (Looks at SHEILA.)

You're offering the money at the wrong time, Mr. Ling. (He makes move as if concluding the session, possibly shutting up note-book, etc. Then surveys them sardonically.) No, I don't think any of you will forget. Nor that young man, Gerald, though he had some affection for her at least, and made her happy for a time. Well, Eva's gone. You can't do her any more harm. And you can't do her any good now, either. You can't even say, "I'm sorry, Eva."

One Eva has gone - but there are millions and millions of Evas and Johns still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, with what we think and say and do. We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. We don't live alone. Good night."

Some questions to ask your students to reflect on after delivering the speech:

- Does trying out the speech reveal any discoveries about the Inspector or any of the other characters?
- How did delivering the speech make you feel, and what emotions did you experience while delivering it?
- What was the message the Inspector was trying to communicate during this speech? Did you feel you effectively communicated the message and emotions of the Inspector to the audience?

FURTHER RESOURCES

This section contains links and information to additional resources that you may use to supplement the students learning.

The Works of J. B. Priestley

J. B. Priestley's wrote plays, as well as both fiction and non-fiction books. Many of his works have become 20th century literary classics. Some of his notable works include:

- *The Good Companions*
- *Angel Pavement*
- *Lost Empires*
- *When We are Married*
- *Time and the Conways*

Websites

- **The Official J.B. Priestley Website:** <https://jbpriestley.co.uk/>

On the official website, you can find a more information about J.B. Priestley, his life, photos the books that are currently in print, as well as a list of his works, his plays, and fiction and non-fiction books.

- **Minimum Income Standards:** <https://whatsenough.sg/>

A group of researchers in Singapore who are undertaking research on the Minimum Income Standard , and are part of a network of countries carrying out similar research around the world.

The Minimum Income Standard (MIS) refers to a research method establishing what incomes households require in order to reach a 'minimum' standard of living, appropriate for the place and time in which they live. It is reached by talking in depth to groups of members of the public, asking them to agree what goods and services households require in order to have such a living standard. The results are used to construct minimum budgets for different household types. MIS is about more than just what is needed to survive, and refers to what is required to be part of society, according to definitions produced in each country by members of the public.

Podcast

- ***What is “a basic standard of living”? A deeper research and methodological dive into the Minimum Income Standard Study (with Drs Ng Kok Hoe and Two You Yen) by socialservicesg:*** <https://open.spotify.com/episode/0nSp5PIWODeaTa8ZakMYdL?si=IH8qrLbXSR6FjsZGxdMLdQ>

socialservice.sg is a website, podcast, and newsletter dedicated to social service research, practice, and policies in Singapore. It is run by Jin Yao Kwan.

Books

- ***This Is What Inequality Looks Like* by Teo You Yenn**

What is poverty? What is inequality? How are they connected? How are they reproduced? How might they be overcome? Why should we try?

The way we frame our questions shapes the way we see solutions. This book does what appears to be a no-brainer task, but one that is missing and important: it asks readers to pose questions in different ways, to shift the vantage point from which they view ‘common sense,’ and in so doing, to see themselves as part of problems *and* potential solutions. This is a book about how seeing poverty entails confronting inequality. It is about how acknowledging poverty and inequality leads to uncomfortable revelations about our society and ourselves. And it is about how once we see, we cannot, must not, unsee.

Programme Booklet

- ***An Inspector Calls 2023 Programme Booklet:*** <https://bit.ly/AIC-programme>

The programme booklet provides information about the production, casts members and the team involved, the director’s message as well as an article sharing about J.B. Priestley’s inspiration behind the work.

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