Historical Events:
The play is set just two years shy of the First World War and Priestley decides to set it here, rather than in the midst of the war, to give audiences the advantage over the family as to what is about to come and all of the post-war changes made.

- After the war there was a great deal of questioning being done regarding how much power and leadership the upper class held which didn't happen before the war.
- Developments in gender equality were made; by 1928 all men and women over 21 were allowed to vote, which spread the power out more evenly.
- The labor vs capitalist tensions came to a head in 1926 when workers struck nationally (The General Strike) which forced many major industries to stop temporarily.
- The Depression from 1930 saw a massive increase in unemployment and terrible poverty for workers.
- After both world wars there was a need for a fairer society which many more now worked for with socialist and left-wing ideas becoming more and more popular.
- The Labour Party came into power in 1945 and the welfare system was greatly improved (The NHS was started in 1948).

The Titanic Era:
The play was written during the Titanic era and Mr Birling makes reference to the Titanic in the famous quote 'unsinkable...absolutely unsinkable'

- The Titanic was one of three ‘Olympic Class’ ships belonging to the White Star Line.
- These ships were significantly advanced for their time with progressive engineering, size, and speed.
- The ship was completed in only three years and was ready to sail from Southampton to New York with a variety of people seeking a better life in America.
- It's trip ended 4th April 1912 and tragically took over 1500 lives with it.
- The Titanic represented the luxury of the Edwardian era and foreshadowed the tragedy of World War One.
- The Titanic was viewed as indestructible and was seen as a symbol of strength, wealth and prosperity. It saw the loss of both rich and poor however the rich were more likely to survive due to the location of the liferafts.
An Inspector Calls: Social and Historical Context

The Edwardian Period:

Rules of Society: An Inspector Calls was first performed in 1945 but is set in 1912 (this falls into the Edwardian Period). It’s important to know what happened in between these years and why Priestley may have chosen to set the play in a different era. At this time, Britain was quite different from how it is now:

• The class system was a prominent and important way to separate people. Those with more money had more power. Due to the unfair situation, this placed the lower classes in, the Labour Party was formed in 1906 with the intentions of giving them a bigger voice and a fairer life.

• Women had no power. They were unable to own property and unable to vote. A woman spent her life under the control of men on which they wholeheartedly depended on – this would be their father in their early life and then their husband when they were married and their son(s)/brother(s) if they were widowed.

• Governmental help was very limited. With rich people voting the government into power, there wasn’t a government who cared enough about helping the lower classes to provide a voice, protection, or financial help. This meant that charities (such as the one that Sybil helped at) were so important to the lower classes.

Edwardian Era Key Facts:

• The Edwardian Era spans from the mid 1890’s to the breakout of World War One in 1914. It is named after the reign of King Edward VII (Seventh) which spanned from 1901 to 1910.

• In the early 1900’s there were significant political shifts regarding labourers and women who were becoming more and more involved in politics where they were previously excluded from it.

• Although there was still a strict social class structure, there was an increase in social mobility due to the changing economic system – this meant that people could change their social class easier rather than remaining in the same one that they were born into.

• As the disadvantaged people became more involved in politics, socialism became more popular as it focuses on helping the disadvantaged members of society.

• More economic opportunities were becoming available as the industry increased.
An Inspector Calls: Social and Historical Context

Edwardian Rules of Society:

- Poor people don’t possess any manners/class/sophistication/education.
- Poor people can never EVER become rich.
- The poor and rich can never join together in a relationship/friendship/work.
- Poor people should be grateful for all that they get from the rich.
- The poor are only there to do a job – not to be seen or heard.
- The poor worked for the rich.
- The rich can fire the poor without any questions or consequences.

Practise Questions:

1. Identify two incorrect predictions from Mr Birling and explain why they are wrong and how this changes the 's audience's opinion of him.

2. Mr Birling tells Gerald and Sheila that they’ll be marrying at "a very good time" – Would the 1946 audience agree? Do you? Why/why not?

3. Consider why Birling is wrong in his speech in Act one ("Just because the Kaiser..." to "in the Balkans.")

4. How were the British separated in Edwardian times and what was the social effects of this?

Anything you didn't feel totally comfortable with? Or just want to re-visit some of the key information in even greater depth?

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