

## Mr Birling's Speeches Group Activity

### Birling Excerpt One

*First, read your excerpt out loud in your groups. Then, discuss the following connection questions, annotating any ideas and reflections on your large group copy of the speech. After you have finished, transfer these ideas to your book or individual copy of the speech, so that you have them available for future reference.*

This excerpt runs from 'It's a pity Sir George and -' (top of p. 4) to 'lower costs and higher prices' (mid-bottom of p. 4).

### Connection Questions

1. Why might Sir George and Lady Croft be absent from the party? What does their absence suggest about society and class?
2. What does Birling state about Sheila and Gerald's future marital happiness? How is what he says for each of them different? What does this suggest about society?
3. Birling states that Gerald is 'just the kind of son-in-law' he's always wanted. What does he mean? Why might this be the case?
4. Birling ends his speech with an expressed desire for 'lower costs and higher prices'. What does this mean? What does this desire reveal about his character?
5. Which social values does Mr Birling express in this excerpt? How are these linked to his identity?
6. As a group, circle three key quotations from this excerpt and write an adjective that describes what each one says about Mr Birling (e.g. writing 'self-involved' or 'opportunistic' next to 'just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted').

### Birling Excerpt Two

*First, read your excerpt out loud in your groups. Then, discuss the following connection questions, annotating any ideas and reflections on your large group copy of the speech. After you have finished, transfer these ideas to your book or individual copy of the speech, so that you have them available for future reference.*

This excerpt runs from 'I just want to say this' (top of p. 6) to 'steadily increasing prosperity' (mid p. 6).

### Connection Questions

1. What does Mr Birling's request for Sheila's attention suggest about him? Why?
2. Birling describes himself as a 'hard-headed businessman'. What does this phrase mean? What does it suggest about what he values?
3. Birling claims to 'know what he's about'. What evidence can you see in this excerpt that throws this claim into doubt?
4. The working class in Britain and Ireland took to the streets in regular mass strike actions in a period known as 'The Great Labour Unrest' (1910-14). How do these strikes impact Birling's views on 'labour trouble'?
5. Which social values does Mr Birling express in this excerpt? How are these linked to his identity?
6. As a group, circle three key quotations from this extract and write an adjective that describes what each one says about Birling (e.g. writing 'unaware' or 'hypocritical' next to 'I don't often make speeches at you—').

## Mr Birling's Speeches Group Activity

### Birling Excerpt Three

*First, read your excerpt out loud in your groups. Then, discuss the following connection questions, annotating any ideas and reflections on your large group copy of the speech. After you have finished, transfer these ideas to your book or individual copy of the speech, so that you have them available for future reference.*

This excerpt runs from 'Eric: What about war?' (mid p. 6) to 'absolutely unsinkable' (mid p. 7).

### Connection Questions

1. How does Birling describe the chances of war? What do his ideas about war suggest about him?
2. Where else in the play so far does Birling make incorrect predictions? How does this make the audience perceive him?
3. How does Birling respond to Eric? What does his response suggest about their relationship?
4. How do you think Priestley wanted his audience to perceive 'hard-headed, practical [men] of business'? Why, based on what you know about Priestley and the historical context of the play?
5. Which social values does Mr Birling express in this excerpt? How are these linked to his identity?
6. As a group, circle three key quotations from this extract and write an adjective that describes what each one says about Birling (e.g. writing 'condescending' next to 'Eric. You've a lot to learn yet').

### Birling Excerpt Four

*First, read your excerpt out loud in your groups. Then, discuss the following connection questions, annotating any ideas and reflections on your large group copy of the speech. After you have finished, transfer these ideas to your book or individual copy of the speech, so that you have them available for future reference.*

This excerpt runs from 'That's what you've got to keep your eye on' (mid p. 7) to 'we've had experience – and we know' (bottom of p. 7). For your reference, Russia was not a socialist country in 1912.

### Connection Questions

1. Why does Priestley have Birling refer to 1940 in his speech? What is relevant about this time period?
2. What 'Capital versus Labour' agitations is Birling referring to? Whose side is he on? How do you know?
3. George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells were both writers who also believed in socialism. How would Birling's views as a capitalist have differed from theirs?
4. What experience does Birling claim to have had in this section of the play? Do you believe him? Explain your view.
5. Which social values does Mr Birling express in this excerpt? How are these linked to his identity?
6. As a group, circle three key quotations from this extract and write an adjective that describes what each one says about Birling (e.g. writing 'prejudiced' next to 'Russia, which will always be behindhand').

## Mr Birling's Speeches Group Activity

### Birling Excerpt Five

*First, read your excerpt out loud in your groups. Then, discuss the following connection questions, annotating any ideas and reflections on your large group copy of the speech. After you have finished, transfer these ideas to your book or individual copy of the speech, so that you have them available for future reference.*

This excerpt runs from '(solemnly) But this is the point' (bottom of p. 9) to 'We hear the sharp ring of a front door bell' (top of p. 10).

### Connection Questions

1. What does Mr Birling 'lecture' Eric and Gerald about in this speech? What does this suggest about him?
2. Mr Birling states that "now, ... things are so much easier". Given what you know about the historical context, how is Mr Birling incorrect? How does his statement make audience members and readers perceive him?
3. How does Mr Birling view the community in his speech? How is this linked to Priestley's views about capitalism?
4. Birling claims to have 'learnt in the good hard school of experience'. Given what you know about Birling's background and social situation, how might Mr Birling's claim be thrown into doubt?
5. Which social values does Mr Birling express in this excerpt? How are these linked to his identity?
6. As a group, circle three key quotations from this extract and write an adjective that describes what each one says about Birling (e.g. writing 'selfish' next to 'a man has to mind his own business and look after himself').