In the Inspector’s final speech he says ‘We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other.’

When An Inspector Calls was written (1944-45), the playwright, J.B. Priestley, was keen that the then Conservative government would be beaten by a Labour government instead.

Thatcher (Conservative Prime Minister in the 1980s) said in 1987, ‘There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour. People have got the entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There's no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation.’

Sort it out!

1. What is Thatcher’s viewpoint about individuals and their role in ‘society’? Sum up her viewpoint, then explain it to a partner.

2. What connection can you make between the quotation from the Inspector’s final speech and Thatcher’s viewpoint? Are they the same or opposite viewpoints?

3. Thatcher’s viewpoint is often taken out of context to suggest that Thatcher believed in selfish individualism, where the collective good is ignored. What else does she suggest about the relationship between individuals and the state?

Annotate the Inspector’s speech

1. Now look in detail at the Inspector’s final speech (below):

‘But just remember this. One Eva Smith has gone – but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, and 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. Good night.’
Politics and persuasion in the final speech

2. Highlight all the emotive vocabulary in the extract.

3. Now annotate the extract with any persuasive techniques you find (rule of three, personal pronouns etc.).

4. Explain how and why the Inspector's final speech is effective for the audience, whose voice we hear through his words, and what it might make them believe.

The Inspector thinks that ‘We are all responsible for each other.’ This is the opposite viewpoint to Thatcher’s! Priestley was putting forward a socialist point of view.

Stephen Warbeck (musical composer of a recent production of An Inspector Calls) was also attracted by the play’s vision of an alternative society: ‘In an era when the received orthodoxy of the party in government is that we all look after ourselves, my feeling is that most people do not actually believe that. Most people want to feel that they would be looked after and cared about by other people. And people do care about other people. I think that the Inspector’s final speech will probably have the hair standing up on the back of a lot of people’s necks just to hear somebody stand up in front of you and say that we have a responsibility for other people. It is exciting and reassuring at the same time.’

Some final questions for you …

1. How do you show you care for others?

2. Can you think of a situation when you have been cared for by someone else?

Discussion task

Now think of reasons why we should have a responsibility for others, and contrasting reasons why we should have responsibility for only ourselves instead. When you are ready, prepare a group discussion based on the topic:

To what extent do we have a responsibility for others, or should we be solely responsible for ourselves as individuals?