How does Priestley present selfishness and its effects in An Inspector Calls?

This is an example of a response that attained 16/30 marks. This would be an approximate Grade 4. I have enlarged the font to allow you to understand how much this might look like in average sized handwriting. There are 590 words in this response.

The writer presents selfishness in ‘An Inspector Calls’ by having Mrs Birling use harsh vocabulary. For example, when being questioned, Mrs Birling says “I have nothing to be ashamed of”. This quote shows that Mrs Birling is being selfish and thinks that she is more important than everybody else. Also, it suggests that she wants everyone to believe she had nothing to do with Eva Smith’s death. The word “nothing” shows that Mrs Birling is only thinking about herself in this matter. This is effective because it links to the context of the upper class being better than everyone else in society. Priestly might have done this with Mrs Birling to present her as a selfish and self-obsessed character. An audience of the time would not have been surprised at Mrs Birling’s selfishness because it would have been normal for someone of high standing and Capitalist to be like this. However, an audience now would be shocked at Mrs Birling’s behaviour because she is only thinking about her self.

Also, when Mrs Birling is being questioned, she admits that she got Eva Smith sacked from her job and was being selfish. Mrs Birling says “she called herself Mrs Birling what was I supposed to do?”. This shows that Mrs Birling is finally coming to terms that she was really selfish towards Eva Smith and may have gotten her to commit suicide. However this could show that Mrs Birling doesn’t care about what she has done and is still only thinking about herself. The rhetorical question “what was I supposed to do?” shows that Mrs Birling didn’t even think of the consequences of getting Eva Smith fired from her job were, because she only cared about her reputation. Furthermore, it suggests that Mrs Birling’s only choice was to get her fired, and that led to Eva’s suicide. Priestly may have done this to emphasise the effects on selfishness and what the consequences may be. In addition, Priestly could be putting across the message to think before you act. An audience of the time period would feel angry towards Mrs Birling because the consequences of her acts got someone killed. An audience today may react in the same way because Mrs Birling is presented in such a selfish way.

Priestley presents selfishness in ‘An Inspector Calls’ by having Gerald Croft, Sheila Birling’s husband to be, have an affair with Eva Smith. Gerald admits, whilst being questioned, that he went behind Sheila’s back and had an affair with the girl who committed suicide. This shows that Gerald is being selfish and unfaithful to his fiancé and this effected their relationship. Gerald says the words “it just happened”. This shows he was only thinking about himself and Eva, and not Sheila when he was going behind her back. However, this could show that Gerald is sorry for what he did and only loves Sheila. The only reason he is admitting his sins, is because the inspector is there, and this terrible act was on his conscience. The writer may have done this to show Gerald is selfish and thinks about only himself. A modern day audience would be disgusted by Gerald, because he has cheated on his fiancé. An audience at the time of the play’s release would feel anger towards Gerald because he has been so selfish and it effected his relationship with Sheila.