**Conflict/differences between the generations**

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| **The Old** (Mr and Mrs Birling) | **The Young** (Sheila and Eric) |
| The old are set in their ways. They are utterly confident that they are right and they see the young as foolish. | The young are open to new ideas. This is first seen early in Act 1 when both Eric and Sheila express sympathy for the strikers - an idea which horrifies Birling, who can only think of production costs and ignores the human side of the issue. |
| The old will do anything to protect themselves: Mrs Birling lies to the Inspector when he first shows her the photograph; Mr Birling wants to cover up a potential scandal. | The young are honest and admit their faults. Eric refuses to try to cover his part up, saying, "the fact remains that I did what I did." |
| They have never been forced to examine their consciences before and find they cannot do it now - as the saying goes, 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks.' | Sheila and Eric see the human side of Eva's story and are very troubled by their part in it. They do examine their consciences. |
| Mr and Mrs Birling have much to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they know they will lose everything. | Sheila and Eric have nothing to fear from the visit of the 'real' inspector because they have already admitted what they have done wrong, and will change. |

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