

Sydney Theatre Company presents

Waiting For Godot

By Samuel Beckett



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PRE-PRODUCTION EXERCISES

Searching for Meaning In Waiting 1

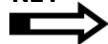
Only Words 2

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Education Resource written and compiled by Kerreen Ely-Harper

KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

PRODUCTION TITLE

Sydney Theatre Company Education Resources 2013

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ABOUT STCED

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CREATIVE TEAM

Director Tamás Ascher

Associate Director Anna Lengyel

Costume Designer Alice Babidge

Set Designer Zsolt Khell



CAST

Richard Roxburgh, Hugo Weaving

THEMES

Identity & Belonging

Existentialism

Absurdism

Act 1 A Country Road. A Tree. Evening.

Two homeless tramps ESTRAGON (GOGO) and VLADIMIR (DIDI) are waiting for Godot. He said they were to wait by a tree. They have been waiting so long they can't even remember when they started waiting. They are hoping he will explain to them the meaning of their existence. Vladimir declares it's all too much for one man to bear, the not knowing. They question whether or not they should repent even being born. They reminisce and re-tell old stories to pass the time.

Where is the tree they were supposed to meet him at? Are they in the wrong place? Estragon thinks they have been here before, possibly yesterday. He wants to share his dreams with Vladimir who protests he'd rather he keep them private. They consider hanging themselves. Vladimir offers a hungry Estragon a carrot. Taking his time he eats it.

Enter POZZO and LUCKY. Pozzo is driving Lucky like a large animal secured with a long rope. Lucky is Pozzo's slave. He is carrying a heavy bag, picnic basket and a large coat. Pozzo has a whip.

They ask if Pozzo is Godot. He confirms he is not. Pozzo is on his way to market to sell Lucky, who he refers to as his "pig", his "hog". Estragon questions what he intends to do with Lucky's bones. Pozzo becomes agitated by the question and says Estragon can have them if he wants. Vladimir is disgusted by the way Pozzo treats Lucky. Lucky is routinely commanded to follow his master's orders: "Stop", "Turn", "Stand back", "Dance", "Think". Finally Lucky breaks his silence, shouting a seemingly intelligible text. Only by seizing his hat, do they stop him speaking and 'thinking'. Pozzo kicks him and jerks his rope, reasserting his authority. Pozzo asks Estragon and Vladimir to help him get Lucky back on his feet. Pozzo loads Lucky up again with the bag and basket as he prepares for market. They all say goodbye a number of times, but no one moves. Pozzo cracks his whip and Lucky moves off. They exit.

The tramps return to waiting for Godot. A BOY enters and tells them he has a message from “Mr Godot”; that he will not be coming this evening but will come tomorrow. The boy looks familiar and Vladimir asks, “It wasn’t you came yesterday?” The boy says this is his first visit. They question him about how Mr Godot treats him. He reveals he also has a brother, who is beaten regularly. Eventually they say he can go. When he asks them what they want him to tell Mr Godot. They say “tell him you saw us”.

Estragon and Vladimir ponder on whether they should separate. But agree it’s probably too late and not worth the effort. Deciding to continue on, they remain still, not moving.

Act 2 Next Day. Same Time. Same Place.

Estragon’s boots and Lucky’s hat are on the stage. The tree has only a few leaves. Vladimir is the first to arrive. He sings a song about a dog. Then silence. Enter Estragon.

Together again at the tree waiting for Godot they chastise the other for having got separated overnight. Estragon says he had to spend the night in a ditch and was beaten by an unidentified mob “of ten”. Glad to be reunited they embrace. They pass the time reminiscing and reflecting on their mutual state of happiness. However, they soon begin to argue about discrepancies in their memories of the past. Estragon reaffirms it might be better if they did part. Vladimir accuses him of always “crawling back”. Turning their attention to listening to the sound of “dead voices” they continue to debate their predicament. Time passes.

Estragon almost falls. Vladimir sees he has a wound that is festering and realizes he’s not wearing his boots. He sees the pair of boots and calls for Estragon to put them on. Estragon insists they are not his boots. He wants to go. But Vladimir says they must wait for Godot. He offers Estragon a radish to eat. But it is black and unable to eat it, Estragon gives it back. Vladimir tries again to get Estragon to put the boots on. He begrudgingly acknowledges they fit him perfectly. Desiring to be able to sleep, Estragon lies down in foetal position. Vladimir sings a lullaby that soon sends Estragon to sleep. Vladimir takes off his coat and drapes it over Estragon which causes him to suddenly wake up. Estragon runs about wildly having dreamt he

was falling. Vladimir consoles him. Again Estragon asks if they can go, but Vladimir says they can't because they are waiting for Godot.

Vladimir sees Lucky's hat, and puts it on in place of his own. He hands his hat to Estragon who puts it on. They do a farcical hat swapping routine which leads to a role play where they act out being Lucky and Pozzo. They proceed to abuse each other and at one point Vladimir declares Godot has arrived. Panic sets in as they rush around the stage and into the wings. Afraid they are being surrounded, Estragon hides behind the tree. He asks Vladimir to tell him what to do. He replies there is nothing to do. They continue to hurl verbal abuses at each other until Pozzo and Lucky enter.

Pozzo is now blind. Lucky is carrying everything. He falls, bringing Pozzo down with him. Estragon asks if it is Godot. With Pozzo and Lucky both helpless, Vladimir sees it as an opportunity to be needed. When they remind him about their meeting yesterday Pozzo does not remember. He tells them that Lucky is also now dumb.

Pozzo and Lucky exit. Vladimir looks after them. They continue waiting for Godot. The boy returns. Vladimir asks if he recognizes them. He tells them he did not visit them yesterday. He has a message from Godot; he is not coming this evening, but to expect him tomorrow. The boy leaves.

They consider hanging themselves with Estragon's trouser belt. He loosens the cord that holds up his trousers causing them to fall about his ankles. Even though the cord is way too short, they give it a go. Both pull on the cord, causing it to break. They then decide it's not worth the bother. They will return tomorrow with a good bit of rope to hang themselves. They reiterate that if Godot comes they will be saved. Vladimir takes off and puts Lucky's hat back on. He tells Estragon to put his trousers back on.

They agree to leave, but neither moves.

Consider

Waiting For Godot is a modern morality play.

Beckett uses comedy to sour the tragic.

In *Waiting For Godot* nothing happens, twice.

The play is in part a tribute to Charlie Chaplin.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

“I preferred France in war than Ireland in peace”

Samuel Beckett

Beckett was Irish but spent most of his life living in Paris. He began writing in the 1930's and began writing drama in the 1950s'. *Waiting For Godot (En attendant Godot)* was written in French and published in 1952. The following year the play had its first stage production in Paris. Regarded today as a masterpiece, Beckett is quoted as saying he wrote the play to “get away from the awful prose I was writing”. The first English production in 1955 received mixed reactions. A theatre critic expressed his disdain:

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* is a dramatic vacuum. Pity the critic who seeks a chink in its armour, for it is all chink. It has no plot, no climax, no denouement; no beginning, no middle, and no end... *Waiting For Godot* frankly jettisons everything by which we recognize theatre ...

Kenneth Tynan
The Observer, 1955

The British censors insisted on the words like 'erection' being removed and there were attempts to ban the play. A Lady, Dorothy Howitt, wrote to the Lord Chamberlain:

One of the many themes running through the play is the desire of two old tramps continually to relieve themselves. Such a dramatisation of lavatory necessities is offensive and against all sense of British decency.

It was not until 1964 that the first uncensored version of *Godot* was performed at the Theatre Royal in England. Today it is performed all over the world and rivals only the works of Shakespeare in its status as the definitive narrative of the modern psyche.

In *Godot* the two protagonists are on journey but they do not move, and what/who they are waiting for never arrives. It is both a tragedy and a farce where nothing happens. The work has come to represent many things from 'the destitution of modern man' in an increasingly secular society, to being a metaphor for the futility of human existence. Even Beckett himself was not prepared to offer audiences a tangible single interpretation. When asked who was Godot, he replied "if I knew, I would have said so in the play".

The lack of plot and non-adherence to the three act structure (beginning, middle and end) creates an uncertainty which is at the essence of the play's exploration of what has been described as the 'existentialist crisis' – the failure to identify and experience a functional 'I am' self. Many theorists have drawn analogies between the play's themes of alienation, disconnection and disenfranchisement of the individual from community with the political instability and social fragmentation that followed the break up of Europe after the Second World War and its continuing affects through to the Cold War. Theatre Historian Oscar Brockett writes:

His spiritual derelicts are usually isolated in time and space: they torture and console each other and themselves, raise questions which cannot be answered, and struggle on in a world which seems to be disintegrating around them. Probably more than any other writer, Beckett expressed the post-war doubts about man's capacity to understand and control his world.

Godot is in part a response to the historical and social circumstances in which Beckett was living and actively commenting on as is evident in his other literary works of the same period. One of the inspirations for the play was a painting by Caspar David Friedrich, 'Two Men Contemplating The Moon' (1819). The tree in *Godot* is both a literal reference to the painting and a metaphor for the Bible's 'Tree of Knowledge': 'you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die' (Genesis 2:17).

Beckett's personal experiences during the war as a member of the French Resistance undoubtedly had a significant impact on him, traces of which can be argued to have found their

way into the *Godot* text. American scholar Marjorie Perloff's recent research on the biographical connections between Beckett's own war experiences and the experiences of *Godot's* itinerant characters trapped in a time loop, raises new possibilities for interpretation and critiquing the text.

Beckett and his French wife, Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil worked for the Resistance organization 'Gloria' as translators decoding messages about Axis (German, Italian and Japanese coalition) troop movements and relaying them back to allied headquarters in London. In 1942 Gloria was exposed by a double agent and Beckett and his wife were forced to flee Paris and make their way to the Unoccupied Zone in the South of France. Beckett describes one night's ordeal trying to avoid capture:

I can remember waiting in a barn (there were ten of us) until it got dark, then being led by a *passeur* over streams; we could see a German sentinel in the moonlight. Then I remember passing a French post on the other side of the line. The Germans were on the road; so we went across fields. Some of the girls were taken over in the boot of a car.

Note Beckett's reference to the 'ten of us' recalls Estragons' description of having spent the night in a ditch and his claim to have been beaten by an unidentified "ten of them".

Finally settling in the French town of Roussillon the Beckett's remained under the constant threat of Nazi patrols passing through the area and having to hide in the rural outskirts of Roussillon to avoid capture. Conditions were harsh as they endured periods of homelessness, extremely cold winters, poor and scant food supplies. In her study Perloff cites a connection between Beckett working as a farm labourer picking grapes and Vladimir's memory of picking grapes:

But we were there, together, I could swear to it! Picking grapes for a man called . . . (*he snaps is fingers*) . . . can't think of the name of the man, at a place called . . . (*snaps his fingers*). . . can't think of the name of the place, do you not remember?

Beckett scholar Hugh Kenner also notes the parallels between *Godot* and Beckett's autobiographical experiences of being in hiding from the Germans and having to wait out the war in a prolonged state of uncertainty and impending threat:

Two men waiting, for another whom they know only by an implausible name which may not be his real name. A ravaged and blasted landscape. A world that was ampler and more open once, but is permeated with pointlessness now. Mysterious dispensers of beatings. A man of property and his servant, in flight. And the anxiety of the two who wait, their anxiety to be as inconspicuous as possible in a strange environment ("We're not from these parts, Sir") where their mere presence is likely to cause remark. It is curious how readers and audiences do not think to observe the most obvious thing about the world of the play, that it resembles France occupied by the Germans, in which its author spent the war years. How much waiting must have gone on in that bleak world; how many times must Resistance operatives—displaced persons when everyone was displaced, anonymous ordinary people for whom every day renewed the dispersal of meaning—have kept appointments not knowing whom they were to meet, with men who did not show up and may have had good reasons for not showing up, or bad, or may even have been taken; how often must life itself not have turned on the skill with which overconspicuous strangers did nothing as inconspicuously as possible, awaiting a rendezvous, put off by perhaps unreliable messengers, and making do with quotidian ignorance in the principal working convention of the Resistance, which was to let no one know any more than he had to.

Waiting For Godot's representation of the complexities and obscurities of the human condition continues to offer up questions rather than answers about identity and our search for meaning. The play begs we return to it again and again to re-familiarize us with the very fundamental questions we deal with everyday: who am I, where do I belong, why am I here, how long should I wait?

Consider

Waiting For Godot is partly autobiographical.

Writers write about what they know, don't know and can never know.

Once you know the answers to the questions the learning stops.

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"In Love With Hiding": Samuel Beckett's War, Marjorie Perloff, *Iowa Review*, 35 (2), (2005)
http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/perloff/articles/beckett_war.pdf

<http://english.turkcebilgi.com/Waiting+for+Godot>

A Readers Guide To Samuel Beckett, Hugh Kenner, (1996).

Additional Resources

Samuel Beckett



Beckett Archives At Reading University & International Beckett Foundation

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/beckett/>

<http://www.beckettfoundation.org.uk/>

The Samuel Beckett Endpage

http://www.ua.ac.be/main.aspx?c=*SBECKETT&n=22071

A Readers Guide To Samuel Beckett, Hugh Kenner, (1996)

Beckett: Waiting For Godot, David Bradbury, (2001).

Comprehensive Biography & Resources Link Guide

<http://kirjasto.sci.fi/beckett.htm>

<http://www.samuel-beckett.net/>

Nobel Prize

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1969/beckett-facts.html

Victoria and Albert Museum collection

On "Waiting For Godot"

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/users/node/8648>

'Modern Theatre: The Explosion of New Writing', feature article.

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/m/the-explosion-of-new-writing/>

Sydney Theatre Company 'Back Stage' magazine feature on Beckett

<http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/magazine/posts/2013/february/feature-about-beckett.aspx>

Famous Quotes by Beckett

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/9780670/Samuel-Beckett-ten-best-quotes.html>

Waiting for Beckett: A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, documentary film, (1994).

Former Productions

Sydney Theatre Company 'Back Stage' magazine feature; 'Ghosts of Godots Past'.

<http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/magazine/posts/2012/september/feature-ghosts-of-godots-past.aspx>



Interview with Patrick Robinson and Jeffrey Kissoon. First all black production in the UK.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kQgJH89hBk>

Clip of Conor Lovett in Beckett's *The End*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDchPdiD-Zw>

Comparative Texts

Film, starring Buster Keaton, written by Beckett (his only screen play), (1964).
<http://vimeo.com/29908858>



Caspar David Friedrich, 'Two Men Contemplating The Moon' (1819).
<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/2000.51>

Waiting For Godot, film directed by Michael Lindsay-Hogg (2011).

Everyman, 15th Century Medieval Morality play.

The Tramp, film with Charlie Chaplin, (1915).
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goWVdmEcSF4>

No Exit, Jean Paul Sartre, (1944).

The Inferno, Dante, (14th Century)

Ulysses, James Joyce, (1922).

Articles & Reviews

'Very unpromising material': A Review of *Waiting For Godot*, 1955.
http://dangerousminds.net/comments/very_unpromising_material_a_review_for_becketts_waiting_for_godot_from_1955

'A word from the enigmatic master Samuel Beckett', *The Australian*, 2010.
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/a-word-from-the-enigmatic-master-samuel-beckett/story-e6frg8n6-1225921361785>

The Telegraph, Anna McMullan, 2013.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/9780077/When-Beckett-wrote-Waiting-for-Godot-he-really-didnt-know-a-lot-about-theatre.html>

'A performance of *Waiting For Godot* worth the wait'. *The Australian*, 2010. Interview with Ian McKellan.
http://dangerousminds.net/comments/very_unpromising_material_a_review_for_becketts_waiting_for_godot_from_1955



Theatre Royal, Haymarket, The Guardian.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/may/07/waiting-for-godot-theatre-review>

Stratford Festival, Canada (2013).

<http://www.guelphmercury.com/whatson-story/3871563-dennehy-shines-in-stratford-s-waiting-for-godot/>

Absurdsim

The Theatre of the Absurd, Martin Esslin, (2001)

<http://www.Samuel-Beckett.net/Esslin.html>

<http://www.slideshare.net/leodolcevita/theatre-of-absurd-beckett>

History of the Theatre, Oscar Brockett, (1968)

The Cold War

History Learning Site

<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/coldwar.htm>

Wikipedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historiography_of_the_Cold_WarStudent_project

The Cold War, Sean Sheehan, (2003).

The Culture of the Cod War, Stephen J. Whitfield, (1996).



AIM: To explore and analyse questions of meaning and interpretation in *Waiting For Godot*.



The Waiting Game

What do you understand by the expression 'waiting for Godot'?

Think of all the situations in life when you have to wait – in a queue, to receive news, at the airport, Christmas, a birthday, test results, on a waiting list, in a hospital emergency ward, etc.

Tell us about a significant event where you had to wait for a length of time in which your patience was tested, or when you felt a degree of stress or anxiety?

When has waiting been a positive experience? A negative experience?

How did you deal/not deal with the challenge of having to wait?

How much of your discomfort was caused by not knowing when or what was going to happen?

Form small groups and share your waiting stories.

Brainstorm & write a 'list of tips' for dealing with waiting.

Share your tips with the rest of the class.

Discuss what can we learn from having to wait?

Write a short piece on the theme of waiting.

Include a reference to the expression 'waiting for Godot'.

Write a short piece beginning with the phrase 'we spend our whole lives waiting ...'

OR

Choose from the list of well know phrases and sayings:

- Wait and see
- Wait for it!
- Wait for something to turn up.

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- Waiting in the wings.
- Wait on someone hand and foot.
- I can't wait.
- Accident waiting to happen.

OR

Come up with a title of your own.

Interpreting Godot



Waiting For Godot is often described as a morality play for the cold war generation.

Google morality play.

What is a morality play?

Where did the morality play originate?

What is the purpose of a morality play?

List 3 key features of a morality play that have relevance to *Waiting For Godot*.

Reflection Question:

What is the moral of *Waiting For Godot*?

List all the religious references, images and metaphors in the play.

Read the following excerpt:

VLADIMIR: But you can't go barefoot!

ESTRAGON: Christ did.

VLADIMIR: Christ! What's Christ got to do with it? You're
not going to compare yourself to Christ!

ESTRAGON: All my life I've compared myself to him.



Discuss with reference to the play's religious imagery and the proposition that Godot is a reference to God.

Do you think *Waiting For Godot* is a religious play? Why/why not?

Debate For OR Against this statements:

The real question in *Waiting For Godot* is not who is Godot, but about it means to be a human being.

OR

The subject of the play is not Godot but the act waiting.

Write down in 30 words or less what *Waiting For Godot* is about.



Extension:

Read the following quote by Beckett on the question of Godot's identity after attending a reading of the play:

I don't know who Godot is. I don't even know (above all don't know) if he exists. And I don't know if they believe in him or not – those two who are waiting for him. The other two who pass by towards the end of each of the two acts, that must be to break up the monotony. All I knew I showed. It's not much, but it's enough for me, by a wide margin. I'll even say that I would have been satisfied with less. As for wanting to find in all that a broader, loftier meaning to carry away from the performance, along with the program and the Eskimo Pie I cannot see the point of it. But it must be possible... Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo, Lucky their time and their space, I was able to know them a little, but far from the need to understand. Maybe they owe you explanations. Let them supply it. Without me. They and I are through with each other.

Samuel Beckett, 1952

Note an Eskimo Pie was a popular chocolate covered vanilla ice-cream.

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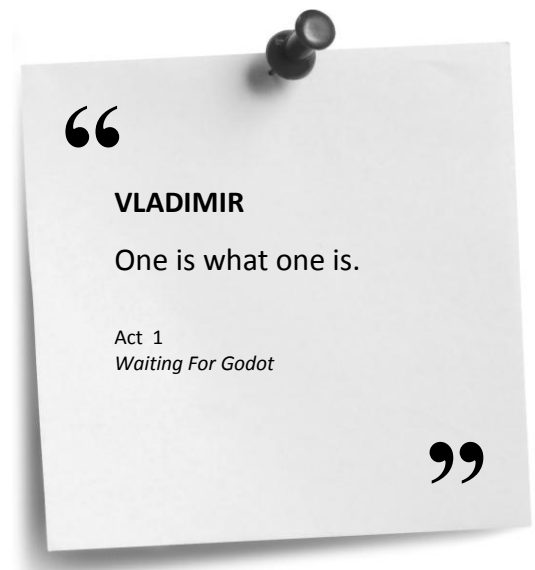
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What does Beckett mean by “I was able to know them a little, but far from the need to understand?”

Why does he say he and his characters “are through with each other?”

Discuss how much is a writer obligated to explain his work after he has written it?

How much is it the reader/audience’s responsibility to interpret meaning for themselves?





AIM: To explore and experiment with Beckett's use of language and writing techniques.



Devices & Techniques

Beckett uses many writing techniques and literary devices to create *Waiting For Godot's* potent combination of pathos, irony, foreboding and humour.

Discuss Beckett's use of language in the play with reference to the following quote:

“Words are all we have”

Samuel Beckett

How do the words create the world of the play and the characters?

Find & Match examples in the text that demonstrate:

Rhyme

Repetition

Verbal Puns

Verbal Symmetries – where words form identifiable patterns through repetition and placement.

Catalogue Lists

Alliteration - repetition of the beginning sounds of words, as in “catch a chill”.

Simile – when two unlike things are compared to each other, as in “noise like wings”.

Metaphor

Read the following excerpt from Act 1:

ESTRAGON : Oh I say!

VLADIMIR: A running sore!

ESTRAGON: It's a rope.

VLADIMIR: It's the rubbing.

ESTRAGON: It's the inevitable.

VLADIMIR: It's the knot.

ESTRAGON: It's the chaffing.

List the techniques and devices being used in this passage.

Find another example from the play, which demonstrates similar techniques and devices being employed by Beckett.

+

Extension:

Read this dialogue silently to your self (without speaking).

Listen to two fellow students read the dialogue aloud, each playing the respective roles.

Compare reading, listening and watching.

Do Vladimir and Estragon speak the same or differently?

From reading can you always tell who is who?

How much does performance and the voice of the actors assist us in discerning between the characters?

Discuss why Beckett, Vladimir and Estragon often speak in a 'symmetrical' manner?

What is the effect of not always having a clearly defined difference between them in the way they speak and the words they speak?

Performance Viewing Task:

How critical is seeing and listening to the play compared to reading it?

Imagine the play without the words. If you took away the words how would it change the performance?





Speaking & Writing In the Style Of Beckett

Form groups of 5-7.

Tell a story phrase by phrase around the group, each phrase begins with 'It's'.

Repeat, but this time each phrase begins alternately with 'It's' and 'It's not'.

Repeat, with each phrase beginning alternately with 'fortunately' and 'unfortunately'.

Do not allow for a repeat of a phrase or situation, which has already been used as this holds up the action and does not allow for the narrative to progress.

Reflection Question:

Consider how the narrative builds on a given situation without retracing of steps.

Consider how Beckett uses repetition to progress the narrative as well as put the characters back to where they were.

Give an example from the text when he takes the story back through the repeating of specific words and phrases by the characters.

Write a short dialogue piece based on the same verbal exercise in small groups or individually.

Use phrases of your own choice.

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'The structure of Waiting for Godot', Muhammad Naeem blog site.

<http://neoenglishsystem.blogspot.com.au/2010/12/structure-of-waiting-for-godot.html>

A Guide To Improvisation: A Handbook For Teachers, Ronald James & Peter Williams, (1981).



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LAUGHTER IN TEARS



AIM: To understand and evaluate *Waiting For Godot* as a tragicomedy.

POZZO The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops.



Tragedy & Comedy Combined

Tragicomedy has its origins in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama that combines the character types, content and plot lines of tragedy and comedy. The tragicomic ethos was an attempt to 'balance and reconcile' the contradictions that exist between comedy and tragedy and the need to counterbalance good and evil, the macabre means with the happy ending. High status characters are drawn from the tragic heroic traditions whilst the lower status characters provide comic relief. For example, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* re plays that interweave moment of high tragedy and pathos with moments of farce and comedy.

Why is *Waiting For Godot* regarded as a tragicomedy?

List all the dramatic elements you consider tragic in *Waiting For Godot*.

List all those you consider comic.

Give 3 examples from the play when something comic becomes tragic.

Give 3 examples when something sad and tragic becomes funny.

Support your responses with specific quotes from the text.

Performance viewing task:

What was the funniest moment in the production? Why?

When did a funny moment become unfunny?

What was the saddest moment for you? Why?

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Master & Slave

The master-slave relationship can be seen to be underlying all the interactions between characters in the play. The master-slave dynamic is based on power and control. The drama and conflict comes from the see-sawing interchange between who has the power and who is controlling whom at any one time. The master's high status position is always the most at risk, because the master has more to lose. The slave being low status has more flexibility and less to lose. The master uses violence, intimidation and punishment to assert his/her authority. But without the slave, the master has no one to exercise authority over and therefore cannot occupy a master position. Possibly the master needs the slave more than the slave needs the master. Being low status the only direction left for the slave is upwards. The slave is faced with two choices: to rebel and overthrow the master or to escape leaving the master to fend for him/herself.

In tragicomedy the tragic and comic elements of the master-slave relationship are counter-pointed between the real threat of death and persecution against the hope and achievement of survival through wit and intrigue.

Describe an example in the play when Pozzo is clearly the master.

Describe a contrasting moment when his master role is under threat.

What strategies does Pozzo use to maintain his master role over Lucky?

How does Lucky challenge Pozzo's authority?

Give an example of Vladimir and Estragon in a master-slave interaction?

Why do they decide to role-play Pozzo and Lucky?

Why do you think they are not able to sustain the master-slave relationship?

Performance Viewing Task:

How did you feel about the way Pozzo treats Lucky when they first appear on stage?

What is the emotional effect of Lucky's silence for the audience?

Why do you think Beckett decided to keep Lucky silent for the majority of the play?

WAITING FOR GODOT

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Pass The Master's Hat

The master's objective is to maintain their high status.

The slave's objective is to elevate the status of the master in order to stay safe.

A hat (prop) is passed around the whole class in an all group improvisation.

Whoever wears the hat is the master ('boss' or 'leader') the other players are the slaves ('followers').

Masters can only give 3 instructions and then they must pass the over to a new master.

A master cannot give an instruction unless they are wearing the hat.

The slaves must say 'yes' to all the instructions. However, the way the slaves respond may not exactly be as the master anticipated.

Reflection Questions:

Did you prefer being a master or a slave? Why/why not?

Was it easy or hard to be the master? The slave?

What skills do you need to maintain the role of the master?

What strategies does a slave need to keep safe?

Performance Viewing Task:

Why does Vladimir put on Lucky's hat?

What do the hats represent in the world of the play?

References:

A Glossary of Literary Terms, M.H.Abrams.

Dictionary Of Literary Terms And Literary Theory, J.A Cuddon

“

LUCKY

divine aphasia loves us
dearly with some
exceptions

Act 1
Waiting For Godot

”

IN A COLD WORLD



AIM: To explore, create, interpret and respond to an absurdist text.



Existentialism & Absurdism



Write down your understanding of the term 'existentialism'.

How does the philosophy of existentialism apply to *Waiting For Godot*?

Give specific examples from the play that are consistent with existentialism.

What is your understanding of the term 'absurdism'? Absurdist theatre?

Key features of Absurdist drama are:

- Exaggerated characters and situation
- Grotesque behaviour
- Anti-realistic
- Disjointed & non-linear narrative
- Extensive uses of pauses, silences, mime and farcical routines
- Nonsense language
- Anti-scientific – where something becomes what it is not in reality.

Find & Match each of these features with specific examples from the play.

Include other features (and text examples) that you uncover in your independent research.



Extension:

List 3-5 key themes of Absurdist drama, drawing on your research references in the Additional Resources.

Explain which of these themes are represented in *Waiting For Godot*.



Absurdist Play Building

In pairs.

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A begins telling a story on the theme of 'time'.

B interrupts the story with random words (one at a time) that A must incorporate into the story.

Repeat and reverse roles.

How did the stories change with each word interruption?

Write a list of noun words on separate pieces of paper - objects, places, things, person, quality, action (be bold and surprising in your ideas).

Put in a container & mix them up.

Choose 5 random words (without looking!)

Devise & Present a scene entitled 'Waiting' incorporating the 5 words.

Or **choose** a title of your own.

Or **select** one of the phrases from the previous writing task on theme of waiting.

+ Extension:



Incorporate a key word or line of dialogue from *Waiting For Godot*.

Include the expression "waiting for godot" into the scene.

Don't forget your Absurdist checklist – grotesque, anti-realistic, exaggerated, silences, mime action!

Performance Viewing Task:

Describe an exaggerated 'absurdist' moment in the performance.

Describe an 'existentialist' moment.

