



## LESSON PLAN

Waiting for Godot  
Author: Samuel Beckett

Reviewer: Astrid McCormick

### PUBLISHER INFORMATION

Faber & Faber Ltd in Australia Through Penguin Books Australia  
250 Camberwell Road  
Camberwell  
Victoria 3124  
AUSTRALIA  
Fax: 61 (3) 9811 2613

[www.TeachingEnglish.com.au](http://www.TeachingEnglish.com.au)

## **Waiting For Godot**

Author: Samuel Beckett (1906 – 1989)

Publisher: Faber and Faber Ltd

Year: 1970 (reprinted)

ISBN: 571058086

Genre: Drama – Theatre of the Absurd

Level: NSW – HSC English Stage 6 Theatre of the Absurd

Level: Victoria – VCE Units 3&4

Level: South Australia – SABSA English Studies Stage 2 (2006)

Author of the review: Astrid McCormick – 1029 words

## **Synopsis**

ESTRAGON:           What do we do now?  
VLADIMIR:           I don't know.  
ESTRAGON:           Let's go.  
VLADIMIR:           We can't.  
ESTRAGON:           Why not?  
VLADIMIR:           We are waiting for Godot.  
ESTRAGON:           Ah!

Two tramps are waiting for a third man who never arrives. They are waiting at the beginning of the play, they are waiting at the end of the play. **Waiting For Godot** is a tragic comedy in two acts.

This play has changed the way we view theatre. The original title is “En Attendant Godot” and the play was first performed in Paris, in French, on 5 January 1953. ‘It is a classical absurd play; a milestone in the history of modern theatre, one of the key three or four plays of contemporary theatre’, Jean Anouilh.

## **Theatre of the Absurd**

**Waiting for Godot** is an example of the Theatre of the Absurd, a phrase that was coined by the theatre critic Martin Esslin in the sixties. The term is attributed to plays written by Ionesco, Camus, Beckett, Pinter, Kafka and Stoppard.

The setting is minimalist and the plot reduced. People struggle to come to terms with their existence. The plays are based on Albert Camus’ existentialism, highlighting the senselessness and meaninglessness of life.

## **Themes**

Metaphysics

Human condition in general

Nature and purpose of God

Alienation and meaninglessness

## Tools and Tasks

TASK TYPE	ASPECT	TASK
IT Task	Researching the life of the playwright	Homework. Students work in pairs and research the internet with the aim of finding important details and interesting highlights of Samuel Beckett, one of the most relevant writers of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century.
		<b>Task</b>
		Samuel Beckett was a very creative person and writer. He produced brilliant plays, which are important to us today.
		What elements (phases) of his life were supporting his quest for creative expression and fuelling his creative talent?
Creative Task		Sketch a scene or compose a collage that may be used as the program cover of <b>Waiting for Godot</b> .
		(Research the internet for examples.)
Creative Task Imagination	Critically study	Conventions of traditional drama are suspended in <b>Waiting for Godot</b> .
		The absence of a distinct setting, action, plot, characters, exposition, climax and solution make it challenging to work through the highly charged symbolism of the play.
		Students compile the questions that the play triggers:
		<b>For example</b>
		Who is Godot?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it God?</li> <li>• Is he a relative, a friend?</li> <li>• Is he an opportunity, the only chance in life?</li> <li>• Good luck? Success?</li> <li>• Death?</li> <li>• The end of a journey?</li> <li>• A real estate agent?</li> </ul>

Where do the players come from?

Where are they?

Is it summer or winter?

How long have they been there?

How long are they going to stay?

Why does nobody else come past?

Why does nobody come looking for them?

What do we hear?

Associate and understand Assist students with understanding the senselessness in **Waiting For Godot**.

Critically study Develop diverse and creative ways for students to stop and think, associate and spark thoughts. Associations can be triggered by working with certain episodes, sentences or part dialogues. Associations will flow easily when the process is repeated.

Students are given the opportunity to brainstorm and make associations about key terms, like

- waiting
- sense
- meaning
- life

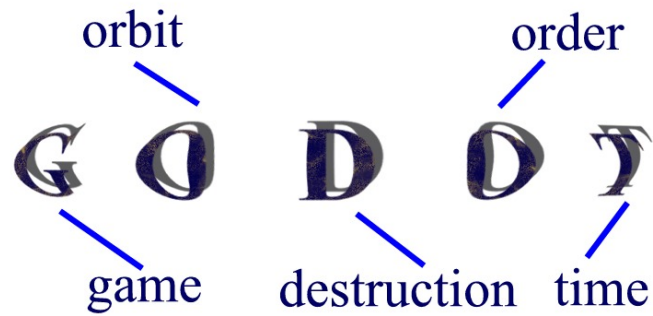
to capture their thoughts and feelings. (See example below.)

Through association and discussion students will understand the core of the play.

They will be able to understand how boredom and absence of meaning are the substance of the play.

Example

If Godot is not a person, what does Godot mean?



Example

Find a phrase Estragon says that demonstrates senselessness. What are your feelings/thoughts, when you read this phrase several times?

Building  
associations,  
triggering  
thoughts

ESTRAGON



### Example

Find an example of a paradox sentence or behaviour in the play. What feelings/associations does this trigger for you?

## ESTRAGON



Critically study  
and discuss

The play can take up to two hours when put on stage, even though nothing happens.

- How is the time filled?
- Why is the play so charged with meaning?
- What are the players doing to while away the time?
- What is the recurring structure of the episodes?

### Acting

Performing to  
understand

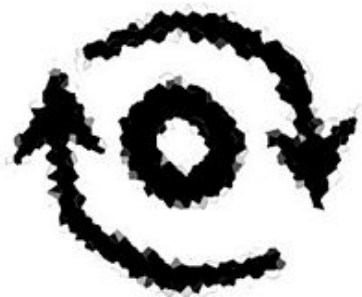
Ask students to play several of the episodes.

De-brief the players and ask how they felt, after they have played.

### Interpretation: Circular Structure

Instead of action, there are excited and hectic activities on stage. All actions are done fast, that means they are superficial.

There is no depth, there is no meaning. This is why episodes and words are repeated.



The meaninglessness and aimlessness of the episodes is demonstrated through a circular structure.

We always go back to where we have started, we cannot escape.

Critically  
study

How is the audience/the reader drawn into the play?

The audience/the reader

1. has to make sense of the empty stage;
2. has to find out how the two characters are linked;
3. has to figure out what it means when Estragon answers to Vladimir saying, that he also thinks he might have been gone for ever;
4. tries to find out where the dialogue is heading.

**Visual Task**

Transfer

[http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/B/beckett/plays/waitingforgodot/interview\\_hogg.html](http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/B/beckett/plays/waitingforgodot/interview_hogg.html)

A very short video sample is available at this site. Discuss with students the challenges of filming the play.

<b>Writing Task</b>	Transfer Extension	<p>The play has been staged in many different ways throughout in the last 50 years.</p> <p>One of the performances in Germany, Cologne, was set in a TV studio with the actors being involved in a talk show and Pozzo's part was played by a woman.</p> <p>Another very extraordinary way is to show the play in a puppet theatre for adults.</p> <p>Can you explain why stage directors and theatre companies experiment with the play?</p>
<b>Creative Task</b>	Brainstorm and discuss	What other settings come to your mind?
<b>Writing Task</b>		Write a convincing letter to your school principal asking for support to stage <b>Waiting for Godot</b> at your school.