

# Waiting for Godot

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## Overview

### Author

Samuel Beckett

### First Performed

1953

### Type

Play

### Genre

Drama

### About the Title

The two central characters, Vladimir and Estragon, wait for someone named Godot, **who, as a stand-in for God, never arrives.** The title focuses the audience on the **futility of human existence.**

The meaning of the name *Godot* is debated among scholars. Although Beckett wrote in French, it is possible that he wanted his audiences to consider the presence of the English word *God* in the name of the character who never shows up. (The similarity between the words *Godot* and *God* does not exist in the original French, in which God is *Dieu*.) It is possible, however, that Beckett named the character for a French bicyclist called Roger Godeau—or for a French slang word for boots.

## Waiting for Godot | Context

*Waiting for Godot*, like most of [Samuel Beckett's](#) works, contains little in the way of historical context. He wanted his audience to experience the play without the expectations and assumptions attached to a particular people, place, or time. The play is not entirely free from cultural context, however, containing references to the Bible, Shakespeare, and ancient Greek mythology, as well as a number of allusions to Christianity.

## World War II

Beckett wrote *Waiting for Godot* shortly after World War II ended, and the conflicts and horrors of the war were fresh in his memory. He lived in occupied Paris, working with the French Resistance until he and his companion, Suzanne Déschevaux-Dumesnil, had to flee to avoid being arrested by the Germans. He and Déschevaux-Dumesnil spent the remainder of the war in a region of the French countryside not under German control. After the Allied victory in Europe, Beckett volunteered for the Red Cross, witnessing firsthand the consequences of war and the results of Nazi brutality.

## Modernism and Postmodernism

*Waiting for Godot* displays characteristics of both modernism and postmodernism. The modernist period in literature, which began around the turn of the 20th century, saw writers respond negatively to the Industrial Revolution and the horrors of World War I. Modernism's goal—to create something completely new—sparked much experimentation by merging psychological theory with the creation of many new forms and styles. Characteristics of modernism include the following:

- focus on the inner self or consciousness
- concern with the decline of civilization and the effects of capitalism
- characterization of technology as cold and unfeeling
- alienation and loneliness of the individual
- first-person narrators
- stream of consciousness style

- deviation from traditional plot structures

Postmodernism, which arose after World War II, turned away from modernism's insistence on entirely new literary forms. Instead, postmodern art, including literature, often reflected numerous traditional styles within one work. Characteristics of postmodernism include the following:

- parody, paradox, or pastiche (imitation of another work)
- fragmentation
- interest in flattened emotions
- focus on an anonymous or collective experience
- self-reference or recursion (the use of repeating elements)
- unreliable narrators

Both modernist and postmodernist works reject traditional values and generally accepted meanings for texts.

### **The Theater of the Absurd**

Absurd: lack of purpose and logic

*Waiting for Godot* was a defining work in what came to be known as the Theater of the Absurd, plays in which a lack of purpose and logic create uncertainty, hopelessness, ridiculousness, and humor. The absurdity of characters' words and actions reveals the absurdity of human existence. The characters may call one another by childish, almost clownish, nicknames and engage in conversations and interactions straight out of slapstick comedy. Though not a formal movement, the absurdist plays of Beckett, along with those of Eugène Ionesco, Harold Pinter, and some other playwrights of the mid-20th century had in common a pessimistic view of an essentially purposeless human existence. As in *Waiting for Godot*, absurdist plays break with traditional structures and use of language to convey images and ideas that have no clearly defined meaning or resolution.

In *Waiting for Godot*, the human condition is depicted as ridiculous and without purpose. Beckett labeled the play a "tragicomedy," emphasizing both the humor to be seen in the absurdity of existence and the anxiety and hopelessness resulting from a lack of purpose. Many also see the play as an illustration of the views of existentialism, especially the philosophy of French writer

Jean-Paul Sartre, whose proposition that humankind "first surges up in the world—and defines [itself] afterwards," argues that there is no inherent meaning in human existence. Beckett warned audiences, however, against making religious or philosophical deductions, saying, "the key to the play was the literal relations among its surface features not any presumed meanings that could be deduced from them."

## Waiting for Godot | Character Analysis

### Estragon

Both Estragon and Vladimir are essentially Everymen, representing all of humanity, but they also contrast in some ways. Estragon is primarily concerned with feelings, particularly his own suffering, rather than intellectual thoughts, and he has trouble understanding much of Vladimir's logic and philosophy. He displays intuitive leaps, however, that go deeper than Vladimir does with his logic. If the two primary characters represent two parts of a person, Estragon is the body. The beatings Estragon says he receives represent the suffering that afflicts and traps humanity. There is nothing noble about this suffering—Estragon's complaints about it are self-pitying, and the fear of another beating keeps him locked in the endless waiting.

### Vladimir

Vladimir is the more logical and intellectual of the two primary characters. He is the only character who remembers most events from one day to another, and he works the hardest to fit those events into a logical time frame, despite conflicting evidence. He tries to explore philosophical ideas logically, but often misses deeper truths Estragon seems to grasp instinctively. If Estragon represents the body, Vladimir represents the mind, with all its ability to deceive itself.

### Pozzo

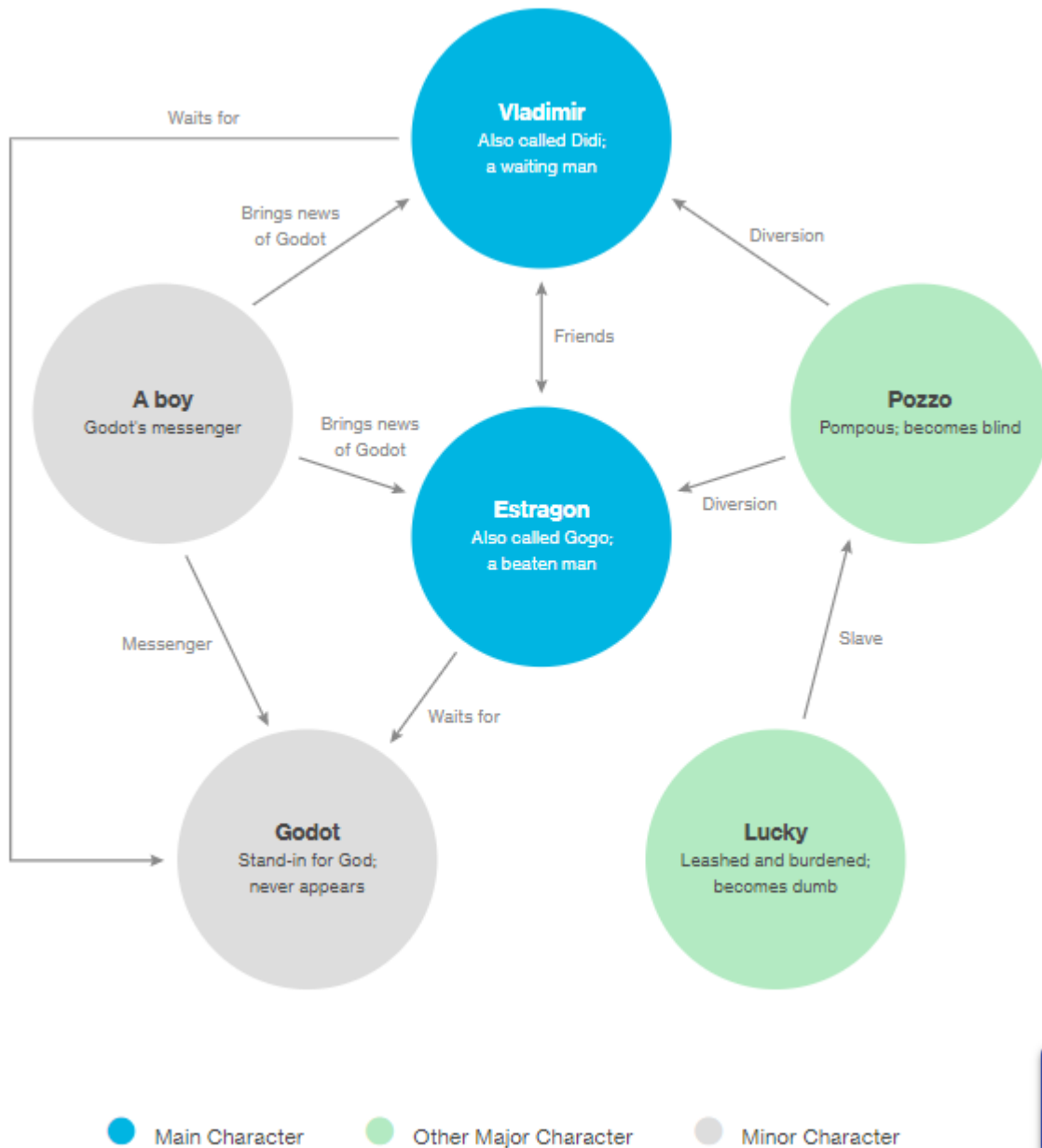
In contrast to the other characters, Pozzo is a wealthy landowner with power and resources. He clearly sees Vladimir and Estragon as beneath him but condescends to talk with them anyway. His concern with appearances and social conventions is ridiculous, pointing out their meaninglessness. Pozzo uses his power over Lucky to abuse him horribly. But his power and resources are ultimately useless—they don't give his life meaning or protect him from

misfortune. When he becomes blind, he must rely on his slave, Lucky (who was previously merely a convenience and for entertainment) to help him navigate life, becoming pitiful in a single stroke of fate.

## **Lucky**

As Pozzo's slave, he must constantly carry burdens that are not his own. His body is constrained, much like his free will. This might be why he seems not even to consider leaving when Pozzo becomes blind, losing most of the power he had wielded over Lucky. However, Lucky demonstrates some willpower during his long speech in Act 1, and he is upset by the prospect of Pozzo selling him, which suggests he may choose to remain in his role. There is a dependency between Lucky and Pozzo that seems related to, but not limited to, their inequality.

## Waiting for Godot | Character Map



## Waiting for Godot | Plot Summary

### Summary

#### Act 1

Two shabby men who seem to be old friends meet on the side of a country road near a leafless tree. The first, [Estragon](#), has been beaten up, and the second, [Vladimir](#), suffers from groin pain and frequent urination. They consider repenting, though they don't know what for, and they discuss the different views in the Bible of the two thieves crucified with Christ. Getting bored, they consider leaving, but Vladimir says they are waiting for Godot. They have asked him for something, though they aren't sure what, and they are waiting for a response. They consider hanging themselves as a diversion to pass the time or to speed up time, but they worry about one of them surviving alone. In the meantime, there is "Nothing to be done."

Vladimir and Estragon hear a "terrible cry" just before two travelers arrive. [Pozzo](#), a wealthy landowner, stops to eat and talk to the two men but mostly takes pleasure in hearing himself talk. He roughly orders around and abuses [Lucky](#), a slave whom he keeps on a rope. Lucky is unresponsive except when following Pozzo's orders, and kicks Estragon when he tries to comfort him. When he is ordered to think, however, Lucky produces a jumbled speech that verges on profound meaning. He becomes increasingly passionate until the others angrily attack him to make him stop. Lucky collapses, and to be revived, he must be reacquainted with the burdens he carries. After the sun sets, he and Pozzo continue on their journey.

Vladimir reveals that he and Estragon have met Pozzo and Lucky before—at least he thinks so. A boy arrives with a message from Godot—he will not come this evening, but "surely tomorrow." It seems the two friends have also heard this message before, although the boy claims not to have come yesterday. Their questions about Godot reveal how little they know about the person they've been waiting for. They ask the boy to tell Godot he has seen them. The moon rises, and they decide to find a place to sleep, but neither moves.

## **Act 2**

When Vladimir and Estragon return, the tree has a few leaves on it, which is astounding for Vladimir and confusing for Estragon. Estragon has been beaten again, and he is angry that Vladimir, who is feeling better, seems happy without him. He suggests they part ways, but Vladimir discourages him. Vladimir reminds Estragon of their encounter with Pozzo and Lucky "yesterday," of which Estragon has only vague recollections. Estragon sees the world as a "muckheap," and their conversations—to pass the time—linger on describing the dead, who

"make a noise like feathers." They also debate the value of thought, ultimately deciding it has little worth.

When Vladimir points out the change in the tree, Estragon denies that they were in this place yesterday. Certainly all is not exactly as they left it, including Estragon's boots, which he claims are now a different color and size. Estragon becomes increasingly bored and wants to go, but when he does leave, he returns immediately, fleeing from someone who seems to be coming from all directions. When Vladimir looks, however, he sees no one. After Estragon calms down, they continue their random conversations and activities to pass the time as they wait for Godot.

Lucky and Pozzo arrive again, but they are much different. Pozzo has gone blind, which turns him into a pitiful figure who must rely on Lucky's guidance and support. He falls whenever Lucky does. Indeed, both fall as they arrive and seem unable to get back up. When Vladimir and Estragon try to help them, they also fall and cannot get up, until a passing cloud distracts them. They help Pozzo up and suggest that Lucky might perform for them again. But Lucky has been struck dumb (left unable to speak). Pozzo also has no memory of any previous meetings with Vladimir and Estragon. After letting Estragon avenge himself on Lucky, Pozzo and Lucky continue on, falling down again as they go.

While Estragon naps, a boy arrives with the same message from Godot: he cannot come tonight but will tomorrow "without fail." The boy says he did not come yesterday and doesn't know if his brother, who is sick, did. Vladimir again asks the boy, more desperately this time, to tell Godot that he has seen him, but the boy runs away without confirming that he has seen him. Night falls and Estragon wakes up. He and Vladimir again consider hanging themselves, but once again they have no rope. They resolve to bring some tomorrow when they return to wait for Godot, and agree to go for the night. Neither moves

## **Waiting for Godot | Quotes**

### **1.**

*We can't ... We're waiting for Godot.*

### **Vladimir, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir)**

Vladimir's reply to Estragon, who wants to get up and leave with his friend, is repeated numerous times throughout the play. It perfectly encapsulates their situation: they cannot leave



because of hope that this Godot will appear and "save" them. However, he never comes, trapping them in endless waiting.

## 2.

*What exactly did we ask [Godot] for? ... A kind of prayer.*

### Estragon, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir)

Vladimir and Estragon don't really remember what they asked Godot; it may not have even been a defined request, which calls into question the value of any answer they could get in return. None of that, however, is going to stop them from waiting forever for the answer. The description of their request as a prayer seems to indicate they are seeking a larger meaning to existence. That an answer never comes strongly indicates that no such meaning exists.

## 3.

*We got rid of them.*

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### Vladimir, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir)

When Estragon asks whether he and Vladimir have lost their rights, Vladimir gives an uncharacteristic reply: Vladimir often blames Godot's restrictions on why they can't leave, such as claiming he will punish them for dropping him. Here, however, he seems to recognize, at least for a minute, that they are the only ones restricting what they can and cannot do.

## 4.

*The tears of the world are a constant quantity.*

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### Pozzo, Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive)

Observing that Estragon begins to weep as Lucky stops, Pozzo pronounces this pompous conclusion. He even goes on to say that laughter is the same way. This statement sounds profound but is actually ridiculous—there is no restriction on the number of people in the world who can cry or laugh at the same time—pointing out the meaninglessness of philosophical "truths."

## 5.

*Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!*

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### Estragon, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks)

Estragon breaks out this extremely accurate summary of their circumstances, and indeed the whole play, as they wait for Lucky to begin thinking. It's a bit absurd that he chooses a time when someone has actually come and something is about to happen to complain about nothing happening and nobody coming, but it doesn't diminish the larger truth of his statement.

### 6.

*They all change. Only we can't.*

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### Estragon, Act 1 (A Boy with a Message)

After Lucky and Pozzo leave, Vladimir comments that they have changed since the last time he saw them. Indeed, when they return in Act 2, they have changed significantly again. Estragon, however, correctly observes that he and Vladimir remain essentially the same throughout the play, and presumably beyond. Estragon suggests they are incapable of change, which doesn't bode well for their chances of eventually giving up waiting for Godot.

### 7.

*All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery!*

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### Estragon, Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return)

*Mud* here does not signify degradation or immorality, but rather total stultifying uniformity. Vladimir is trying to remind Estragon how the tree looked "yesterday," but, to a man for whom all places are indistinguishable, such details of scenery are meaningless, and even angering.

### 8.

*We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?*

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### Estragon, Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time)

Estragon considers, at least for a moment, the possibility that they don't actually exist and that all their struggles are simply to give themselves the impression that they do. Vladimir, in particular, is concerned with making the uncertain concrete, attempting to define the passing of time. What they are waiting for from Godot might be recognition of their existence. Because Godot never comes, their existence remains uncertain.

## 9.

*But at this place, at this moment ... all mankind is us, whether we like it or not.*

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### Vladimir, Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return)

When Pozzo and Lucky fall down, Vladimir and Estragon are the only ones around to help them. They at this moment are representing all of humanity and, as such, they have a responsibility to help. This is by far the most humanitarian impulse displayed by anyone in the play. (Its characters are usually focused on their own pains and struggles.) The results, however, are less than inspiring. When Vladimir and Estragon try to help Pozzo get up, they also fall and get stuck on the ground.

## 10.

*We are all born mad. Some remain so.*

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### Estragon, Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return)

Vladimir has been trying to determine whether the waiting is making them lose their reason, but Estragon goes straight to the heart of the matter. Everyone is born mad (meaning crazy, or without reason), and some never escape it. Despite all of Vladimir's thinking and reasoning, he and Estragon may not have escaped the madness of existence. Of course, the audience realizes their endless waiting is crazy and completely without reason.

## 11.

*They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.*

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### Pozzo, Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return)

Unlike Vladimir, Pozzo doesn't care about time, claiming he has no concept of it since he has gone blind. He sees existences flashing nearly instantaneously from life (represented by light) to death (represented by night), with nothing in between.

## 12.

*The air is full of our cries. ... But habit is a great deadener.*

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### Vladimir, Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message)

Vladimir continues Pozzo's birth-to-grave metaphor, except he includes that humans have more time for suffering, demonstrated by the cries in the air, between birth and the grave. But habit deadens the pain of living. That might seem like a good thing, but habit is also one of the major forces keeping Vladimir and Estragon in a limbo of waiting.

### Waiting for Godot | Symbols

Beckett famously refused to interpret *Waiting for Godot*, letting his writing speak for itself. "No symbols where none intended"—the last line of Beckett's novel *Watt*—is often read as a warning against assigning symbolic meaning to objects in his writing. This doesn't mean that no symbolism was intended, only that audiences should be careful about assigning meanings not supported by words and actions in the play.

### Leafless Tree

The tree, near which [Estragon](#) and [Vladimir](#) meet, is completely bare of leaves at the beginning of the play. It represents the only organic element in the setting, and it is dead or dormant. This tree portrays the world as barren and lifeless, emphasizing the lack of purpose and meaning the characters must contend with. The apparent growth of leaves on the tree in Act 2 does nothing to ease the sense of meaninglessness; it only adds to the characters' uncertainty about the place and the passage of time. The staging is telling in this regard: despite Vladimir's description of the tree as "covered with leaves," the stage directions specify only "four or five" leaves, leaving it mostly barren.

Some point out that the cross on which Christ was crucified is sometimes called a tree. Vladimir and Estragon do discuss the tree and hanging themselves in Act 1 shortly after talking about the

two thieves crucified along with Christ. This could support the interpretation that hanging from the tree draws a parallel between them and the thieves. [Beckett](#), however, said he was puzzled by people trying to take away "a broader, loftier meaning" from the play, making it unlikely that he intended any broader religious symbolism.

### **Lucky's Baggage**

[Lucky](#) never puts down the items he carries, except when it is necessary to fulfill one of [Pozzo's](#) orders. Then he immediately picks them up again, even when he has not been told to do so and there is no purpose in it. This action echoes the human tendency of enslavement to burdens, holding onto them even when doing so is unnecessary. The baggage Lucky carries seems to consist mostly of items for Pozzo's comfort. In Act 2, however, one of the bags, which is never opened in Act 1, is revealed to contain only sand. Other than his hat, none of what Lucky carries is for himself and may not even be useful. Yet he takes it up again and again—another example of a character "deadened" by habit, fulfilling the task mindlessly and without purpose.

### **Pozzo's Rope**

[Pozzo's](#) rope is the only rope that physically appears in the play, and it represents the balance of power in the relationship between Pozzo and [Lucky](#). In Act 1, Pozzo dominates Lucky with a rope half the length of the stage: "Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed around his neck," and Lucky is often the recipient of Pozzo's whip. Yet Lucky accepts this balance of power without question, as if he cannot envision any other state for himself. By Act 2, however, the rope is shortened, and the balance of power in Pozzo and Lucky's relationship is less clear. Pozzo, now blind, depends on Lucky for direction, and Lucky, still slavish, depends psychologically on Pozzo.

By extension, there are a number of figurative ropes in the play. [Vladimir](#) and [Estragon](#), like Pozzo and Lucky, are similarly tied to each other in a relationship based on domination and submission. The pair is also tied to Godot and the dominating belief that his arrival will provide a meaning for their lives. Vladimir and Estragon also entertain the idea of hanging themselves with a rope. While suicide is never a real option, its discussion provides the pair a diversion from the act of waiting for Godot. The rope here becomes a symbol of submission to an illogical belief.

## Waiting for Godot | Themes

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett builds his themes through the minimalist setting and the characters' absurd conversations and actions. Characters represent humanity, the setting represents human existence, and words and actions demonstrate larger truths about the human condition.

### Absurdity of Existence

One of the most noticeable features of the play is utter absurdity: [Vladimir](#) and [Estragon](#) dress shabbily, engage in physically inept actions, and partake in clownish nonsensical conversations. They absurdly wait endlessly for an unchanging situation to change when it is clear Godot will never come. They occasionally discuss ending their wait by hanging themselves or simply leaving, but absurdly, they never take any action. Although they agree there is "nothing to be done," they work absurdly hard to fill the time while they wait. The unavoidable conclusion is that human existence itself is absurd. [Beckett's](#) emphasis on the absurdity of human behavior shows both the tragic and comedic sides of the existential crises.

### Purposelessness of Life

None of the characters in *Waiting for Godot* has a meaningful purpose. Waiting for Godot might seem to give [Vladimir](#) and [Estragon](#) a purpose, but the fact that Godot never arrives renders their waiting meaningless. Likewise, [Pozzo](#) and [Lucky](#) might seem to be traveling toward something, but their travels are ultimately shown to be equally purposeless. Pozzo initially professes to be taking Lucky to the fair to sell him, but this purpose is never fulfilled. The second time they pass by, they express no purpose at all—they are simply moving from one place to another. Their traveling may even be counterproductive because they cannot seem to go any distance without falling down.

The messages from Godot delivered by the boy are equally purposeless. Godot will never come, and it is not at all clear the messages are even meant for Vladimir and Estragon—the boy calls Vladimir "Albert." All the characters seem to be trapped in their purposeless roles by little more than habit, which Vladimir calls "a great deadener." The idea that life has no purpose is a recurring theme in the Theater of the Absurd, which *Waiting for Godot* helped define.

## **Folly of Seeking Meaning**

Although it is unclear who or what Godot represents, by waiting for him, [Vladimir](#) and [Estragon](#) are clearly seeking some type of meaning outside themselves. In Act 1, they remember making a "kind of prayer" to Godot, expecting it to give them some direction, and they decide it is safer to wait and see what Godot says rather than die by hanging themselves. Godot, however, never comes, representing the futility and folly of such a search for meaning in an inherently meaningless existence.

## **Uncertainty of Time**

Time is a slippery thing in *Waiting for Godot*. It seems to pass normally during the period the characters are on the stage, with predictable milestones, such as the sunset and moonrise, although the characters are sometimes confused about it. But the intervals between the two acts and various events are wildly uncertain. When [Vladimir](#) and [Estragon](#) return at the beginning of Act 2, the growth of leaves on the tree suggests a longer period of time has passed than the one day Vladimir claims it has been. Estragon and [Pozzo](#) retain little or no memory of their encounter the "previous" day, and other changes have mysteriously occurred "overnight." Estragon and Vladimir have no firm idea of how long they have been together or how long ago they did other things, such as climb the Eiffel Tower or pick grapes in Macon country.

The characters also seem to be trapped by time, endlessly repeating essentially the same day again and again. This creates a despair that leads them to repeatedly contemplate suicide, although they never remember to bring the rope they would need to actually hang themselves. Time is one of the main ways people organize their lives and memories, so the uncertainty of time in the play contributes to the feeling of meaninglessness.

## **Waiting for Godot | Motifs**

### **Duality**

Duality is everywhere in *Waiting for Godot*. Every character has a counterpart, and the paired characters often complement and contrast each other. [Vladimir](#) and [Estragon](#) seem nearly identical at first, but contrasting characteristics show them to be essentially two different parts of a whole. [Pozzo](#) and [Lucky](#) are opposites in status, but they also share a mutual dependence. The boy, although written as one part played by a single actor, may actually be two brothers, one of

whom tends the sheep while the other tends the goats. Even people who are simply discussed often come in twos, such as the two thieves from the Bible (one is saved, the other is damned). The only character without a counterpart is the one who never appears: the ambiguous Godot. The whole play is dual in structure, consisting of two acts depicting nearly the same events. Act 2 mirrors Act 1 (for example, Estragon arrives first in Act 1, while Vladimir is the first to appear in Act 2), with the events of Act 2 seeming to reflect a bit more darkly the events of Act 1. It is also clear that the two days seen in the play are reflections of many days in the past and days that will continue, endlessly, into the future.

## Hats

Hats are worn by Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky, and Pozzo and are a vehicle for the characters to show their identities. For example, Lucky needs his hat in order to think; Pozzo shows his power over Lucky by taking his servant's hat off. Vladimir, the "thinker" of the two main characters, is fixated on his hat, while Estragon, who is more realistic, thinks first of his boots. In Act 2, Estragon and Vladimir have a long "bit" in which they exchange their hats along with Lucky's; an aimless attempt to make time pass as they wait.

## Samuel Beckett | Biography

Samuel Beckett was born on **April 13, 1906, in Foxrock, in County Dublin, Ireland**. As a youth, Beckett **experienced severe bouts of depression** that kept him bedridden; he reflected, "**I had little talent for happiness,**" an observation that would later provide an undercurrent in much of his writing. From 1923 to 1927, he studied Romance languages at Trinity College in Dublin, and in 1928 he moved to Paris to teach. In Paris, he became a friend of another Irish author for a time, **James Joyce**. Beckett briefly returned to Ireland to teach in 1930. After traveling in Europe, he settled in Paris, France, in 1937. When World War II broke out, Ireland remained neutral, so Beckett was able to stay in Paris even after the Germans invaded. He became active in the **French Resistance** and, after members of his resistance group were arrested, he and his then-companion (later wife) Suzanne Déschevaux-Dumesnil fled to rural France for the remainder of the war, surviving on Beckett's farm work.



Returning to Paris after World War II, Beckett produced many of his best-known works. *Waiting for Godot* was originally written in French (*En attendant Godot*). Beckett felt his mastery of the conventions of English concealed what he was trying to express, and the French tongue offered him a better medium for his ideas. He later translated *Waiting for Godot* into English himself.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett addresses an essential question of existence in two acts that mirror each other: Why do humans exist? Vladimir and Estragon, because they are logical beings, assume there is a point to their lives. With no confirmation, they have made an appointment with Godot, who may or may not be real. The audience is presented with two sets of characters: one pair—Vladimir and Estragon—waits passively, and another pair—Pozzo and Lucky—fills the time with purposeless journeying. Beckett claimed his works begin where the implied happy endings of other literary works leave off. He strips away the false rewards of power, wealth, or marriage to present concentrated sparseness as a means of exploring existential questions. The absurdity and humor in his works are meant to liberate his viewers from the angst of these questions. He intends to free his viewers from the experience of trying to make sense of the senseless.

The original French version of the play, *En attendant Godot*, was performed in full for the first time in Paris at the Théâtre de Babylone in 1953. Despite Beckett's inexperience in theater, this first play required only superficial revisions during the rehearsals. Early audiences were bored, confused, and even angered by the play. Some critics disliked its rejection of purpose and meaning. Others, however, immediately recognized the play's revolutionary importance. Sylvain Zegel, who wrote the first review of the production, observed that Vladimir and Estragon represent all of humanity, trying to achieve at least the illusion of living.

It didn't take long for the play's popularity to spread. In 1953, an inmate of Lüttringhausen prison in Germany, having gotten a copy of the script, translated it into German and performed it with his fellow inmates. He wrote to Beckett that the harshness of life and the endless waiting depicted in the play resonated strongly with the prisoners. The first English-language performance, directed by Peter Hall at the Arts Theatre in London in 1955, was received with mixed reviews. Despite Hall's opinion that the dialogue was "real dramatic poetry," critic Philip Hope-Wallace called the language flat. Fortunately, the critic for the *Sunday Times*, Harold Hobson, was hooked, and the public soon caught what Hall later called "Godotmania."

Since then, *Waiting for Godot* has been performed in many different ways around the world. Beckett famously insisted that productions of the play remain faithful to his original dialogue, setting, and stage directions. Actors and directors, however, continue to put their own spin on performances. In a 1988 production at New York's Lincoln Center, superstar comic Robin Williams, playing Estragon, couldn't resist interrupting Lucky's monologue with antics and verbal outbursts. Also in 1988, the Dutch Haarlem Toneelschuur Theater staged an all-female production, despite Beckett's objections. A Classical Theater of Harlem production in 2006 set the play in flooded New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Beckett, a master of form, strove throughout his life to produce plays, poetry, and prose pared down as much as possible to address essential questions of human existence. *Come and Go* (1967) contains only 121 words; "Lessness" (1970) comprises only 30 sentences, each appearing two times; and *Rockaby* (1980) runs for a duration of 15 minutes.

Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1969. He died on December 22, 1989, in Paris

## **Waiting for Godot | Discussion**

What is the tone of *Waiting for Godot*?

*Waiting for Godot* is both bleak and absurdly humorous. From the moment the curtain rises, the barrenness of the set conveys loneliness and isolation, and the rundown characters exude a subtle desperation. They seem to have hope, persevering in waiting for some sort of meaning or salvation, but it is ultimately revealed to be foolish and futile. But the humor created by the absurdity of the characters and their situation saves the play from total darkness. The audience's laughter is cathartic, counteracting the sense of hopelessness to create a lighter mood. In a way, the two tones reinforce each other. Things are bleak to the point of absurdity, and the absurdity reveals bleak truths about humanity and existence. The first line of the play, "Nothing to be done," in addition to summing up the action in the play, demonstrates both bleak resignation and a comically absurd casualness. Beckett called the play a tragicomedy, and his work has been interpreted both bleakly and humorously on the stage.

### [Absurdity of Existence Folly of Seeking Meaning](#)

Why is Vladimir appalled in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) and what does it mean in the context of the play?

In Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir), Vladimir is talking about "the last moment" when he says he feels "it coming." He is both relieved and appalled. He has also just tried to remember a quotation he heard before about "hope deferred" making someone sick. Presumably it is death that he feels coming, and remembering the quotation provokes these mixed feelings. Although he mentions being both relieved and appalled, the feeling of being appalled is clearly stronger because the word is repeated, written in capital letters, and broken into syllables to be spoken with strong emphasis. Virtually, the only hope demonstrated in the play is implied by Vladimir's insistence on continuing to wait for Godot despite his ongoing failure to appear and Vladimir's recurring longing for death. For just a brief minute, Vladimir seems to recognize that waiting is the cause of his suffering, leaving him appalled and perhaps even making him physically ill. However, as often happens in the play, he quickly gives up on the thought with the comment "Nothing to be done."

### Vladimir Godot Folly of Seeking Meaning

What does Vladimir mean by a man "blaming on his boots the faults of his feet" in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir)?

Like many statements in the play, Vladimir's statement in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) sounds like a profound truth, but becomes absurd on closer examination. This is often interpreted as pointing out the tendency of humans to blame their problems on external sources (the boot) rather than looking to themselves (one's own foot) for the root of the problem. While this is something people do, the metaphor is based on the absurd premise that feet should somehow fit their boots rather than the other way around. It also is an example of situational irony that Vladimir and Estragon are never able to take it upon themselves to escape the excruciating waiting by just leaving instead of waiting for an external figure, Godot, to appear and save them.

### Vladimir Estragon Godot Absurdity of Existence

What does Estragon suggest repenting of in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir)?

In Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) when Vladimir comes up with the idea of repenting of something, Estragon suggests they repent of being born. In Christianity, repentance is usually understood to involve feelings of deep regret for past wrongs, so Estragon is suggesting their very existence is a regrettable mistake. If Estragon feels they would have been better off not

being born, he must not feel their lives have contained much worth living for, thus contributing to the ideas in the play about life being devoid of purpose. Another interpretation suggests itself in the idea of Estragon repenting of something that cannot possibly be his own fault—his birth. This exposes the idea of repentance as absurd.

### Estragon Vladimir Purposelessness of Life

In *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) why does Estragon say, "People are bloody ignorant apes"?

Estragon makes this statement in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) in response to Vladimir's complaint about the story of the two thieves in the Bible. Only one of the four Gospels in the New Testament says Christ took mercy on and saved one of the thieves crucified alongside him, yet Vladimir says it is the only version people know. (Another Gospel says both thieves were damned, and the other two don't mention the thieves at all.) Estragon explains this by saying you can't expect any more of people because they're really nothing but animals. Rather than thinking through complex ideas, they simply choose whatever seems likely to be better for them. It is fitting that, of the two main characters, Estragon is the one to observe that people are no more than animals because he is the character most in touch with his animal drives, including pain and hunger. Like the apes he decries, Estragon also refuses to think through complex ideas with Vladimir. It is also interesting to note that this statement, which is based on the theory of evolution, occurs during a discussion of a Bible story. It is only in evolutionary science that humans are believed to have descended from apes. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, people are created separately from animals and considered to be inherently superior.

### Estragon Vladimir

What must Godot do before answering Vladimir and Estragon's request in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) and what does it reveal about Godot?

According to Vladimir and Estragon in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir), before answering their "kind of prayer," Godot must "think it over" and consult with his family, friends, agents, correspondents, books, and bank account. This list is delivered in the same comic free-association format Vladimir and Estragon repeat throughout the play, in which they seem almost to compete to see which one can come up with the most ways to say the same thing. This raises

the question of whether they're listing meaningful things or simply saying the next thing that occurs to them. If, however, their list is meaningful, it reveals that this higher power they are depending on to save them, instead of having final decision-making power, must first consult with pretty much everyone he knows as well as established learning and financial institutions to make a decision. This reveals Godot to be less than a definitive or divine authority and points out the foolishness of Estragon's and, especially (because he represents the mind) Vladimir's reliance on him to provide meaning to their existence.

### Vladimir Estragon Godot Folly of Seeking Meaning

Why does Vladimir stifle his laughter in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir)?

In Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir), Vladimir "breaks into a hearty laugh" and stifles it, "his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted." Then Vladimir claims laughter is not allowed. He is the only character who makes this claim, however, and apparently the only one bound by it because both Pozzo and Estragon laugh freely and without consequence before the end of Act 1. This restriction Vladimir imposes clearly applies only to himself. Obviously, Vladimir has a prostate problem, but on a subtler level the restriction he tries to impose on everyone implies that he sees his physical illness as a type of punishment. Later in the play, he says they cannot drop (abandon) Godot because he will punish them. It explains perhaps why Vladimir insists on waiting for Godot, and it shows that he really does believe in Godot's powers.

### Vladimir Estragon Godot

What is the significance of the confusion about Pozzo's name and identity in *Waiting for Godot*?

In both acts Estragon asks whether Pozzo is Godot when he and Lucky first arrive. They have been waiting for an authority figure, and Pozzo appears to be one, at least in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive). The idea is chilling: This pompous person who treats a fellow human being so callously could be the higher authority Vladimir and Estragon have been waiting for. Thankfully, Vladimir is certain he is not Godot—mostly. In the confusion about Pozzo's name in Act 1, Estragon calls him "Bozzo," comparing him to a clown. Vladimir says he knew a Gozzo family, the mother of which had a sexually transmitted disease (gonorrhoea, known as "the clap"). He offers this information to try to calm Pozzo, but the unfavorable comparisons only highlight the absurdity of Pozzo's demands for recognition and respect.

## Pozzo Estragon Vladimir Absurdity of Existence

What is the significance Vladimir and Estragon's reaction when they examine Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive)?

As they examine Lucky in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive), Vladimir and Estragon first notice that rubbing from the rope is causing a sore on Lucky's neck. Estragon declares this inevitable. After noticing he's "not bad looking," Estragon points out Lucky's "slobber," and Vladimir declares that inevitable. They speculate that he is mentally disabled. Vladimir thinks Lucky has a goiter (an abnormal enlargement of the thyroid gland in the neck), but Estragon says it is uncertain. Then Vladimir notices Lucky's "goggling" eyes, and Estragon says Lucky is at his "last gasp," but Vladimir calls that uncertain, too. The contrast between their two primary conclusions, things are either inevitable or uncertain, is comical, but their conclusions are also self-serving. Concluding that the sore and the slobber are inevitable is heartless; accepting Lucky's condition without question, and dismissing his signs of illness, even possible death, as "uncertain" ensures that they don't need to help him. They can continue to avoid action and resume waiting.

## Lucky Vladimir Estragon Pozzo's Rope

In *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive) how do the chicken bones help illustrate differences between Estragon and Vladimir?

As the half of the pair that represents the body, Estragon is primarily concerned with his hunger, and nakedly shows his interest in the chicken bones. In Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive), he holds to social conventions enough to ask permission to take the bones but feels no embarrassment about greedily scooping them up and gnawing on them once he has been given the go-ahead. Estragon can also be seen as personifying the *id* in Freud's theory of the human psyche, or personality. The *id* functions purely on instinct, is only concerned with biological needs, and demands instant gratification. As the one concerned with reason and logic, Vladimir is more bound by social conventions, and is scandalized by the forwardness of Estragon's request. In Freud's framework, Vladimir best represents the *ego*, the part of the psyche concerned with reasoning and social consequences. He is also the only character who occasionally demonstrates features of the *superego*, which is concerned with higher societal values such as morality

In *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 what do the characters' comments about the carrot and Pozzo's reaction to his second pipe suggest?

In Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir), Estragon says the more he eats the carrot the worse it gets, and it was just a carrot to begin with. Vladimir replies that he is the opposite; he gets "used to the muck" as he goes along. As Pozzo smokes a second pipe in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive), he comments that the second pipe is not as sweet as the first, although it is still sweet. Although they are talking about specific experiences, these varying reactions seem to make larger statements about their varying attitudes toward life and existence. Estragon's reaction indicates his increasing disillusionment with his existence as it goes along, although he doesn't expect much to begin with. Pozzo seems to experience a similar disillusionment toward his repetitious life experiences, but he also holds on to some degree of satisfaction with life. Because Vladimir expects "the muck" of existence, it actually becomes more bearable for him as he goes along. Pleasure might be seen as meaning in life, and these reactions suggest that seeking meaning is bound to lead to disappointment.

### [Estragon Vladimir Pozzo Folly of Seeking Meaning](#)

What is the significance of Pozzo's vaporizer in *Waiting for Godot*?

In Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive) and Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Pozzo sprays his throat with a vaporizer before answering questions about Lucky and making an extended speech. This repeated action lends a feeling of almost ceremonial preparation, calling attention to himself and creating the impression that he is going to say something of great importance. Of course when he does speak, his words don't live up to the expectation created by his contrived preparations, again pointing out the absurdity of his social pretensions. Like many people, he acts as if he is more important than he really is. The vaporizer is clearly linked with speaking for Pozzo, similar to the way in which the bowler hats are linked to thought. Pozzo doesn't seem to strictly need the vaporizer to speak as Lucky needs his hat to think, but he uses it when he wants to call particular attention to what he is saying. Significantly, the vaporizer does not appear in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) after Pozzo's social status has been reduced by his blindness.

### [Pozzo Lucky Absurdity of Existence](#)

What are the philosophical implications behind Pozzo's reasoning for why Lucky never puts down the bags in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive)?

Pozzo "reasons" in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive) that Lucky has the right to make himself comfortable by putting down the bags he holds, so the fact that he does not put them down must mean he chooses not to. This logic, however, is based on a false and absurd premise—it is not at all a given that Lucky has the right to put down the bags. Philosophically, Lucky may have the same right as any human being to exercise his will freely. As an apparent slave, however, bound by rope and on his way to be sold, Lucky does not have the power to make the choices Pozzo hypocritically imputes to him. Perhaps Pozzo would not object to Lucky's putting down the bags, but he certainly never encourages him to do so either, demonstrating a total lack of concern for Lucky's feelings. In fact, Pozzo claims Lucky is trying to take advantage of *him* by convincing Pozzo not to sell him. Behind all this rationalizing, Pozzo merely tries to dissimulate his culpability in Lucky's lot.

#### Pozzo Lucky Lucky's Baggage Pozzo's Rope

What is the effect of Pozzo's saying that Lucky drives him mad in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive)?

When in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive) Pozzo says he and Lucky have been together nearly 60 years, Vladimir and Estragon become outraged that he would want to get rid of such an "old and faithful servant." But then Pozzo seems to break down, saying the way Lucky "goes on" drives him mad. The timing of Pozzo's outburst seems convenient for moving the blame away from him, and it is supremely hypocritical of Pozzo to complain about Lucky's decline after inflicting years of abuse on him. Nonetheless, Vladimir and Estragon begin abusing Lucky for his "mistreatment" of Pozzo. Pozzo, meanwhile, recovers himself, tells the others to forget what he has said, and, in a comic reversal, denies he is the kind of "man that can be made to suffer," ending the discussion. This exchange reveals the absurdity of human social conventions. Vladimir and Estragon's sympathy for Lucky is shown to lack any basis in principle because they switch their sympathies to Pozzo as soon as he acts upset. And Pozzo ridiculously denies the feelings he has just expressed because they don't fit with his concept of his social role.

#### Pozzo Lucky Vladimir Estragon Absurdity of Existence



What do Pozzo's references to Greek gods show in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive)?

Instead of referencing Christian religious traditions as Vladimir and Estragon do, in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive) Pozzo exclaims "Atlas, son of Jupiter!"—two Greek gods (more or less)—when outraged, and uses the Greek demigod Pan to describe the stillness of nightfall. This seems to be another way Pozzo pompously tries to separate himself from the more "common" Estragon and Vladimir. The study of ancient Greece was seen as the height of learning, so Pozzo is trying to establish that he is a learned man. However, he gets his Greek mythology wrong—Jupiter is not the son of Atlas—emphasizing the absurdity of his social posturing. These Greek references seem to have no meaning for Vladimir and Estragon, suggesting the uselessness of religion to provide meaning in life. Although they are more familiar with the Christian tradition, it never gives them any answers, either.

### Pozzo Vladimir Estragon Folly of Seeking Meaning

In *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks) how does Pozzo describe his view of life during his speech about the night?

After reminding everyone to pay attention to him in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Pozzo begins his speech about the night by describing the sky as they are seeing it at twilight, the time after the sun sets but before the sky is totally dark. He describes how the sun shines strongly during the day and then more and more palely in the evening until it finally goes down. It seems like a gentle time, but behind the peaceful twilight, night is "charging" and will "burst upon us ... like that!" He concludes, depressingly, "That's how it is on this bitch of an earth." This speech of Pozzo's, which comes shortly before Lucky's long speech, previews the speech's theme and mood. Both speeches address a kind of decline, represented in Pozzo's speech by the fading of sunlight and onset of night. The sunlight fades gradually, making it feel inevitable that night will take over, a night Pozzo depicts as vital, forceful, and even malicious. Day and night (or light and dark) are common symbols for life and death, so Pozzo seems to be making a deeper statement that life is weak and powerless and is easily overtaken by death.

### Pozzo Lucky

In *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks) how are the names given to Lucky's dance significant?

When Pozzo asks Vladimir and Estragon to guess the name of Lucky's brief, flailing dance in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Estragon calls it "The Scapegoat's Agony," and Vladimir guesses "The Hard Stool," which might seem at first to refer to the stool that Pozzo sits on and Lucky carries but makes more sense as a reference to a difficult bowel movement. Both names indicate that Lucky's dance makes him appear to be in pain. Estragon's name also calls to mind that Pozzo blames Lucky for driving him mad when his abuse can't have helped but contribute to Lucky's decline. Pozzo has made Lucky his scapegoat, among other things. Lucky's own name for the dance, "The Net," goes even deeper, echoing the characters' entrapment—Vladimir and Estragon's in their endless waiting, and Lucky and Pozzo's in their endless journeying. There is no indication in Lucky's dance that he gets out of the net—he struggles only briefly within it, suggesting there is no purpose to struggling, or to life.

### Lucky Estragon Vladimir Purposelessness of Life

How do Lucky's hats relate to independent thought in *Waiting for Godot*?

In Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Pozzo says Lucky must have his hat on to think; the speech Lucky gives when he thinks does seem to express some thoughts of his own, although they are jumbled. Even then, he needs to be ordered to think. Just wearing the hat, however, is not enough. Although he is wearing his hat when he and Pozzo arrive, he shows no sign of independent thought, only responding to Pozzo's orders. The other characters remove Lucky's hat to stop his thinking, and it's left behind when Pozzo and Lucky continue on their way. When Lucky returns in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), he is no longer able to speak, so he could not express any independent thoughts even if he were so inclined. That he wears a different hat seems to symbolize this change in his ability to think.

### Lucky Pozzo Folly of Seeking Meaning

In *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks) how does Lucky's speech make fun of academic speech?

Parts of Lucky's speech in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks) echo structures of academic language, such as the statements "Given the existence ... of a personal God" and "considering ... that as a result of

the labors left unfinished." However, the conclusions to these statements never appear, implying the lack of meaningful conclusions in academic speech. Lucky often repeats syllables such as "quaquaquaqua." *Qua* is a preposition originating from Latin and used in both French and English to mean "which way" or "as," again signaling a logical direction or conclusion that is never fulfilled. He also repeats syllables in words such as "Acacacademy of Anthropopometry." While *academy* and *anthropometry* are real words associated with learning (anthropometry is the study of the measurements of the human body), the repeated syllables call to mind slang terms for feces. The names of "scholars" in Lucky's speech use similarities to words in English, French, and even German to reference nonacademic concepts. For instance, the driver and ticket puncher on a tram are "Puncher and Wattman." Many, such as "Fartov and Belcher," take words for bodily functions and make them sound like words in foreign languages. These references clearly signal that academic speech foolishly fails in its attempts to identify and prove any sort of meaning in existence.

### [Lucky Folly of Seeking Meaning](#)

What does Lucky's speech suggest about the meaning of existence in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks)?

The premise at the beginning of Lucky's speech in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), "Given the existence ... of a personal God," seems to indicate he is arguing for religion, which traditionally provides meaning in people's lives. But he then attributes to God the characteristics of apathia (apathy or indifference), athambia (inability to be bothered), and aphasia (inability to communicate), showing that if there is a God, he apparently doesn't much care to help or even communicate effectively with people. Lucky's speech also indicates humanity has turned away from God and toward learning, technology, and various forms of recreation to find meaning. This effort has also failed, however, and humanity "wastes and pines." The end of Lucky's speech portrays humanity as abandoned and fading in a cold, dark, wasteland, containing nothing but stones and skulls. It is understandable that the horrors of World War II, including the Holocaust, would have led to this view of the decline of humanity and the world. If God doesn't intervene to prevent such horrors, it certainly calls his existence into question, and it is difficult to find any other meaning in it, either. Beckett seems to see this loss of meaning as causing the decline of humanity. What remains is a hard, barren wasteland. The final word, "unfinished," seems to refer both to Lucky's unfinished speech and the continuing decline of mankind

In *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks) why does Lucky's speech upset the other characters? In Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Lucky's speech paints a fairly unhappy picture of the future of humanity, which could provoke a listener to want to make him stop. Pozzo has also indicated that Lucky, who "used to think very prettily," now drives him mad, likely because of the extremely broken way he expresses his thoughts. Lucky's speech is jumbled and scatological (contains bathroom humor); it brings up lofty theological notions only to drop them for fart jokes; and though the other characters succeed in breaking it off at the word "unfinished," Lucky otherwise shows no signs of stopping. It is significant that Beckett leaves the stage directions vague for the rising frustrations of the other characters during Lucky's speech. Their increased frustration is not tied to any particular word or phrase. Instead, the speech seems to simply irritate the other characters the more it continues, until they finally reach the point of attacking Lucky physically to make him stop. If the rising frustration correlates to anything in the speech, it is probably Lucky's torrent of incoherence.

### Lucky Pozzo Vladimir Estragon Absurdity of Existence

What is unusual about Estragon's and Vladimir's names in *Waiting for Godot*?

The identities of the two main characters are never quite certain throughout the play. When Pozzo asks Estragon what his name is in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Estragon mysteriously tells him "Adam." His choice of the name of the Biblical first man reinforces the impression that he is an Everyman, representing all of humanity. It also raises the question of whether their names even are Estragon and Vladimir. They never volunteer their names to other characters and only address each other by the childish nicknames "Gogo" and "Didi." Vladimir says his own name just once, and the longer form of Gogo's name, Estragon, appears only in the script. This uncertainty is heightened when the boy with a message from Godot refers to Vladimir as "Mister Albert" in both Act 1 (A Boy with a Message) and Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message), and Vladimir fails to correct him. Are they Vladimir and Estragon, or are they Albert and Adam? Are they using code names, like members of the French Resistance? In the end, it doesn't really matter. Whatever their names, they are the ones keeping themselves waiting for a meaning that will likely never come.

### Estragon Vladimir Pozzo A boy Folly of Seeking Meaning

How does Pozzo's watch contribute to the uncertainty of time in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (Lucky Thinks)?

Before Lucky's dance and speech in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), Pozzo listens to his watch to disprove Vladimir's claim that time has stopped. After Lucky performs, however, Pozzo is suddenly unable to find his watch. Absurdly, instead of checking his pockets, he, Vladimir, and Estragon listen to his chest to try to find it. They hear something but conclude it is Pozzo's heart, making a connection between the heartbeat, death, and time: when the heart stops, a person dies. Estragon suggests the watch has stopped, suggesting perhaps time itself has actually stopped, or time is an illusion. Pozzo ultimately concludes he left his watch at home, apparently forgetting that he had it only a little while before. The unreliability of Pozzo's memory throws into doubt any number of other details: perhaps he and Lucky have met Vladimir and Estragon before, even many times before—perhaps they are actually reliving the same day over and over.

#### [Pozzo Vladimir Estragon Lucky Uncertainty of Time Absurdity of Existence](#)

How does the boy contribute to Vladimir and Estragon's uncertainty in *Waiting for Godot*?

Despite his multiple appearances (or the multiple boys who appear), always conveying a message to or from Godot, in both acts the boy does not firm up Vladimir and Estragon's certainty. In fact, the boy contributes to their uncertainty by providing a real but totally confounding link to Godot: if he is indeed carrying a message from Godot, where did he come from? Where is Godot right now? Why cannot the men travel back to Godot with the boy? Far from raising their hopes by being a real-life, and almost real-time, connection with the long-awaited guest, the boy serves only to heighten the unreality of their whole waiting enterprise—so much so that, by the time the boy finally returns, the men know exactly what message he brings.

#### [A boy Estragon Vladimir Absurdity of Existence](#)

Have Vladimir and Estragon met Lucky and Pozzo before Act 1 of *Waiting for Godot*?

After Pozzo and Lucky leave, Vladimir says in Act 1 (A Boy with a Message) that they have actually met before and he just pretended not to recognize them. This seems surprising at first because Vladimir went along with Estragon's apparent confusion about Pozzo's name in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive). When the scene is reviewed with the new information, however, it seems possible that Vladimir was deliberately playing along and perhaps even trying to provoke

Pozzo by linking him to a woman with a sexually transmitted disease. In Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), it becomes evident that Vladimir and Estragon are living the nearly same day over and over again, including the arrival of Lucky and Pozzo. This strongly suggests that the same day probably also played out at least once before the beginning of Act 1, meaning they had all met before. It could still be debated that Vladimir actually remembers previous meetings with Lucky and Pozzo, because memory, even Vladimir's, is extremely uncertain in *Waiting for Godot*. It brings up a deeper philosophical question: Can a person actually be the same every day, because circumstances, reactions, and emotions are constantly in flux? Beckett seems to be making the contradictory point that everything changes and stays the same simultaneously.

### Vladimir Estragon Pozzo Lucky Uncertainty of Time

What does the rising of the moon signify in *Waiting for Godot*?

In *Waiting for Godot*, the moon rising signals the beginning of full night and the time when Vladimir and Estragon stop waiting for Godot for that day. As in Pozzo's speech about the twilight, night could be seen to represent death. Indeed, night falls quite suddenly based on the stage directions, echoing Pozzo's picture of night bursting upon a weakly fading day. Godot's messenger arrives shortly before the moon rises, making it clear that Godot will not come after dark. If night is death and Godot represents some sort of meaning to existence, these events suggest humanity will find no meaning before or after death. In Act 1 (A Boy with a Message), Vladimir exclaims "At last!" when the moon rises, seeming relieved by the symbolic arrival of death as an end to their waiting. They also consider literal death—hanging themselves from the tree again after nightfall. Estragon adapts part of a Percy Bysshe Shelley poem, saying the moon is pale and tired from climbing the heavens and looking down on "the likes of us." Even the moon is exhausted by Estragon and Vladimir's existence. In Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message), the moon rises even more quickly, and Vladimir and Estragon play out virtually the same scene as in Act 1, contemplating hanging themselves or parting ways, and in the end, doing nothing.

### Estragon Vladimir Folly of Seeking Meaning Absurdity of Existence Leafless Tree

Why does Estragon abandon his boots in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1?

In Act 1 (A Boy with a Message), Estragon leaves his boots at the edge of the stage, saying someone will come along with smaller feet and the boots will make this person happy. Although

also absurd, this is one of the most hopeful actions in the play. The boots are a constant source of suffering to Estragon, so by abandoning them he is actually taking a small step toward improving his existence. Unfortunately, he is unable to take the larger step to end the suffering of their endless waiting, although he repeatedly wants to (and even once tries to) leave. Estragon hopes his boots might be found by someone with the right-sized feet who will find them a source of comfort rather than suffering. Of course, chances are slim that someone with just the right-sized feet will find the boots, making his hope somewhat absurd. But improbably, the boots in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return) do seem to be different from the ones Estragon left at the end of Act 1, at least allowing the possibility that someone took his old ones because they found them useful. The boots represent the possibility that good things do happen but humanity is too figuratively asleep to notice.

### Estragon Absurdity of Existence Purposelessness of Life

What is the significance of Estragon's comparing himself to Christ in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 1 (A Boy with a Message)?

When in Act 1 (A Boy with a Message) Vladimir tells Estragon he can't leave his boots and go barefoot, Estragon says, "Christ did." Vladimir protests he can't compare himself to Christ, and Estragon replies he has all his life. Vladimir argues against this by focusing on the practical differences, pointing out that Christ lived in a place where feet didn't need so much protection from cold and wet. Estragon replies, "And they crucified quick." By focusing on the suffering of Christ's death, he seems to be drawing a parallel to his own suffering, caused by his ill-fitting boots and the mysterious nightly beatings. The comparison, however, is absurd because it applies only at a surface level. Whereas it is a central article of Christian faith that Christ suffered to save all humankind, it is difficult to see any purpose or meaning in Estragon's suffering. And that may be Beckett's point: if there is no God or higher meaning, then Christ's suffering doesn't mean any more than Estragon's does. In fact, Estragon replying "And they crucified quick," implies that he feels he suffers more than Christ did because Christ died quickly, while Estragon is still suffering.

### Estragon Vladimir Folly of Seeking Meaning

What are some elements of metafiction, in which the characters are aware that they are in a work of fiction, in *Waiting for Godot*?

In *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir occasionally say and do things to indicate that they are aware they are in a play. This makes the play, to some extent, a work of metafiction, in which the elements of a literary work are used to point out that the work itself is an artificial construct. The most obvious of these instances occurs in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive) when Estragon directs Vladimir to the "End of the corridor, on the left" to go to the bathroom. These directions are more consistent with a building, such as a theater, than the outdoor setting of the play. Vladimir strengthens the impression they are in a theater by replying, "Keep my seat." Of course, there are no seats on stage. In Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time) when Estragon becomes convinced that people are coming after him from all directions, Vladimir points him beyond the front of the stage, toward the audience. Although Vladimir says there is no one in sight, Estragon recoils as if he is afraid. Given that he has been afraid of strange people coming, there is a definite impression that he is horrified to see people—the audience—in that direction as well. Vladimir then acknowledges whatever Estragon is reacting to, saying, "Well I can understand that." When the two begin insulting each other a few moments later to pass the time, Estragon comes up with "Critic!" as the ultimate insult. Of course, an actor would consider a critic the worst of the worst, much more than two ragged men on the side of country road would. These comments, revealing the fictional nature of the characters' existence, only emphasize the absurdity of their "reality," and by extension, all of humanity's as well.

### [Estragon Vladimir Absurdity of Existence](#)

Why do negative reactions tend to follow acts of affection in *Waiting for Godot*?

In *Waiting for Godot*, characters only occasionally display affection or compassion (they are most often concerned with their own feelings), and in Act 1, those displays are followed immediately by negative reactions. Vladimir wants to embrace Estragon when he first arrives in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir), but Estragon irritably brushes him off. Later, Estragon prompts Vladimir to embrace him but then recoils because he smells of garlic. In Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive), Estragon tries to comfort Lucky by wiping away his tears, and the usually passive Lucky viciously kicks Estragon for his efforts. Generally, affection and compassion serve to connect people to one another; these negative reactions serve to immediately cut off those connections, again keeping the characters isolated from one another emotionally, and generally reinforcing the



impression of an uncaring, meaningless existence. This disconnection between the characters lessens somewhat in Act 2. Estragon forcefully rejects Vladimir's first request to embrace in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return) because he is angry that Vladimir seems happy without him. When they do finally embrace a bit later, however, neither one is disgusted or reacts violently. Vladimir comically pulls away first, making Estragon almost fall, but overall, it is a moment of connection. Their embrace in Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time) is even more positive. After insulting each other, the two embrace to make up. Finally, there is nothing awkward or negative about the embrace, although as part of their efforts to fill time it may be less than completely genuine. This increasingly evident emotional connection between Vladimir and Estragon is a small, positive, counteraction of the torture of their endless waiting. They may be waiting forever, but at least they have each other.

What is the significance of the changed tree in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2?

The changes to the tree between Act 1 and Act 2 of *Waiting for Godot*, like most things in the play, could mean a number of different things. Even the change itself is a bit uncertain. The stage directions in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return) describe the tree as now having "four or five" leaves, which continues the impression of barrenness in the setting, while Vladimir characterizes it as "covered with leaves" in Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time). The presence of leaves leads Estragon to conclude it is spring, a season that usually represents new life and hope. A change of season also indicates that much more time has passed than the one day Vladimir and the audience assume, a possibility that is not nearly so hopeful. It's also possible that this is a different tree altogether, making it uncertain whether the characters are waiting in the right place (if there even is such a thing). The effect of having the audience notice the discrepancy between the tree and what the characters say about the tree highlights the idea that truth is subjective, not objective; it depends on the viewer's or seeker's perception.

### Vladimir Estragon Uncertainty of Time Leafless Tree

What do Estragon's nightly beatings suggest in *Waiting for Godot*?

Of the two primary characters, Estragon is clearly the one most connected with bodily concerns, including physical suffering. The beatings he says he receives every night are perhaps the most significant feature of his suffering. Rather than fighting against or trying to avoid the beatings, however, he seems almost to take them for granted. The source of the beatings remains largely undefined; Estragon says in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return) only that there were 10 of

"them." The lack of a source or clear cause for the beatings suggests that suffering is simply an unavoidable part of existence. Furthermore, the suffering is entirely without any sort of purpose or meaning, emphasizing the purposelessness of life itself. Vladimir, at least, thinks of trying to prevent the beatings, claiming that he would have stopped Estragon from doing whatever caused him to be beaten. His assumption, however, that Estragon brings the beatings on himself is absurd.

### Estragon Vladimir Purposelessness of Life Absurdity of Existence

How do Vladimir's and Estragon's memories of Lucky and Pozzo differ in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2?

When Vladimir brings up Lucky and Pozzo in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return), Estragon remembers very little about them. He recalls mostly the parts that affected him physically, such as being kicked by Lucky in the shin and chewing on Pozzo's discarded chicken bones. Estragon has no clear sense of when these things occurred, but he doubts that those things he does remember happened yesterday, again raising the uncertainty of time. It is almost as if he is remembering something that happened a long time ago, and the rest of the details have gotten lost in time. Estragon also acknowledges his bad memory: "Either I forget immediately or I never forget." Vladimir's memory and sense of time is more fixed; he remembers more details of their previous encounter with Lucky and Pozzo and is relatively certain it occurred yesterday. By the time Vladimir mentions Pozzo and Lucky again in Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time), Estragon already has forgotten them. Now he doubts Pozzo gave him the bones, which he now remembers were "like fishbones," perhaps suggesting they were different bones and he is remembering a different day. Vladimir seems to prove that the events he remembers happened yesterday by finding a wound just "beginning to fester" on Estragon's leg, presumably from Lucky's kick. But Vladimir doesn't remember exactly which leg was injured and looks first at the wrong one. Estragon appears to once again forget everything immediately—a few minutes later Vladimir suggests playing a game called "Pozzo and Lucky," and Estragon replies that he has "Never heard of it." Beckett asks the audience to consider how reliable the constructs of human memory and time really are.

### Vladimir Estragon Lucky Pozzo Uncertainty of Time

Are Estragon's boots different in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2?

In Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time), Estragon claims that the boots that appear on the stage in Act 2 are not the ones he left at the end of the previous act. He believes they are a different color—either brown or green when his were black, or maybe gray. At Vladimir's suggestion, Estragon tries them on, and the two characters struggle getting them on, but perhaps only because they cannot work together gracefully. Estragon says the boots fit, or are even a bit too big, supporting his claim that they are different boots. Then in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), he again has trouble taking them off, in much the same way he struggled with his boots in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir). This seems to suggest that they might be the same boots and the problem really is with his feet (swelling, perhaps). Finally, Estragon removes the boots easily after waking up from a nap in Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message) and once again sets them out in preparation for leaving for the night. Although nothing is certain in *Waiting for Godot*, most of the evidence in Act 2 seems to point to the boots being different from the ones in Act 1, which could be another indication that more than one day has passed between the two acts. The discrepancy does leave room for another unexplained possibility—such as someone leaving the boots there—but no specific answer is provable. Perhaps the question *is* the point. There are some things Estragon and Vladimir can never know, hence the folly of seeking meaning.

### [Estragon Vladimir Uncertainty of Time Folly of Seeking Meaning](#)

Why is Pozzo's rope shorter in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2 and what does that signify?

In Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), the rope around Lucky's neck is much shorter than in the previous act. While this is a practical change, allowing the now-blind Pozzo to be guided by Lucky's movements, it also symbolizes the increased dependence between these two characters. The rope is now only partly an instrument of control over Lucky; Pozzo is also dependent on it to navigate through life, and when Lucky falls, he takes Pozzo with him. The shorter rope suggests that the inequality between them has lessened; now that they are both afflicted with physical limitations (blind and mute), Pozzo is no longer Lucky's superior. Lucky seems also to be more dependent on Pozzo because he takes no independent action in Act 2, even when Pozzo drops the rope after falling. He moves only in response to Pozzo's orders, automatically giving the rope back to Pozzo on request. Whether by conscious choice or the oppression of slavery, Lucky seems to have embodied his role to the point that he is dependent on Pozzo for decisions and directions.

## Pozzo Lucky Pozzo's Rope

What is Pozzo's relationship with time in *Waiting for Godot*?

Whereas Vladimir and Estragon are uncertain of the passing of time throughout the play, Pozzo starts out the play quite sure about time. From the beginning of his first appearance in Act 1 (Lucky and Pozzo Arrive), Pozzo consults his watch whenever he mentions a period of time. He says explicitly that they've been on the road for six hours. In Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), he says he has a schedule to keep and, to contradict Vladimir's statement that time has stopped, listens to the ticking of his watch. The watch also plays a part in Pozzo's speech about twilight, the transition time between day and night. When Pozzo suddenly cannot find his watch after Lucky's speech, rather than acknowledge that it might be lost, he absurdly concludes that he left it at his manor house, even though he had it just minutes before. Pozzo's blindness in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) is clearly tied to his concept of time because he says, "the blind have no notion of time." It is possible to see Pozzo's loss of the watch as causing the loss of his sense of time, which is associated with his blindness. Estragon and Vladimir even express doubt about his actual blindness, suggesting it might be something he is affecting to deal with the loss of his concrete sense of time. Pozzo tries to hang on to his previous sense of time: after being helped up and determining that Vladimir and Estragon will not kill him, he asks what time of day it is and gets quite anxious when they have trouble answering. He cannot, however, escape the fact that time is now as uncertain for him as it is for them. In fact, he now sees all of life as without time, going straight from birth to the grave in "an instant."

## Pozzo Vladimir Estragon Lucky Uncertainty of Time

What is the significance of the loss of Lucky's voice in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2?

Because the only independence Lucky displays in the play is during his speech in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks)—although he must be ordered to speak and must have his hat on to do it—the loss of his voice in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) cuts him off from all independence. There is also possibly a relationship between Pozzo's going blind and Lucky's going dumb, because the two of them turn up in this changed condition at the beginning of Act 2. (And if only one day has passed since their previous meeting, then Lucky's muteness and Pozzo's blindness befell them on the same day.) It is even possible that Lucky cannot speak because Pozzo has decided not to order him to speak. There is even less evidence for Lucky's being unable to speak than there is for

Pozzo's being unable to see. He simply does not, which is no different from how he behaved when not ordered to speak in Act 1. Only Pozzo's perception of Lucky has changed.

### Lucky Pozzo

Why does Estragon call Pozzo "Abel" and Lucky "Cain" in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return)?

The names Abel and Cain refer to the Bible story about the origins of humanity. They are the first two sons of the first man and first woman, and Cain kills Abel out of envy when God seems to favor Abel over Cain. For this, Cain is exiled, and his descendants are believed to also bear his wickedness. On the other hand, Abel is remembered as a saint. Because people can be classified as either good or bad, Cain and Abel represent another duality in the human condition. By seeing if Pozzo and Lucky respond to these names in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), Estragon may be trying to determine which of them is good and which bad. And when Pozzo responds to *both* names, Estragon concludes, "He's all of humanity."

### Estragon Pozzo Lucky

How does Vladimir play on Shakespeare in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return)? In his long speech about why he and Estragon should help Pozzo up in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), Vladimir says, "What are we doing here, *that* is the question." This statement calls to mind perhaps the best-known line from Shakespeare, *Hamlet's* famous "To be or not to be—that is the question" phrase. By asking "What are we doing here" instead of "To be or not to be," Beckett changes the question from one of existence to one of purpose. For Vladimir, the defining question of existence is his purpose in life, and he is proud to have an answer to his question: "We are waiting for Godot to come." Unfortunately, when Godot again fails to arrive, the dramatic irony of this purpose is revealed—it is quite likely Godot is never going to come, making this purpose meaningless. And if the focus of Vladimir's and Estragon's existence—waiting for Godot—is, in fact, purposeless, does anyone's life really have a purpose?

### Vladimir Estragon Purposelessness of Life

What does Vladimir's answer to Pozzo about what time it is in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) suggest about Vladimir's viewpoint on life and death?

When in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) Pozzo asks first what time it is and then whether it is evening, Estragon and Vladimir at first argue about the answer, but Vladimir eventually answers Pozzo that it is evening, almost night. He says Estragon made him doubt for a moment, "But it is not for nothing I have lived through this long day." He assures Pozzo that the day is "very near the end of its repertory." On the surface, Vladimir is simply answering Pozzo's question about the present day with a bit of flowery language. Given other instances, however, of day standing for life and night representing death, a deeper figurative meaning can be seen. Vladimir has been living a long time—he and Estragon believe they have been together 50 or so years—and repeating virtually the same day waiting for Godot for who knows how long. Their existence has indeed been one very "long day," and they are tired of it. Vladimir envisions the end of the day, death, drawing "very near." It seems only death can release them from the purposelessness of life

What is the significance of the Latin phrase *Memoria praeteritorum bonorum*, used by Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return)?

In Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) when Pozzo says his sight used to be "wonderful," Vladimir quotes a Latin saying, *Memoria praeteritorum bonorum*, which means the past is always remembered well. In other words, people tend to remember the good things about the past more than the bad, or reshape their memories to make the bad events seem less negative. Vladimir then comments, "That must be unpleasant," contradicting the usual understanding that people enjoy remembering the good things about the past. Instead, Vladimir says remembering the past well is unpleasant for Pozzo, perhaps focusing on how unpleasant his blindness must seem in contrast to his past "wonderful sight." Vladimir also seems to mean that remembering the past well is generally unpleasant, which is supported by other instances of memory in the play. He has brought up with Estragon their past time in France, and it often seems to reflect badly on their present situation.

### Vladimir Pozzo Estragon Uncertainty of Time

In *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2 what does Lucky's bag of sand say about life?

As Pozzo and Lucky prepare to depart in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return), Vladimir finally thinks to ask what is in the bag Lucky carries. Pozzo casually answers, "Sand." It is jarring to discover that the apparently heavy bag Lucky has been carrying throughout the play is full of sand, used simply to weigh things down. Generally, no one transports a heavy bag without a

reason, and the audience automatically assumes it contains something of value—clothes and supplies for the journey, or maybe even gold. The unexpectedly absurd revelation that it contains only weight both creates humor and serves as a powerful illustration of the purposelessness of life. Poor Lucky is shown to be not only carrying burdens not his own but also doing so pointlessly.

### Lucky Pozzo Vladimir Purposelessness of Life Lucky's Baggage

In *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2 how are Vladimir and Estragon similar to the two thieves crucified with Christ?

Near the end of Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message), Vladimir confirms that he and Estragon will hang themselves tomorrow—unless Godot comes, in which case they will be saved. This plan calls to mind the same duality in Vladimir's Bible story from Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) about the two thieves crucified along with Christ, one of whom was damned and the other saved. Vladimir and Estragon are caught in this same duality, although rather than suffering either of these fates, they exist in a kind of perpetual limbo between them every day. Godot never comes to save them, and they never manage to actually damn themselves to hanging, either.

### Vladimir Estragon Absurdity of Existence

Why doesn't the boy see Lucky and Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot*, Act 2?

When the boy arrives in Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message) shortly after Pozzo and Lucky have departed, he says he hasn't seen them. This is a marked difference from the boy in Act 1 (A Boy with a Message), who says he waited until Pozzo and Lucky left to deliver his message because he was afraid of them. It is unclear from the stage directions whether the boy arrives in Act 2 from the same direction in which Pozzo and Lucky have recently departed, but his claim not to have seen them seems a little odd, just like his other claims (such as never having seen Vladimir before). Vladimir has just been pondering whether he, Estragon, and their whole existence waiting for Godot are even real—perhaps he is asleep and dreaming. This would go a long way toward explaining the absurd lack of logic in time, memory, and everything else they do and say. However, like the rest of the play, whether it is all a dream remains uncertain; Vladimir immediately rejects the idea, and he and Estragon continue waiting for Godot.

## A boy Pozzo Lucky Vladimir Estragon Absurdity of Existence

What does the boy represent in *Waiting for Godot*?

The character of the boy, like everything else in *Waiting for Godot*, is open to different interpretations, but a few things are relatively clear. First, the boy is the only character who says he has direct knowledge of someone named Godot. Second, he is a messenger. (To those who see Godot as God, it is difficult not to think of the boy as an angel, one of God's divine messengers.) However, his message is the opposite of the answer Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for—it serves only to keep them endlessly waiting. Children often represent innocence, and Vladimir defends the boy against Estragon's anger in Act 1 (A Boy with a Message), perhaps suggesting that he is less to be blamed than an adult. The boy also displays a level of timidity, saying he is frightened of Lucky and Pozzo in Act 1 and running away from Vladimir's frustrated lunge in Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message). Overall, however, the boy doesn't seem particularly innocent. Thematically, the boy's message is what keeps Vladimir and Estragon's search for meaning—in the form of answers from Godot—alive. Without a nightly assurance that Godot will arrive tomorrow, they would likely stop waiting. Despite this, the hope of finding meaning is enough to keep Vladimir and Estragon trapped in endless waiting.

## A boy Vladimir Estragon Folly of Seeking Meaning

Why do characters wonder if they're asleep or dreaming in *Waiting for Godot*?

Reality is one of the many uncertain things in *Waiting for Godot*. Characters often suggest they might be sleeping and living in some sort of dream; perhaps predictably, it seems to be Estragon who is most in touch with this deeper possibility. The first time he wakes up from a nap in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) and Vladimir refuses to hear his dream, Estragon asks, "This one is enough for you?" The stage directions specify that his words are accompanied by a gesture that indicates "the universe." Vladimir's concrete idea of time and reality contrasts with Estragon's more subjective view in Act 2 (Vladimir and Estragon Return). When Vladimir tries to remind Estragon of events that happened "yesterday," Estragon suggests that Vladimir dreamed them. Even Pozzo in Act 2 (Lucky and Pozzo Return) begins to doubt his reality after going blind. When he describes waking up without his sight, he wonders if he's "not still asleep." In Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message), Vladimir finally wonders if he is also sleeping, implying that his existence is a dream and wondering what truth there is in the events he remembers. But he



cannot seem to face the implications of this possibility—if their reality is a dream, Estragon and Vladimir may not really exist either—and quickly reverts to his "rational" viewpoint, at least on the surface. His deeper doubts are revealed in his reply to Godot's messenger—to acknowledge that he's seen him, that he really exists.

### [Estragon Vladimir Pozzo Uncertainty of Time Absurdity of Existence](#)

What is the significance of the bowler hats in *Waiting for Godot*?

The bowler hats all four men wear are clearly associated with thinking. Lucky is unable to perform his thinking without his hat on his head in Act 1 (Lucky Thinks), and Vladimir frequently takes off his hat when he is trying to think of something, peering into it as if he will find what he's looking for hidden in the lining. (As the character most connected to bodily concerns and least concerned with intellectual thought, Estragon stares into his boot instead.) When Vladimir discovers in Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time) that Lucky's hat has been left behind, he discards his own and wears it instead (after a slapstick exchange of the three hats between him and Estragon). He claims that his was bothering him, perhaps suggesting that he is unhappy with his own thoughts and wants to think someone else's.

### [Lucky Vladimir Estragon](#)

What is the significance of Estragon's dreams and nightmares in *Waiting for Godot*?

Throughout the play, Estragon tends to go to sleep to avoid unpleasantness, ranging from boredom to physical injury. Unfortunately, he doesn't usually find a refuge from suffering in sleep because he often reports nightmares or unpleasant dreams upon waking up. Estragon calls his dreams in Act 1 (Estragon and Vladimir) "private nightmares," and in Act 2 (Conversation Kills Time) he reports dreaming of falling from the top of something. It doesn't seem too surprising that Vladimir doesn't want to hear about these nightmares. When Estragon wakes up after sleeping through Pozzo and Lucky's departure in Act 2 (Different Boy, Same Message), he says he was dreaming that he was happy—and Vladimir still doesn't want to hear about it. Either Vladimir is too decorous or proper to want to hear Estragon's dreams, or Estragon's dreams get at a reality Vladimir wants to ignore, such as clues that they don't really exist or that Godot is not going to come—things Estragon is closer than Vladimir to understanding.

### [Estragon Vladimir Absurdity of Existence](#)

What is the significance of Lucky's name in *Waiting for Godot*?

Lucky's name is mostly situationally ironic because he is far and away the most abused and beaten down character in the play. His situation seems anything but lucky. He is the recipient of some of the worst impulses human nature has to offer—Pozzo treats him as less than human, and even Vladimir and Estragon can muster only fleeting sympathy for him. In a way, however, Lucky can also be said to be actually lucky. Because all decisions are made for him, he doesn't agonize over his own existence as the other three main characters do. The slavery that binds him, like the rope, also relieves him of the need to think, except when ordered. This frees him from the fruitless search for meaning that keeps Vladimir and Estragon waiting for Godot.

### [Lucky Pozzo Vladimir Estragon Folly of Seeking Meaning Pozzo's Rope](#)

What might Godot represent in *Waiting for Godot*?

It is important not to attach too specific an identity to Godot because Beckett himself said he didn't know who Godot was. Many readers and audience members see similarities between the name "Godot" and "God," and that might have been intentional. Although Beckett originally wrote the play in French, he was a native English speaker and would have recognized the similarity. From his later statements though, it seems the similarity wasn't meant to be a concrete sign that Godot was God. It is possible, however, to conclude from the play's allusions to Christianity related to Godot that he represents something about religion, possibly spirituality in general—anything people seek outside themselves to try to provide meaning in their lives. The fact that Godot will probably never come expresses a strong doubt on Beckett's part about whether such a meaning exists, in which case people are actually seeking nothing. To wait for Godot is essentially a fool's chase

### **Waiting for Godot | 10 Things You Didn't Know**

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, which premiered in 1953, is one of the most enigmatic theatrical works ever composed. Featuring an ensemble of only five characters, the play is a cornerstone of absurdist theater. The titular Godot, though heavily discussed throughout the play, never appears onstage. It is his absence that has led audiences to interpretations of the play as everything from a Cold War commentary to a Christian allegory.

Beckett was very straightforward regarding how he wanted *Waiting for Godot* to be staged. The only scenery of note in the stage directions is a tree and a stone or mound on which Estragon sits. The barrenness of the set, along with the play's complicated classification as a tragicomedy, has caused scholars to study and theorize about the play. Beckett's literary and theatrical immortality was confirmed when *Waiting for Godot* was voted [the most significant](#) English-language play of the 20th century in a poll conducted by the British Royal National Theatre.

### **1. Lucky is often viewed as a Christ figure.**

Beckett stated explicitly that Christian allegory was not intentional in *Waiting for Godot*. However, many critics view Lucky as [comparable to Christ](#), in both how he carries the constant burden of Pozzo's bags and how he is treated like a subjugated prisoner.

### **2. Beckett didn't support the idea of an all-female ensemble performance of *Waiting for Godot*.**

When questioned about his opinion of an all-female cast performing *Waiting for Godot*, he expressed his distaste for the idea by [replying](#), "Women don't have prostates." This was in reference to the number of times Vladimir has to leave the stage to urinate during the play.

### **3. Beckett appreciated prison productions of *Waiting for Godot*.**

[Prisoners](#) in Lüttringhausen, German, undertook the staging of the play in 1954 with input from Beckett himself. Beckett generally approved of the play being staged in the prison environment. Later when he was discussing pictures taken from a performance in 1957 at San Quentin prison in California, [he stated](#), "I saw the roots of my play."

### **4. There were attempts to ban *Waiting for Godot* in the 1950s.**

In 1950s England, strict censorship was applied to theatrical performances. The Lord Chamberlain at the time [received a letter](#) in favor of banning the play for its use of bathroom humor. The letter read, "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."

### **5. Many famous acting duos have portrayed Vladimir and Estragon.**

In 1979 Geoffrey Rush and Mel Gibson—who happened to be roommates at the time—appeared in a production as Vladimir and Estragon, respectively. Steve Martin and Robin Williams

appeared in the iconic roles during a 1988 performance. However, perhaps the most [interesting combination](#) took the stage in a London performance where the sketch comedy actors from *Totally Tom*—Tom Stourton and Tom Palmer—took the stage, "Sporting Adidas tracksuit bottoms, hoodies and five-day stubble."

#### **6. An online adaptation of *Waiting for Godot* stages the play among New York's homeless population.**

Entitled *While Waiting for Godot*, the web series is described as, "Giving backdrop to the play—and a sharp commentary on the issues of poverty and the urban homeless population." Each episode is between five and eight minutes long. In 2014 the web series won Best Cinematography at the [Rome Web Awards](#).

#### **7. An unauthorized sequel actually features Godot.**

The "sequel," entitled *Godot Arrived*, was written by the Yugoslavian playwright Miodrag Bulatović in 1966. Beckett [did not encourage](#) this sequel to be composed, but he did not take any sort of action against Bulatović or openly disapprove of him writing it.

#### **8. Beckett likely intended the name *Godot* to refer to feet.**

Rejecting the notion that the word *Godot* is a play on *God*, [Beckett noted](#) in an interview that the character's name was derived from the French word for boot: *godillot* or *godasse*. This is a distinct possibility, since feet and boots do play a prominent role in the play, but another story claims that a man named Godot was the last competitor to pass Beckett as he was observing a bicycle race in France.

#### **9. Lucky was originally portrayed as suffering from Parkinson's Disease.**

French actor [Jean Martin](#), who played Lucky in the premiere of *Waiting for Godot*, decided to play the character with the constant trembling and quivering symptomatic of Parkinson's. Martin consulted a doctor to mimic the attributes of the condition properly. Not wanting to confirm or deny anything about the characters' personal histories, Beckett refused either to approve or disapprove of the interpretation, although Beckett himself had only recently lost his mother to Parkinson's.

**10. *Sesame Street* featured a spoof of *Waiting for Godot*.**

Oddly, the PBS children's show parodied Beckett's play in a skit called "[Waiting for Elmo](#)" (1992). The parody appears in the show's "Monsterpiece Theater" segment, which pays homage to the adult PBS program *Masterpiece Theater*. In the parody, Grover and Telly Monster wait for Elmo near a tree. Fed up with the never-ending waiting, the tree abandons the characters to join the cast of the musical *Okalahoma!*