

**Tikrit University**

**College of Education for Humanities**

**English Department**

**Fourth Grade**

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## **Waiting for Godot Characters**

### **Estragon**

One of the two main characters of the play, along with Vladimir, Estragon is rather helpless on his own. In the beginning of the play, he struggles just to take off his boots, for example. Unlike Vladimir, he has no grasp of time, and is confused as to whether it is evening or morning in act two. Along similar lines, he has a poor grasp of people's identities. He doesn't recognize Lucky and Pozzo in act two, and at one point thinks Pozzo's name is Abel. He cannot even remember his own past, and tells Pozzo his name is Adam. Estragon repeatedly wants to leave, but each time Vladimir reminds him that they must stay and wait for Godot. While he often forms the dull-minded counterpoint to the more cerebral Vladimir, Estragon is still able to match Vladimir's verbal wit and once claims that he used to be a poet.

### **Vladimir**

Perhaps the real protagonist of the play, Vladimir often seems to be more rational than his more nonsensical companion, Estragon. Unlike the other characters in the play, he has a sense of linear time and realizes that the events of act two essentially repeat those of act one. He is also able to remember people's identities, unlike Estragon and Pozzo, who forget each other in act two. He seems to be the only one who is really outraged at Pozzo's horrible treatment of Lucky in act one, but he doesn't actually do anything to help him. Vladimir often tries to explain what is going on in the world—where they are, when they are—and to show evidence to support his theories. But such rational or "scientific" efforts never yield any solid insight, and by the end of the play Vladimir seems less sure than he did at the beginning. Vladimir relies upon Estragon's company as much as Estragon relies upon Vladimir: whenever Estragon leaves the stage for a brief moment, Vladimir panics out of his intense fear of loneliness and abandonment.

### **Godot**

While Godot never appears on stage or has any lines, he is such a significant absence in the play that he may be rightly recognized as one of the play's characters. What little we can gather about Mr. Godot comes from the dialogue of Estragon, Vladimir, and the boy he sends to deliver his

message. The boy says that he watches over Godot's goats, and describes Godot as a relatively kind master. Whoever Godot is, Vladimir and Estragon are convinced that he alone will save them, so they wait endlessly for his arrival, which never comes. Because of his name's resemblance to God, Godot is often read as Beckett's pessimistic version of God, an absent savior who never comes to the aid of those suffering on earth.

## **Pozzo**

Pozzo runs into Vladimir and Estragon while journeying along the road in both acts. He abuses Lucky and treats him as a slave, pulling him around with a rope tied around his neck and having him carry all his things. While he exercises some relative power and authority over Lucky and acts superior to the other characters, he is nonetheless far from powerful himself. He panics when he loses things like his watch and is doomed to repeat his wandering every day, just as Vladimir and Estragon repeat their waiting for Godot. He is particularly helpless in act two, when he is inexplicably struck blind and is unable to get up after falling to the ground.

## **Lucky**

Lucky is Pozzo's slave, whom Pozzo treats horribly and continually insults, addressing him only as "pig." He is mostly silent in the play, but gives a lengthy, mostly nonsensical monologue in act one, when Pozzo asks him to think out loud. While all the characters on-stage suffer in different ways throughout the play, Lucky is the play's most obvious figure of physical suffering and exploitation as he is whipped, beaten, and kicked by other characters.

## **Boy**

The unnamed boy who brings a message from Godot in both acts. Both times, he tells Vladimir and Estragon that Godot is not coming, but will come the next day. It is unclear whether the same boy comes in both acts, or whether these are two different characters. In act two, the boy claims to be different from the boy of act one, but then again Pozzo claims in act two that he did not meet Vladimir and Estragon in act one. The boy describes working under Godot as if on a farm or plantation, where he watches over Godot's animals. When the boy asks Vladimir if he would like to send a message to Godot, Vladimir asks him to tell Godot simply that he saw Vladimir.

## **Waiting for Godot Symbols**

### **Hats**

Because the play has so few props, the props that do appear onstage take on an exaggerated significance. As one example, Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky, and Pozzo all wear hats and at times seem oddly preoccupied with them. Lucky, for instance, needs his hat to think, and stops his long monologue once his hat is knocked off. In act two Estragon and Vladimir exchange their hats

and Lucky's hat back and forth, trying different ones on. Given the importance of these hats to their individual owners, this scene can be seen as representing the fluidity and instability of individual identities in the play. As Pozzo and Lucky don't remember having already seen Vladimir and Estragon in act two, Vladimir begins to wonder whether the Pozzo and Lucky of act two are the same as those of act one. Estragon, for one, does not recognize them, and calls Pozzo Abel. Estragon can't even remember his own past, and at one point tells Pozzo that his name is Adam. Moreover, it is not clear whether the young boy in each act is one boy or two different ones. The boy also calls Vladimir Mr. Albert, which may or may not actually be Vladimir's name. With all of this ambiguity and instability regarding people's identities, the scene of the hat exchange playfully represents an exchange of identities, as Vladimir and Estragon wear different combinations of hats. Vladimir ends up wearing Lucky's hat—notably, the one he needed to "think"—seemingly taking on a new identity, as he then asks Estragon to "play" at being Lucky and Pozzo. Indeed, it's uncertain whether Vladimir and Estragon (or other characters) are actually being themselves throughout the play, or if they even have stable selves they can be.

## **Names**

Many of the names in Beckett's play can be seen as having hidden meanings. The most important example is Godot, whose name evokes similarity to God for many readers. Along this reading, Godot symbolizes the salvation that religion promises, but which never comes (just as Godot never actually comes to Vladimir and Estragon). But the similarity between "Godot" and "God" could also be a game Beckett is playing with his audience and readers, a kind of red herring that actually imparts no important information. This would be in line with other character names: Estragon means "tarragon" in French, for example, while Pozzo is Italian for a water well, but these meanings hold little to no significance for those characters. And Lucky's name is anything but fitting, as he is the character who unluckily suffers the most onstage. In the end, Beckett's character names suggest the possibility of meaning but fail to deliver on this promise, just as Godot promises to save Vladimir and Estragon but never shows up. As further examples of the nihilist worldview that pervades *Waiting for Godot*, the play's character names may be significant precisely for being insignificant, meaningful in that they mean nothing.