

## Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett (1952)

### Summary of the Work:

The story revolves around two seemingly homeless men waiting for someone—or something—named Godot. Vladimir and Estragon wait near a tree, inhabiting a drama spun of their own consciousness. The result is a comical wordplay of poetry, dreamscapes, and nonsense, which has been interpreted as mankind's inexhaustible search for meaning. Beckett's language pioneered an expressionistic minimalism that captured the existential post-World War II Europe. His play remains one of the most magical and beautiful allegories of our time.

### Rationale:

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952) works well in a class like AP Literature because the play offers multiple access points for beginning a larger discussion of literature as philosophy. Not only can class discussion focus on literary techniques like point of view, tone, mood, character development, and sensory detail, minimalist set and language, but the play provides excellent context for Beckett's views on meaning and purpose as they relate to concepts like existentialism and absurdism.

### Themes:

- Man and The Natural World
- Mortality
- Time
- Isolation
- Religion
- The Self
- Detachment and Non-Conformity
- Friendship
- Habit
- Passivity and Indifference
- Comedy & Tragedy

### Essential questions:

Essential Question: "How does language influence perspective?"

Essential Question: "How does personal responsibility affect not only the individual but also the world as a whole?"

Essential Question: "How reading/studying a text reveals universal truths about the human experience?"

## Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

*Waiting for Godot* is the most well-known play from the Theatre of the Absurd movement. It was written by Samuel Beckett and performed for the first time in Paris on January 5th, 1953. At its premier, the play shocked its audience as it presented a new type of theatre which used very unconventional methods. Godot's debut in the United States took place at San Quentin penitentiary in November 1957. Unlike European audiences, the prisoners were able to identify with the play, primarily because they understood the concept of waiting (Esslin 19). Eventually, *Waiting for Godot* received the recognition it deserved and took its place as a classic of modern theatre. This anecdote is an excellent preface to reading or seeing *Waiting for Godot* because it prepares the audience to abandon any preconceptions they may have about theatre in order to better understand the piece.

“Performed across the globe by some of the world's most iconic performers, Samuel Beckett's indelible masterpiece remains an unwavering testament of what it means to be human.

From an inauspicious beginning at the tiny Left Bank Theatre de Babylone in 1953, followed by bewilderment among American and British audiences, *Waiting for Godot* has become of the most important and enigmatic plays of the past fifty years and a cornerstone of twentieth-century drama. As Clive Barnes wrote, “Time catches up with genius ... *Waiting for Godot* is one of the masterpieces of the century.” (Amazon)

## Notes on the Text:

*(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)*

## Noted Distinction:

### Readability

- Lexile Score:

### Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

## Connection to the Curriculum:

RI.11- 12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.  
RI.11- 12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one

# *The Stranger*

by Albert Camus

(Published in 1942)

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another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.11- 12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, cultures, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

### **Additional Connections:**

*(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)*