

**SYDNEY
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EDUCATION**

ON CUE



HAPPY DAYS

By Samuel Beckett

Conceived and Directed by Nick Schlieper & Pamela Rabe

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Image: Pamela Rabe. Photo: Rene Vaile.

Compiled by Kelly Young.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. You can contact the Education Team on **education@sydneytheatre.com.au**

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Sydney Theatre Company acknowledges the Gadigal of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land and waters on which the Company gathers. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with whom we work and with whom we share stories.

CAST AND CREATIVES

HAPPY DAYS

By Samuel Beckett

Conceived and Directed by Nick Schlieper & Pamela Rabe

Cast

Winnie
Pamela Rabe

Willie
Markus Hamilton

Creative Team

Set & Lighting Designer
Nick Schlieper

Costume Designer
Mel Page

Sound Designer
Stefan Gregory

Assistant Director
Kenneth Moraleda

Voice & Text Director
Charmian Gradwell

Production Team

Production Manager
Joe Fletcher

Deputy Production Manager
Julia Orlando

Stage Manager
Zoe Davis

Assistant Stage Manager
Chloe Langdon

Costume Coordinator
Sam Perkins

**Hair, Wig & Wardrobe Supervisor,
Costume Day Maintenance**
Lauren A. Proietti

Lighting Supervisor
Amy Robertson

Lighting Programmer
Corrine Fish

Lighting Operator
Oscar de Gruchy

Sound Supervisor
Hayley Forward

Sound Operator
Ben Andrews

Set Construction Supervisor
Boaz Shemesh

Props Supervisor
Emily Adinolfi

Scenic Art Supervisor
Ron Thiessen

Staging Supervisor
David Tongs

Mechanist
Oscar Broadhead

Rehearsal Photographer
Brett Boardman

1 hr 40 mins, no interval

THIS PLAY PREMIERED AT THE CHERRY LANE THEATRE, NEW YORK CITY ON 17 SEPTEMBER 1961

THIS PRODUCTION OPENED AT WHARF 1 THEATRE, SYDNEY ON 9 MAY 2025

SUPPORTED BY STC ANGELS



DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

PAMELA RABE & NICK SCHLIEPER



When we first started to talk about making this production of *Happy Days*, we began with the usual question – why now? What does this play written 64 years ago have to say to us today? In seeking to answer this fundamental question, we pondered the many ways in which you could approach the text, the most obvious of which would be through the lens of climate change. Or post some unspecified holocaust. Or amongst the aftermath of a society choked by its own insatiable appetite for consumerism. Or even the end of Empire. The list of possibilities goes on. The text abounds with allusions to all of these readings, indeed an earlier draft more than hinted at a cataclysmic war and the play is redolent with the ramifications of climate change. Our short answer was that the play is still replete with relevance for this time and in some ways feels even more urgent, given the uncertainties of our current world.

However, we decided that to take any single one of these approaches was ultimately reductive. It narrowed the play's scope, and it would actually shift the focus away from the universal and towards the specific. It's no coincidence that throughout the eight drafts that Beckett worked through, he continued to strip out any specificity hinting at an actual scenario and focussed ever more on the quintessential. At its heart this work is about how human beings persevere and survive, even in the face of the most daunting conditions, whatever form those might take. To specify the particular nature of Winnie's circumstances was to do a disservice to the much broader metaphor at the centre of the text – which in a nutshell is simply the story of an individual's struggle to find a way of surviving in a situation that is not of their own making. And while most of us will presumably never find ourselves literally trapped inside a mound, who can't identify with that feeling?

Therefore, we've chosen to place our Winnie and her Willie in an unspecific, timeless wasteland; a landscape stripped of all features, a landscape of the mind, rather than of any particular time or place. In this mindscape, we witness an extraordinary act of human perseverance, an examination of the human spirit in the face of erasure, where Beckett tests the very limits of human endurance even as memory, identity and ultimately time itself, crumble away and slip from the grasp.

As we continue to forensically comb through this text, it's been fascinating to discover how perfectly logical it actually is. How much sense it all makes. Something that at first reading seems to be riddled with absurdities set in the context of a surreal metaphor, turns out to be both quite logical and terribly, movingly real. Because ultimately, we've all found ourselves in some version or other of Winnie's dilemma, trapped in a life that we'd never have chosen - if we'd had any choice.



Nick Schlieper and Pamela Rabe

SYNOPSIS

Winnie, a woman in her fifties, is buried up to her waist in a mound of earth. Her predicament – the blinding sun beating down on her, the blasted wasteland that surrounds her – does nothing to dampen her bright optimism. She moves through familiar routines: brushing her teeth, applying lipstick, and inspecting the few possessions in her handbag. She speaks incessantly to herself and to her husband Willie, clinging desperately to everyday rituals to stave off despair. Willie, mostly silent and out of sight, occasionally responds in fragmented grunts or words. Willie's intermittent responses offer Winnie bright moments in the darkness, but her profound isolation remains.

Time passes, and Winnie is now buried up to her neck. Her physical condition has worsened, but her cheerfulness remains. With even fewer resources for comfort or distraction, she struggles to continue. In spite of it all, Winnie maintains her stubborn hope that the day will end happily.



CURRICULUM LINKS

DRAMA

Stage 5 & 6

- Individual Project: Monologue
- Dramatic Forms and Performance Styles: Absurd Theatre
- Improvisation, Playbuilding and Acting: Scripted Drama
- Elements of Production in Performance

ENGLISH

Stage 5 & 6

- English Extension 1: Elective 2 Worlds of Upheaval; Elective 4 Literary Mindscapes

SUITABLE FOR

Years 9 - 12

THEMES & IDEAS

- Loneliness
- Humans and the Non-Human World
- Constructions of Gender



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Winnie



Pamela Rabe

Inexplicably buried up to her waist in a mound of earth and caught in the glare and heat of the sun, Winnie tries to make the most of each day, rising to the sound of a bell in the morning and going to sleep at the ring of the bell in the evening. Isolated from the rest of humanity, apart from her often-silent husband, Winnie lives a life of loneliness and isolation.

Winnie occupies herself by repeating daily rituals which centre on the contents of her “capacious black bag” and parasol. The bag includes toothbrush, toothpaste, mirror, hairbrush, spectacles, handkerchief, red medicine and a revolver, which Winnie ominously circles back to during moments of the play.

To combat her loneliness, Winnie fills her life with chatter. She talks to the world around her and to her husband Willie, who she mostly cannot see, and often to herself. Willie, a man of few words, is often unresponsive, causing Winnie much anguish. When he does reply, Willie’s terse comments are cause for celebration and joy – “a happy day”. If Willie is absent, or not in the mood to reply, Winnie will chat to herself about her life on the mound, the contents of the bag beside her and her reflections on life including her past, religion and literature.

Willie

Married to Winnie and a man of few words, Willie also lives on the mound but is rarely seen or heard. Willie is quite a coarse character, enjoying a suggestive postcard, the play on the word “formication” and loud nose blowing. Unlike his wife, Willie is caught in the past, spouting conservative rhetoric from the newspaper that he is reading behind the mound. The final image of Willie is one of ambiguity, as he emerges from the mound, fully dressed, as though headed for a funeral. His final line, “Win” suggests an attempt to connect with his wife, however, their final stare as the lights fade down implies that, as the sun rises on the following morning, they will be as disconnected as ever.



Markus Hamilton

FORM, STYLE AND CONVENTION

“This is the question that occupies Camus... and the playwrights of The Theatre of the Absurd... (considering the) ... consequences and... resulting actions of our Absurd situation... How is one to make meaning out of such a world...?”
Michael Bennett 2011

Form

The narrative structure of Absurd Theatre is a reaction to that of Realism and the well-made play, which relied on the convention of a clear beginning, middle and end. This means that the conflict established at the outset is resolved for the audience within a clear place, time and situation. *Happy Days*, much like other examples of what theatre critic Martin Esslin categorised as Absurd Theatre, challenged the notion of linear time and the meaning that humans allow it to impose on their existence. In Absurd Theatre, the narrative is circular, and the action occurs during an ambiguous situation, time and place – often a day – which repeats as the play progresses. This circular repetition implies that the action experienced by the characters continues until death. This means that each character is forced to examine their relationship with, and position in, the universe.

Style

Absurd Theatre

The concept of Absurd Theatre first appeared in 1961 when theatre critic Martin Esslin identified a group of plays, written by playwrights such as Beckett, Ionesco, and Pinter, all of whom appeared to have similarities both in form and style. These plays, written the decades after WWII, explore the human quest for meaning and connection in the universe. Conventions of this style include a circular narrative (form), repetitious and illogical dialogue, pauses and silences, clichés, non-sequiturs, lists, meaningless violence and sex, clowning, physical comedy, and the inclusion of Vaudeville, Cabaret and Musical tropes. At its most extreme, language may be discarded all together.

One of the observations made about Absurd Theatre is that, as a style, its playwrights and characters have tended to be male, making the character of Winnie in *Happy Days* an unusual one.

Monologue

A monologue is a performance by one actor. It can be the performance of a long piece of dialogue within a play, or a production that contains only one actor playing a range of distinct roles. These roles can be created through live performance, live-streamed video, and pre-recorded video, or a combination of each. The creation of Winnie in this production of *Happy Days* requires actor Pamela Rabe to perform live by herself for most of the production, with the occasional interactions with Markus Hamilton playing the character of Willie.

THEMES AND IDEAS

Loneliness

“The human condition being what it is, with man (sic) small, helpless, insecure, and unable ever to fathom the world in all its hopelessness, death and absurdity, the theatre (must) confront ... (the) ... bitter truth that most human endeavour is irrational and senseless, that communication between human beings is well – nigh impossible, and that the world will forever remain an impenetrable mystery.”

Martin Esslin (1960)

Beckett’s work was influenced by the work of Existentialist philosophers, such as Albert Camus and Satre, who were interested in exploring the impact of Enlightenment thinking on human understanding of the universe. Existentialist philosophers suggested that the universe is profoundly complex and impossible to understand, and that the Enlightenment focus on rationality and logic can only result in humans realising the impenetrability of the universe within which they exist. Consequently, humans feel profoundly alone and isolated. The philosophical journey away from belief in God begun in the Enlightenment, the horrors of the 20th Century and the resultant lack of purpose experienced by humans, has given rise to enormous metaphysical anguish beyond that of a traditional understanding of feeling lonely.

Humans exist in this universe, and our only choice is the response to the question of what do we do, now that we find ourselves here?



Happy Days explores the experience of Winnie, a woman buried to her waist and then neck in a mound of earth, a visual metaphor for physical isolation and metaphysical loneliness. Governed by artificial constructions of time signified by a bell for waking and sleeping, Winnie spends her days (mostly) on her own trying to make meaning and forge connection. This includes her attempts to appreciate the world around her including the sky and the heavens, a grooming routine, protecting herself from the unbearable heat of the sun, reminiscing and trying to connect to her husband, whose tenuous responses to his wife leave Winnie both anxious and hopeful about the meaning of her life.

The quality of human communication is a key feature of Absurd Theatre, with playwrights constructing a world in which humans struggle to connect, make themselves understood and establish understanding between themselves. Winnie, like most of Beckett's characters, struggles to make herself understood by other humans. Isolated from other people and immobile, we see her valiant struggle to connect with her husband, the one person who should love her the most.

"Days perhaps when you hear nothing. (Pause) But days too when you answer"

(*Happy Days*, Act I pg. 6)

and

"That is what enables me to go on, go on talking that is. (Pause) Whereas if you were to die – (smile) to speak in the old style – (smile off) – or go away and leave me, then what would I do, what could I do all day long...?"

(*Happy Days*, Act I pg. 6)

The set design for *Happy Days*, by Nick Schlieper, focuses on visually representing human isolation and loneliness. Deliberately set "nowhere" Schlieper (Final Design Presentation 2 January 2025) has noted that the context in which Winnie and Willie exist could so easily be clearly represented as a post-apocalyptic, post WWII, post nuclear world that is easily locatable within that distinct historical period. The decision, however, to embrace the "nowhere" of Beckett's play, is an attempt to remove the historical distance from a contemporary audience, allowing them to connect with Winnie's enormous bravery and perseverance.

Hidden by a curtain to allow a reveal of the space and accompanied by an ominous swell of sound, culminating in an ear-splitting crescendo, the lights fade up to reveal Winnie in a mound of earth up to her waist, isolated and unable to move. The set functions as a literal grounding of the character of Winnie into the earth, unable to escape from her place in the world. Symbolically, the set represents Winnie's complete isolation from all other members of humanity, including her taciturn husband, who rarely speaks and leaves Winnie to her own devices for most of the day. It is here, on her own, literally and metaphorically, that Winnie spends her day, with little company and little obvious purpose. Her daily acts of bravery in the face of such desolation reminds the audience that each person must, in their own way, do their utmost to find daily meaning in their lives, no matter what obstacles present themselves.



Discussion Question

Describe Schlieper's set design.

How does the colour, texture and angle of the mound in which Winnie finds herself support her experience of the world?

Humans and the Non-Human World

Beckett's plays, including *Happy Days*, are a response to the philosophical beliefs of Western civilisation and its focus on rationality and progress since The Enlightenment. This focus on rationality and progress, generated by French philosophers in the 18th Century, taken up throughout Europe and disseminated globally through the process of European colonisation, has provided the theoretical foundations for the development of global capitalism, humanism and secularism. Prior to WWII, French philosophers such as Camus, Satre and de Beauvoir began to challenge the logic of rationality held so dearly by the West for centuries. These 20th Century philosophers noted that Enlightenment thinking had solidified binaries of man/woman, domestic sphere/public sphere, human/non-human and nature/civilisation. The focus on development, progress and rationality has come at the expense of women, indigenous groups and the environment, in the mistaken belief that humans can control the natural forces around them. In their struggle to dominate the world, humans have not only destroyed it with their focus on economic progress but also by subscribing to the absurdity of thinking that humans are able to change and withstand the vast power of the universe, thereby blinding them to the reality of human powerlessness and preventing any possibility of change and fulfilment.



The absurd, then, can be seen as the attempt by human beings to control the ungovernable forces of nature whilst trying to make meaning from this process of development and the ideology of linear progress. *Happy Days* visually explores the experience and impotence of humans in the face of their position in the universe. Winnie's literal immobility as she is buried in the earth, unable and unwilling to extricate herself, looking at the enormity of the heavens and the beauty of the "Emmet", speaks to our place in a destroyed world. Winnie represents both the end point of the process of human forces unleashed in the attempt to tame the universe and the only possible approach to making some meaning for herself.

The character of Winnie written deliberately by Beckett as a woman, when most of his other protagonists are men, also offers a critique of the desperate, devastating violence of traditional western, gendered approaches to the world. Caught by her class and her gender, Winnie tries valiantly to make meaning from traditional middle class feminine routines and interests, however, it is her focus on the beauty of the heavens, the acknowledgement of her tiny place in the universe and the grace with which she approaches every day despite the horror of her predicament, that offers a way of making peace with the illusion of human (male) power and control.

Discussion Question

What does the mound of earth represent in *Happy Days*? Why do you think Winnie doesn't try to extricate herself from the mound? Can she?

Constructions of Gender

“Beckett’s Winnie is thus not only a woman; she is the physical embodiment of the condition of being a woman in her society. Not a stereotype, she is the result of stereotypic views of women. Beckett suggests what culture offers as a ballast for women like Winnie.”

Linda Ben-Zvi

Women in Beckett

Quoted in *The Mound of Sand in ‘Happy Days’ Tomb to Womb*. (Inoue, R. 1999)

Beckett’s plays have traditionally been seen as a response influenced by Existentialism in the 20th Century, to western civilisation and its traditional, Enlightenment focus on masculine rationality and progress. A key thinker of the mid-20th Century was Simone de Beauvoir, a French feminist philosopher, who wrote *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir was interested in the ways in which cultural, societal and political ideas about the female body limited women’s freedom and agency, changing ways of understanding of and relating to the world around them. De Beauvoir was a colleague and friend of Beckett, and her feminist analysis can be seen in *Happy Days*.

Winnie’s position in the mound, trapped to her waist and her then to her neck, has traditionally been seen as a comment on the disconnection between human beings - a function of their isolation from other humans and the universe. This is true, but it can also be argued that Beckett is particularly interested in the absurd experience of being a woman in an ungovernable universe that will not allow, or even possess the illusion of, human agency. Winnie, rather than being able to move through her world is connected to the earth in such a way that that she will never leave it, irrespective of whether she is able to or not. She is literally bound to the earth, a visual representation of Enlightenment binaries that locate women/nature/irrationality against men/civilisation/rationality. Winnie, then, represents the lack of agency women have experienced over time, bound to the domestic sphere, care, nurturing and child rearing.



Pamela Rabe

The mound that Winnie finds herself in reduces and reflects her agency in the world about her, limiting her to her immediate, personal sphere. For middle-class women such as Winnie, this has been understood to reflect the home and the maintenance of family. Literally contained by, and shackled to, the domestic sphere, Winnie must make the most of her day in that context, to survive the boredom and lack of control over her life. Beckett, with his focus on the possessions in Winnie's black bag, explores the narrow experience of women in society. The bag and its contents are gendered tools whose use is designed to maintain Winnie's sense of self. The daily, ritualised maintenance of her outward appearance, based on gender and class, provides Winnie with the illusion of happiness by keeping a sense of structure to her day.



Winnie's identity as a woman has been generated by patriarchal notions of what a woman should be, keeping her (literally and symbolically) in a fixed position, with little prospect or hope of change. As Act II progresses, Winnie's story of Mildred and the little mouse, her experience with "Mr Shower or Cooker", her relationship with her husband Willie and connection with a patriarchal God deepens our understanding of the process by which Winnie, and by extension all women, have been positioned as subordinate to the gaze of men, and whose narratives determine their agency.

Feminists have long suggested that traditional, heterosexual marriage has been used to justify women's oppression. Once entered, women arguably experience a narrowing of their agency. Ranging from the confinement of women's bodies in the home, the manipulation and adherence to impossible standards of beauty, the allocation of the primary role of childcare and domestic chores, and the expectation of monogamy, it is possible to argue that notions of happiness in marriage are a strategic camouflage for gender control. *Happy Days* explores the complexities of this experience for middle-class women, examining the way in which expectations of happiness, fulfilment and joy manipulate women into subservience. Winnie thinks she is happy partly because she is a devoted wife, able to fulfil the role that society expects of her and conform to the cultural script allocated to women.



“Oh! You are going to talk to me today, this is going to be a happy day!”

(*Happy Days*, Act I pg. 15)

Beckett’s exploration of the impact of the patriarchy relies on the inequality in the relationship between Winnie and Willie. As husband and wife, Beckett shows the audience the ways that Willie’s choices govern Winnie’s daily experience. Winnie, as the immovable centre of the mound and symbolically, the domestic sphere, has little choice but to centre her life around Willie. Willie, as a man and husband, can leave the mound if he wishes and engage in interests outside the domestic routines that centre Winnie’s existence. He remains, however, the centre of the world created in and around the mound. Interactions between the two offer a bleak insight into married life, as Willie’s choice to ignore and neglect Winnie as he wishes, suggests that Winnie has only functional value in her role as a wife, with all its attendant notions of support, nurture and the provision of sexual services.

Discussion Question

What is the importance of Winnie’s black bag? What does she keep in there? Why might this be a comment on the construction of gender?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Reflection Questions

After viewing the performance, discuss as a class:

- Revisit the character analysis above. What has changed for you since seeing the production?
- What do you think Winnie might represent about women? Why?
- What do you think Willie might represent about men? Why?
- Do you think that Beckett is commenting on class as well as gender in this play? Why?

Loneliness

Activity 1

Read the Myth of Sisyphus, the story that inspired Albert Camus to reflect on the way that humans try to make meaning in their lives. Camus concluded that, like Sisyphus, humans should not give up, but rather, confront the Absurd with honesty. If humans are clear that there is no ultimate grand meaning to their lives, then each person may find their own purpose in life by looking at their choices and making them afresh throughout their lives.

- a. In groups of 4 – 5 respond to the Myth of Sisyphus by creating an improvised performance of this story. As part of the performance, include a narrative voice that represents Sisyphus and the choice not to give up hope, particularly in the morning when the stone must be pushed back to the top of the mountain.
- b. Perform this improvisation for the class and evaluate it using the following questions
 - How could Sisyphus' daily struggle be understood as a torment? Why? Why not?
 - What was included in Sisyphus' narrative voice that might provide insight into his choices?
 - What links can you find between Sisyphus' choices and Winnie's daily acts of bravery?
 - How might this offer insight into our experiences as humans?

Activity 2

In different groups of 4 – 5, explore how knowing the Myth of Sisyphus might help us to understand the Absurd idea of loneliness using the following suggestions:

- Create a freeze frame that represents the Absurd notion of loneliness as a symbolic shape.
- Ask each group to show their freeze frames to the rest of the class.
- Once students have made and performed these images, discuss how space and proxemics were used to create this image. How was space important in the visual representation of loneliness?

Humans and the Non – Human World

Activity 1

Look at the images of Nick Schlieper's set in performance.

What do you notice about Winnie's position in the world?

What would you expect her outlook on her life experience to be as a result? Why?

Activity 2

Designer Nick Schlieper has stated that the design is not a direct replication of a post-apocalyptic world, post-WWII.

What else might the design suggest to a contemporary audience? Why?

Activity 3

Use the following extracts from *Happy Days* to create a montage of Winnie's thoughts about her position in the world and the universe. If possible, find a way to anchor her into the earth around her so that the visual metaphor remains at the forefront of the performance.

- WINNIE: *Gazing at zenith* **Another heavenly day** (Act I pg. 2)
 - WINNIE: *Pause. Head back level, eyes front, pause. She clasps her hands to her breasts, closes eye. Lips move in audible prayer, say ten seconds. Lips still. Hands remain clasped. Low.*
For Jesus Christ sake Amen. (Act I pg. 2)
 - WINNIE: *Eyes open, hands unclasp, return to mound. Pause. She clasps hands to breast again, closes eyes, lips move again in inaudible addendum, say five seconds. Low.* **World without end Amen.** (Act I pg. 2)
 - WINNIE: **That is what I find so wonderful, that not a day goes by – smile – to speak in the old style – smile off – hardly a day, without some addition to one's knowledge however trifling, the addition I mean, provided one takes pains.** (Act I pg. 10)
 - WINNIE: **Oh, I say, what have we here?** *Bending head to ground, incredulous. Looks like life of some kind! Looks for spectacles, puts them on, bends closer. Pause. An Emmet! Recoils. Shrill. Willie, an Emmet, a live Emmet! Seizes magnifying glass, bends to ground again, inspects through glass. Where's it gone? Inspects. Ah! Follows its progress through grass. Has like a little white ball in its arms. Follows progress. Hand still. Pause. It's gone in.* (Act I pg. 20)
 - WINNIE: **Is gravity what it was, Willie, I fancy not.** *Pause. Yes, the feeling more and more that if I were not held – gesture – in this way, I would simply float up into the blue.* (Act II pg. 23)
 - WINNIE: **Ah well, natural laws, natural laws, I suppose it's like everything else; it all depends on the creature you happen to be.** (Act II pg. 23)
- a. Each group should perform their work for their peers.
 - b. Respond to the performances of each group using the following questions to guide your analysis
 - What do you notice about Winnie's relationship with the sky? The light? Why do you think this might be?

- What do you notice about Winnie's thinking about what might be in the heavens? Why do you think this might be?
- What do you think Beckett is trying to tell us about Winnie's incredible endurance as she lives the reality of her life? Do you think that religion is helping her? Give reasons for your answer.

Activity 4

After thinking about Winnie's relationship with the world around her, go back to Nick Schlieper's set design for this production. How would you design the set for *Happy Days* to reflect your understanding of humans and our place in the universe?



The Construction of Gender

Activity 1

Winnie's manipulation of the black bag, its contents and her graceful mastery of her daily routine involves ritual polishing, brushing and cleaning.

- a. Working in groups of 4 – 5, choose one of Winnie's routines and rehearse it using the theatrical style of Realism. Each student should perform the routine exactly as the other student actors do. After each performance, evaluate the impact that it had on the audience.
- b. Once the class has performed using the style of Realism, ask students to add slow motion and repetition to the performance to provide a sense of ritual. After each performance, ask students to discuss the impact of the ritualisation of the routine for the audience. What was revealed in the performance?

Activity 2

Winnie's experience with Willie, "Mr Cooker or Mr Shower" and the doll suggests that her experiences of men and male attention involves being inspected, judged and impinged upon by male standards, with little real choices for herself. Working in groups of approximately 3 – 4, use moments from *Happy Days* that explore Winnie's experiences with men. Stage these as a montage and find the commonalities that emerge from each. As each group performs, debrief with the audience, using the following questions:

- What adjectives can you find that describe the way that the men in each moment look at Winnie?
- What adjectives can you find that describe the way that the men in each moment listen to Winnie?
- What adjectives can you find that describe the way that the men in each moment speak to Winnie?
- What does this suggest about Winnie's experience as a woman? What might Beckett be saying about the experience of women on a societal level?

Activity 3

The quotes from *Humans and the non-Human World* (found below) also suggest that sexism and misogyny, traditionally seen as a natural expression of the relationship between women and men, are perhaps, not as natural as humans have assumed.

- **Is gravity what it was, Willie, I fancy not. *Pause.* Yes, the feeling more and more that if I were not held – *gesture* – in this way, I would simply float up into the blue.**
Act II pg. 23
 - **Ah well, natural laws, natural laws, I suppose it's like everything else; it all depends on the creature you happen to be.**
Act II pg. 23
- a. In pairs create a duologue between Winnie and Willie that explores the reality of their gendered experiences. Rather than use the mound, have the students bring the subtextual meaning of Winnie's predicament into the open through the dialogue.

- b. As students perform these duologues, create a mind map of the ideas that emerge from the explicit discussion of the symbolism of the mound. As this discussion emerges with the class, be aware of the class-based experiences of Winnie and Willie.
- c. Once the discussion and mind map have finished, ask the students to go back to their pairs. In this improvisation, students should imagine that Winnie and Willie are of the working classes. Create a new duologue that reimagines meaning of the mound. Perform these for the class and discuss the differences between the two performances. Use the following questions to guide the discussion
- How might the mound be imagined for a working-class woman?
 - What would be in Winnie's black bag if she were a working-class woman?
 - What might Willie's reality be if they were in a working-class marriage? Would the reality change at all? Why? Why not?

Activity 4

Beckett's use of dramatic irony makes the audience aware of Winnie's understanding of her own value, irrespective of the way that Willie treats her. Winnie, through her engagement with the world about her, can make her own meaning in the face of an impenetrable universe.

In groups of 4 – 5, find examples of the meaning that Winnie finds in her life outside of her marriage. Place these textual examples together and create an improvised performance that explores the connection between Winnie and absurd understandings of human loneliness found in the Myth of Sisyphus.

Activity 5

Examine the end of *Happy Days*. There is a suggestion that, with Willie's extrication of himself from the mound and the ambiguity of his gesture as he reaches for Winnie (or the gun), there is no happy ending for women entrapped by patriarchal expressions of heterosexual, middle-class marriage.

Working in groups of 3, with 2 actors and a director, use the script from *Happy Days* below to stage the final moments of the play. Allocate each group with different character objectives for Winnie and Willie. Ask each group of actors to explore the different messages that might be received by the audience in this moment, depending on the directorial vision.

Activity 6

If *Happy Days* had an Act III, what would the audience see? Hear? Justify your answer from your understanding of the text.

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IMAGES

Rehearsal photos courtesy of Brett Boardman.

BOOKS

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