



The *Odd Couple* traces the lives of mismatched roommates, Felix and Oscar, who move in together after separating from their wives. They argue about their different lifestyles with bizarre comic consequences.

"Opposition is true Friendship."

William Blake

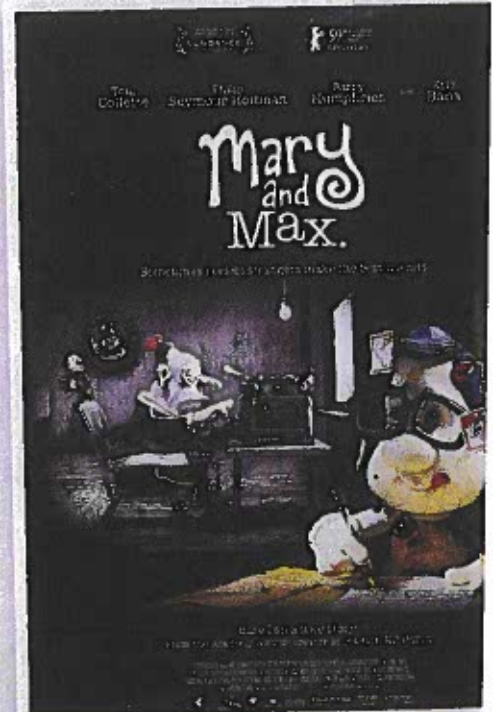
A still from the animated film *Up* (2009), about the improbable friendship between an elderly widower and an enthusiastic young boy who embark on an adventure.



It takes two to tango^o

“ Friendship requires that rare mean betwixt likeness and unlikeness. [...] There must be very two, before there can be very one. Let it be an alliance of two large, formidable natures, mutually beheld, mutually feared, before yet they recognize the deep identity which beneath these disparities unites them. ”

Ralph Waldo Emerson,
Essays: First Series (1841)



Mary and Max (2009) is a tale of friendship between two unlikely pen pals. Mary, a lonely, eight-year-old girl living in the suburbs of Melbourne and Max, a forty-four-year old, severely obese man living in New York.



Comedy double-act Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy

“We are just two people.
Not that much separates us.”

Kathryn Stockett,
The Help (2009)

a novel about the relationships between two black housemaids and a white woman in Jackson, Mississippi, 1962, who decide to write a book together.

VIDEO

10

Watch the trailer
of the movie *The Help*



“Without contraries is no progression.
Attraction and repulsion, reason and
energy, love and hate, are necessary to
human existence”

William Blake

“It was like some crazy art-world marriage
and they were the odd couple. The relation-
ship was symbiotic. Jean-Michel thought
he needed Andy’s fame, and Andy thought
he needed Jean-Michel’s new blood. Jean-
Michel gave Andy a rebellious image again.”

Ronny Cutrone, quoted in *Warhol: The Biography*
by Victor Bockris (2003)



React

1. Identify the type of friendships the documents explore.
2. Do they illustrate or question your own definition of friendship?
3. Discuss the advantages or difficulties of such relationships.

The Odd Couple: main features



An Unexpected Alliance

The second volume of T. S. Eliot's* letters was recently published by Yale University Press, with new materials and previously unpublished missives. This is as good a time as any to reflect on Eliot's most fascinating correspondent. Ezra Pound? Well, no. James Joyce? Hmm. No. Paul Valéry! *Non!* I am referring to Groucho Marx*. And no, this isn't a joke. The letters between T. S. Eliot and Julius Henry Marx are among the strangest and most delightful epistles ever created. [...]

At this point, I should insert some boilerplate² reflection, something along the lines of "Two more unlikely correspondents could not be conceived of", etc. And on the surface, the two men certainly are a surpassingly odd couple. [...]

Where Eliot was the famous defender of tradition, order and civilised taste, the crux³ of Groucho's humour was flouting⁴ tradition, fomenting chaos and outraging taste. Yet one day in 1961 Groucho received in the mail a note from none other than Eliot himself. Expressing his admiration for the comedian, Eliot asked him for an autographed portrait. A shocked Groucho sent back a studio photograph of himself [...] and a happy Eliot wrote to thank Groucho [...]. Groucho had asked for a portrait of Eliot in return, and the latter happily enclosed one. [...]

The precious handful of letters that have been published reveal mutual warmth and respect—on the surface. Underneath there is a mutual fascination and wariness⁵. They speak of getting together for three years before Groucho and "Mrs. Groucho," as Eliot

gamely calls her, arrive at the Eliots' apartment in London for dinner one evening in 1964. Throughout their correspondence, Groucho is almost alarmingly provocative with Eliot. "I get away with saying some pretty insulting things," he told one of his biographers. "People think I'm joking. I'm not." [...]

Groucho writes that the week before the dinner, "I read *Murder in the Cathedral* twice, *The Waste Land** three times, and just in case of a conversational bottleneck⁶, I brushed up on *King Lear*⁷." They begin with cocktails. A lull in the conversation prompts Groucho to "toss" in a quotation from *The Waste Land*. Eliot "smiled faintly, [...] preferring instead to discuss *Animal Crackers* and *A Night at the Opera**. "Now," recounts Groucho triumphantly, "it was my turn to smile faintly." Suddenly they are like two characters in a play co-written by Samuel Beckett⁸ and Neil Simon⁹. Groucho finishes on a note of sincerity: Eliot "is a dear man and a charming host".

Clearly the two men found a mesmerizing¹⁰ bond in each other's very alienness. That is not so surprising when you think about it. They had both, in their ways, spent their lives following Edgar's¹¹ brave, if dangerous, exhortation at the end of *King Lear* to: "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say." Or as Groucho famously put it—and it could serve as an epigraph to *The Waste Land*—"Whatever it is, I'm against it." It takes one strange god to know another.

Lee Siegel, *More Intelligent Life*,
October 2011

Thomas Stearns "T. S." Eliot (1888-1965)

a famous American poet and dramatist of the Modernist movement, later naturalized as a British subject. Among his masterpieces, one can quote poems *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1910-1915), *The Waste Land* (1922), and the play *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948.



Julius Henry "Groucho" Marx (1890-1977)

an American comedian and film star, acclaimed for his wit and extravagant look. He made many films with his brothers ("the Marx Brothers") including *Animal Crackers*, *Duck Soup*, and *A Night at the Opera*.



* See information on T. S. Eliot and Groucho Marx above

1. three outstanding literary figures — 2. common — 3. essence — 4. showing contempt for — 5. prudence — 6. a blank in the conversation — 7. a tragedy play by William Shakespeare — 8. a worldwide famous Irish dramatist (see p. 141) — 9. an American playwright who wrote *The Odd Couple*, a comic play, in 1966 — 10. fascinating, hypnotizing — 11. a character in *King Lear*

Read the text

1. a. Pick out elements about each figure.

	Personality	Profession
Groucho Marx		
T.S. Eliot		

b. Pick out information about their relationship.

Relationship	Precise examples of what they exchanged or shared	Feelings for / attitudes towards each other

How do you react?

Discuss

2. a. Explain the title "An Unexpected Alliance".

Pick out other expressions conveying the same idea.

b. How do you interpret "It takes one strange god to know another" (lines 69-70)?

→ Keep all these elements in mind when reading the texts in the file.

Toolbox

Friends and friendship

- a pair, a couple
- a friend, a chum, a buddy,
- a mate, a pal, a partner,
- a sidekick
- a companion, a confidant
- companionship, togetherness
- a bond



- affinity, intimacy
- friendship, friendliness
- partnership, fellowship
- intimate, inseparable
- take to
- rub shoulders with
- pair up, pal up
- hit it off, get on well
- be on the same wavelength as

Trust

- reliable /rɪlaɪəbl/, trustworthy,
- dependable
- faithful, loyal
- loyalty, confidence, trust

Support

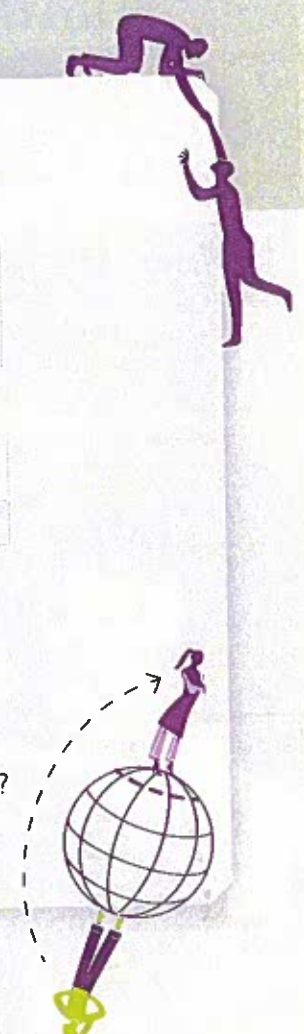
- understanding, support
- sympathy, solace, guidance
- caring
- stand by

Balance and dependence

- dependence, dependency,
- depend on, rely on
- balance out, compensate
- make up for

Difference and disparity

- odd, weird, quaint
- unlikely, improbable
- unconventional,
- atypical /ətɪpɪkəl/
- a contrast, a foil
- a riddle, an enigma
- different from,
- be as different as chalk
- and cheese, be poles apart,
- be at odds



»» Mutual warmth and respect

“Boon’ companions”



↑ A still from *A Dog's Life* directed by Charlie Chaplin (1918)

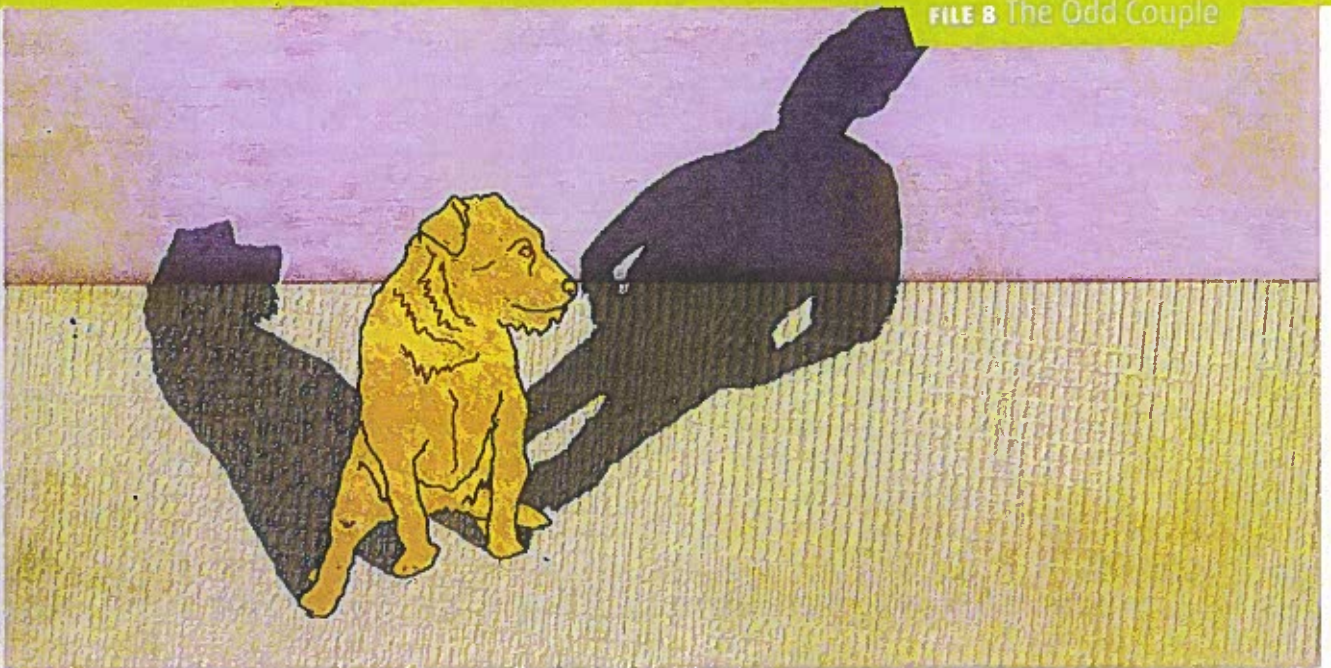
1. a thing that is helpful or beneficial
2. “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks”: people who have long been used to doing things in a particular way will not abandon their habits
3. chances of something happening
4. dilemma
5. in poor health
6. closed police vehicles
7. a person closely associated with another as a subordinate or partner
8. a dog ready to be forgotten
9. extreme pathological talker

Mr. Bones had been with Willy since his earliest days as a pup, and by now it was next to impossible for him to imagine a world that did not have his master in it. Ever thought, every memory, every particle of the earth and air was saturated with Willy’s presence. Habits die hard, and no doubt there’s some truth to the adage about old dogs and new tricks but it was more than just love or devotion that caused Mr. Bones to dread what was coming. I was pure ontological terror. Subtract Willy from the world, and the odds³ were that the world itself would cease to exist.

Such was the quandary⁴ Mr. Bones faced that August morning as he shuffled through the streets of Baltimore with his ailing⁵ master. A dog alone was no better than a dead dog, and once Willy breathed his last, he’d have nothing to look forward to but his own imminent demise. Willy had been cautioning him about this for many days now, and Mr. Bones knew the drill by heart: how to avoid the dogcatchers and constables, the paddy wagons⁶ and unmarked cars, the hypocrites from the so-called humane societies. No matter how sweetly they talked to you, the word *shelter* meant trouble. It would begin with nets and tranquilizer guns, devolve onto a nightmare of cages and fluorescent lights and end with a lethal injection or a dose of poison gas. If Mr. Bones had belonged to some recognizable breed, he might have stood a

chance in the daily beauty contests for prospective owners, but Willy’s sidekick⁷ was a hodgepodge of genetic strains—part collie, part Labrador, part spaniel, part canine puzzle—and to make matters worse, there were burrs protruding from his ragged coat, bad smells emanating from his mouth, and a perpetual bloodshot sadness lurking in his eyes. No one was going to want to rescue him. As the homeless bard was fond of putting it, the outcome was written in stone. Unless Mr. Bones found another master in one quick hurry, he was a pooch primed for oblivion⁸. [...]

Most dogs acquire a good working knowledge of two-legged speech, but in Mr. Bones’s case there was the advantage of being blessed with a master who did not treat him as an inferior. They had been boon companions from the start, and when you added in the fact that Mr. Bones was not just Willy’s best friend but his only friend, and then further considered that Willy was a man in love with the sound of his own voice, a genuine, dyed-in-the-wool logomaniac⁹ who scarcely stopped talking from the instant he opened his eyes in the morning until he passed out drunk at night, it made perfect sense that Mr. Bones should have felt so at home in the native lingo. When all was said and done, the



only surprise was that he hadn't learned to talk better himself. It wasn't for lack of earnest effort, but biology was against him, and what with the configuration of muzzle, teeth, and tongue that fate had saddled him with, the best he could do was emit a series of yaps and yowls, a mooning, muddled sort of discourse. He was painfully aware of how far from fluency these noises fell, but Willy let him have his say, and in the end that was all that mattered. Mr. Bones was free to put in his two cents⁹, and whenever he did so his master would give him his

50

55

full attention, and to look at Willy's face as he watched his friend struggle to make like a member of the human tribe, you would have sworn that he was hanging on every word.

Paul Auster, *Timbuktu* (1999)

9. give his opinion

Paul Auster (born 1947)

an American novelist, essayist, translator, and poet; he also wrote screenplays for several films. His works are often concerned with the search for identity and personal meaning, with story lines that emphasize the significance of twists, coincidences and random events in everyday life.



Understanding the facts

1. Who is Mr. Bones? Who is Willy? How are they related?
2. a. Pick out elements referring to:
 - Mr. Bones
 - Willy
 b. Draw a portrait of each character.
3. Explain what situation Mr. Bones is about to face.

Interpreting

4. Consider how Mr. Bones reacts to this situation and why. What does it reveal about his existence?
5. "Willy had been cautioning him about this for many days now" (lines 20-21); "the hypocrites from the so-called humane societies" (lines 24-25): what does this say about Willy's feelings for people in general?

6. How do you interpret the expression "boon companions"? Explain what Mr. Bones and Willy's relationship is based on, and what roles they play for each other.

Reacting

7. Would you say the couple described in this extract is an "odd couple"? Why or why not?
8. Are characters in an odd couple necessarily at odds?
9. Look at the picture on p. 134: imagine why the two protagonists are boon companions.

»» A mesmerizing bond

“Guys like us”

The story is set in California during the Great Depression. George Milton and Lennie Small, two migrant workers, are sitting around a campfire.

George still stared morosely at the fire. “When I think of the swell¹ time I could have without you, I go nuts². I never get no peace.”

Lennie still knelt. He looked off into the darkness across the river. “George, you want I should go away and leave you alone?”

5 “Where the hell could you go?”

“Well, I could, I could go off in the hills there. Someplace I’d find a cave.”

“Yeah? How’d you eat? You ain’t got sense enough to find nothing to eat.”

10 “I’d find things, George. I don’t need no nice food with ketchup. I’d lay out in the sun and nobody’d hurt me. An’ if I foun’ a mouse, I could keep it. Nobody’d take it away from me.”

George looked quickly and searchingly at him. “I been mean³, ain’t I?”

“If you don’ want me I can go off in the hills an’ find a cave. I can go away any time.”

15 “No—look! I was jus’ foolin’, Lennie. ‘Cause I want you to stay with me. Trouble with mice is you always kill ‘em.” He paused. “Tell you what I’ll do, Lennie. First chance I get I’ll give you a pup. Maybe you wouldn’t kill it. That’d be better than mice. And you could pet it harder.”

20 Lennie avoided the bait⁴. He had sensed his advantage. “If you don’t want me, you only jus’ got to say so, and I’ll go off in those hills right there—right up in those hills and live by myself. An’ I won’t get no mice stole from me.”

George said, “I want you to stay with me, Lennie. Jesus Christ somebody’d shoot you for a coyote if you was by yourself. No, you stay with me. Your Aunt Clara wouldn’t like you running off by yourself, even if she is dead.”

Lennie spoke craftily⁵: “Tell me—like you done before.”

25 “Tell you what?”

“About the rabbits.”

George snapped⁶, “You ain’t gonna put nothing over on me.”

Lennie pleaded, “Come on, George. Tell me. Please, George. Like you done before.”

30 “You get a kick⁷ outta that, don’t you. Awright, I’ll tell you, and then we’ll eat our supper...” George’s voice became deeper. He repeated his words rhythmically as though he had said them many times before. “Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don’t belong no place. They come to a ranch an’ work up a stake⁸ and then they go inta town and blow⁹ their stake, and the first thing you know they’re poundin’ their tail on some other ranch. They ain’t got nothing to look ahead to.”

Lennie was delighted. “That’s it—that’s it. Now tell how it is with us.”

40 George went on. “With us it ain’t like that. We got a future. We got somebody to talk to that gives a damn¹⁰ about us. We don’t have to sit in no bar room blowin’ in our jack jus’ because we got no place else to go. If them other guys gets in jail they can rot for all anybody gives a damn. But not us.”

Lennie broke in. “*But not us! An’ why? Because... because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that’s why.*” He laughed delightedly. “Go on now, George.”

45 “You got it by heart. You can do it yourself.”

“No, you. I forget some a’ the things. Tell about how it’s gonna be.”

1. excellent, very good

2. (inf.) mad

3. unkind or unfair

4. temptation

5. cleverly, cunningly

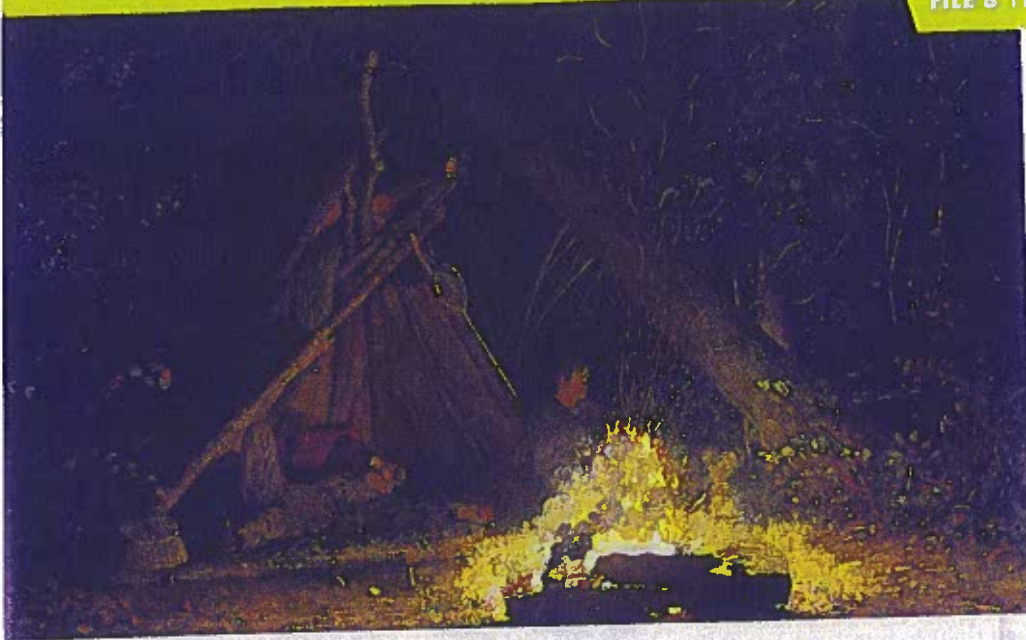
6. said something quickly and irritably

7. stimulating, pleasurable excitement

8. sum of money, share in a business

9. (inf.) spend extravagantly

10. (inf.) cares



← *Camp Fire*
by Winslow Homer
(1877-1878)

“O.K. Someday—we’re gonna get the jack together and we’re gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an’ a cow and some pigs and—”

50 “An’ live off the fatta the lan’,” Lennie shouted. “An’ have rabbits. Go on, George! Tell about what we’re gonna have in the garden and about the rabbits in the cages and about the rain in the winter and the stove”, and how thick the cream is on the milk like you can hardly cut it. Tell about that, George.”

“Why’n’t you do it yourself. You know all of it.”

55 “No... you tell it. It ain’t the same if I tell it. Go on... George. How I get to tend the rabbits.”

“Well,” said George “we’ll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we’ll just say the hell with goin’ to work, and we’ll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an’ listen to the rain comin’ down on the roof—Nuts!” He took out his pocket knife. “I ain’t got time for no
60 more.” He drove his knife through the top of one of the bean cans, sawed out the top and passed the can to Lennie. Then he opened a second can. From his side pocket he brought out two spoons and passed one of them to Lennie.

65 They sat by the fire and filled their mouths with beans and chewed mightily. A few beans slipped out of the side of Lennie’s mouth. George gestured with his spoon.

John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* (1937)

11. device for cooking or heating

John Steinbeck (1902-1968)

a widely acclaimed American author who received the 1962 Nobel Prize for literature. He often wrote about poor farmers in California. His best-known books include *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *East of Eden* (1952), which were made into films.



Understanding the facts

Read the beginning of the text down to line 23.

1. Consider George’s mood. What may account for it?
2. What does Lennie suggest? Why? How does George react to Lennie’s suggestion? Why?

Focus on the end of the text.

3. a. Say what the characters evoke.
b. Compare how they take part in the story that is told and what effect it has on them.
4. Say what image you get of each character from the way they speak and the way they act.

Interpreting

5. Line 24: why does Lenny want to hear the story again? Why does George comply with his request?
6. What does their dream reveal about them?

Reacting

7. Discuss their attitude towards each other.
8. What brings this odd couple together? Is there balance in the couple?
9. Look at the painting above: what atmosphere does it convey? What aspect of the characters’ relationship in the novel may it illustrate?

»» Fascination and wariness

“A riddle and a dazzlement”

The story is set in the year 1974-75. Genna Hewett-Meade, whose family is left wing, descends from Quakers who founded the college she attends, and belongs to the Establishment. Minette Swift is a merit scholarship student and the daughter of a powerful and charismatic minister from Washington D.C. Genna tells the events fifteen years later.

Minette Swift! Her face fascinated me, it was the most striking face I'd ever seen close up, on one so young: fierce, sharp-boned, round, rather flat, with dark skin that looked stretched tight to bursting. You felt that, if you dared to touch that skin, your fingers would dart away, burnt. Her hair was wedge-shaped¹, stiff and jutting² like wires, smelling of natural oils. Her eyes were small and deep-set and evasive and yet beautiful, thick-lashed. Her shell-pink plastic glasses gave her a look of prim grade-school innocence. The first time I'd seen Minette Swift, on Orientation Day, before I'd known that we were to be roommates, Minette had been wearing one of her starched³, dazzling-white, long-sleeved cotton blouses with a gold cross at her throat [...]. She looked nothing like the several stylish black girls who'd been my classmates at the Cornwall Academy, daughters of lawyers, doctors, politicians, and well-to-do businessmen.

From the start, Minette was an enigma to me. A riddle and a dazzlement. I felt clumsy in her presence not knowing when she was being serious or not-so-serious. Minette made droll remarks, but without smiling; it was her way to frown, if I laughed, as if in rebuke⁴ of my response, but perhaps it was a playful sort of rebuke, which I could not decode. As if we were playing basketball, and Minette was dribbling the ball away from me, and I was following eagerly in her wake, and Minette paused suddenly to turn, and toss⁵ the ball at me, or to feign tossing it at me, so that I stumbled over my own feet. At other times, when I tried to talk to Minette, she seemed uncomfortable, and answered in monosyllables. I had to wonder if she'd have been happier with another roommate, a dark-skinned girl, instead of me.

I thought *I will make her like me. I will!*

Eventually Minette told me that, except for summer Bible camp, she'd never had to share a room with anyone before. “Had to share” was uttered in a tone



1. in the shape of a triangle pointing downward
2. projecting outward
3. empesté
4. reproach
5. throw

meant to be neutral but Minette's lips curled in disdain. (Still less had she "had to share" a room with a white girl, I supposed). She'd graduated "with honors" from Booker T. Washington High School of Arts, Sciences, and Music—
 45_ "About the best there is, of the public schools"—in Washington, D.C., and she'd always lived at home. At Schuyler College, Haven Hall was one of the older residences, known as the "most integrated" in bringing together "young women of diverse races, religions, ethnic and cultural backgrounds"; Haven Hall was
 50_ billed as a "haven"⁶ for the most serious, brainy students. Yet Minette didn't appear especially impressed with Schuyler College traditions and rituals. "Know what my daddy calls this kind of thing?— 'white Mickey Mouse' Minette snorted with laughter, I tried to join her, not knowing if this was the right response. For wasn't I *white*, and part of the joke? Or, since Minette was con-
 55_ fiding in me, which Minette rarely did, maybe for the occasion I wasn't somehow *white*, and therefore privileged? I said, "At the prep school I went to, there was all this 'tradition', too, some of it was okay but some of it..." my voice trailed off, I heard myself sounding clumsily eager, "... was just, what the girls called it, bullshit."

60_ *The girls.* As if, even in this moment of awkward camaraderie, I couldn't bring myself to say *we*.

Minette laughed: "Yah. White bullshit."

I laughed with Minette, I think I laughed. I wasn't sure what I was laughing at, but I laughed.

6. refuge

Joyce Carol Oates

(born 1938)

an American novelist, short-story writer, and essayist noted for her vast literary output in a variety of styles and genres. Particularly effective are her depictions of violence and evil in modern society.



Joyce Carol Oates,
Black Girl, White Girl (2006)

Understanding the facts

1. Pick out words to fill in the grid.

Information about the place	Physical description of the characters	Characters' backgrounds	Characters' relationship

2. Read the whole text and recap the main themes developed in each paragraph.
3. Explain the characters' differences and / or similarities.

Interpreting

4. Look at the first sentences of each paragraph: what can you notice? What does this show about the narrator?

5. Comment on the following line: "A riddle and a dazzlement" (line 24). More generally, how would you describe and characterize the two characters' relationship? Examine the devices used in the text to show it.

Reacting

6. Discuss what strikes you as "odd" about the narrator's relationship with Minette.
7. What does this story reveal about the issue of racial relationships in the United States at that time?
8. To what extent is the picture on page 138 a faithful representation of Minette, or of Genna's dream of friendship with her?

» It takes one strange god to know another

“Nothing is certain”

*A country road. A tree.
Evening. [...]
Enter Boy, timidly. He halts. [...]*

VLADIMIR: Words words. *(Pause.)* Speak.

5_ BOY: *(in a rush)*. Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening but surely tomorrow.

Silence.

VLADIMIR: Is that all?

BOY: Yes Sir.

10_ [...]

Silence.

VLADIMIR: All right, you may go.

BOY: What am I to tell Mr. Godot, Sir?

15_ VLADIMIR: Tell him... *(he hesitates)*... tell him you saw us. *(Pause.)* You did see us, didn't you?

BOY: Yes Sir.

He steps back, hesitates, turns and exits running. The light suddenly fails. In a moment it is night. The moon rises at back, mounts in the sky, stands still, shedding a pale light on the scene.

20_ [...]

VLADIMIR: We've nothing more to do here.

ESTRAGON: Nor anywhere else.

VLADIMIR: Ah Gogo, don't go on like that. Tomorrow everything will be better.

ESTRAGON: How do you make that out?

25_ VLADIMIR: Did you not hear what the child said?

ESTRAGON: No.

VLADIMIR: He said that Godot was sure to come tomorrow. *(Pause.)* What do you say to that?

ESTRAGON: Then all we have to do is to wait on here.

30_ VLADIMIR: Are you mad? We must take cover. *(He takes Estragon by the arm.)* Come on.

He draws Estragon after him. Estragon yields, then resists. They halt.

ESTRAGON: *(looking at the tree.)* Pity we haven't got a bit of rope.

VLADIMIR: Come on. It's cold.

35_ *He draws Estragon after him. As before.*

ESTRAGON: Remind me to bring a bit of rope tomorrow.

VLADIMIR: Yes. Come on.

He draws him after him. As before.

ESTRAGON: How long have we been together all the time now?

40_ VLADIMIR: I don't know. Fifty years maybe.



↑ *Waiting for Godot*
directed by Sean
Mathias, Theatre Royal
Haymarket (2010)

ESTRAGON: Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhone?

VLADIMIR: We were grape harvesting.

ESTRAGON: You fished me out.

VLADIMIR: That's all dead and buried.

45_ ESTRAGON: My clothes dried in the sun.

VLADIMIR: There's no good harking back on that. Come on.

He draws him after him. As before.

ESTRAGON: Wait!

VLADIMIR: I'm cold!

50_ ESTRAGON: Wait! (*He moves away from Vladimir.*) I sometimes wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself. (*He crosses the stage and sits down on the mound.*) We weren't made for the same road.

VLADIMIR: (*without anger.*) It's not certain.

ESTRAGON: No, nothing is certain.

55_ *Vladimir slowly crosses the stage and sits down beside Estragon.*

VLADIMIR: We can still part, if you think it would be better.

ESTRAGON: It's not worthwhile now.

Silence.

VLADIMIR: No, it's not worthwhile

60_ now.

Silence.

ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?

VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.

They do not move.

End of act I.

**Samuel Beckett,
Waiting for Godot (1954)**

AUDIO



Listen to this extract from the play

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)

an Irish novelist, poet and above all dramatist. Considered as one of the most influential writers of the 20th century, he wrote both in English and French.

Theatre of the Absurd

His puzzling plays, Waiting For Godot (1954), Endgame (1957), Happy Days (1961) created a literary shock and were soon seen as initiating a new kind of drama called Theatre of the Absurd. Influenced by Existentialist philosophers, the Theatre of the Absurd tackles themes such as the absurdity, meaninglessness of human life, the problems of communication, the notion of repetition and circularity.



Understanding the facts

1. What news do the characters learn in this extract? Study how each reacts to it and what their final decision is.

Interpreting

2. Study the two main characters' personalities, and how their resemblances / differences are conveyed in the scene.
3. Consider the way both characters communicate. What is striking in the link between cues and stage directions (especially the last one)?
4. Examine how "Godot" is presented: what could he represent, symbolize?
5. Look at the information given about time and space and analyse the effects and goals of such a presentation of the setting. What dimension do the characters acquire?

Reacting

6. Discuss the vision of human relationships given in this passage.
7. How can you relate this extract to the Theatre of the Absurd?
8. Prepare a performance of this extract, using the previous questions and the stage directions as guidelines to think about the roles, the movements on stage, the rhythm of the scene, the setting.
9. Comment on the picture on page 140: do the characters in this version of the play correspond to your representation of them?
10. To what extent does it take one strange god to know another?