

Happy days by samuel beckett essay sample



**ASSIGN
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The play 'Happy Days' is a humorously dark and ambiguous play. The play is primarily a one-woman show. It is an interesting play that wrestles with themes of loneliness and extreme optimism in the face of utter hopelessness. The play unfolds rather loosely as we are introduced to Winnie, a middle-aged, happy-go-lucky woman buried up to her waist in sand. Behind her and hidden from view sleeps Willie, her husband. Winnie goes about her normal routine rituals. She brushes her teeth, reaches into her bag for miscellaneous items, and makes herself pretty by applying makeup. Throughout the first act, Winnie always holds a high sense of optimism in her state of paralysis. She states how it is "another happy day with the sun shining." She remarks on the loveliness of the sun, the blue sky, and obsessively tells herself how happy she should be that she is still breathing. The fear of impending death has her appreciating the basic needs of survival. Much of the play remains a mystery, the second act, which begins with Winnie buried up to her head in sand.

We could not know who buried her up to her neck. There is also the case of her husband Willie, a strange, bizarre, sluggish practically mute man next to her throughout the play. At one point, Winnie's extreme optimism leads her so far as to ask Willie if he ever felt the need for gravity to suck him up to the sky. Willie reacts with a groan and merely replies with the phrase "sucked up." Her world is upside down and as she becomes more hyperaware of her grim fate, she fantasizes that her ironic thoughts could possibly be a reality. Willie is dressed in a suit, crawling toward Winnie, as if he is already mourning her death and ready for the funeral procession. While Winnie never uses the word, she is constantly lonely. Since Willie barely has any lines, we

never get a sense of his personality. He's like a pawn in the background and Winnie relies heavily on his presence, constantly looking for assurance that he is listening to her as she talks incessantly. Winnie escapes her loneliness by adhering strictly to her everyday routines and by taking great care of the inanimate objects she uses - a comb, toothbrush, lipstick, a nail file, and a revolver which she kisses.

By treating these items almost like pets, she relieves her anxiety that she is alone. Although Willie is close to her physically, they are separated because she's stuck in a mound of dirt and they barely communicate. She doesn't ask much of Willie, but needs to feel that her words an impact on someone else, and are not simply thoughts. The song she loves so much is a duet about love, what Winnie songs for most, yet her love of and dependency on Willie is reciprocated only briefly at the end of the play. Perhaps the play's setting is merely an extension of their married life, one that became a stale, lifeless coupling over time. Winnie compensates for this loneliness through her imagination. She recites lines from poems and plays in an attempt to commune with their authors, and conjures up the image of Shower/Cooker and his fiancée. The imaginary couple watches and discusses Winnie, and gives her the feeling of being cared for, something she doesn't get with Willie. Rituals, such as Winnie's brushing her teeth and cleaning her effects, dominate the play's constrained but frequent actions.

She performs the routines to fill up the empty hours of the long days, but the completion of each ritual also depletes her, causing her sadness, such that the ritual becomes a repetitive motion which grinds Winnie into a static, exhausting routine—she notes that holding up her parasol is fatiguing, but if

she were in motion it wouldn't be. Moreover, nothing is really changed at all after the rituals are performed, and the entire day takes on the appearance of one large ritual; Winnie remarks that her burnt parasol will return to new the next day, and she acknowledges that the climate around her is always the same and will stay that way. If there are changes, they are so minute as to be virtually static. As the play nears the end, its silences and pauses increase, lending the impression that Winnie's and Willie's lives are dragging on ever more slowly toward a death they will never reach. Winnie and Willie are slowly approaching death. Then mound, Winnie is slowly being buried in is her grave but never kills her. Willie, too, has a hole in the earth, but his is low to the ground and he can crawl in and out of it. He is reborn each time he emerges into the past he is trying to hold on to.

For example, he reads a newspaper that announces job openings for youth. But just as Winnie cannot stave off death. Willie's crawling, as Winnie points out, is not as good as it once was, and in his final crawl he is dressed as if for a funeral. His crawling, however, is just one of many rituals both practice, repetitive exercises that that draw them ever closer to death while keeping them active. Winnie's nail filing is a good example of this dual pull. Nail-filing is a mundane activity that seeks to return the nails to their normal length, but the nails also continue growing after the body dies. The nails will always grow back and signal the approach of death. The black bag follows all the rituals of Winnie's life: her toothbrush, comb, magnifying glass, and, most importantly, "Brownie," her revolver. These items do not need her, as she says, they have a "life" of their own, and create a world of ritual. The bag's color provokes connections to death, and Winnie eventually takes out for

good the revolver, which always seems to rest at the top of the bag despite its weight. The bag, then, symbolizes the death ritual brings to Winnie and the legitimate option of suicide it presents, one which she refuses with her optimism.