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*Dramatic Publishing*

Stephen Gregg's

# This Is a Test



*"This Is a Test* is a play that begs to be messed with." —**Stephen Gregg**

# This Is a Test

**Comedy. By Stephen Gregg. Cast: 13 to 15 actors, either gender.** As the ticking clock reminds you, you've only 60 minutes remaining to complete this oh-so-important predictor of your future. But you didn't get the review sheets, the teacher doesn't seem to like you and your classmates are blatantly cheating. Time is passing and the voices in your head keep reminding you that though you may be having trouble with the test, your personal life is far, far worse. Then you reach the essay question. The good news is that it's an opinion essay. The bad news is that it's in **Chinese**. And things aren't going to get better! *One int. set. Approximate running time: 30 minutes. Code: T 73.*

*Cover: Byram Hills High School, Armonk, N.Y.  
Cover Design: Susan Carle.*

ISBN: 978-0-87129-442-5



9 780871 294425 >



Printed on recycled paper



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[www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com)

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# THIS IS A TEST

by  
**STEPHEN GREGG**



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(THIS IS A TEST)

ISBN 0-87129-442-7

## THIS IS A TEST

*A One-Act Play  
for a large, flexible cast*

### CHARACTERS

ALAN

LOIS

MOTHER

TEACHER

EVAN

CHRIS

PAT

THE CHORUS

OTHER STUDENTS

THE VOICE

*TIME: The Present*

*PLACE: A Classroom*

## PRODUCTION NOTES

The series of statements — *This is a test.* — and questions — *A what?* — performed by the Chorus is a modification of a fairly standard drama exercise normally performed by four or more people in a circle rather than, as here, in a line. It's normally an exercise in cooperation and concentration since each person is both presenting an object to the person on his/her right and receiving one from the person on his/her left. But, in the play, since there are only three Chorus Members, and since they work in a line — that is to say that Three doesn't hand things back to One — only Two has the double task of receiving and presenting objects and only has to do so the first time that the Chorus appears.

After the Chorus' first appearance — *This is a pen.*, etc. — it's more important that the audience hear what objects are being passed through the line than that the exercise be performed properly. The second and subsequent times that the Chorus speaks, Two and Three should respond in unison so that only one object is being passed along at a time. For example:

ONE. This is a list.  
TWO and THREE. A what?  
ONE. A list.  
TWO and THREE. A what?  
ONE. A list.  
TWO and THREE. Oh, a list.  
ONE. This is a desk.  
TWO and THREE. A what?

And so on. Because only one thing (or idea, since an actual object need not always be passed,) is going through the line at a time, the first person in the Chorus can control the pace. He or she may need to pause occasionally in order to let Alan finish what he's saying. An extreme example of this slowing down of

the pace occurs when *A Mork* and *A lie* are passed through the line, at which point the Chorus alternates lines with Alan.

Experiment with the Chorus. It can be more than three people. I've seen it performed as resolutely mechanical or as reacting to the objects with emotions appropriate to Alan, such as screaming *A what?* in terror when confronted with a breast, for example.

Any character in this play can be played by either sex. Just substitute an appropriate name (such as "Elaine" for "Evan") and use your imagination to solve any inconsistencies that might arise (Elaine might carry a basketball instead of a football). The only place where there will be a major difference is during the *This is a date* sequence if the Alan character is female. There are lots of possible ways of handling this. One would be to substitute a different body part for "breast." The point is only that Alan (?) is socially inept and sexually inexperienced.

Three final points. In the productions of the play that I've seen, a loud metronome was used for the ticking of the clock. It was set to tick slightly faster than a normal clock and then considerably faster after the daydream.

Choose whatever voice you like for the Voice of the test. I imagined something like the deep voice of God in Drano commercials and corny movies. It may or may not be the same voice that does the opening and closing announcements.

I'm told that bluebooks are not universally recognized. A bluebook is usually twelve to fourteen 8" x 6" sheets of writing paper bound in blue paper. They're small enough that a prolific student will use up three or four of them during a test, causing those of us who are either laconic or ignorant much anxiety. If your audience won't know what they are, just call them answer sheets. The point is that only Pat uses an inordinate number of them. If possible, I think Pat's desk should be covered with bluebooks by the end of the play. Pat might slip some extras on top of the desk during or immediately following the daydream sequence.

STEPHEN GREGG



# This is a test

There is a high-pitched whine of the type that comes on the television during the emergency broadcast system tests.

VOICE. This is a test. For the next sixty minutes, this classroom will conduct a test of your emergency information retrieval system. This is only a test.

Lights come up on five desks and, behind them, a large blackboard. Two of the desks are occupied by LOIS and ALAN. LOIS is neatly groomed. ALAN is a mess. His shirt is buttoned incorrectly, his socks do not match, and his hair sticks out at odd angles. His expression is both dazed and frantic.

ALAN. I shouldn't have done this.

LOIS. It's going to be worth it.

ALAN. This was not a good idea.

LOIS. You know the stuff, right?

ALAN. I don't feel good.

LOIS. You're going to get an A and you're going to thank me.

ALAN. No. I should have slept.

LOIS. I told you, a little sleep is worse than no sleep.

ALAN. For you maybe. You do this all the time. I'm not used to this. I shouldn't have done it. I should have taken my phone off the hook.

LOIS. You did the right thing.

ALAN. It didn't work! I don't know anything.

LOIS. Yes, you do.

ALAN. I don't. (He reaches under his desk, gets his books, and frantically thumbs through them.) I have to study some more.

LOIS. Relax!

ALAN (stopping at a random place and seeing the word "Saladin"). "Saladin. A Moslem sultan of Egypt in the twelfth century. (He pauses.) His name means 'keeper of the faith.' (He pauses.) He grew up in Lower Mesopotamia."

LOIS (reaching over and shutting Alan's book). Stop it. It's too late to study now. You either know it or you don't. The best thing you can do now is just relax.

ALAN. I can't! I don't know anything! Nothing stuck with me. You know what I learned last night? I learned that the Battle of Hastings was in ten-sixty-six and I learned that Thomas Edison's middle name was Alva. That's it. That's all I know. If we're asked when the Battle of Hastings was, I can say, "The Battle of Hastings was in ten-sixty-six." If he asks, "What was Thomas Edison's middle name?" I can say, "Alva." Other than that, I'm completely sunk.

LOIS. No, you're not.

ALAN. Evan wouldn't have done this.

LOIS. What does Evan have to do with this?

ALAN. He has the best grades in the class and he didn't stay up all last night.

LOIS. Who cares?

ALAN. He's going to get a better grade than I am and he didn't have you calling him every half hour to say, "Are you still awake?" (He snarls.) Yes, Lois, I am still awake. I am still awake, Lois. I am still awake!

LOIS. Calm down!

ALAN (after a pause, much calmer). I'm sorry. (He pauses.) It's all that caffeine. It makes me nervous.

LOIS. I know.

ALAN. I lose my concentration.

LOIS. Me too.

ALAN. I lose my concentration.

LOIS. Don't worry.

ALAN. I have to study some more. (He goes for his books.  
LOIS stops him.)

LOIS. No! Trust me. Just close your eyes . . . (ALAN closes his eyes. After a pause.) . . . and relax. Think about something else.

(The Chorus, ONE, TWO and THREE, walks onstage.)

LOIS. Are you thinking about something else?

ONE (after a pause, holding a pen). This is a pen.

ALAN. Yes.

TWO (after a pause of about two beats). A what?

ONE (after the same length pause). A pen.

TWO (after a pause of about two beats). A what?

ONE (after the same length pause). A pen.

TWO (after a shorter pause, taking the pen from ONE). Oh, a pen. (TWO turns and addresses THREE.) This is a pen.

THREE. A what?

TWO. A pen.

THREE. A what?

TWO. A pen.

THREE. Oh, a pen.

**NOTE:** For clarification of the following section, see the Production Notes at the end of the playbook.

*ONE (to TWO, holding a shoe). This is a shoe. (ONE and TWO go through the same dialogue: "A what?" "A shoe." "A what?" "A shoe." "Oh, a shoe." When TWO takes the shoe, he or she immediately turns to THREE and says, "This is a shoe." Simultaneously, ONE — holding a spoon — says, "This is a spoon" to TWO. THREE responds, "A what?" to TWO at the same time that TWO turns and responds "A what?" to ONE. ONE and TWO, who turns back to THREE, say, "A*

*spoon” and “A shoe.” TWO and THREE respond, “Oh, a spoon” and “Oh, a shoe” and take the respective objects. TWO immediately says, “This is a spoon” to THREE while ONE says, “This is a match” to TWO and the process repeats with ONE presenting objects, THREE receiving them, and TWO both presenting to THREE and receiving from ONE. After the match, they pass these objects through the chain: a coin, a cup, a watch, a key, a shirt, a sock, a glass, a book, a bell, the time, a test. Soon after the Chorus begins to go through this routine, ALAN opens his eyes, squints, and shakes his head from side to side. When ONE says, “This is a shirt,” LOIS notices ALAN shaking his head back and forth and the following dialogue – all the way down to Alan’s line, “Fine!”, overlaps the Chorus.*

LOIS. What’s the matter?

ALAN. It’s that drama exercise we did yesterday.

LOIS. What about it?

(With no interruption in the dialogue, PAT and CHRIS, both students, enter and sit in the empty chairs. They notice ALAN contorting his face and banging his head.)

ALAN. That’s what I’m thinking about.

LOIS. So?

ALAN. It’s stuck.

LOIS. What do you mean “it’s stuck”?

ALAN. It’s stuck in my head.

LOIS. Think about something else.

ALAN. I can’t! (A loud bell rings, signaling the beginning of class.)

(The TEACHER enters, carrying tests.)

TEACHER. Good morning. (The STUDENTS acknowledge him. He watches ALAN for a moment.) I hope we’re all rested and

ready to go. I know I am. There are a couple of things I'd like for you to keep in mind while you take this test. First, you really shouldn't think of this as a test. It is a test, of course, but it's also quite a bit more. (He has been watching ALAN who has been shaking back and forth and hitting the side of his head.) Alan, are you all right?

ALAN (a little wildly). Fine! (The Chorus stops, even if it isn't finished with the list of objects.)

TEACHER. Good. As I was saying, keep in mind that this isn't only a test. This is your mid-term. How you do today, this morning, will determine to a large extent how you do for the rest of this course. And, of course, how you do in this class has a large impact on your overall grade point which is a major factor in determining what, if any, colleges you might be accepted into. It might help if you didn't think of this as a test so much as you think of it as your future. Your future in . . . (He looks at his watch.) . . . fifty-eight minutes. Any last minute questions? (CHRIS raises a hand.) Chris?

CHRIS. Uh, what was Thomas Edison's middle name?

TEACHER. Alva. But don't worry. That's not on the test. Anything else? (A pause.) All right then. Let's get going. (He hands out the tests, face down.) Think carefully about each question and be sure not to leave anything blank. Most of the questions come right off the review sheets, so if you studied them you'll be fine.

ALAN (panicked). Review sheets?

TEACHER. Yes. These. (He holds up a stack of at least ten sheets of paper, stapled together.) I handed them out last week. Didn't you get them?

ALAN. No.

TEACHER. Well, I don't know how that could have happened. Were you here last Monday?

ALAN. Of course.