

# Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

*Dramatic Publishing*

**Stephen Gregg's**

# **This Is a Text**



***This Is a Test's* rowdier little sister**

**A rollicking play about  
the impossibility of taking a test  
in the age of distraction.**

# **This Is a Text**

***Comedy. By Stephen Gregg. Cast: 11 to 17 either gender. Sophia needs to get a 61! If she gets a 61 on her *Romeo and Juliet* exam, she'll get into Coldwater State. But she was up all night, distracted by a mysterious text, and now she can't focus. Sophia's only hope: Flowcus, the concentration pill that sits tantalizingly close on the teacher's desk. *This Is a Text* is *This Is a Text's* rowdier little sister, a battle against an exam, waged during the age of distraction. Sophia's quest to get into Coldwater State ends in a way that neither she nor the teacher could have anticipated and leads to a conclusion that's both surprising and unexpectedly moving. *Flexible staging. Approximate running time: 30 minutes. Code: T59.****

*Cover: Bakersfield High School, Bakersfield, Calif.  
(l-r) Briana Taylor and Sadie Elizondo. Photo: Cheryl Mestmaker.  
Cover Design: Susan Carle.*

ISBN: 978-1-58342-823-8



9 781583 428238 >



Printed on recycled paper



*Dramatic Publishing*

311 Washington St.  
Woodstock, IL 60098  
ph: 800-448-7469

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

© The Dramatic Publishing Company

# **This Is a Text**

Comedy by  
**STEPHEN GREGG**



**Dramatic Publishing Company**  
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

\*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\*

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: [www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com), or we may be contacted by mail at: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

©MMXIV by  
STEPHEN GREGG

Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(THIS IS A TEXT)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-823-8

## IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with  
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois.”

*This Is a Text* premiered at Bakersfield High School in Bakersfield, Calif., on April 11, 2012.

Director ..... Jacquie Thompson-Mercer  
Technical Director..... Dale Olvera

The cast consisted of Sadie Elizondo, Briana Taylor, Norma Camorlinga, Alice Verderber, Chelsea Hatler, Emily Smith, Cassidy Fraley, Gilbert Perez, Eric Dains, Christina Dains, Hannah Yanez, Kendra Fender, Cherish Jessee, Tyler Palo.

# **This Is a Text**

## **CHARACTERS**

### **The Students:**

SOPHIA: panicked, about to fail the biggest test of her life.

LOIS: perfect, about to ace the biggest test of her life.

RUDOLPH: appealing but has the attention span of a ferret.

GERMY: a walking contagion. Becomes JEREMY.

JUDE: prone to allergies.

KEVIN: plays the piano, getting some help.

### **The Adults:**

MS. BROPIA: the teacher.

CHITA: Kevin's tutor.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS 1 & 2: members of the Teacher  
of the Year committee.

MR. GREENPEACE

TEST VOICE



## PRODUCTION NOTES

The easiest way to stage Sophia's quest for the pill is to put her all the way upstage and to have Ms. Bropila talk to fantasy characters downstage.

Bropila is accented on the first syllable.

Change any genders you like.

For Gergy's transformation, it's useful to use groomers (onstage dressers). In one early production, they entered and fixed up Gergy in full view of the audience. In another production, they held a screen in front of him while the transformation happened.

You can do the ending without the music—just adjust the dialogue—but when you try it with the music you'll see how much it adds. It's not a perfectly easy piece to play, but it's slow and you don't need too much of it. In the very first reading that used the music, the pianist struggled a bit, but the effect was weirdly great; it was Kevin learning the music, stumbling into loveliness at the same time Sophia and Jeremy did.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

I'm not sure why I thought the end of the world would be amusing. I don't know how I could have thought that having a comedy end with the destruction of our planet was a good idea.

It wasn't a good idea.

But that's how the premiere of *This Is a Text* ended. Bakersfield High School, under the direction of Jacquelyn Thompson-Mercer, gave the play a great production, complete with lovely character work and high-end tech. But then the curtain came down at the end of the play and the audience applauded politely.

No playwright daydreams of polite applause.

The Bakersfield production was supposed to be the culmination of a development process, proof that the play was ready for publication. But it wasn't.

Five minutes before the end of the play, I thought, "Huh, all these appealing young people will be dead in five minutes. This might be a problem."

A few weeks after the politely received production, I said to Todd, "So, is it kind of a downer that the world ends?" He confessed that yes, the nuclear holocaust was a bummer.

So I took out the end of the world. But, as you can imagine, it requires a fair amount of exposition—setting up—to explain why the world explodes. So that exposition came out. And when that exposition was removed some moments no longer made sense and some transitions went missing. Worst of all, some characters seemed irrelevant and the play had no sense of drive.

All of which made me realize that my problems had been bigger than the ending. (Among other things, using a character

solely as an expository device is bad playwriting.) The more I pulled at the apocalypse thread, the more my little throw rug of a play unraveled. *This Is a Text* dissolved into about four inchoate pages.

The moment when a project unravels is a never a writer's best moment. But it does happen. At that point—no credit to me—the play was already in Dramatic Publishing's catalog, and on its website, with a sadly out-of-date description.

There was nothing to do but see which of the little threads was most promising and to start over.

Fortunately, over the next couple of years, director friends stepped forward to offer their theatre programs to help rethink the play. Among the schools kind enough and brave enough to mount a play that was still finding itself were: The Patriot Playhouse at First Colonial High School in Virginia Beach, Virginia (directed by Nancy Curtis); Anderson Collegiate Vocational Institute in Whitby, Ontario (directed by Margo Rodgers); Labette County High School in Altamont, Kansas (directed by Heather Wilson); and CHAMPS Charter High School of the Arts in Van Nuys, California (directed by Donovan Glover).

Thanks to them for helping me to remember that sometimes you have to start anew, and that when you do, it's not the end of the world.

## This Is a Text

*(As the house lights dim, we hear a TEXT SOUND. Then a different one. Then another and another. Then a cacophony of TEXT SOUNDS.)*

*Lights up on an empty classroom. SOPHIA enters, dazed and frantic. Her clothing is off in ways both subtle and not, but it's probably the hair we notice first. It's gone wildly wrong.*

*She opens a copy of Romeo and Juliet and reads. Her goal is to learn the entire play in the next five minutes.)*

SOPHIA *(reading fast)*. “Two households, both alike in dignity, / In fair Verona, where we lay our scene.”

*(A TEXT SOUND makes her look at her phone for a second. But there is no text.)*

SOPHIA *(cont'd)*. “Two households, both alike in dignity, / In fair Verona, where we lay our scene!”

*(Another TEXT SOUND makes her look again. Again, nothing.)*

SOPHIA *(cont'd)*. “TWO HOUSEHOLDS, BOTH ALIKE IN DIGNITY, / IN FAIR VERONA, WHERE WE LAY OUR SCENE!”

*(Another TEXT SOUND. Before she can look at her phone, LOIS enters. LOIS, SOPHIA's best friend, is prepped, poised.)*

LOIS. Who are you yelling at?

SOPHIA. No one!

LOIS. You ready for the big one?

SOPHIA. No!

LOIS. Sure you are.

SOPHIA. No. I'm going to fail! I'm going to fail, I'm going to fail, I'm going to fail!

*(Throughout the following, SOPHIA cleans anything near her with hand sanitizer.)*

LOIS. What happened?

SOPHIA. I didn't study!

LOIS. At all?

SOPHIA. No!

LOIS. Why not?

SOPHIA. I got a text. I was all set to hunker down last night and read the play, but then I got this text.

*(SOPHIA shows LOIS her phone.)*

LOIS. "Will you go out with me?" Who's it from?

SOPHIA. I don't know!

LOIS. Maybe Rudolph?

SOPHIA. Let's hope! I was staring at it, trying to figure it out and I just ...

*(A light change.)*

SOPHIA *(cont'd)*. It was like I fell into my phone.

*(We're in a strange vortex, as the words, "Will you go out with me?" echo over and over in different voices.)*

*An ALARM RINGS. Lights snap back to normal.)*

SOPHIA (*cont'd*). And suddenly it was morning! It's an essay test on *Romeo and Juliet* and I HAVEN'T READ THE PLAY! All I know is that it's a love story and that it ends happy.

LOIS. It doesn't end happy.

(*JUDE enters, takes a seat.*)

SOPHIA. I have to get a 61. If I get a 61, I get into Coldwater State.

LOIS. Are you sure?

SOPHIA. Yeah. They use a formula. Sixty-one on this test keeps my grade at a 70. Add in my standardized test scores and I'm in!

LOIS. You can get a 61.

SOPHIA. It's an essay test. You have to be able to concentrate and I can't concentrate because I was up all night, and did I mention I haven't read the play!

LOIS. Two deep breaths.

(*SOPHIA complies.*)

LOIS (*cont'd*). It's not like she's gonna ask you to summarize the whole plot. Just focus on the question. (*Re: SOPHIA's cleaning.*) Would you stop that? You're getting neurotic with the clean thing.

SOPHIA. I have a fragile immune system.

LOIS. It's cause you don't give it any practice.

SOPHIA. I have to guard against Gergy. He's a walking plague.

(*RUDOLPH enters. He is appealing, but has the short-term memory of a ferret. He's capable of being surprised by things he learned 10 seconds ago. SOPHIA is smitten.*)

RUDOLPH. Hi, Sophia!

SOPHIA. Hi, Rudolph! I bought you that book on female empowerment!

*(The book probably has a bow on it.)*

RUDOLPH. Thanks! *(But before he takes it, he sees JUDE.)*  
Jude, how's your grandpa?

JUDE. He died.

RUDOLPH. Oh no! *(Sees SOPHIA, as though for the first time. Forgets about JUDE's grandpa.)* Hi, Sophia! How goes?

SOPHIA *(hinting)*. I'm OK, but I got this text and I don't know who it's from.

RUDOLPH. Oh, I've got to take my pill!

*(RUDOLPH's pill is enormous, like a giant Sweet Tart. He forgets to take it as he sees JUDE.)*

RUDOLPH *(cont'd, concerned)*. Jude, how's your grandpa?

JUDE. Dead.

RUDOLPH. Oh no! *(Chipper.)* Sophia, whasssup!?

SOPHIA. Trying to figure out who sent me this text.

RUDOLPH *(sees the book)*. Whatcha got there?

SOPHIA. You know, we were talking about this book and I just—

RUDOLPH. What were you saying about a text?

SOPHIA. It's this one here.

RUDOLPH. Hang on one sec, I got to take my pill. *(To JUDE.)*  
Hey, how's old gramps?

JUDE. Dead.

*(RUDOLPH puts the pill in his mouth and chews it. After a second, it kicks in and he develops a Buddhist calm.)*

RUDOLPH. Excuse me while I meditate.

*(RUDOLPH sits and meditates. The other three are a bit awed.)*

LOIS. Wow.

JUDE. What happened to him?

LOIS. Flowcus.

JUDE. What?

LOIS. He took a Flowcus.

SOPHIA. I've heard of it.

LOIS. It's concentration in pill form. You chew it and 10 seconds later your mind becomes a calm ocean of thought.

SOPHIA. I need that pill. Hey, Rudolph, do you have another one of those? Rudolph?

*(But he's deep in meditation. SOPHIA starts to rummage through his jacket pockets.)*

LOIS. What are you doing?

SOPHIA. I need one of those concentration pills.

LOIS. You'll get us in trouble!

*(The BELL RINGS, stopping her search. Among those who enter are KEVIN and CHITA, KEVIN's tutor. The teacher, MS. BROPILA, enters with the tests.)*

MS BROPILA. Hello everyone.

*(A chorus of hellos greets her.)*

MS BROPILA *(cont'd)*. Sometimes people ask me what I like best about teaching, and I tell them I like the tests. And it's true. I do. This whole semester I've been telling you what I know about *Romeo and Juliet*, but now I get a chance to hear what the play means to you. The test is open book. You can use the text of *Romeo and Juliet*, but nothing else. All electronics off.



(A loud HAWKING announces GERMYY's entrance. GERMYY's clothes are baggy and stained, his hair scraggly, his voice permanently stuffed up.)

GERMY. Sorry to be late. I was trying to clear out my phlegm, but sometimes if it's that really dark kind of phlegm you just can't do it.

(To SOPHIA's horror, he takes the seat next to her.)

GERMY (*cont'd*). Hi, Sophia. I like your hair!

SOPHIA. Thanks.

MS. BROPILA. Let's get into concentration mode, people. And ... begin!

SOPHIA (*to herself*). Sixty-one, 61, 61, 61.

TEST VOICE. Question one. Forty points. Summarize the entire plot of *Romeo and Juliet*.

SOPHIA. Oh!

MS. BROPILA. Sophia? Something wrong?

SOPHIA. No, just ... 40 points! That's a lot of points.

MS. BROPILA. It's a gift. If you've read the play you won't have any trouble.

SOPHIA. True! (*To herself*.) OK. Bad start. No big deal.

TEST VOICE. Question two. Twenty points. Give the Elizabethan definition of tragedy and explain how *Romeo and Juliet* fulfills that definition.

SOPHIA (*to herself*). Tragedy. Ha! Good try, Ms. Bropila. (*Writing*.) "Good try, sneaky little Teach, but this is a trick question! *Romeo and Juliet* ends happily!"

(JUDE has started to move an arm slowly up and down.)

SOPHIA (*cont'd*). Jude, what are you doing?