

The Test

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By Cliff McClelland



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SYNOPSIS: A satire-powered Saturday Night Live-style play that explores the pitfalls and potholes of testing in America. Witness the beginning of testing in prehistoric times! Become the studio audience for a new testing game show! Torture audiences as they wait excruciatingly long (nearly two minutes) for the home pregnancy test results! Humor and satire collide when the "No Child Left Behind" fiasco, some people like to call it a mandate, captures the essence of what is right, wrong, and heinous in American schools today. It's all here, it's all fun, and it's all available to you for the very low price of two number-two pencils and possibly, an itsy bitsy piece of your soul in this hilarious sketch comedy. But remember, "This is only a test."

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CAVEMAN #1(Non-speaking)
CAVEMAN #2(Non-speaking)
CAVEMAN #3(Non-speaking)
BILL BAILEYA talk show host. (38 lines)
ROSEA housewife. (11 lines)
MARCELA mime. (Non-speaking)
JONAHThe Old Testament prophet. (12 lines)
DANNIBill's gorgeous assistant. (2 lines)
ANNOUNCERRecorded or offstage voice. (10 lines)
ENIGMA SINGERSA three-girl singing group like the
Supremes. (2 lines)
MANA husband. (Non-speaking)
WOMANA wife. (Non-speaking)
HEAD INQUISITOROf the Monty Python-esque Inquisition.
(88 lines)
MARGARETAnother inquisitor. (31 lines)
GERALDAnother inquisitor. (38 lines)
SHELLYAnother inquisitor. (22 lines)
OLD MANAnother inquisitor. (10 lines)

ANNE	Secretary of the inquisitors. (11 lines)
HELGA	A heretic. (22 lines)
BEAT TEACHER.....	A cool cat experimental teacher. (5 lines)
LINDSEY	A beat class student. (1 line)
REGINA	A beat class student. (2 lines)
MICHAEL	A beat class student. (1 line)
JANICE.....	A beat class student. (2 lines)
MOTHER.....	Of an autistic child. (14 lines)
FATHER.....	Of an autistic child. (6 lines)
ESMIE	An autistic child. (9 lines)
DOCTOR	Of the autistic child. (13 lines)
TRAINER	A standardized test trainer. (33 lines)
TEACHER #1	Teacher administering standardized tests. (5 lines)
TEACHER #2	Teacher administering standardized tests. (13 lines)
TEACHER #3	Teacher administering standardized tests. (4 lines)
TEACHER #4	Teacher administering standardized tests. (6 lines)
ARMY GUY.....	Test security person. (5 lines)
MOTHER.....	An older woman in a doctor's office for a test. (Non-speaking)
SON	Her son, waiting with her. (Non-speaking)
DOCTOR	Bringing back the test results. (Non-speaking)
ZOMBIES.....	The cast dressed as zombies. (2 lines; ZOMBIE #1 - - 1 line, ZOMBIE #2 - - 1 line, ZOMBIE #3 - - 1 line)

SETTING

All over America.

TIME: Today.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

This play is meant to run with scenes back-to-back, separated only by music and possibly a slide show of cartoons having to do with testing. There are hundreds of them available on the internet! In terms of cast, you can have a huge one or a cast of eleven to fourteen, for which the play was originally designed.

The Bill Bailey music was written in 1902, so that's public domain.

“Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” is controlled by BMI, so you would need to license it for this show, pick another appropriate song, or even write your own original music. Every school has five or six garage bands. Have them help out.

Finally, props, costumes, and set should be minimalistic and representational, because there are so many changes. Find a way to bring out the theme rather than something realistic.

This play was performed in front of a whole group of teachers when it was written, and there were so many belly laughs that it was unbelievable. With testing in the newspapers every other week, though, the audience for the show is expanding all the time, so have fun with it!

ACT ONE
THE PREHISTORIC AGE

To the tune of "Thus Spake Zarathustra (Also Sprach Zarathustra)." Three CAVEMEN approach a set of stone tablets on the floor and begin to draw. At the first brass flourish, the 1ST CAVEMAN reveals a picture of a circle. Other CAVEMEN approach, interested in the creation. During the timpani solo, the 2ND CAVEMAN draws furiously. At the flourish, he holds up a picture of the same circle, only detail has been added to create a wheel. The CAVEMEN leap around the floor, hooting and hollering their approval. During the timpani solo, the 3RD CAVEMAN draws furiously, and at the final flourish, holds up a picture of a circle inscribed with the words, " $A = \pi r^2$ and $r = 5$. Solve for A." The 3RD CAVEMAN looks incredibly pleased with himself, but the other CAVEMEN just shake their heads. Their confused mumblings morph from discontent to anger, and they finally pick up their clubs, beat the 3RD CAVEMAN into jelly, and destroy his stone tablet. The lights fade on stage as a slide appears. The slide reads, "And thus, the practice of testing was postponed for a few thousand years."

THE GAME SHOW

Fun, game-show style music fades in as the slides disappear. LIGHTS FADE IN ON: THE GAME SHOW.

Three contestants stand in front of podiums that bear their names. The contestants include an overbearing housewife, ROSE, her hair in curlers and wearing a robe, MARCEL, a mime, and the Old Testament prophet, JONAH, who, from his appearance, seems to have just come from the belly of a giant fish.

The host of the show, BILL BAILEY, stands at his podium, all smiles.

THE TEST

BILL BAILEY: All right, everybody. Welcome back to Enigma, that mysterious game show that combines the brilliance of the most puzzling questions in history with the goofiest people on the face of the earth. I'm Bill Bailey, your host of this top ten Nielsen Ratings' hit. Now let's meet our contestants.

First, let's say hello to a real flower child, Rose McDowell!

An applause track is played. All three contestants look around them, trying to figure out from where the applause is coming from.

BILL BAILEY: Hi, Rosie!

ROSE: It's just Rose, you smiley-faced moron.

BILL BAILEY: And don't I know it! As our current champion, Rose has garnered a whole fourteen dollars and eighty-five cents here on Enigma!

The applause track goes wild.

ROSE: Oh, shut up! It's fifteen bucks. My son brings home more than that just beating kids up for lunch money.

BILL BAILEY: Your son extorts lunch money from other children?

ROSE: Hey, watch what you say about Denny. He's just got some issues.

BILL BAILEY: Okay! Well, moving on, let's all say hello to Marcel Marceau, the most famous mime in history!

Applause track erupts. The MIME opens an invisible door, walks through it, and blows kisses to the audience.

BILL BAILEY: It's Marcel's first time with the show, but I assure you, he had to answer some real toughies to make it into the final selection of contestants. Isn't that right, Marcel?

MARCEL gives him a thumbs up.

BILL BAILEY: And finally, we have an Old Testament prophet, Jonah, who according to some people actually lived in the belly of a big fish for several months.

ROSE: I thought something smelled.

JONAH: Hey, it wasn't my fault. Do I really smell? I didn't have time to take a shower. It was bam, thrown up on the shores of Ninevah, and then I got the call on my cell, got back in the whale and headed for L.A.

BILL BAILEY: You actually rode a whale to America?

JONAH: Have you seen the price of airline tickets?

BILL BAILEY: Good point. All right, you all have your buzzers, right?

All three contestants hit a button, and their buzzers make noise.

BILL BAILEY: Good.

MARCEL continues to hit his buzzer, enjoying making sounds for once.

BILL BAILEY: Hey, Marcel. That's probably . . . hey, big guy. That's enough of . . . Marcel!

A CAVEMAN from the first scene enters and bops MARCEL over the head with his club. MARCEL falls and the CAVEMAN drags him out.

ROSE: Who's that guy with the club? He was kinda cute.

BILL BAILEY: Well, I guess that's it for Marcel. Johnny, do we have another contestant standing by?

ANNOUNCER: *(Offstage.)* We sure do, Bill. But first, let's welcome the Enigma singers!

Three FEMALE SINGERS appear.

SINGERS: Won't you come home, Bill Bailey? Won't you come home? She moans the whole day long. I'll do the cooking, darling, I'll pay the rent; I know I've done you wrong. 'Member that rainy eve that I threw you out, with nothing but a fine-tooth comb? Yeah, I know I'm to blame, now, ain't that a shame. Bill Bailey, won't you please come home?

BILL laughs.

BILL BAILEY: Johnny, you get me every time. Goodbye girls!

The SINGERS blow him kisses and exit.

ANNOUNCER: *(Offstage.)* All right. Our next contestant on Enigma is . . . *(Drum roll.)* The Rock!

BILL BAILEY: Wow! I didn't know he was coming on the show. Ladies and gentlemen, let's give it up for the Rock!

A Vanna White-like game show babe, DANNI, steps out with a large rock and places it on the podium. She gestures over it, smiles, then exits.

BILL BAILEY: Not exactly what I had in mind . . . but it'll do. All right, for the benefit of the home viewing audience, I want to go over the rules of the show one more time. You're all going to receive questions of varying difficulty, along with six possible answers labeled A, B, C, D, E, and F. Your job will be to decipher which is the correct answer among the letters A, B, and C, or D, which is "all of the above," E, which is "none of the above," or F, "some of the above," but only on days of the week that begin with the letter T. We have ten questions for each of you. Danni?

DANNI appears with three brown Kraft envelopes. She hands them to the contestants, gesticulating appropriately.

BILL BAILEY: Now . . . *(Panicking as ROSE opens the envelope.)* Don't open it yet, Rose! Danni, can you help us out here?

DANNI grabs a roll of tape and reseals the envelope. BILL BAILEY wipes his forehead in mock relief.

BILL BAILEY: Whew! That was a close one. Can't compromise the game show security, folks. Next time, wait until you receive instructions there, would ya, speedy?

ROSE: Whatever.

BILL BAILEY: Now, you'll have ten questions in the first round. If you get at least seven questions right, we'll allow you to go on to the second round. If you get less, I'm afraid we're going to have to send you off to a remedial game show, like Blind Date. Of course, getting seven questions right is only good this week. Next week, you're going to have to get at least eight questions right, and nine the week after that. The option to go to another game show will unfortunately be lost as well, and we will have to keep you here until you get at least nine questions right or we give up and have you turned into Soylent Green. Is everybody with me so far? *(Sounds of mumbled questioning.)*

BILL BAILEY: Good. As long as we're all on the same page. Our motto is: No Game Show Contestant Left Behind.

JONAH raises his arm.

ROSE: *(She grabs her nose.)* Oh, please don't do that!

JONAH: Sorry.

BILL BAILEY: Yes, Jonah?

JONAH: Umm, how do we answer the questions? Do we have little buttons for A, B, and --

BILL BAILEY: You didn't bring a pencil?

JONAH: What?

BILL BAILEY: It distinctly said in your instructions that you were supposed to bring two number two pencils.

JONAH: Really?

BILL BAILEY: Yes.

JONAH: Let me check.

He reaches into his bag and pulls out a phone book-sized document of instructions covered in seaweed. He starts flipping pages. After a few moments . . .

BILL BAILEY: Page 4.

JONAH: Ummm.

He finds the page.

BILL BAILEY: Paragraph 8, subsection 3.

JONAH: Yada yada yada, you will be executed in a style befitting - -

BILL BAILEY: Sub paragraph A, little letter i little letter B little letters
ii big A and then number - -

JONAH follows along as he speaks.

JONAH: Oh. *(Beat.)* Ahhh! *(He closes the book.)* Sorry.

BILL BAILEY: Danni?

DANNI appears again, this time with two number two pencils and a knife. She hands JONAH the pencils.

DANNI: We're going to want those back after the show.

JONAH: Right. I'll get them to you.

DANNI grabs his hand and lays it on the podium, then carves a (fake) finger off with the knife. JONAH screams and stares at his hand.

DANNI: I'll just keep this on ice in the back until the show's over.
Don't forget my pencils!

She smiles and gestures over the severed finger, then walks beautifully off stage.

BILL BAILEY: That is some girl, right Jonah?

JONAH: *(Barely able to talk.)* Uh huh. *(JONAH faints.)*

BILL BAILEY: Oh, well. Rosie, it looks like you've got a real shot today, bringing your status of returning champion to an all-time record of four weeks.

ROSE: Whatever. Can I open the envelope now?

BILL BAILEY: You sure can. *(She breaks the seal. A loud chime is heard.)*

BILL BAILEY: Oh, I'm afraid that's all the time we have for today, Rosie.

ROSE: It's Rose, you idiot.

BILL BAILEY: We're going to have to move you to the gym to finish the show, and then we'll report the results to our audience next week on . . . Enigma!

ROSE: I can't believe I came back here for this.

BILL BAILEY: Bye, everybody!

The lights fade to black.

ANNOUNCER: *(Recorded.)* All representations of real people on Enigma are false and should not be taken for real representations. Please mark B on your answer document for "false." All contestants will be eligible to receive one free dinner at the Macaroni Factory after the results of the show have been tabulated and processed by the National Center for Disease Control. If you experienced a rash while watching this program, please use Preparation H ointment. If an itching-burning sensation occurs, please consult a physician. This program assumes no liability for mild side effects caused by the show. And don't forget, coming in April - - Enigma, the home board game! This has been a DesiLu production.

ROSE: *(In the dark.)* Whatever.

LIGHTS rise on:

E.P.T. (PART ONE)

Soft music plays as the lights rise on a WOMAN entering her home. She has a bag in one hand and her purse over her shoulder. She sets the purse down and opens the bag, removing a small box from inside. She opens the box and removes the contents, reads the printed instruction pamphlet, and then exits opposite the way she entered. After a few moments, a MAN enters with a briefcase. He sets it down and starts to exit where the woman did. Then he sees the box. He picks it up and stares at it curiously, his eyes growing wider by the minute. He looks up in time to see the WOMAN re-enter, wearing a robe and looking down at a small, pink stick. She sees him, and they stare at one another for a moment. He shows her the box, and she slowly shakes her head "no." She looks as if she might cry, and the MAN goes to her, holds her. He holds her face to his and smiles. Eventually, she returns the smile. He kisses her softly, and they hold each other. He whispers something in her ear, and she giggles. He picks her up and exits. As she leaves, she tosses the pink stick on the ground. The music builds to a beautiful climax and ends. LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.

THE SPANISH INQUISITION

Lights rise on a roomful of INQUISITORS and a WOMAN bound to a chair.

HEAD INQUISITOR: All right, all right. Everyone settle down.

Percy! I think you've had enough of the cheese dip. If you'll take a seat. Thank you. Okay, welcome everyone to the first meeting of the Spanish Inquisition. Yes, Margaret?

MARGARET: Will we be taking time out later for a water closet break?

HEAD INQUISITOR: We just started, Margaret.

MARGARET: Well, of course we did. But Samuel brought that wonderful mulled wine . . . *(She golf claps, and everyone else follows suit.)* . . . and you probably know this from the country club, that delicious beverage just runs right through me - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: Enough, yes. Thank you for bringing that to our attention, Margaret. We will certainly take time for a break a little bit later.

MARGARET: I think we still have a bundt cake we haven't sampled, either.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Very good, then. A bundt cake break it is, if I may say so.

MARGARET: You may.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Thank you, I did. Now, our invitations had some promotional materials with them. I hope everyone had a chance to read them? *(Beat.)* Gerald, you're looking at the floor a bloody lot right now.

GERALD: I was just wondering if this tile was new. Seems like the last bit wasn't nearly as shiny and fresh.

HEAD INQUISITOR: So you mean to say that you have read the material.

GERALD: I didn't say that at all.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Then you haven't read it.

GERALD: Didn't say that, neither.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Well, which is it, Gerald?

GERALD: Are you getting cross?

HEAD INQUISITOR: No, I'm not getting cross. I'm just wondering if you had a chance to look over the promotional materials I sent you.

GERALD: I don't think I received them.

HEAD INQUISITOR: You had to of.

GERALD: That's not true.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Yes, it is. I included them with the invitation. If you hadn't received the materials, you wouldn't have received the invitation, and then you wouldn't be here tonight at all.

GERALD: Not necessarily.

HEAD INQUISITOR: What do you mean?

GERALD: I mean that you could be wrong.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I understand - -

GERALD: After all, they're synonyms, really. "Not necessarily" and "you could be wrong." Not perfect synonyms like plunder and loot, but synonyms just the same.

MARGARET: Who brought the synonyms tonight, anyway? I thought they were lovely. (*She leads a golf clap.*)

GERALD: You mean cinnamons, dear. The cinnamon buns we ate earlier.

MARGARET: Oh, right. Very good.

GERALD: Delicious, and almost a homonym with synonym, though not quite. Synonym, cinnamon. Not a homonym like there and their.

SHELLY: What?

GERALD: There and their.

SHELLY: They're the same word.

GERALD: Ah, there's another one. They're!

SHELLY: They're the same word.

GERALD: No, dear. I'm spelling them differently.

HEAD INQUISITOR: For crying out loud.

SHELLY: I can't hear it. Say it again.

GERALD: There. Their.

SHELLY: No. Still not hearing it. Are you sure you're spelling them differently?

GERALD: Quite. You see, the "there" is with an "ere," and the "their" is with an "eir." And there's the third "they're" with an "ey're."

MARGARET: Use it in a sentence.

GERALD: I can do all three.

SHELLY: Cannot.

GERALD: I can do all three in a limerick, which is sort of like one sentence but Irish.

HEAD INQUISITOR: What?

GERALD: Listen. There once was a Queen ripe with age/Who believed her sweet charms all the rage/'Til one day, like a fool/She passed wind in the pool/Killing half the king's court and one page.
(*Everyone titters.*)

HEAD INQUISITOR: You didn't do it.

GERALD: Do what?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Didn't use their and they're in the limerick. You only used there.

MARGARET: That's true.

SHELLY: Indeed.

GERALD: Yes. But it was clever wasn't it?

SHELLY: Oh, certainly so.

MARGARET: Grand. *(Everyone golf claps.)*

GERALD: Well? Where were we?

HEAD INQUISITOR: I don't remember.

MARGARET: Who's taking notes? Surely someone is writing all of this down. After all, one day this will be looked back upon as a time when history was made.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Margaret. Dear. One day, everything will be looked back upon as a time when history was made. That's what history is.

SHELLY: I think he has you there, love.

MARGARET: No it's not.

SHELLY: I think he does.

MARGARET: Not at all. Everyone knows my husband Bruno, right?
(General agreement is ad-libbed.)

MARGARET: Well, yesterday Bruno shaved his back. *(General ad-libbed disgust.)*

SHELLY: Love, Bruno is the hairiest man in this part of the world.

MARGARET: Agreed.

GERALD: I once saw him without his shirt and almost shot him for a bear.

HEAD INQUISITOR: There aren't any bears in Spain.

GERALD: There's bears in the circus.

MARGARET: So anyway, he shaved his back, which is now as shiny as a baby's little behind. And that was yesterday. So it's history, right? That's history.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Basically.

MARGARET: Hundreds of years from now, people will read about the huge pile of black, greasy back hair sitting on my kitchen table.

SHELLY: Let's not talk any more about this, dear. Too many synonyms.

GERALD: Cinnamons.

SHELLY: Whatever. I'm feeling a bit off now.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Stop!

Everyone turns to him.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Let's try to return to the point, shall we? I think we were talking about the promotional materials I sent you.

GERALD: I didn't get any promotional - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: Would you shut up, you blithering baby?

OLD MAN: (*Whispering.*) That was alliteration right there. Blithering baby.

HEAD INQUISITOR: If those people who received their promotional materials could be persuaded to share with those who did not.

One LADY takes out a pamphlet.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Only one of you brought the promotional materials?

SHELLY: I didn't receive any.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Oh, bloody hell! (*Turns to another woman.*) Anne, you were the one who folded everything and put it in the envelopes. Would you please tell these cretins that they all received promotional materials?

ANNE, a timid young thing, stands.

ANNE: Ummm. I'd like to thank you all for coming . . .

HEAD INQUISITOR: Anne!

ANNE: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I forgot to put them in the envelopes.

HEAD INQUISITOR: (*Beat.*) You what?

ANNE: Well, it was my turn to bring the snacks for the cricket players, and Manuel was going to be there, and one thing led to another.

HEAD INQUISITOR: You didn't stuff the promotional materials in with the invitations?

The LADY waves hers in the air.

ANNE: I did one.

MARGARET: One's better than none, I always say.

HEAD INQUISITOR: And why didn't you just say so in the first place?

ANNE: Because I knew you'd yell.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I'm . . . not . . . yelling.

ANNE: You will. When everybody's gone and I'm here alone. You'll yell, and then you'll make me play those silly games with you again . . .

HEAD INQUISITOR: Anne . . .

ANNE: Where I dress up like Little Miss Muffet and you get on that spider suit.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Anne!

ANNE: I just hate curds and whey!

HEAD INQUISITOR: Do you have the promotional materials with you?

ANNE: (*Beat.*) Well, of course I do. What kind of a nit do you think I am? (*She grabs a boxful of flyers and shows them to him.*)

HEAD INQUISITOR: If it's not too much trouble, could you please hand them out?

ANNE: Of course. You should've just asked that in the first place.

She hands out the flyers.

GERALD: They're all blank.

ANNE: Oh, I forgot to tell you. The printer said - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: Enough! We don't need any promotional materials. Let's just talk about the Inquisition, shall we? Anybody have any problems with that? I mean, that is the reason we're here today, right?

MARGARET raises her hand. The HEAD INQUISITOR can only bite his lip and nod.

MARGARET: I don't suppose we're close to that break, are we? The mulled wine . . . it's really starting to hit now.

HEAD INQUISITOR: (*Barely.*) Please . . . feel free.

MARGARET: Thank you. Everyone, let's take ten.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Nooo! (*Smiles.*) Not everyone. Just . . . you.

We'll fight through without you for a few minutes.

MARGARET: Oh. All right. If you're sure.

HEAD INQUISITOR: (*Quickly.*) I'm sure.

MARGARET: All right, then. (*She exits.*)

HEAD INQUISITOR: Now . . . what was in the promotional - -
(*MARGARET barges back in.*)

MARGARET: Sorry.

She grabs her bag and exits.

HEAD INQUISITOR: - - materials was simply a list of things we needed to talk about if we were truly going to put this Spanish Inquisition thing into motion. For instance, where would we want to set up shop? What sort of methods might we use to extract confessions from the heretics? Should we have matching outfits, that sort of thing.

GERALD: I'd certainly go for the matching outfits. Maybe something in blue with a white stripe down the side.

SHELLY: We could do parti-coloring, like the minstrels in Italy.

GERALD: Exactly. This pattern here . . . (*Points to one side of his chest.*) . . . the same pattern down here on the stomach.

SHELLY: I think that would be wonderfully gay.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Although your ideas are certainly inspired, I'm not sure the bright colors will go along with our themes of terror and abasement.

SHELLY: Oh, it's all how you present it.

GERALD: Quite right. Fishy Johnny used to beat me up every day when we were kids. Wore yellow like he'd just sprung up from a daisy field.

SHELLY: Daisies are white.

GERALD: Well, Johnny never was very good with colors.

HEAD INQUISITOR: So you see, we might want to go with blacks and grays, maybe a dark green thrown in.

SHELLY: Oh, I see. Dark and mysterious, with perhaps a touch of a jungle motif.

GERALD: It might work.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I'm so glad for your confidence. Next subject: location. Where shall we meet?

OLD MAN: What about here?

HEAD INQUISITOR: No, no. Here won't work. Here's too small. We need room to spread out, really get the branding irons cooking, you know. That sort of thing.

MARGARET re-enters.

MARGARET: What'd I miss?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Nothing really. We'll catch you up as we go.

MARGARET: Catch me up.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Yes.

MARGARET: Well, then how am I going to participate in the conversation? I thought this leaving the room was a bad idea, but the mulled wine, you see - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: Margaret! I saved the most important part of the meeting for your return.

MARGARET: Oh, you did?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Of course. There's no way we could have handled this part without you. We needed your creative energies, your fertile mind.

MARGARET: Oh. Well, then. Proceed.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Thank you.

MARGARET: No, thank you.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Th *(Thinks better of it.)* Allow me to introduce tonight's special guest. This is Helga. She's a heretic.

EVERYONE: Hi, Helga. Hello. *(Etc.)*

HELGA: Hello.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Helga has kindly agreed to be our crash test dummy, if you will. She's going to allow us to torture her. You know, work out all the kinks.

HELGA: Torture a *little*, that was the agreement.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Right. There will be no removing of the limbs or full body piercings.

HELGA: Well, we can still talk about the piercings. But I definitely want to walk out of here on all my legs.

GERALD: You only have two.

HELGA: Right. All two.

GERALD: Actually, you would just say both. The word “all” implies three or more.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Exactly what we’re saying. Both your legs, both your arms . . . all of your appendages intact.

HELGA: You could take a little off the nose if you wanted. My mother always said it was a tad large.

MARGARET: But of course, that’s not an appendage, is it?

SHELLY: It sticks out from the body.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Gerald?

GERALD: I believe an appendage must be attached to the trunk of the body. Hence the nose would simply be a sticky-outy thing.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Is that the official word?

GERALD: No. The official word would be poopy-head, which of course would refer to you.

MARGARET: Gerald!

HEAD INQUISITOR: Shut up before I punch you in your sticky-outy thing.

GERALD: Oh, yeah?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Yes, you miserable bag of twit!

GERALD: Nose booger!

HEAD INQUISITOR: Backful of Bruno hair! *(People start cheering for one man or the other.)*

HELGA: *(Yelling.)* I am waiting for a spanking! *(Total quiet.)*

HEAD INQUISITOR: Excuse me.

HELGA: Or something. I volunteered to be tortured for the good of history. Now would someone get a whip?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Well, we would, but we still haven’t voted on how to torture you yet. There are several items on the docket. The rack, fingernail spikes, Iron Maiden . . .

SHELLY: Didn’t they break up in the 80s?

HEAD INQUISITOR: What?

SHELLY: Never mind.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Eviscerations, dunking . . .

HELGA: For apples?

HEAD INQUISITOR: No, just your basic dunking. Push you under, bubble bubble bubble, you almost drown . . . that sort of thing.

HELGA: Oh.

HEAD INQUISITOR: And so forth.

HELGA: I really like apples. I don't suppose - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: No.

HELGA: Well, it was worth a try.

OLD MAN: What is all this for anyway?

HEAD INQUISITOR: What do you mean?

OLD MAN: This Inquisition stuff? What's it for?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Well, it's kind of like a test.

OLD MAN: What kind of test?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Umm, a test where if you fail, then you die.

OLD MAN: Oh. What happens if you pass? Do you get a prize?

HEAD INQUISITOR: Not really. You die anyway. But your soul passes into the next world free from sin.

OLD MAN: Oh. That's good, I guess.

HEAD INQUISITOR: We thought so.

OLD MAN: I mean, it's not like a new refrigerator.

HEAD INQUISITOR: No.

OLD MAN: Or a trip to Aruba.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I suppose not.

OLD MAN: Is it time for a break yet? That mulled wine is going right - -

HEAD INQUISITOR: Yes! Please! Let's everyone take a break. We'll meet back here in ten minutes. *(Everyone gets up and starts to exit.)*

HEAD INQUISITOR: Please bring your thinking caps back with you. We've still got a lot to decide.

MARGARET: And don't forget that bundt cake.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Right.

Everyone leaves but HELGA and HEAD INQUISITOR.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Well, I guess it's just you and me for a few minutes.

HELGA: I suppose.

THE TEST

HEAD INQUISITOR: *(Beat.)* Listen, have you ever read Mother Goose? I especially like the one that goes - -

HELGA: Not interested.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Oh. Right.

HELGA: I'm not even a heretic, really.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Oh.

HELGA: No.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Hmm. Well, why are you here?

HELGA: Oh, bored I guess. I'm an actress mostly, but the jobs have been few and far in between lately.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I bet.

HELGA: You mind if . . . *(She nods down to her ropes.)*

HEAD INQUISITOR: Oh, no. Feel free. *(She stands up, and the ropes fall off of her.)*

HELGA: Much better.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Right.

HELGA: Hemp just does not breathe.

HEAD INQUISITOR: I imagine. So, an actress, you say?

HELGA: Yes. Well, and a barmaid. A few other odd jobs.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Interesting. I bet you're a wonderful actress.

HELGA: Oh, not bad, if I do say so myself. *(Beat.)* What was that about Mother Goose again?

He snuggles over next to her and puts his arm around her shoulders.

HEAD INQUISITOR: Fascinating work, really. Let me tell you the story of Mary Mary Quite Contrary.

HELGA: Ooh! Sounds scandalous.

They giggle together. LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.

**THE TESTING TABLE
A PANTOMIME**

Lights rise to find two STUDENTS sitting at a table. Music plays as a TEACHER hands out a test. The TEACHER moves away, walking around the classroom as they begin. At first, both of them work hard and fast, barely looking up as their pencils fly across their papers. Then the BOY comes to a hard question. He just can't get it. He thinks a moment, then glances over at the GIRL. She's still intent on her test. He yawns and leans over a little, trying to get a glance. She sees him and covers up her paper with her arm. He looks back at his paper and sets back to work. He skips that problem and moves on to others, and for a while, everything's fine. Then he runs into a wall again. He sits there, tapping his pencil. The GIRL looks over, perturbed, and he stops. Then he gets an idea. He hits his pencil eraser on the table and bounces it over onto the girl's paper. Acting remorseful, he grabs his pencil and succeeds in exchanging his paper for hers. He starts working, pretending that he doesn't realize he's switched papers. The GIRL starts on hers, quickly realizes that he's got her paper, and snatches it back. The TEACHER notices a disturbance and comes over to check on things. The GIRL acts like nothing's wrong, so the TEACHER leaves again. She looks over at the BOY and smiles. He smiles back. She uncovers her paper a little, and he gratefully checks out an answer or two. They take hands, and he scoots a little closer. He's really checking out her paper now, when suddenly the TEACHER is there, right over his shoulder. He gets up to explain, but there's no way he's getting out of this one.

THE TEST

The TEACHER points, and he gets up with his paper and pencil, ready to leave the class. The GIRL motions for him to wait. She writes something on a small piece of paper and hands it to him. He opens it and sees her phone number. She gives him the “call me” signal, and he smiles. The TEACHER drags him away and kicks him out of the room. The GIRL gets back to work. After a few moments, a SECOND GUY walks in, late to the test and in a rush. He gets a test from the TEACHER and sits down by the GIRL. She looks over and smiles at him. He smiles and starts working on his test. He’s going great, and then he hits a wall. He looks up and then over at the GIRL. She looks at the audience and moves her arm for him to see. He starts copying. The GIRL winks at the audience, then looks over at the BOY with a big smile.

LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.

THE BEAT TEST

Lights rise on a club atmosphere. The room is smoky and several STUDENTS sit at tables with drinks. Some of them wear berets. A TEACHER approaches a microphone upstage.

BEAT TEACHER: All right, everybody. Welcome, cool cat students and parents to our first open mic night here at the Night Owl. As you know, Jim’s Night Owl Club received a grant several months ago in coordination with the National Education Agency to study the correlation between classroom environment and the learning process.

Tonight, you are all here to witness the results of our first World History Exam, which was written in the popular style of beat poetry. Don’t you just love the sixties? (*Everyone snaps their fingers.*)

So without further ado, or a-don’t, we’re gonna bring our first student up to the stage. Everybody lay some snaps down for Lindsey, who is gonna poetize for us on the American Revolution.

Everybody snaps as LINDSEY makes her way to the stage.

LINDSEY: Breaking away. Breaking away, baby. Like a big blue boat on a big blue sea. Breaking away. Breaking away like a strange new colt in a field of daisies. Red crashing. Blue crashing. Red-blue-red-blue crashing crash crash crashes into my mind like a thousand points of light. Wooden teeth scratching on my soul, man. Scratching 'til I just can't sleep. One if by land and two if by sea but I can't see, man. I just can't see. *(Beat.)* Up yours, King George. Thank you.

She sits back down to thunderous snapping.

BEAT TEACHER: Dig it. By the way, open classroom doesn't worry about grades. What's an A mean on a piece of paper? And why's it so much better than an F, or even a G, which is my personal favorite letter. Lindsey, my soul felt your soul. If that isn't an A, I don't know what is. Next up is Regina. She's gonna slide something on us about the Civil War.

REGINA: I love you, Abe Lincoln. I love your big black beard and your tip top topper and the way you loved your fellow man. If you were here, I'd say give me some skin, and I know you wouldn't care what color skin, black or white or anything in between, 'cause you knew that the color on the outside isn't the color on the inside, the color of the soul, can you dig it? *(People snap enthusiastically.)* I love you, Abraham Lincoln. Abraham like my forefather before my forefather before my forefather way back up the Hebrew line, 'cause I'm a Jew and I know that wouldn't make any difference to you. You'd give me some skin and the coat off your back, 'cause it don't matter race and it don't matter sex. I bet your wife had just as much say in the government as you did, 'cause you knew how to listen to the women, Abe. Abraham. Father of a new United States. Four score and seven years ago, you said, and though you talked real funny sometimes, I think I got it. I was with you all the way down as you buried all those soldiers. I love you, Abraham Lincoln. If you were here today, I'd steal you away from that crazy woman you were married to, and

we'd run off and live in a log cabin that you built with your own hands, and it wouldn't matter that I'm too young, Abe, because you know that beauty and honesty is in the heart of the young, and we'd have a baby named Isaac, and you wouldn't tie him up and try to stab him with a knife, 'cause you know that violence doesn't solve anything, and you were sad about the war and the killing, and I love you, Abraham. If we'd of been married back then you wouldn't have died in the theatre because I hate the theatre, and I would've made you take me to lunch somewhere nice instead, and that nutcase John Wilkes Booth could've shot the vice president, and then I would've taken over his job. President and First Lady running America right. I love you, Abraham Lincoln, you sexy thing, you. I'm looking for a boy that looks just like you, just maybe a little lighter on the soul patch. I'll call him Abe and he'll call me babe, and we'll have seven kids and never send any of them off to war. *(She steps away from the microphone and everyone snaps.)*

BEAT TEACHER: What a night, man. Thank you, Regina. I'm feeling a little misty-eyed, and I know that Abraham wouldn't have minded me crying a little up here, would he?

REGINA: No way, man. You cry all you want.

BEAT TEACHER: Thank you, baby. You're a real cool cat. I think we've got Michael next, with a little something he calls "The Industrial Revolution."

MICHAEL gets up there, pauses to feel the right mood, and then speaks.

MICHAEL: *(Sad.)* Air pollution sucks, man.

He steps down. Lots of snaps.

BEAT TEACHER: How can I speak? You said it all, cat. You said it all. (*Beat.*) Our final poet is gonna enlighten us about World War II, and then we're gonna meet in the back room for coffee and dessert. MaryLou brought in brownies tonight, and if you haven't had one of MaryLou's brownies, I guarantee you're in for quite an experience. All right, Janice. You're up, baby.

JANICE steps to the podium.

JANICE: Bam. Crash. Did we really need the bomb, Momma? Did we really need the bomb? Ten thousand people in a cloud of dust, not just in the cloud but of the cloud, a people cloud of dust rolling across Nagasaki, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Now I'm scared to walk outside, scared that Iran's gonna hate the Beatles and drop bombs on my head just like we did to Japan, and where are we gonna live when the world's just one big oven? Bam. Crash. Radiation. It made Godzilla, and he's kind of cute in that big rubber suit, but that's just movies, Mama. Radiation's poison, in the water, in the soil, and we try to cover up but they're just makin' bigger and bigger bombs. Hitler was a madman and prob'ly deserved to die, but now the whole world's on a gas burner, just waiting for somebody to turn the dial and we're all just so much roasted meat, like what we have on Sundays at Grandma's house. What happens when the whole world melts, Mama? Is that the end of us? Are we the dinosaurs? Did they discover the bomb, too? Bam. Crash. First with our teeth, and then with sticks and stones and slingshots and arrows and swords and guns and machine guns and artillery.

It's like our aim got worse and worse, so we got bigger rocks and bigger guns and now we're rocking whole cities to their concrete knees. Concrete knees, street arms, building heads, sewer guts, but it's all just rubble in my mind, and I'm so scared, Mama.

JANICE starts to cry and the BEAT TEACHER steps up beside her and takes her hand.

JANICE: (*Quietly singing.*) Where have all the flowers gone, long time passing?

Everyone slowly joins in.

JANICE AND ALL: Where have all the flowers gone, long time passing? Where have all the flowers gone? Gone to young girls, every one. When will they ever learn? When will they ever learn?

LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.

E.P.T. (PART TWO)

Soft music plays as the lights rise on a WOMAN entering her home. She has a bag in one hand and her purse over her shoulder. She sets the purse down and opens the bag, removing a small box from inside. She opens the box and removes the contents, reads the printed instruction pamphlet, and then exits opposite the way she entered. After a few moments, a MAN enters with a briefcase. He sets it down and starts to exit where the woman did. Then he sees the box. He picks it up and stares at it curiously, his eyes growing wider by the minute. He looks up in time to see the WOMAN re-enter, wearing a robe and looking down at a small, pink stick. She sees him, and they stare at one another for a moment. He shows her the box, and she slowly shakes her head "yes." The MAN faints and the WOMAN puts her hands to her mouth as if to call someone. SEVEN KIDS file in whispering to each other about their father on the floor. The WOMAN points at him and the kids pick him up and haul him out. The WOMAN looks at the EPT stick as if it was the devil, breaks it, and walks out.

LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.

AUTISM

The lights rise in a doctor's office, where ESMIE, a little girl, is playing on the floor with different plastic shapes. ESMIE is autistic and her speech is a little irregular. A MOTHER and FATHER stand looking at the child.

ESMIE: Blocks are good, but Legos . . . Mommy?

MOTHER: Yes, sweetie?

ESMIE holds out her hand.

MOTHER: Honey, the Legos are at home. We'll play with them when we get home.

ESMIE: Home is Legos.

A DOCTOR enters.

DOCTOR: Good morning, Mr. Williams. Mrs. Williams.

MOTHER: Good morning, Doctor.

DOCTOR: We've finished all our tests.

MOTHER: And?

DOCTOR: It's like I thought in the beginning.

FATHER: She's autistic?

DOCTOR: Yes. It's not incredibly severe. Some patients are totally withdrawn, barely able to function. Esmerelda is capable of doing a lot of things that will make her life almost normal.

MOTHER: Will she still be able to go to school?

DOCTOR: Certainly. All the public schools have specially trained teachers to help gifted children like her excel in her studies.

MOTHER: Gifted?

DOCTOR: Yes.

MOTHER: You call this a gift? My little girl can't even put a good sentence together. That's a gift?

DOCTOR: Mrs. Williams - -

THE TEST

MOTHER: No! I don't accept this. We did everything we could. I didn't drink, I didn't smoke . . . we did everything! This isn't fair. Why is God punishing me like this?

DOCTOR: You're not the one with the condition.

Beat. The MOTHER collapses against her husband.

FATHER: Doctor, we both love Esmie very much.

DOCTOR: I'm sure you do.

FATHER: It's just very hard for us right now.

DOCTOR: Of course it is. But think about this. You have a beautiful girl who will live out her life with you. She is incredibly gifted in some ways. I mean, look at what she's building. *(They step over to ESMIE.)*

DOCTOR: That configuration is five years beyond what she should be capable of right now. Her I.Q. is probably near 200.

ESMIE: Two hundred Legos.

The FATHER laughs a little, then looks disgusted with himself.

DOCTOR: It's okay to laugh. Most kids love the sound. It makes them happy to hear their parents sound happy. And they're funny sometimes, and it's unintentional, but it's still funny. Enjoy her and take care of her and love her, and she'll love you back on the inside, and on the outside she'll love you as much as she can.

ESMIE: Love Mommy.

MOTHER: Oh, sweetheart! *(The MOTHER falls to her daughter's side and holds her close.)*

ESMIE: Mommy cry.

MOTHER: No, honey. Mommy's just happy she's here with you.

ESMIE: Wish I could make Mommy better.

ESMIE slips out of her mother's arms and stands. The lights change to focus only on ESMIE, and her speech ceases to be slurred. Her face grows thoughtful.

ESMIE: I wish I could make her stop crying. If I could just say everything that I'm feeling, she'd never cry again. She'd be so jealous, because the world I live in is beautiful. The colors and shapes are like rainbows and hexagons and diamonds all combined, and the things I build have a life all their own. If I could say everything I feel, everything I know, I could change the world. I have things inside of me that would solve world hunger, bring rains to the desert. Make people trust one another again, as hard as that is to believe. All of this is trapped inside of me where no one can see it and that makes me sad sometimes, but it's okay. It's okay because I fly back and forth to the stars every day, skipping off planets like a flat stone on a still lake. It's amazing and Technicolor and stereo, and I'd still trade it all for once, just once, to be able to look into my mother's eyes and tell her that it wasn't her fault, that she doesn't need to cry. That I'm happy. I'd trade it all, the universe inside of me, for that one little moment. But I can't. I try. *(She slips back into her mother's arms, and the room comes to life again. ESMIE grabs her mother's face in her hands and looks at her.)*

MOTHER: What, baby?

ESMIE tries to talk and can't. Tenderly, she kisses her mother's forehead, then turns to the blocks again. She grabs them and runs slightly upstage, turning her back to the audience.

FATHER: Teri, it's time to go.

MOTHER: I know. *(She stands and walks to ESMIE.)*

MOTHER: Esmie. Time to go bye bye.

ESMIE: Bye bye. *(ESMIE continues working.)*

MOTHER: Time to get ice cream. *(ESMIE immediately gets up.)*

ESMIE: Ice cream. Bye bye.

She grabs her mother's hand and walks away.

FATHER: Thank you, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Call me if you have any problems.

FATHER: We will.

The three exit, leaving the DOCTOR alone on stage.

He walks over to the blocks and sees that ESMIE has made them into a heart. He looks back at the door with a smile, then walks toward his office. LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.

STANDARDIZED TEST PREPARATION

A group of TEACHERS sit at a table, eating donuts. The TRAINER stands up in front of them.

TRAINER: All right. I'd like to thank all of you for being here and most of you for being on time. Today, we're going to be reviewing the new rules for taking the TIKS test.

TEACHER #1: Don't you mean TAKS?

TRAINER: No. Didn't you read my e-mail?

TEACHER #1: I guess not.

TRAINER: The TAKS acronym just seemed a little too . . . pointy for the legislature. They decided to change it to TIKS. It's a whole new test, really.

TEACHER #2: So we went from TAAS . . .

TRAINER: Titular Assessment of Academic Success. Nobody really liked the word "titular." We got calls from parents on that one.

TEACHER #2: To TAKS . . .

TRAINER: Tasty Academic Kitsch Survey . . .

TEACHER #2: To TIKS . . . what does that one stand for?

TRAINER: Total Ignorance Kills Students. They thought the built in subliminal message might help motivate them.

TEACHER #2: Oh.

TRAINER: Plus, it's an apt descriptor of what we all get from teaching test-taking skills all year. As a matter of fact, just saying the words "teaching test-taking skills" makes that little nerve above my eye jump. Now let's get on with the training. I know you don't want to be late to your first period.

TEACHER #3: I could only hope.

TRAINER: Turn to page one, please. *(All the teachers open their training manuals.)*

TRAINER: Look down at the third paragraph on the left-hand side. Now, in the past, we've had some trouble with test security. That's why we won't actually receive the booklets and answer sheets from the armored truck until the morning of the test.

TEACHER #2: Armored truck?

TRAINER: I tell you, fellow teachers, the government is getting mighty serious about their testing. Three armed guards will accompany the tests and then remain in the testing center to pick up the sheets after we're finished. Each of you will have to be fingerprinted, and all tests will be examined under black lights at a top secret location somewhere in the capitol building to make sure that no teacher has touched any answer document more than twice.

TEACHER #1: And if we have?

TRAINER: I can't officially answer that; however, we do have a visitor from TIKS headquarters. *(An ARMY GUY in fatigues steps out with a rifle.)*

ARMY GUY: We have a problem?

TRAINER: No. No problems. Thank you, Captain.

ARMY GUY: Carry on. *(He exits, staring at the teachers suspiciously.)*

TRAINER: Okay, so after we hand out the test and answer document, we will then proceed to page 18 - -

TEACHER #4: Answer documents.

TRAINER: What?

TEACHER #4: Tests. You said document and test, singular. We're going to have twenty-five students per class, right?

TRAINER: Oh, no. That's all been changed. There are just too many opportunities for cheating when you have that many teenagers in one class. They've dropped the maximum number, new for this year.

TEACHER #2: How many then?

TRAINER: Ummm. One.

ALL TEACHERS: What?

TRAINER: One student per teacher per classroom. That's the new rule.

TEACHER #3: That's insane!

TEACHER #4: How are we going to test 1500 students in one day when we only have one student per teacher?

TRAINER: We're not, actually.

TEACHER #4: I thought so.

TRAINER: We're adding twelve more testing days to the calendar. If you count all three original tests, the grand total comes to thirty-six more days of testing. (*The TEACHERS ad-lib disgust and outrage.*)

TEACHER #2: When are we going to have time to teach?

TRAINER: Excuse me, Mr. Smith. We are here to test, not to teach. Except when we're teaching the test. You must learn to prioritize.

TEACHER #4: This is ridiculous.

TRAINER: Captain! (*The ARMY GUY returns.*)

ARMY GUY: Yes, ma'am?

TRAINER: They're getting a little . . . testy.

ARMY GUY: You want me to take somebody out?

TRAINER: No. If you could just stay with us for a while.

ARMY GUY: My pleasure. (*He salutes.*)

TRAINER: Now, let's continue. On page 18, we have a description of what you're going to do on the day of the test. You have your student sit down with his freshly-sharpened number two pencil, and you will hand him his answer document. Any questions?

TEACHER #1: Is that it?

TEACHER #3: Where's the script?

TRAINER: Script?

TEACHER #3: You know. The eight pages of dull instructions the kids know but we're forced to read anyway.

TRAINER: Oh, that's been done away with, thank the Lord. We feel like the less communication between the teacher and student, the better. In fact, after you hand out the test, you'll leave the room altogether.

TEACHER #4: This is totally . . . (*Sees the ARMY GUY perk up.*)
. . . wonderful. I love this new test.

TRAINER: It certainly keeps us on our toes.

TEACHER #2: But how will we make sure the kids don't just fall asleep?

TRAINER: The test people have already thought of that. We're having positive and negative charged cables run to each desk. If the student falls asleep or starts daydreaming, you just hit a button. Zap! Two hundred volts right to his keister.

TEACHER #1: Ow.

TRAINER: They recommend we do it a couple times with each student, even if they're not sleeping. Apparently, a good shock stimulates the brain.

TEACHER #2: So what you're saying is we don't have any clue what the test is really about. We'll hand it out to the students without any instructions and then leave, monitoring the student with some sort of crude electric chair device to ensure he's constantly on task.

TRAINER: And I thought you weren't paying attention.

TEACHER #2: *(Working herself into a fury.)* This is crazy! What happened to teaching? Just getting up there with the students and sharing your knowledge, your love of your subject area with a group of bright minds waiting to grow. That's why I became a teacher! What happened to simple, teacher-based education?

The ARMY GUY looks at the TRAINER questioningly, and the TRAINER gives him a nod. The ARMY GUY leaps across the room and collars TEACHER #2.

TEACHER #2: Hey, what're you doing?

The ARMY GUY starts dragging TEACHER #2 towards the door.

TEACHER #2: Leave me alone! You can't do anything to me! I'm a great teacher! I teach my students to think, not to just mindlessly take tests. *(The ARMY GUY drags TEACHER #2 outside.)*

TEACHER #2: *(Offstage.)* When did we lose control?

TRAINER: *(Beat.)* Well, I believe that's just about it. Are there any questions? *(No one raises a hand.)*

TRAINER: Excellent. If you will turn to the last page of your booklet, you'll see your teacher oath, saying you've gone through this training. Please sign that. Umm, not with a pen, Ms. Wiley. If you'll notice the small razor blade taped to the page? We're going to need that signature in blood. *(From the hall, a sharp retort sounds, as if from a gun. The TEACHERS all jump.)*

TRAINER: And make sure it's spelled correctly. *(The TRAINER starts laughing, and the laughter turns evil and "echoey," a frightening sound.)*

LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.

THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE A PANTOMIME

An OLDER WOMAN waits patiently in a chair, reading a magazine. Her SON sits beside her. Music plays as they nervously fidget with their reading material. The SON gets up, points at the restroom, and leaves. As he exits, the DOCTOR enters. He shows the WOMAN an x-ray and some printouts he has. He points some things out to her. She looks at him questioningly, and he nods his head. She drops hers, and he puts his hand on her back. He gives her the papers and points at them. She nods, then shakes his hand. He leaves. After a moment, the SON returns and sees his MOTHER with her back turned. She turns around to him, and he looks at her, wide-eyed. The MOTHER puts on a fake smile, shakes her head, and releases a big sigh. The SON runs to her and hugs her tightly. He gets his cell phone out of his pocket and starts calling people. The MOTHER gives him her car keys and he exits. She watches him go, and then lapses into a coughing fit. She pulls a white tissue out of her purse and wipes her lips. The tissue comes away bloody. She stands there for a moment, trying to control the tears.

When she has a handle on everything, she follows her SON out the door.

LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.

FINALE

Game show music rises, and the voice of the ANNOUNCER echoes from above.

ANNOUNCER: *(Recorded.)* Good evening, America, and welcome to your newest reality show, Stress Test, where we really see how the common American reacts under pressure. Now, here's your host, your friend and mine, Bill Bailey!

BILL BAILEY walks out, standard wide grin on his face.

BILL BAILEY: All right, everybody. Welcome back to Stress Test, where we put a finger on the pulse of America and make it race. My name is Bill Bailey, and I'm here to show you some of the funniest video shot since Britney Spears shaved her head. Johnny, tell us who we have on the lineup tonight.

ANNOUNCER: Be happy to, Bill. But first . . .

The ENIGMA SINGERS appear.

SINGERS: Won't you come home, Bill Bailey? Won't you come home? I been alone to - -

BILL BAILEY: Stop it! You're driving me crazy with that crap! Get out of here!

The SINGERS quickly exit.

BILL BAILEY: Johnny, I swear if you do that one more time . . .

ANNOUNCER: *(A little panicked.)* Our lineup tonight is classic comedy, Billy. We've got a man who is told by his teenage daughter that she's with child, quitting school, and moving to Nicaragua. *(Canned laughter.)* Also, we've got a Wall Street broker whom we convinced that the market has crashed worse than it did in 1929!

THE TEST

All I can say about that one is, look out below! But first, hold on to your hats, we've got a studio audience that thinks it's just watching a game show.

ACTORS (ZOMBIES) begin entering from offstage, one at a time, zombie-like expressions on their faces.

ZOMBIE#1: Testing has become so complicated that they have to print out a full calendar just to keep the days straight. Teachers don't just lose days of teaching to tests anymore. They lose weeks.

ANNOUNCER: Little do they know that they're not just in the audience, they are themselves being tested.

ZOMBIE #2: Do you know the average rainfall in the Amazon Basin? Then why should I?

ANNOUNCER: We're all tested, constantly, our skills being checked, our measure being taken.

ZOMBIE #3: I'm from Mexico. In two years, I am expected to learn the entire language of English enough to pass the tests students in this country have had a decade to pass.

ANNOUNCER: Testing.

ALL ZOMBIES: (*Echoes.*) Testing . . . testing . . . testing.

The ZOMBIES have, by now, lined up across the stage behind BILL. One ZOMBIE holds a rose.

BILL BAILEY: Oh, come on, folks. We're just funnin' ya. After all, testing's been around since the beginning of time. I mean, you probably have to take tests at work, make sure you're still competent at your job, right? Or is it just your boss looking over your shoulder all the time, making sure you're doing it right? Ahh. Just some silly fun. Testing, hmmm. Keeps growing, though. Like weeds choking a flower bed. (*BILL takes the rose from the ZOMBIE.*) Have to be careful. You don't pull a few weeds now and then, that's all you'll have left in your garden. Ugly . . . (*He pulls petals off the rose.*) pointy . . . (*More petals.*) thorns. (*The petals are gone. He turns to the ZOMBIES.*) Smell 'em, guys. Brains!

ZOMBIES: Brains! (*They begin moving towards the audience again.*)

BILL BAILEY: You gotta forgive 'em. You see, they don't have brains of their own any more. Who'da thought? You don't need nuclear waste or voodoo priests to create zombies. Just some good old standardized testing. You all have a good night now. (*He walks through the ranks of the ZOMBIES, who watch him go. After Bill has exited, the ZOMBIES turn and slowly raise their arms in an attack position. They freeze.*)

ANNOUNCER: Testing. It's not just for dinner anymore. (*Beat.*) You are.

The ZOMBIES roar and attack. LIGHTS BLACKOUT.

THE END

NOTES

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