

QUESTIONABLE

By Alan Haehnel

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CHARACTERS

MRS. GLADLY

AUDIENCE MEMBER

HERB

DARLA

NANCY

SULLY

RAELYN

RAELYN A, B,C

JIMMY

JIMMY A,B,C

SARAH

SARAH A,B,C

DAN

DAN A,B,C

JULIA

JULIA A,B,C

MORGAN

MORGAN A,B,C

JASON

JASON A,B,C

MINDY A,B,C

MARK

MARK A,B,C

DAWN

DAWN A,B,C

AMY

AMY A,B,C

PROP LIST

Programs with test answer sheets

Two large posters of test answer sheets

Test instruction booklet

Duct tape

Tape player

Remote control

Clipboard

Backpack

Pencils for audience members

Assignment sheet

Cell phone

Report card

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At Rise: MRS. GLADLY, a very tired-looking old teacher, comes to center stage. SHE reads the test directions directly from the booklet, not bothering to distinguish between what SHE is supposed to read silently and what SHE is supposed to say to the audience.

MRS. GLADLY: Read the following directions to the audience before beginning the test. Good morning, afternoon, evening, whichever is appropriate. My name is say name here. **(looking up)** Mrs. Gladly. **(reading again)** I will be your proctor for this unique testing experience. Unlike typical tests where questions and possible answers are posed to you, the test-taker, in written form, the questions and answers this morning, afternoon, evening, whichever is appropriate, will be presented to you dramatically, on this stage. Gesture to indicate the stage. Be sure to smile to indicate your enthusiasm. **(MRS. GLADLY perfunctorily gestures, then smiles bleakly, dropping the expression as soon as SHE goes back to the booklet.)** Before we begin, please be certain you have received an answer key. This will be located on the back of your program. You should also have received a sharpened #2 pencil to mark your answer key. Please raise your hand now if you have not received either of these essential items. Look up to be certain everyone has the aforementioned pencil and answer key. **(SHE looks up. A couple of audience members have their hands raised. MRS. GLADLY looks blandly at them, then returns to her booklet.)** If anyone is missing one or both of the items, be certain the ushers have taken care of these needs before proceeding. **(MRS. GLADLY looks up again, watches as the ushers go to those who need programs or pencils.)** Once you are satisfied that all of the audience's needs have been met, proceed with reading the test instructions. Before we begin the actual test, we will...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Excuse me. Hello?

MRS. GLADLY: ...practice some essential elements of...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Mrs. Gladly, I have a question, please! **(MRS. GLADLY looks up, her face registering complete boredom and resignation to the stupidity of all students.)** Um, Mrs. Gladly, my pencil is a little dull. The tip is slightly rounded. Will that be an issue?

(MRS. GLADLY stares at the questioner for a long time, saying nothing. An usher finally comes down and gives the AUDIENCE MEMBER a more sharpened pencil.) Oh, this is much better.
Thank-you.

MRS. GLADLY: ***(as if the interruption never happened)*** ...test-taking procedure by means of a sample question. Please note, at the top of your answer key, the words "sample question." Below those words, you will see the number 1; to the right of that number, you will see three bubbles corresponding to the letters A, B, and C. After viewing the dramatic situation and options presented before you onstage...gesture to indicate the stage... ***(MRS. GLADLY flops her hand toward the stage briefly)*** you will then fill in the bubble corresponding to your chosen selection. We will now watch the sample question.

(Center stage, a light comes up on RAELYN. SHE stares at an imaginary object on the ground.)

RAELYN: Oh, look! Isn't that cute, that thing I see over there? It's so furry and cuddly. I just want to scoop it up and take it home and feed it some warm milk. Come here, you cute little...

(SHE freezes. The light shifts from her to a platform upstage right. Behind the platform is a large A. An actor is crouched in precisely the same position as RAELYN. We'll call this actor RAELYN A.)

RAELYN A: Come here, you cute little pickle.

(RAELYN A freezes. Lights come up on a center platform, platform B. RAELYN B is there, also crouched.)

RAELYN B: Come here, you cute little kitten.

(RAELYN B freezes. Lights come up on a stage left platform, platform C, where RAELYN C is crouched.)

RAELYN C: Come here, you cute little Nazi.

(The lights go down on the main stage and back up to MRS. GLADLY.)

MRS. GLADLY: Before answering the sample question, please give your attention to the two testing technicians who will demonstrate proper bubble-filling technique. **(Two TESTING TECHNICIANS enter, each bringing an easel with a poster-sized replica of the sample question from the answer key on the back of the programs:**

Sample Question

| | A | B | C |
|----|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

The technicians stand next to their easels. The FIRST TECHNICIAN looks eager; the SECOND looks bored.) Our first technician, pause to allow technician to say name.

(MRS. GLADLY pauses for a second, then looks at the FIRST TECHNICIAN, who looks back at her blankly.)

FIRST TECHNICIAN: Huh? Oh, oh, my name. **(turning with a big grin to the audience)** Nancy! Hi!

MRS. GLADLY: Will instruct you on how to properly fill out the bubble sheet.

NANCY: Me, now? Great! Okay, first, I consider what I have seen and heard carefully. Well, even before that, though, I listen. Really hard. And watch. Because I know I will only get to see the question and the answers once. So that's the first thing I do; I pay attention. That's the first thing you should do: Pay attention! Yes. And I notice the clues in the question, about how the thing is cute and furry and would like milk, right? So then I *pay attention* to the possible answers and I know that pickle isn't right and I suspect that kitten is but I keep *paying attention* to the last possible answer! Then I hear it and I know that Nazi isn't right—oh, no, definitely not—and then I pencil in my answer like this... **(SHE fills in the bubble for A, staying carefully within the borders of the circle.)** Then, I step back and carefully check my answer and see that—oops!—I have made a mistake! I wanted to mark B, not A! I chastise myself a little bit for not *paying close attention*—Nancy, Nancy, Nancy, you can sometimes be a little bit silly, can't you?—and then I erase my wrong answer thoroughly like this. **(SHE erases the mark on A, carefully to get every bit of pencil eradicated.)** Now, I *pay better attention* and mark B, which is what I wanted to do all along. **(NANCY pencils in B as SHE did A.)** Then I step back, check my answer once more, and congratulate

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myself to make up for when I chastised myself—Nancy, Nancy, Nancy, I am so proud of you for fixing your mistake!—and then I am done with Sample Question 1!

MRS. GLADLY: Thank-you, say name of first technician...

NANCY: (*whispering to MRS. GLADLY*) Nancy.

MRS. GLADLY: Nancy, for your fine demonstration. Make gesture of appreciation to first technician for the clear demonstration.

(MRS. GLADLY pats NANCY on the head with no enthusiasm.)

NANCY: Thank-you.

MRS. GLADLY: We will now turn to our second technician, pause to allow second technician to say name...

SECOND TECHNICIAN: Sully.

MRS. GLADLY: Who will demonstrate what we should avoid when answering test questions.

NANCY: (*to SULLY*) Remember to pay attention.

SULLY: (*to NANCY*) Remember to shut the hell up. (*to audience*) I'm talking to my friend during the question so I don't hear it and then I listen to the answers and I think I don't like pickles and kittens are stupid little fuzz balls and Nazi is the only answer that's even interesting. So I go to mark answer C but I'm pretty bored (*marking his answer sheet sloppily as HE speaks*) so on the way over to C, I kind of run my pencil on over bubble A and stop to make a smiley face on bubble B...

NANCY: Oh!

SULLY: And then, just because Nancy's watching, I put a bleeding bullet hole in the forehead of the smiley face I just made...

NANCY: (*whining to the almost-sleeping MRS. GLADLY*) He's not even paying attention!

SULLY: And then I mark answer C. (*HE scribbles in the bubble for answer C, straying far outside the lines.*) Then I go back to talking to my friends. (*Out to audience.*) Yo, Marcus, your Xbox working yet?

MRS. GLADLY: Thank-you, say name of second technician...

SULLY: I already said it once, you saggy bag of bones. Sully.

MRS. GLADLY: Sully, for demonstrating how not to take this test. Make gesture showing disapproval of second technician's methods.

(MRS. GLADLY hauls off and slaps SULLY, knocking him out. NANCY anxiously tries to drag SULLY and the easels offstage.)

NANCY: Oh, dear. Oh, my goodness. Well, that's what we get when we don't *pay attention*. Could I have a little help, please?

(Others come out and help NANCY with SULLY and the easels. All the while, MRS. GLADLY stares at them until they are gone. When they have left, SHE turns back to the audience and commences reading from her instruction book.)

MRS. GLADLY: Now that you have been introduced to the formal aspects of the test and the accompanying answer sheet, a representative of the National Institute for Testing While Involving Theater will speak to you briefly about the content of the examination. Gesture to indicate the entrance of the representative.

(SHE gestures stiffly as HERB WHITTEN comes from the wings. HE carries a clipboard with notes for his speech. On the back of the clipboard, in large letters, is the acronym for his organization: N.I.T.W.I.T. This acronym might be emblazoned on any article of his clothing, as well.)

HERB: Greetings, test-takers, or, as we like to say at the National Institute for Testing While Involving Theater, Greetings, test succeeders because we firmly believe that tests are about success. Before I begin my official, but brief—ha,ha—comments, I would like to take a moment to recognize the efforts of your local proctor, Mrs. Gladly. Let's give her a hand, huh? ***(After the applause dies down...)*** What a job she is doing. I understand you've been teaching for quite some time, Mrs. Gladly. ***(MRS. GLADLY stares straight ahead, her brain in neutral.)*** Mrs. Gladly?

MRS. GLADLY: ***(waking up, assuming it's her turn again, reading from the manual)*** Wave to the departing representative. ***(SHE raises her hand in a perfunctory wave.)*** The instruction segment of our presentation...

HERB: No, no, Mrs. Gladly, over here. This part isn't in the instruction booklet. I was just asking how long you've been teaching. ***(MRS. GLADLY looks at him for a moment, then back at the instruction booklet, puzzled.)*** Mrs. Gladly, how many years? Have you been here as a teacher?

MRS. GLADLY: 38.

HERB: 38 years! Isn't that something! 38 years of captivating, motivating and stimulating students in this very school. I bet you have some fascinating stories to tell, haven't you, Mrs. Gladly?

MRS. GLADLY: ***(after looking at HERB for a very long time)*** 38. ***(turning back to the instruction booklet)*** Wave to the departing...

HERB: In a minute, Mrs. Gladly, if I could just have my brief, little say—ha, ha!—you can get right to that part that you're so, uh, anxious to read. Now, back to the topic at hand: Our goal at the National Institute of Testing While Involving Theater, along with providing an enjoyable test-taking experience, is to move to a greater understanding of the readiness of students to enter and succeed in the high school environment. Unlike our sample question, which was really just designed as a warm-up, if you will—ha, ha!—our actual test will pose questions and provide alternative answers about how to handle common high school situations. Unlike other tests, however, that may take months for the results to come back, the National Institute of Testing While Involving Theater believes in immediate feedback, so I will return at the end of the test to let you know how you did! How about that? So, I hope I was brief enough—ha, ha!—and I wish you all, test-succeeders, the very best. Concentrate, don't hesitate and, above all, be right! Thank-you!

(HE exits. MRS. GLADLY stares blankly ahead, as SHE has done throughout the above monologue. After a long pause, NANCY sticks her head out from the wings, looks at MRS. GLADLY, and quickly pokes her in the arm to get her going again. As soon as NANCY prods her, MRS. GLADLY immediately goes back to reading from the instruction booklet.)

MRS. GLADLY: Wave to the departing representative. *(SHE lifts her hand vaguely in the direction HERB left, then continues.)* The instruction segment of our presentation is now drawing to a close. You have received information about both the form and content of this test. One final word, then, before we begin: integrity. We hope that each of you has a high degree of personal integrity that would not allow you to think of cheating on this test. To reinforce your personal sense of integrity, we have installed video cameras throughout this facility. Please be apprised that, if the cameras should catch you looking at another's answer sheet or seeking to compare answers, your life will be shortened by approximately twelve years. Yes, we can do this; yes, we have done this. To emphasize this crucial point, look up and maintain eye contact with three individuals in various parts of the room. Be certain to look stern. *(MRS. GLADLY looks up, pastes on her "stern look"-- that bears a great resemblance to her regular look--then stares for three seconds at individuals in three different areas of the audience. After following this instruction, SHE goes back to reading.)* Once you are certain the test-takers are convinced of the gravity of the test, proceed with the final sentence of instruction. Smile during your delivery. *(MRS. GLADLY*

pastes on a smile, now—again looking only mildly different.)
Thank-you for your attention; we will now proceed with the test.

(Lights come up on center stage where JIMMY stands with his backpack.)

JIMMY: First day of high school. I want to be prepared, that's for sure. I have brought with me three essential elements for being ready to start my high school career. ***(unzipping his backpack and reaching in)*** I have with me...

(As Jimmy A, B and C say their answers, they pull out the items they are describing.)

JIMMY A: ...toilet paper, Band-aids and an inflatable raft.

JIMMY B: ...my portable DVD player, my pirated copy of the latest installment of The Matrix and a large bag of Cheetos.

JIMMY C: ...a pencil, a pad of paper and a scheduling book.

(The lights go down on the three JIMMIES and back up on MRS. GLADLY.)

MRS. GLADLY: Mark your selection for question one now.

(DARLA enters next to MRS. GLADLY.)

DARLA: Mrs. Gladly?

(MRS. GLADLY looks at DARLA, then at her instruction booklet, then back at DARLA.)

MRS. GLADLY: 38.

DARLA: Mrs. Gladly, I'm Darla, and I have a poem about a test. That I want to read? Can I? Because, see, there's this time in between the questions, when everybody has to have a little pause to get ready for the next question—you know, for the actor-people to put their stuff away and for the new ones to get in place and all that. I wanted to do that, to be one of the actors. I tried out and everything but, I guess, you know, I wasn't good enough and everything. But I'm all over that now. I had some therapy and stuff. I'm feeling better. Sleeping okay. Thanks. Like I said, though, I have this poem about a test. A personal poem. I could read it during the in-between times? I asked the guys up there, running the lights, and they said they could give me a light over there where I could do it, if it was all right with you. ***(The lights***

begin to dim on MRS. GLADLY and DARLA, coming up center stage for the next question.) Shoot. Time's up. You think about it, okay? Thanks. Talk to you later? Okay, thanks, Mrs. Gladly.

(DARLA exits. MRS. GLADLY watches her go, perplexed, as the lights shift completely to SARAH giving the scenario for the second question. SHE sits in a typical school desk.)

SARAH: Okay, here I am. First day in class, first question: Tell us something about yourself. One of those new-age, let's-all-be-pals type things. Fine. Tell us something about yourself. What should I say? My turn. Great. ***(standing)*** Hi. My name's Sarah. One interesting thing about me is...

SARAH A: I have a cat named Fluffy and a dog named Boris. I guess that's two things. Anyway, that's it.

SARAH B: Though my habits often put me in high risk situations, I have not yet contracted any sexually transmitted diseases. I'm very proud of that.

SARAH C: I believe that the most underappreciated artist in the history of rock and roll is Barry Manilow, and, though I know it's very unlikely, I'm hoping to one day become his bride.

(Lights down on the SARAHs, up on MRS. GLADLY.)

MRS. GLADLY: Mark your selection for question two now.

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