“The Test” by Theodore Thomas: Study Guide

**Setting:** The imagined turnpike and actual examination room are the two settings of the stories, although the setting is fairly irrelevant to the overall plot

**Characters:**

*Robert Proctor:*
- Round static main character/protagonist
- “a good driver for so young a person”
- “Robert Proctor noted this and put it in the back of his mind. He was slowly overtaking the car and the truck. He would reach them in another minute or two.” -- Logical and well thought out, Employs logic and his knowledge
- “Was too wise to slam on the brakes” -- Very cautious and careful driver
- Selfless - concerned for the well being of the little girl and his mother

*The uniformed man (The government):*
- Flat static antagonist
- Blue uniform = police officer? -- Actually the government official administering the test
- Very objective/stoic - gives a calm feeling to Robert and the readers
- This procedure is very routine for him, his job is to be very professional while administering the test and he does this well

**Fabrications (not developed as normal characters, all flat and static, only there to contribute to the trauma):**

*Sleeping girl:* Trust in the face of the sleeping girl got to Robert -- Very important role in the story, as she could be considered to represent Robert Proctor’s conscience, she is vivid in his mind when he awakes from hypnosis, she could also represent innocence, as she is a childlike character

*Robert’s mother:* Grey-hair woman, mouth was curved in a quiet smile, voice was as cool as the morning

*Man driving the other car:* Unable to move; eyes are wide and filled with fear

**Point of View:** Limited omniscient, told from the third person, as Theodore Thomas is the narrator of the story

**Plot Structure:**

*Introduction*
- Robert Proctor is a skilled driver, driving on turnpike

*Rising Action*
- Robert is pushed off the road
- Forced into oncoming traffic, driver in oncoming car cannot react, goes black before crash,
- Robert wakes up from hypnosis, told he is taking drivers test, given sheet of paper to sign for his license.

*Climax*
- Robert signs paper for license and is then dragged away by two men.

*Falling Action/Denouement* - There is no falling action or denouement.

**Themes:**
- Deciding what is morally right
- Medical/political ethics
- Government’s control over its citizens
- Humanity’s need for power/control
- Perception vs. reality

**Significant Quotations:**
- “It was not the fear in the man’s face that reached Robert Proctor. It was the trust in the face of the sleeping girl.” page 2 (Remorse, innocence)
- “Makes better drivers of them” page 3 (contradictory, the government has a lot of control)
- “Robert Proctor looked at the license application and signed it.” page 3 (final test, mentally ill)
- “As they pulled, his rubber heels slid along the two grooves worn in the floor.” page 3 (others like him)

**Special Topics:** The possibility and the medical ethics of hypnosis; The control of government of its citizens; Situation of society: what would lead to this? Why would the government want to do this? What would lead society to agree to this? Does society know this is happening? Time frame? How far into the future is this? Is this our future?