SEATTLE SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

EDUCATOR RESOURCE GUIDE

MOLIERE’S TARTUFFE

Translated by Richard Wilbur
Directed by Makaela Pollock

All original material copyright © Seattle Shakespeare Company 2015
Dear Educators,

Tartuffe is a wonderful play, and can be great for students. Its major themes of hypocrisy and gullibility provide excellent prompts for good in-class discussions. Who are the "Tartuffes" in our 21st century world? What can you do to avoid being fooled the way Orgon was?

Tartuffe also has some challenges that are best to discuss with students ahead of time. Its portrayal of religion as the source of Tartuffe’s hypocrisy angered priests and the deeply religious when it was first written, which led to the play being banned for years. For his part, Molière always said that the purpose of Tartuffe was not to lampoon religion, but to show how hypocrisy comes in many forms, and people should beware of religious hypocrisy among others.

There is also a challenging scene between Tartuffe and Elmire at the climax of the play (and the end of Orgon’s acceptance of Tartuffe). When Tartuffe attempts to seduce Elmire, it is up to the director as to how far he gets in his amorous attempts, and in our production he gets pretty far! This can also provide an excellent opportunity to talk with students about staunch “family values” politicians who are revealed to have had affairs, the safety of women in today’s society, and even sexual assault, depending on the age of the students.

Molière’s satire still rings true today, and shows how some societal problems have not been solved, but have simply evolved into today’s context. However, it is also full of the witty banter and comedic scenes that define this as a classic French farce. We hope your students enjoy the production, and take the time to think about the major themes in it.

Best,
Michelle Burce
Education Director

www.seattleshakespeare.org/education
206-733-8228 ext. 251 or education@seattleshakespeare.org
CONTENTS

Plot Synopsis ........................................... 1
Characters ............................................. 2
Molière Biography ..................................... 3
A biography of the famous playwright.
Censored Satire ....................................... 4
A history of Tartuffe's debut and censorship in 17th century France.
Rhymes and Rhythms in Translation .............. 5
Molière utilized both rhyme and structured rhythm. Learn how these stylistic elements can be preserved when translating a script from French to English.
Reflection and Discussion Questions ............... 6
Students consider themes in pre-show reflection questions, and think about the production in post-show discussion questions.
Placing the Production ............................... 7–8
Take a look inside the director's inspiration and thoughts for the production.

ACTIVITIES

Two Truths and a Lie .................................. 9
Students attempt to “Tartuffe” one another by mixing truth and lies.
Ending Scene .......................................... 9
Using evidence from the script, students compose an ending scene suited for modern audiences.
The play opens with Madame Pernelle visiting her son Orgon’s house. She criticizes everyone in the house and compares them unfavorably to their boarder, Tartuffe. She describes Tartuffe as a pious man and praises his holiness and devotion. The others object, saying he is a hypocrite and his piousness is false, but she rejects their claims. As she leaves, she scolds everyone and tells them to be more like Tartuffe.

Cléante and Dorine, the maid, discuss Tartuffe, and agree that both Madame Pernelle and Orgon have been fooled by Tartuffe into believing that he is holy and pious. Damis, Orgon’s son, wonders whether Orgon will still allow Mariane, Orgon’s daughter, to marry her love Valère. Damis wants to marry Valère’s sister, so he prods Cléante into asking Orgon about Mariane’s marriage.

Orgon arrives home, and instead of asking about his wife’s illness, he asks about Tartuffe’s wellbeing. Cléante tries to speak with Orgon about Tartuffe, but Orgon can only sing Tartuffe’s praises. When Cléante asks about the wedding between Mariane and Valère, Orgon dodges the question. Mariane arrives, and Orgon tells her that he would like for her to marry Tartuffe, in order to ally him to their house forever. Mariane is shocked, but does not refuse because she wants to be an obedient daughter.

Dorine scolds Mariane for not refusing to marry Tartuffe. When Valère arrives, he angrily accuses Mariane of being false by consenting to marry Tartuffe. Dorine steps in to reconcile them, and they come up with a plan to expose Tartuffe’s hypocrisy.

Damis is also determined to expose Tartuffe to Orgon. He hides in a closet and overhears Tartuffe profess his love to Elmire, Orgon’s wife. Tartuffe suggests that they become lovers behind Orgon’s back, saying it is not a sin if they are not discovered. Damis reveals himself and threatens to tattle on Tartuffe to Orgon. When Orgon arrives, he will not believe anything ill about Tartuffe, and instead thinks that his son is trying to defame Tartuffe’s good name. He disinherits his son, and plans to make Tartuffe his only heir.

Cléante tries to confront Tartuffe, but he receives only trite religious sayings as responses before Tartuffe hastily departs. Orgon and Elmire arrive, and Orgon tells his wife of his plans to ally Tartuffe to their house. Elmire begs Orgon to hide and observe Tartuffe’s actions before he goes through with Mariane’s marriage and Tartuffe’s inheriting of all of Orgon’s property. Orgon agrees and hides while Elmire sends for Tartuffe. When he arrives, he attempts to seduce Elmire once again, and at the same time makes insulting comments about Orgon.

Finally convinced that Tartuffe is not as good as he appears, Orgon reveals himself and orders Tartuffe to depart. But Tartuffe reveals that he now owns Orgon’s house according to the papers that they both signed, so Tartuffe orders Orgon to depart. Tartuffe also holds private incriminating papers from Orgon’s friend Argas, an exile, that Orgon had agreed to hide from the King. When Madame Pernelle arrives, she is finally convinced of Tartuffe’s wickedness, but it is too late.

An officer of the King arrives, but instead of evicting Orgon and his family, he brings news that the King has wisely seen through Tartuffe’s hypocrisy, and orders Tartuffe arrested and imprisoned for his crimes. The King restores all of Orgon’s property to him and pardons Orgon of any wrongdoing.
HOUSEHOLD OF ORGON

MADAME PERNELLE: Mother of Orgon

FLIPOTE: Servant of Madame Pernelle

ORGON: Head of the house and husband of Elmire

ELMIRE: Wife of Orgon, step-mother of Damis and Mariane

CLÉANTE: Brother of Elmire, brother-in-law of Orgon

MARIANE: Daughter of Orgon, fiancé of Valère

DAMIS: Son of Orgon

VALÈRE: Suitor to Mariane.

DORINE: Family housemaid

OTHER CHARACTERS

TARTUFFE: Houseguest of Orgon

MONSIEUR LOYAL: A bailiff

POLICE OFFICER: An officer of the King

ARGAS: Friend of Orgon (mentioned but never seen)
Molière Biography

Molière is considered one of the greatest comedic playwrights of his time. He was born in France as Jean-Baptiste Poquelin to a fairly well-off family in 1622. He lost his mother at an early age and had a troubled relationship with his father, who worked as an official in the court of King Louis XIII. Jean-Baptiste initially seemed to have a career as an official at court, as he was studying to be a lawyer as well as mingling with nobility.

In 1643, Jean-Baptiste decided to leave his secure life behind for a life in the theater. With the actress Madeline Bejart, he founded the Illustre Théâtre. He quickly became head of the troupe, due to his legal training and his talent as an actor. The theatre found itself deeply in debt and, in spite of his debts being paid by an anonymous benefactor, he spent a day in prison. Upon his release, he then adopted the name “Molière,” probably to spare his father the shame of having an actor in the family.

Molière and Madeline formed a new theater company which toured around France over the next twelve years. It was during this period that Molière began to write. Very few of his plays survive from this period. Though Molière was influenced by Commedia dell’arte, he soon grew in fame and notoriety for his talent in satire. Molière gradually began to gain a following, and he set his sights on returning to Paris. Key to this accomplishment was the support of the nobleman Armond, Prince of Conti, who became Molière’s patron for many years. Also important was the addition of Marquise-Thérèse de Gorla to Molière’s acting company. Better known as Mademoiselle Du Parc, she was an actress of great renown who gained notoriety for her various affairs.

In 1658, Molière returned to Paris where he and his company found support and patronage in the court of King Louis XIV. He and his actors became popular and loved by the public. Molière himself became the focus of much love for his plays, specifically his farces. But Molière also had enemies in court and his plays were often met with controversy. Accusations ranged from deliberately causing embarrassment to French society to marrying his daughter. At times his work raised the ire of the Catholic Church. Tartuffe, in particular, produced a scandal when it was first performed in Versailles and was banned.

Over the course of his career, Molière wrote such masterpieces as The Miser, The School for Wives, The Misanthrope, Scapin’s Deceits, and The Learned Ladies. He also became well-known for incorporating music and ballet into his plays. These comédies-ballets were met with great acclaim and popularity, and Molière was soon collaborating with Jean-Baptiste Lully, who was responsible for making opera and ballet into professional arts unto themselves.

In the early 1670s, Molière developed symptoms of tuberculosis, though he continued to write and perform. In 1673, against the advice of his wife, doctors, and friends, he went onstage to perform in his own play, The Imaginary Invalid. Playing the lead part, his real coughing fits were often met with laughter. Molière refused to stop performances, unwilling to disappoint the audience or let down his company, and after a performance of The Imaginary Invalid he collapsed and died.

Source:
Molière’s *Tartuffe*, though famous today, had a rocky start when it was first written in 1664. Its first performance was at the Palace of Versailles and consisted of only the first three of the five acts of the play. King Louis XIV enjoyed the play and could see that it was aimed principally at hypocrisy and not religion itself. However, religious hypocrisy was highlighted in the play, and this did not sit well with several other important figures at the time, including Anne of Austria and La Compagnie du Saint-Sacrament.

Anne of Austria, the mother of King Louis XIV, is thought to be one of the main reasons why *Tartuffe* was swiftly banned after its first performance. She was a devout Catholic and deeply religious. As the Queen Mother, she used her influence to strengthen the power of the Catholic Church. Therefore, if one wished to be in the good graces of Anne of Austria at court, they had to make a big show of their devoutness. The result was a court full of over-zealous courtiers showing their religious fervor, not because of their own inward piiosity, but because of their self-interest of being in the Queen Mother’s favor. *Tartuffe* struck at this hypocrisy, but Anne saw it as an attack on the Catholic Church.

La Compagnie du Saint-Sacrament, or *The Company of the Blessed Sacrament*, was a 30-year-old secret society of priests and citizens who also pressured Louis XIV to ban *Tartuffe*. The group’s main goal was to promote a purer form of Catholicism in France, and a play that seemed to mock fervent piety was not well-received. Anne of Austria had ties to the group, as did Molière’s former patron, the Prince de Conti, and they used their influence to get Louis XIV to ban the play within three days of its first performance.

Other religious aristocracy also pushed for the play’s ban. Roulled, the priest of Saint Barthélémy, wrote that *Tartuffe* was “a demon in flesh, dressed as a man; a free-thinker, an impious bring, deserving to be publicly burnt. Molière is a finished *Tartuffe*, a true hypocrite. If the purpose of the comedian is, as he says it is, to amend men’s lives by amusing them, Molière’s purpose is to ruin their souls eternally by making them laugh — like those serpents whose deathly fangs shed a smile on the faces of those they wound.”

Despite being banned — or perhaps because of it — readings of *Tartuffe* were in demand at private homes of the nobility and in the salons of Paris. Molière worked to change some key points in *Tartuffe* and re-named it *L’Imposteur*. It opened in Paris in 1667 and was banned immediately.

Molière made a formal plea to have the ban lifted, arguing that *Tartuffe* was not a dangerous attack on the Church, but a comedic jab at hypocrisy in general. His request was denied. An anonymous letter published in Paris reviewed *Tartuffe*, arguing that portraying religious hypocrisy on stage was not an attack on religion itself. Finally, in February of 1669, a public production of *Tartuffe* was staged in Paris. People stormed the theatre to see this long-forbidden play, and it gained favorable reviews.

**Sources:**
Holland, Helen Greene. *The Controversy over Molière’s “Le Tartuffe.”* Boston University, 1924.
Molière lived at a time when French literature and culture were highly regulated. The Académie française was created in 1635, and soon became the main body responsible for regulating French language, grammar, and literature. Beyond publishing the first dictionary of the words in the French language in 1697, they also had standards for what constituted “good” theatre, and their preference in Molière’s time was for Neo-classical theatre.

Neo-classicism refers to theatre that is inspired by the classical art of ancient Greece. Specifically, the Académie française based their guidelines for good theatre on the writing of Aristotle. Aristotle wrote that a tragedy contains three unities: unity of time, unity of place, and unity of action. Unity of time means that the entire play takes place in one day. Unity of place means that the play takes place in a single location. Unity of action means that all of the action in the play is related to the central plot of the play, and there are no diversions or sub-plots.

Beyond conforming to the three unities, French plays of this period were also expected to conform to a strict language standard. French plays were written in alexandrine couplets, or what the English would have called iambic hexameter in rhyming couplets. (Shakespeare wrote largely in iambic pentameter, but only a few of his lines rhyme. He often also wrote in prose.) Each line was to have twelve syllables, and every two lines were supposed to rhyme. Each rhyming couplet was to form a complete thought. In addition, it was also common for there to be a short pause in the middle of lines, between the 6th and 7th syllable. This is called a caesura.

Molière’s Tartuffe conforms to this standard in the original French, and the Wilbur translation used by Seattle Shakespeare Company makes only minor changes to the text meter. In translating Tartuffe, Wilbur preserved the sound and structure of the play, since it was so important to Molière in his time, but substituted iambic pentameter (10 syllables*) for the hexameter (12 syllables) used in the French. Other translations are more directly literal, but do not preserve strict alexandrine lines and rhyming couplets.

Look at the examples below. In the first, Molière’s original French has 12 syllables per line, and the two lines rhyme. In addition, there is a short pause, or caesura, between the 6th and 7th syllable in each line. This is easy to see in the second line, where the pause is indicated by a comma. Compared below is a quote from Madame Pernelle in original French and Wilbur’s English translation:

**ORIGINAL FRENCH:**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
C’est que je ne puis voir tout ce mé— na— ge— ci,

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Et que de me com— plaire, on ne prend nul sou— ci.

**TRANSLATED ENGLISH:**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
I must. This house ap— palls me. No one in it

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
Will pay a— ten— tion for a sin— gle min— ute.

In the translated English, the lines are a little shorter, but they still have the same iambic meter.

*As a note, it is generally accepted that one additional, unaccented syllable may be added at the end of a line of iambic pentameter without it disrupting the verse. These lines also preserve the rhyme at the end of the two lines.
**PRE-SHOW REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

Before watching the show, have students reflect on the following questions, either in a large group, small group, or individually in a journal.

- How can you tell the difference between someone who is genuinely good and someone who is pretending to be good in order to gain something?

- Who are some famous “Tartuffes” of today — people who pretend to be more upright than they are to gain power, money, or fame?

- Have you ever been in a situation where members of a family disagree over something very important? What could be done to solve it?

**POST-SHOW REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

Here are some questions to discuss with students after the play. Some possible answers are included, but answers may vary and students are encouraged to come up with their own interpretations of the play. There are many correct answers, as long as they are backed up by events from the play.

**Who is the most sensible person in the play?**

- Dorine: she is able to see right through Tartuffe, and she isn’t afraid to speak the truth.
- Elmire: she is practical and comes up with a plan to convince Orgon of Tartuffe’s true nature.
- Cléante: he has good advice and encourages everyone to keep their wits about them.

**Does the resolution of the play feel satisfying? Why or why not?**

- No, the resolution is not satisfying. The King, who is not a character in the play, suddenly solves an impossible situation.
- No, the resolution is not satisfying because we don’t get to see Orgon have to repent in any way for the mistakes he has made.
- Yes, the resolution is satisfying because the bad people are punished and the good people are unharmed in the end.

**How effective is reason in convincing Orgon that he is wrong? What (if anything) can actually change someone’s mind or make them see the error of something they are passionate about?**

- Reason seems to have no effect on Orgon’s opinion of Tartuffe.
- Hearing Tartuffe insult him helped change Orgon’s mind.
- Making Orgon jealous helped change his mind.
- Having his house taken away helped to convince Orgon.
- It seems like strong negative emotions, like jealousy, betrayal, and loss can help to convince someone that they are wrong about something.

**Do you believe Molière ridicules religion in the play?**

- No. He shows how bad false religion and “putting on a show” can be.
- Yes. He shows how people can use religion to say whatever they want to say.
PLACING THE PRODUCTION

Director Makaela Pollack is taking our production of Tartuffe and placing it in a more modern time. When reading the play, she focused on the themes of belief, greed, and family ties that come up throughout, and decided to set the show in the world of the American 1940’s. The play will start out feeling like an I Love Lucy episode, with a fun and funny atmosphere in a well-off family home. The post-WWII triumph should still feel fresh, and there is optimism around Orgon’s household. As the play progresses and Tartuffe meddles with the family more and more, the play will begin to take on the feel of a film noir, with shadows creeping into the play.

At the same time, there is a need for something to believe in. The 1940’s and 50’s was a time when several new fringe religions appeared in the US. Tartuffe himself is going to belong to an undefined new-age religion, with a made-up symbol drawn both from religious icons and currency symbols, to symbolize his use of religion to make money.

The set of Tartuffe is inspired by the Los Angeles mid-century modern architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard Neutra. This is a fictionalized world that combines 1940’s French elegance with the low and wide ceiling and clean lines of mid-century modern architecture. The furniture will also combine these two aesthetics, with a combination of an elegant chaise lounge and Eames modern furniture.

The lighting and costumes will also help to set the stage by indicating time of day. This play is going to take place over one day, beginning in the morning and running late into the night. As it gets later, more of Orgon’s world falls apart, with the officer coming to his door in the dead of night. The deus ex machina ending will feel like coming out of the night into a new day of hope, and that may be indicated by the breaking of dawn in the world of the play.
PLACING THE PRODUCTION
ACTIVITY: ENDING SCENE

OBJECTIVE: To use textual evidence to re-imagine Tartuffe's ending.

STUDENT SKILLS:
- Cite textual evidence
- Write using narrative techniques

TIME: 30–45 minutes

At the end of Tartuffe, Orgon and his family are saved from losing their house and being treated as traitors by an officer of the King who informs them that their gracious king has seen through the imposter Tartuffe, and he will use his ultimate power to punish Tartuffe and forgive Orgon. This sort of ending is called a *deus ex machina*, or “God from the machine.” It refers to an all-powerful being (God or the King) stepping in at the last minute to make everything right, even if the situation seemed hopeless.

This type of ending is rarely satisfying to modern audiences, so in this activity students will be asked to re-imagine the ending of the play. There are several variations included for different skill levels.

INSTRUCTIONS
- After watching Tartuffe, discuss the ending with students. Introduce them to the concept of *deus ex machina*, and point out that this ending was probably not Molière's original ending of the play. Since Tartuffe was censored, Molière had to re-write parts of the play to make it acceptable to the religious members of the 17th century French court.
- Split the class into small groups, and have them discuss what would be a more natural ending for the play, or one that they could imagine following logically from the rest of the events of the play.

Variation 1: Have students present their idea for an ending to the class. Have them point out how each major character would contribute to that ending, and what events earlier in the play would lead up to that ending.

Variation 2: Have students work together to write a script for the ending of the play. They can write their script in regular prose, or for a bigger challenge students can try to write it in some type of rhyming verse.

Variation 3: Once you have a script written (Variation 2), have each group act out their version of the ending for the rest of the class.

POST-ACTIVITY DISCUSSION
- How did the groups incorporate different characters into their endings?
- Were the endings mostly good for Orgon? Bad for Orgon? Why do you think that is?
- Were these endings more or less believable than the original ending? Why?
Mission Statement
With the plays of William Shakespeare at our core, Seattle Shakespeare Company engages our audiences, our artists and our community in the universal human experience inherent in classic drama through the vitality, immediacy and intimacy of live performance and dynamic outreach programs.

ABOUT US
Seattle Shakespeare Company is the Puget Sound region’s year-round, professional, classical theatre. The company’s growing success stems from a deep belief in the power and vibrancy of the time-tested words and ideas of Shakespeare and other classical playwrights along with a commitment to artistic excellence on stage. The results have been provocative performances that both challenge and delight audiences while fostering an appreciation for great stage works.

Our combined programs — which include indoor performances, free outdoor productions, regional tours, educator and youth programs — reach across barriers of income, geography, and education to bring classical theatre to Washington State.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

In-School Residencies, Matinees, and Workshops
• In-School Residencies bring active, customized curriculum into schools across Washington State. Professional teaching artists plan with teachers to tailor each residency to fit the needs and objectives of the classroom. Seattle Shakespeare Company residencies inject vibrant, active exercises into lessons that unlock the text, themes, and actions of a Shakespeare play.
• Student Matinees bring over 3,000 students annually to our mainstage productions in the Seattle Center. Teachers are provided free study guides, and student groups are invited to stay after the show for a free Q&A session with the cast.
• Pre-show and post-show workshops can be booked to accompany mainstage matinees. These workshops include an introduction to the play itself, student activities, and insights into direction and design choices of our specific production.

Touring Productions
• Fresh and accessible 90-minute productions tour across Washington State each Spring, reaching more than 14,000 students and adults. These nimble productions perform as easily in school gymnasiums as professional theatre facilities. Teachers are provided free study guides and students enjoy free post-show Q&A sessions with the cast.
• Schools have the opportunity to book accompanying in-school residencies with touring productions, led by members of the touring cast and additional teaching artists.

Camps and Classes
• Our summer “Camp Bill” series in Seattle and Edmonds offers young actors a variety of camps to choose from or combine. Camps range from a One-Week Introduction to a Three-Week Production Intensive, with many options in between.
• In our Fall and Spring after-school “Short Shakes” programs, young actors develop their skills and gain hands-on performance and production experience.
• Seattle Shakespeare Company occasionally offers adult classes and workshops to our community featuring guest artists who work on our stage.

In-School Residencies and Camps
Michelle Burce, Education Director
206-733-8228 ext. 251
michelleb@seattleshakespeare.org

Touring Productions
Casey Brown, Education Associate
206-733-8228 ext. 241
caseyb@seattleshakespeare.org

Student Matinees
Lorri McGinnis, Box Office Manager
206-733-8228 ext. 220
studentmat@seattleshakespeare.org

General
Ticket office: 206-733-8222
Administrative offices: 206-733-8228
Fax: 206-733-8202
Seattle Shakespeare Company
PO Box 19595
Seattle, WA 98109
www.seattleshakespeare.org