NOTE TO THE TEACHER ABOUT THE MODULE SCRIPT
FOR MOLIERE'S TARTUFFE

Grades 10-12

The attached script is a distilled, simplified version of a classic drama. It is intended to provide an initial encounter of students with a play, and hopefully stimulate them to read it for themselves one day. It does not represent the total content of the original play because it overemphasizes the plot; aspects of characterization, mood, and language are reduced. It should not be used to teach the play, but to familiarize students with the nature of a masterwork.

A play is never complete until it is performed. A better sense of what this play offers will arise in students if they read the script aloud as a classroom exercise. It would be especially interesting if you assign students to roles and even have them rehearse their reading of it. To assist in that, the following list names all the roles in the script -- although, of course, a student may read aloud more than one role without producing confusion among listeners. Underlined roles should be read by only one student, however.

Narrator
Orgon
Tartuffe
Elmire
Dorine
Officer

Mariane
Valère
Damis
Monsieur Loyal
Cléante

There is no "right" way to perform any play, and students should be encouraged to use their imaginations in dealing with this script -- particularly if you decide to have them stage portions of it in the classroom. Experimenting with alternate interpretations can lend special value to the experience with the script.

You might find it helpful to substitute words that are too difficult for your students -- or even substitute character names (for example, when a student is "doubling" by reading more than one role).

When the script is presented, or afterward, it might add to class understanding if you assign some students to find and read aloud to the class some speeches this script leaves out.
TARTUFFE: Grades 10-12

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Tartuffe = tar-TOOF
Moliere = mole-YAIR
Orgon = or-GONE
Dorine = door-EEN
Cleante = CLAY-ahnt
Mariane = marry-ANNE

Valere = val-AIR
Damis = dah-MEES
Elmire = el-MEER
Loyal = loy-ALL
Argas = ar-GAHS

THE AUTHOR

Moliere (1622-1673) was born in Paris, the son of the king’s upholsterer. He could have had a prosperous life by following his father’s occupation. But his interest in theatre led him to abandon the business and spend many years traveling from town to town, performing with a troupe of actors.

In 1658 Moliere and his company were invited to perform for King Louis XIV. They presented a play written by Moliere himself. The king liked it so much that he gave personal support to Moliere and his troupe. For the rest of his life Moliere wrote and performed comedies like Tartuffe.

Moliere’s plays usually show people making fools of themselves by stubbornly pursuing a poorly-considered idea or desire. He often got into trouble with people who thought Moliere was making fun of them. Actually, Moliere’s plays indicate that he had great affection for his characters, in spite of their foolishness. This ability to balance criticism and good will, and still make people laugh, makes him one of the greatest comic writers in theatre history.

THEATRICAL CONDITIONS IN MOLIERE’S PARIS

Moliere’s real name was Jean-Baptiste Poquelin. He apparently changed it to avoid bringing shame to his family. The Church, which was very powerful, disapproved of actors and of this play.

Yet, the noble classes loved to go to the theatre. The king himself often attended plays, and having a private box in the theatre gave a person status. In fact, people often ignored the play and passed the time looking around to see who was sitting with whom.

The theatres were indoor structures, and plays were presented only during daylight hours. Candle light or oil lamps added to the illumination. The plays were staged very simply with a minimum of furniture and scenery.
TARTUFFE

by Molière
Based on a Translation by Richard Wilbur

Grades 10-12

NARRATOR

Seventeenth-century Paris is a city filled with hypocrisy and corruption. Orgon, a wealthy businessman, has become disgusted with it. He wishes he could find one man in this world who is truly religious, unselfish, and pure of heart. One day, he meets a beggar named Tartuffe.

ORGON

Oh, had you seen Tartuffe as I first knew him. Your heart, like mine, would have surrendered to him. He used to come into our church each day, And humbly kneel nearby, and start to pray. He’d draw the eyes of everybody there By the deep fervor of his heartfelt prayer; He’d sigh and weep, and sometimes with a sound Of rapture he would bend and kiss the ground; And when I rose to go, he’d run before To offer me holy-water at the door.

NARRATOR

Orgon is so impressed by Tartuffe’s religious zeal that he invites the beggar to come live in his house.

ORGON

He guides our lives, and to protect my honor Stays by my wife, and keeps an eye upon her; He tells me whom she sees, and all she does, And seems more jealous than I ever was! And how austere he is! Why, he can detect A mortal sin where you would least suspect; In smallest trifles, he’s extremely strict. Last week, his conscience was severely pricked Because, while praying, he had caught a flea And killed it, so he felt, too wrathfully.

NARRATOR

Tartuffe does not receive so warm a welcome from Orgon’s family. They resent having a beggar tell them how to live. Orgon’s maid, Dorine, is especially outspoken.

DORINE

Surely it is a shame and a disgrace To see this man usurp the master’s place -- To see this beggar who, when first he came,
Had not a shoe or shoestring to his name
So far forget himself that he behaves
As if the house were his, and we his slaves.

NARRATOR

Dorine is also convinced that Tartuffe is merely pretending to be religious in order to cheat Orgon.

DORINE

Tartuffe, much pleased to find so easy a victim,
Has in a hundred ways beguiled and tricked him,
Milked him of money, and with his permission
Established here a sort of Inquisition.

NARRATOR

Orgon is so obsessed with heavenly thoughts that, upon returning from a trip to the country, Tartuffe is the only subject he cares to hear about.

DORINE

Your wife, two days ago, had a bad fever,
And a fierce headache which refused to leave her.

Ah. And Tartuffe?

DORINE

Tartuffe? Why, he's round and red,
Bursting with health, and excellently fed.

Poor fellow!

DORINE

That night, the mistress was unable
To take a single bite at the dinner table.
Her headache-pains, she said, were simply hellish.

Ah! And Tartuffe?

DORINE

He ate his meal with relish,
And zealously devoured in her presence
A leg of mutton and a brace of pheasants.

Poor fellow!

DORINE

After much ado, we talked her
Into dispatching someone for the doctor.
He bled her, and the fever quickly fell.

ORGON

Ah! And Tartuffe?

DORINE

He bore it very well.
To keep his cheerfulness at any cost,
And make up for the blood Madame had lost.
He drank, at lunch, four beakers full of port.

ORGON

Poor fellow!

NARRATOR

Orgon's brother-in-law, Cleante, tries to convince him that his obsession is a dangerous thing.

CLEANTE

Are you so dazed by this man's hocus-pocus
That all the world, save him, is out of focus?
You've given him clothing, shelter, food, and care:
Why must you also...

ORGON

Brother, stop right there.
Thanks to Tartuffe I'm a changed man indeed.
Under his tutelage my soul's been freed
From earthly loves, and every human tie:
My mother, children, brother, and wife could die,
And I'd not feel a single moment's pain.

NARRATOR

But Orgon does give some thought to his daughter, Mariane. He wants her to marry Tartuffe.

ORGON

Oh, I'm aware
That I once promised you to young Valère;
But now I hear he gambles, which greatly shocks me:
What's more, I've doubts about his orthodoxy.
His visits to church, I note, are very few.
Tartuffe, however, is sure of Heaven's blessing,
And that's the only treasure worth possessing.

NARRATOR

The maid Dorine thinks Orgon has lost his mind. She urges Mariane to stand up to her father.

DORINE

Tell him one cannot love at a father's whim;
That you shall marry for yourself, not him;
That since it's you who are to be the bride,
It's you, not he, who must be satisfied;
And that if his Tartuffe is so sublime,
He's free to marry him at any time.

MARIA

If I defied my father, as you suggest.
Would it not seem unmaidenly, at best?
Shall I defend my love at the expense
Of brazeness and disobedience?
Shall I parade my heart's desires, and flaunt ...

DORINE

No, I ask nothing of you. Clearly you want
To be Madame Tartuffe, and I feel bound
Not to oppose a wish so very sound.
Yes, you deserve it; this marriage must go through.

DORINE

No.

MARIA

Not Tartuffe! You know I think him ...

DORINE

Tartuffe's your cup of tea, and you shall drink him.

MARIA

I've always told you everything, and relied ...

DORINE

No. You deserve to be tartuffified.

NARRATOR

At this moment, Mariane's fiancé, Valère, arrives. He has heard
that Orgon has promised her to Tartuffe, and demands to know what
she plans to do about it. Her indecision leads to a lovers' quarrel, to which Dorine listens with amusement.

VALÈRE

Marry the man. That's my advice to you.

That's your advice?

MARIA

Yes.
MARIANE
Truly?

VALÈRE
Oh, absolutely.

You couldn't choose more wisely, more astutely.

MARIANE
Thanks for this counsel; I'll follow it, of course.

VALÈRE
Do, do; I'm sure 'twill cost you no remorse.

MARIANE
To give it didn't cause your heart to break.

VALÈRE
I gave it, Madam, only for your sake.

MARIANE
And it's for your sake that I take it, Sir.

DORINE
Let's see which fool will prove the stubborner.

VALÈRE
So! I am nothing to you, and it was flat Deception when you . . .

MARIANE
Please, enough of that.

You've told me plainly that I should agree To wed the man my father's chosen for me, And since you've deigned to counsel me so wisely, I promise, Sir, to do as you advise me.

VALÈRE
Ah, no, 'twas not by me that you were swayed. No, your decision was already made; Though now, to save appearances, you protest That you're betraying me at my behest.

NARRATOR
Dorine interrupts the quarrel and forces Valère and Mariane to hold hands. After a few moments of haughty silence, they smile shyly at each other.

DORINE
There: a perfect fit.
You suit each other better than you admit. Your father has a plan which must be stopped.
MARIANE
Advise us, then; what means must we adopt?

NARRATOR
Dorine tells Mariane to stall for time by pretending she is sick. Meanwhile, Valère can urge Orgon's friends to try to change his mind.

MARIANE
Regardless of what Father may decide,
None but Valere shall claim me as his bride.

VALÈRE
Oh, how those words content me!  Come what will ...

DORINE
Oh, lovers, lovers!  Their tongues are never still.

NARRATOR
As the lovers depart, Mariane's brother, Damis, rushes in, ready to defend his sister's virtue from Tartuffe.

DAMIS
May lightning strike me even as I speak,
May all men call me cowardly and weak,
If any fear or scruple holds me back
From settling things, at once, with that great quack!

DORINE
Do calm down and be practical.  I had rather
My mistress dealt with him -- and with your father.

NARRATOR
Dorine hears Tartuffe descending the stairs and forces Damis to hide in a closet.  As she closes the door, Tartuffe appears.

TARTUFFE
You wished to see me?

DORINE
Yes ...

TARTUFFE
For mercy's sake
Please take this handkerchief, before you speak.

What?

TARTUFFE
Cover that bosom, girl.  The flesh is weak.
And unclean thoughts are difficult to control.
Such sights as that can undermine the soul.

DORINE
Your soul, it seems, has very poor defenses. 
And flesh makes quite an impact on your senses.
It's strange that you're so easily excited;
My own desires are not so soon ignited.
And if I saw you naked as a beast,
Not all your hide would tempt me in the least.

NARRATOR
Dorine tells Tartuffe that Orgon's wife, Elmire, wishes to speak to him. Tartuffe is more than happy to oblige. He makes that clear once he and Elmire are alone.

ELMIRE
They say my husband means to break his word
And give his daughter to you, Sir. Had you heard?

TARTUFFE
He did once mention it. But I confess
I dream of quite a different happiness.
It's elsewhere, Madam, that my eyes discern
The promise of that bliss for which I yearn.

ELMIRE
All your desires mount heavenward, I'm sure.
In scorn of all that's earthly and impure.

TARTUFFE
Our senses are quite rightly captivated
By perfect works our Maker has created.
Some glory clings to all that Heaven has made:
In you, all Heaven's marvels are displayed.

ELMIRE
It ill becomes a pious man like you ...

TARTUFFE
I may be pious, but I'm human too:
With your celestial charms before his eyes,
A man has not the power to be wise.
I know such words sound strangely, coming from me.
But I'm no angel, nor was meant to be,
And if you blame my passion, you must needs
Reproach as well the charms on which it feeds.

NARRATOR
As the shocked Elmire listens to Tartuffe, Damis leaps from the closet, brandishing his sword.
DAMIS
Ah, now I have my long-awaited chance
To punish his deceit and arrogance,
And give my father clear and shocking proof
Of the black character of his dear Tartuffe.

NARRATOR
As Tartuffe cowers in fear, Elmire indignantly leaves the room.
Then Orgon appears, wondering what all the noise is about. Damis
tells him that Tartuffe has been trying to seduce his wife.

ORGON
Can it be true, this dreadful thing I hear?

TARTUFFE
Yes, Brother, I'm a wicked man, I fear:
A wretched sinner, all depraved and twisted,
The greatest villain that has ever existed.
My life's one heap of crimes, which grows each minute;
There's naught but foulness and corruption in it;
And I perceive that heaven, outraged by me,
Has chosen this occasion to mortify me.
Charge me with any deed you wish to name;
I'll not defend myself, but take the blame.
Believe what you are told, and drive Tartuffe
Like some base criminal from beneath your roof;
Yes, drive me hence, and with a parting curse:
I shan't protest, for I deserve far worse.

ORGON
Ah, you deceitful boy, how dare you try
To stain his purity with so foul a lie?

DAMIS
What! Are you taken in by such a bluff?
Did you not hear ... ?

ORGON
Enough, you rogue, enough!
I disinherit you; an empty purse
Is all you'll get from me -- except my curse!

NARRATOR
Shocked by his father's decision, Damis runs from the house without
a word. Orgon lays a pitying hand on Tartuffe's shoulder.

TARTUFFE
These scenes, these dreadful quarrels, have got to end.
I've much upset your household, and I perceive
That the best thing will be for me to leave.
ORGON

No, no.

TARTUFFE
To leave at once is the solution;
Thus only can I end their persecution.

ORGON

No, no, I'll not allow it; you shall remain.

TARTUFFE

Ah, well; 'twill mean much martyrdom and pain,
But if you wish it...

NARRATOR

Angry at his family's treatment of Tartuffe; Orgon decides that Mariane shall be married to him immediately. And as a symbol of his total commitment to Tartuffe, Orgon takes a drastic step.

ORGON

This very day, I'll give to you alone
Clear deed and title to everything I own.
A dear, good friend and son-in-law-to-be
Is more than wife, or child, or kin to me.
Will you accept my offer, dearest son?

TARTUFFE

In all things, let the will of Heaven be done.

NARRATOR

Now the house is truly in an uproar. Elmire decides that the only way to keep Orgon from making a disastrous mistake is to convince him of Tartuffe's hypocrisy.

ELMIRE

Suppose that from some hiding-place in here
You learned the whole sad truth by eye and ear --
What would you say of your good friend, after that?

ORGON

Why, I'd say ... nothing, by Jehosophat!
It can't be true.

ELMIRE

Pull up this table and get under it.

ORGON

What?

ELMIRE

It's essential that you be well-hidden.
ORGON

Why there?

ELMIRE

Oh, Heavens! Just do as you are bidden. 
Take care that you are neither seen nor heard.

ORGON

Well, I’ll indulge you, since I gave my word
To see you through this infantile charade.

ELMIRE

Once it is over, you’ll be glad we played.

NARRATOR

Orgon crawls under the table, and Elmire lowers the tablecloth to
conceal him. Then she asks Dorine to send Tartuffe into the room.

TARTUFFE

You wish a word with me, I’m told.

ELMIRE

Yes, I’ve a little secret to unfold.
This storm has only bettered your position;
My husband doesn’t have the least suspicion,
And now, in mockery of those who do,
He bids me be continually with you.
And that is why, quite fearless of reproof,
I now can be alone with my Tartuffe,
And why my heart -- perhaps too quick to yield --
Feels free to let its passion be revealed.

TARTUFFE

Madam, no happiness is so complete
As when, from lips we love, come words so sweet.
To please you is my only goal;
Your love is the restorer of my soul.

NARRATOR

As Tartuffe speaks, Elmire coughs, as a signal to her husband to
come out. But Orgon fails to get the hint and stays put.
Meanwhile, Tartuffe begins making bold advances toward Elmire, who
coughs louder and louder.

TARTUFFE

I shan’t quite trust your fond opinion of me
Until the feelings you’ve expressed so sweetly
Are demonstrated somewhat more concretely.

ELMIRE

But how can I consent without offense
To Heaven, toward which you feel such reverence?
TARTUFFE
If Heaven is all that holds you back, don’t worry.
I can remove that hindrance in a hurry.
Nothing of that sort need obstruct our path.
You’ve a bad cough.

ELMIRE
Yes, yes. It’s bad indeed.
Open the door a little, and peek out;
I wouldn’t want my husband poking about.

TARTUFFE
Why worry about the man? Each day he grows
More gullible; one can lead him by the nose.
To find us here would fill him with delight.
And if he saw the worst, he’d doubt his sight.
No one’s about; and now I may at last . . .

ORGON
Hold on, my passionate fellow, not so fast!
I should advise a little more restraint.
Well, so you thought you’d fool me, my dear saint!
How soon you wearied of the saintly life --
Wedding my daughter, and coveting my wife!

TARTUFFE
Brother, you can’t think . . .

ORGON
No more talk from you;
Just leave this household, without more ado.

TARTUFFE
What I intended . . .

ORGON
That seems fairly clear.
Spare me your falsehoods and get out of here.

TARTUFFE
No, I’m the master, and you’re the one to go!
This house belongs to me. I’ll have you know,
And I shall show you that you can’t hurt me
By this contemptible conspiracy,
That those who cross me know not what they do,
And that I’ve means to expose and punish you,
Avenge offended Heaven, and make you grieve
That ever you dared order me to leave.
NARRATOR
Tartuffe marches angrily out of the house. Elmire is worried by Tartuffe’s threat. And Orgon is terrified. For, along with the deed to the house, Orgon gave to Tartuffe some papers belonging to a friend named Argas, an enemy of King Louis XIV. Possessing such papers is an act of treason, punishable by death. As Orgon paces through the house, wondering what to do, a sinister-looking stranger comes to the door.

Monsieur Loyal
Loyal’s my name; I come from Normandy,
And I’m a bailiff, in all modesty.
And I am here, Sir, if you will permit
The liberty, to serve you with this writ ...

Orgon
To -- what?

Monsieur Loyal
Now, please, Sir, let us have no friction:
It’s nothing but an order of eviction.
This house, Sir, from the cellar to the roof,
Belongs now to the good Monsieur Tartuffe.

Narrator
Loyal orders Orgon and his family to be out of the house by morning. Orgon calls in Cléante and Mariane to tell them what Tartuffe has done. Damis, having heard the news, rushes to his father’s side.

Orgon
It’s true, my boy. I’m too distressed for tears.

Damis
Leave it to me, Sir; let me trim his ears.
Faced with such insolence, we must not waver.
I shall rejoice in doing you the favor
Of cutting short his life, and your distress.

Narrator
But before Damis can even draw his sword, Valère arrives.

Valère
Sir, though I hate to bring you more bad news.
Such is the danger that I cannot choose.
That scoundrel who’s imposed upon you so
Denounced you to the King an hour ago.
I don’t know just what charges may be pressed.
But there’s a warrant out for your arrest;
Tartuffe has been instructed, furthermore.
To guide the arresting officer to your door.
CLEANTE
He's clearly done this to facilitate
His seizure of your house and your estate.

ORGON
That man, I must say, is a vicious beast!

VALÈRE
Quick, Sir; you mustn't tarry in the least.
My carriage is outside, to take you hence;
I shall go with you all the way, and place you
In a safe refuge to which they'll never trace you.

ORGON
Alas, dear boy, I wish that I could show you
My gratitude for everything I owe you.
But now is not the time; I pray the Lord
That I may live to give you your reward.

NARRATOR
But before Orgon can escape, Tartuffe bursts into the house. With
him is an elegantly dressed officer from the court of Louis XIV.

TARTUFFE
Gently, Sir, gently; stay right where you are.
No need for haste; your lodging isn't far.
You're off to prison, by order of the Prince.

ORGON
This is the crowning blow, you wretch; and since
It means my total ruin and defeat,
Your villainy is now at last complete.

TARTUFFE
You needn't try to provoke me; it's no use.
Those who serve Heaven must expect abuse.

ORGON
I rescued you when you were destitute;
Have you forgotten that, you thankless brute?

TARTUFFE
No, no, I well remember everything;
But my first duty is to serve my King.

CLEANTE
Why was this zeal not roused until you'd sought
To make Orgon a cuckold, and been caught?

TARTUFFE
Sir, spare me all this clamor; it's growing shrill.
Please carry out your orders, if you will.
OFFICER
Yes. I’ve delayed too long, Sir. Thank you kindly.
You’re just the proper person to remind me.
Come, you are off to join the other boarders
In the King’s prison, according to his orders.

TARTUFFE
Who? I, Sir?

OFFICER
Yes.

TARTUFFE
To prison? This can’t be true!

OFFICER
I owe an explanation, but not to you.
Monsieur Orgon, rest easy and be grateful.
We serve a Prince to whom all sham is hateful.
The King soon recognized Tartuffe as one
Notorious by another name, who’d done
So many vicious crimes that one could fill
Ten volumes with them, and be writing still.
He bade me follow the impostor here
To see how gross his impudence could be,
And force him to restore your property.
Your private papers, by the King’s command,
I hereby seize and give into your hand.
The King, by royal order, invalidates
The deed which gave this rascal your estates,
And pardons, furthermore, your grave offense
In harboring an exile’s documents.

NARRATOR
As the King’s Officer drags away the furious Tartuffe, Orgon and
his family sigh with relief. Cléante thinks a visit to the King
is in order.

CLÉANTE
Orgon, go kneel before your sovereign’s throne
And thank him for the mercies he has shown.

ORGON
Well said: let’s go at once and, gladly kneeling,
Express the gratitude which all are feeling.
Then, when that first great duty has been done,
We’ll turn with pleasure to a second one,
And give Valère, whose love has proven so true,
The wedded happiness which is his due.