The ARTS - Molière: Year 9 French Activity 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience:</th>
<th>Year 9 students studying French</th>
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<tr>
<td>Background Knowledge:</td>
<td>Students need never have studied Molière before but some basic understanding of drama and comedy (from studying English Literature) will be helpful, parts of the body in French, listening and comprehension skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources:</td>
<td>see online resources and bibliographic references provided throughout. These are on Molière, the specific plays and on relevant vocabulary. We also look at two clips in the activity (a news broadcast about <em>Le Malade Imaginaire</em> and a scene from a production of <em>Le Malade Imaginaire</em>).</td>
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<td>Outcome:</td>
<td>As well as having worked through a scene from <em>Le Malade Imaginaire</em> and answered language and comprehension questions, students can then present their work in the form of a presentation, a poster or their own video clip. Students can make up role-plays in French where they diagnose each other with symptoms and illnesses and have a chance to revise basic vocabulary on parts of the body and visits to the doctor. Teachers can also use this as an opportunity to teach ‘emergency scenarios’ in role-plays in French (‘Fire’ ‘Help’, ‘Thief’ etc.).</td>
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<td>Helpful Hints:</td>
<td>This activity can be used across 3/4 classes (Introduction to Molière, the play and section 1; Section 2 comprehension A, B and role-play; Comprehension C, D and performing scenes.</td>
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<td>Going Further:</td>
<td>Students can look at other plays by Molière. Examples of some scenes from different plays are provided in the activity. Keen students can read the plays in French/English, watch DVD versions and write basic summaries of the plots in French for a poster or presentation.</td>
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(Key: teachers Online resource)

Introduction

In the same way that English audiences still go to see plays by Shakespeare and study his comedies and tragedies at school, the French still admire and study works written in France over this historical time-frame (and particularly in the seventeenth-century which is slightly after Shakespeare was writing. Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613). During the seventeenth century France was ruled by the King Louis XIV who keenly supported the arts, seeing it as a way of demonstrating the glory and might of the country. Thus the theatre flourished in France. The works of Jean Racine, Pierre Corneille and Molière, all successful playwrights in their day, continue to be popular today. In fact they are performed all around the world, not just in France. Racine and Corneille are best remembered for tragedy (although Corneille did write comedies early in his career). Molière, who concentrated on comedy, wrote a considerable number of plays. Many of these are still performed in theatres and studied in literature classes across schools in France. If you have the chance to visit France, you can easily locate a theatre showing one of the comedies.

Online resource:

Sometimes theatre troupes in England perform the plays in translation (*The Miser* (*L’Avare*), *Tartuffe* (*Le Tartuffe*) and *The Misanthropist* (*Le Misanthrope*) have all been performed in London in recent years). You can also watch the plays in filmic versions on DVD.
Online resource:
http://www.toutmoliere.net/
Search the section ‘filmographie’ for a list of film versions.

However, there is nothing quite like the experience of watching a play in real time, of feeling the
dynamic exchange of the actors, of appreciating the visual spectacle unfolding and of participating in
the laughter or surprise of the audience. An enjoyable way of becoming familiar with the texts is to
act them out yourselves. Find a group of classmates with whom you can perform a few scenes and
experiment with different ways of making the performance visually amusing and cleverly
choreographed. You can use a translation of the text if this makes things easier.

Resource:

Background
Some Information on Molière and his plays

Online resource:
www.site-moliere.com/
This site provides you with all the plays through online versions of the texts; a biography, data on
Molière's troupe, characters in his plays and significant contemporaries.

Molière (1622- 1673) acted, directed and wrote comedies.
His real name was Jean-Baptiste Poquelin.
His father, Jean Poquelin, was an upholsterer and earned an appointment to the King. Jean-Baptiste
attended a Jesuit school until he was sixteen before moving to Orléans to study law. He gave up the
legal profession, however, and refused to follow his father’s trade, choosing instead a career in
theatre. He set up a theatre company in 1644 with his brother-in law but soon experienced financial
difficulties and eventually went bankrupt and was imprisoned for failing to pay debts. In 1645 he left
Paris to join a wandering theatre troupe. He travelled and performed throughout the provinces. In
September 1653 they performed before the Prince de Conti at Pézenas and received his patronage.
In 1658 they returned to Paris. That year they were commanded to perform two plays for King Louis
XIV at the Louvre. Having become the Troupe de Monsieur, the players began performances at the
Petit Bourbon theatre. Overall, Molière wrote 33 plays.

Medieval farce, ancient Roman comedy, comedy of manners and the improvised commedia dell’arte
of Italian players (who had a notable presence in Paris) all influenced his craft. He also created a
particular genre, known as the comédie-ballet, a form of comedy with balletic and musical interludes.
The play Le Malade imaginaire which we will be focusing on, is one such example of this.

Many of his plays centre around the same idea. The main character has a kind of obsession or mania
and tyrannizes those around him. In L’Avare (The Miser), Harpagon the stingy father of the
household is obsessed with money. In Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, (The Would-Be Gentleman)
Monsieur Jourdain is fanatical about being a ‘man of quality’ and dressing and acting the part. In
Dom Juan, Dom Juan is driven by his endless desire to seduce women and live as he pleases, defying
laws and conventions. In Le Tartuffe, Orgon is infatuated by the falsely pious Tartuffe, blindly thinking
him to be his loyal spiritual advisor and friend. The plays often show young love threatened by the
tyrrannical older man but the wily servants and young lovers win the day and champion over the
obstacles. Disguise, trickery and confusion are key ingredients.
Molière was audacious and mocked contemporary society. Some of his plays satirized doctors, presenting them as charlatans and quacks, some of his plays ridiculed aristocratic circles. The plays that engaged with the question of religion and faith caused considerable controversy (*Le Tartuffe* was banned by the King as a result of pressure from a particular religious group and the Archbishop of Paris threatened anyone who saw, read or heard the play with excommunication. Molière petitioned to have the play reinstated and after making changes to the play he eventually was allowed to publically perform the 1669 version. His next play, *Dom Juan* also came under considerable attack for Dom Juan’s perceived blasphemy and mocking of religion).

**Task**

Today we will be focusing on a scene from the comédie-ballet by Molière called *Le Malade Imaginaire* (the English translation is *The Hypochondriac*).

You can find the play we will be studying online: [http://www.site-moliere.com/pieces/malade.htm](http://www.site-moliere.com/pieces/malade.htm)

or get hold of edition such as:


A hypochondriac is a term used to describe someone who has an obsessive preoccupation with being ill, even though they do not actually have any medical condition.

**Description of the play**

The central character of this play, Argan fits this label. He is convinced he is gravely ill and spends a fortune on remedies, purgings and colonic lavages even though all the members of the household realise that he is not actually physically sick. This does not stop those of the medical profession taking money from him or pandering to his phobias. One of his doctors, amusingly called ‘Monsieur Purgon (which sounds like purge) not only drains him to supposedly ‘cleanse or purify’ him but bleeds him of money.

Argan’s blindness concerning this and his obsessive need to be an invalid has troubling consequences for the rest of the family. His daughter, Angélique, wants to marry the man she loves, Cléante, but Argan wants her to marry the son of one of his doctors, Monsieur Diafoirus (whose name sounds like a comical combination of ‘diarrhée’ (diarhorea) and ‘foie’ (liver)). Argan demands this so that Diafoirus can then provide him with free medical treatment. Argan’s maid, Toinette, also suffers on account of his obsession. She has enough of having to attend constantly to his every whim, clean his bed chamber of his colonic irrigations, plump his pillows and listen to his moaning. His new wife, Béline is a calculating woman who, like the doctors, agrees with Argan and tells him what he wants to hear. However, when Argan pretends to be dead to see what the wife really feels about him, we hear of her callous disdain for him.

**Béline:**

‘Le Ciel en soit loué! Me voilà délivrée d’un grand fardeau. (…) Et de quoi servait-il sur la terre? Un homme incommode à tout le monde, malpropre, dégoûtant, sans cesse un lavement ou une médecine dans le ventre, mouchant, toussant, crachant toujours, sans esprit, ennuyeux, de mauvaise humeur, fatiguant sans cesse les gens, et grondant jour et nuit servantes et valets.

(Thank Heavens ! I am delivered from such a heavy burden. (…) And what use was he on this earth? He was an unpleasant man to everybody, dirty, disgusting ; always with an aenema or a dose or some kind of medicine in his belly. Always snivelling, coughing, spitting; a stupid, tedious, bad-tempered fellow, who was for ever fatiguing people and scolding night and day at his maids and servants.)
Argan is also persuaded by Toinette to pretend to be dead in order to see how his daughter will react. She, on the other hand, is grief-stricken at the thought that her father has died.

Angélique:
Ô Ciel! quelle infortune! quelle atteinte cruelle! Hélas! faut-il que je perde mon père, la seule chose qui me restait au monde? et qu'encore, pour un surcroît de désespoir, je le perde dans un moment où il était irrité contre moi? Que deviendrai-je, malheureuse, et quelle consolation trouver après une si grande perte?

(Oh heavens! what a misfortune! What a cruel grief! Alas, why must I lose my father, the only being left me in the world? And why should I lose him, too, at a time when he was angry with me? What will become of me, unhappy girl that I am? What consolation can I find after so great a loss?)

She discovers that he was only play-acting and the love between father and daughter is happily reaffirmed.

How do the other members of the household ensure that Angélique can marry her beloved and avoid the nerdy and idiotic doctor son Diafoirus? How do they help steer Argan away from the parasitic doctors? In the end, they persuade Argan that all he needs to do is to become a doctor himself. He can then diagnose and cure himself, with no need of other doctors according to this bizarre logic.

In an elaborate and carnivalesque-like spectacle they perform a ceremony in which he is granted the diploma of medicine with strange chants in Latin and ritual incantations. The play ends with Argan still deluded and tricked, (though he has seen the falsehood of his wife and the loving devotion of his daughter). We expect his mania over his health will continue but convincing him of his own healing powers makes him more self-sufficient and less likely to tyrannise those around him.

Watch this short news extract about a production of the play performed in Paris. Here we see a version of the final ‘ceremony’ where they pretend to make Argan a doctor. We also see them rehearsing this. We then see a filmic interpretation from Le Roi danse (2000) of the ceremony.


Information:
La Comédie-Française : A theatre.
The Comédie-Française was founded by a decree of Louis XIV on 24 August 1680 to merge the only two rival Parisian acting troupes of the time, the troupe of the hôtel Guénégaud and that of the hôtel de Bourgogne. The Bourgogne was actually Paris’ first permanent theatre, built in 1548. At this time it had exclusive rights to stage mystery plays (plays about Bible stories and often featuring scenes of the life of Christ) in the city.
In 1680 the new Comédie-Française, its theatre and company of actors got sole rights to perform plays in the capital. The Revolution changed this and got rid of this monopoly. Nonetheless, the Comédie Française still survives, supported by the state to preserve, perform and advance the nation’s theatrical heritage. Since 1799 the theatre has been based at the Salle Richelieu (this is near the Louvre).

Mise en scène- directed (for a show)

Watch the video again. Listen to what the actor and the choreographer say.

Section 1.

1. You will hear the actor Alain Pralon say :
‘L’humanité dans le comique, elle est beaucoup plus difficile de trouver que dans la tragédie’.
What does this mean?
2. Sylvie Mayer, choreographer, says:
‘Il n’y a pas de techniques de danse particulières puisqu’ils sont des comédiens et pas des danseurs. Donc c’est vraiment quelque chose que j’invente avec eux.’
What does this mean?

Vocab:
comédiens- actors
puisque- since
Donc- So/therefore
Eux- them.

3. The voice over tells us that owing to
‘sa difficulté, la comédie française joue pourtant rarement la version dansée et chantée’.
What does this mean? Why are there two ‘e’s at the end of ‘dansée and ‘chantée’?

Vocab:
pourtant- yet/although/however
rarement- rarely

Section 2

The scenes we will be focusing on today come from the third act. Trying to steer him away from his money-grabbing doctors, the maid decides she will disguise herself as ‘médecin’ and comes to give her prognosis of Argan’s condition.
Let us have a look at this scene and then read the dialogue more closely.

The man sitting in the pink nightgown is Argan.
The man standing up is his brother Béralde.
The woman dressed in the garb of a doctor of the time is his maid Toinette.
Argan notes how similar the doctor looks to Toinette!

Online resource:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GPlRoPcWQM

SCÈNE VIII
TOINETTE en médecin, ARGAN, BÉRALDE. TOINETTE, en médecin.— Monsieur, agréez que je vienne vous rendre visite, et vous offrir mes petits services pour toutes les saignées, et les purgations, dont vous aurez besoin.
ARGAN.— Monsieur, je vous suis fort obligé. Par ma foi, voilà Toinette elle-même.
TOINETTE.— Monsieur, je vous prie de m’excuser, j’ai oublié de donner une commission à mon valet, je reviens tout à l’heure.
ARGAN.— Eh! ne diriez-vous pas que c’est effectivement Toinette?
BÉRALDE.— Il est vrai que la ressemblance est tout à fait grande. Mais ce n’est pas la première fois qu’on a vu de ces sortes de choses, et les histoires ne sont pleines que de ces jeux de la nature.
ARGAN.— Pour moi, j’en suis surpris, et...

Comprehension A.
Toinette is disguised as a ............
Why does she say she has come?
Vocab
les saignées- blood-lettings
les purgations- purgings
Argan thinks the doctor looks exactly like his maid Toinette (‘Eh ! ne diriez-vous pas c’est effectivement Toinette ?). What does Béralde say to hide the truth ?

Vocab/structures
Ne... que- are only (in this context, are indeed)
Jeux de la nature- tricks of nature/freaks of nature

SCÈNE IX
TOINETTE, ARGAN, BÉRALDE. TOINETTE quitte son habit de médecin si promptement qu’il est difficile de croire que ce soit elle qui a paru en médecin.— Que voulez-vous, Monsieur?
ARGAN.— Comment?
TOINETTE.— Ne m’avez-vous pas appelé?
ARGAN.— Moi? non.
TOINETTE.— Il faut donc que les oreilles m’aient corné. (My ears must have tingled)
ARGAN.— Demeure un peu ici pour voir comme ce médecin te ressemble.
TOINETTE, en sortant, dit.— Oui, vraiment, j’ai affaire là-bas, et je l’ai assez vu.
ARGAN.— Si je ne les voyais tous deux, je croirais que ce n’est qu’un.
BÉRALDE.— J’ai lu des choses surprenantes de ces sortes de ressemblances, et nous en avons vu de notre temps où tout le monde s’est trompé.
ARGAN.— Pour moi, j’aurais été trompé à celle-là, et j’aurais juré que c’est la même personne.

Comprehension B
What does Toinette do so as to fool Argan into thinking that there is both the doctor and herself in the house ?
Argan asks her to stay. What is the verb (in the imperative (command form)) that he says ?
Does she stay ?

Verbs...
Argan expresses his astonishment.
He uses a construction with if (si) ... Let’s look at this more closely.
In English we say e.g
If I was/were ..., I would....
In French the ‘si’ clause has the imperfect tense and the next clause the conditional.
Let’s see this operating here :

Si je ne les voyais tous deux, je croirais que ce n’est qu’un.
What is the infinitive of the verb voyais- (e.g the infinitive of étais is être) ?
What is the infinitive of the verb croirais ?

Can you fill in the blanks to translate the full sentence ?

If I were not ..... ...at the two of them, I would...... ..that there was only one of them.
Vocab
Se tromper – to be mistaken/taken in

Argan expresses how he would have been taken in and would have thought they were the same person if he didn’t know there were two of them (the funny thing is, of course, there is only one of them so even though he thinks he is seeing clearly he is actually being deceived).

Let’s examine the tenses he employs here in describing how he believes he could have been deceived if he didn’t know better:

Pour moi, j’aurais été trompé à celle-là, et j’aurais juré que c’est la même personne.
Aurais comes from avoir and is the first person conditional. The été is a past participle so together they form the conditional perfect (here: would have been)
So the first part j’aurais été trompé means: I would have been deceived/tricked/conned (trompé)

Translate the next clause:
et j’aurais juré que c’est la même personne.
and I …………………………………….
Jurer- to swear

SCÈNE X
TOINETTE, en médecin, ARGAN, BÉRALDE.
TOINETTE, en médecin.— Monsieur, je vous demande pardon de tout mon cœur.
ARGAN.— Cela est admirable!
TOINETTE.— Vous ne trouverez pas mauvaise, s’il vous plaît, la curiosité que j’ai eue de voir un illustre malade comme vous êtes, et votre réputation qui s’étend partout, peut excuser la liberté que j’ai prise.
ARGAN.— Monsieur, je suis votre serviteur.
TOINETTE.— Je vois, Monsieur, que vous me regardez fixement. Quel âge croyez-vous bien que j’aie?
ARGAN.— Je crois que tout au plus vous pouvez avoir vingt-six, ou vingt-sept ans.
TOINETTE.— Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah! J’en ai quatre-vingt-dix.
ARGAN.— Quatre-vingt-dix?
TOINETTE.— Oui. Vous voyez un effet des secrets de mon art, de me conserver ainsi frais et vigoureux.
ARGAN.— Par ma foi voilà un beau jeune vieillard pour quatre-vingt-dix ans.
TOINETTE.— Je suis médecin passager, qui vais de ville en ville, de province en province, de royaume en royaume, pour chercher d’illustres matières à ma capacité, pour trouver des malades dignes de m’occuper, capables d’exercer les grands, et beaux secrets que j’ai trouvés dans la médecine. Je dédaigne de m’amuser à ce menu fatras de maladies ordinaires, à ces bagatelles de rhumatismes et de fluxions, à ces fiévrottes, à ces vapeurs, et à ces migraines. Je veux des maladies d’importance, de bonnes fièvres continues, avec des transports au cerveau, de bonnes fièvres pourprées, de bonnes pestes, de bonnes hydropisies formées, de bonnes pleurésies, avec des inflammations de poitrine, c’est là que je me plais, c’est là que je triomphe; et je voudrais, Monsieur, que vous eussiez toutes les maladies que je viens de dire, que vous fussiez abandonné de tous les médecins, désespéré, à l’agonie, pour vous montrer l’excellence de mes remèdes, et l’envie que j’aurais de vous rendre service.
ARGAN.— Je vous suis obligé, Monsieur, des bontés que vous avez pour moi.
TOINETTE.— Donnez-moi votre pouls. Allons donc, que l’on batte comme il faut. Ahy, je vous ferai bien aller comme vous devez. Hoy, ce pouls-là fait l’impertinent; je vois bien que vous ne me connaissiez pas encore. Qui est votre médecin?
ARGAN.— Monsieur Purgon.
TOINETTE.— Cet homme-là n’est point écrit sur mes tablettes entre les grands médecins. De quoi, dit-il, que vous êtes malade?
ARGAN.— Il dit que c’est du foie, et d’autres disent que c’est de la rate.
TOINETTE.— Ce sont tous des ignorants, c’est du poumon que vous êtes malade. ARGAN.— Du poumon?
TOINETTE.— Oui. Que sentez-vous?
ARGAN.— Je sens de temps en temps des douleurs de tête.
TOINETTE.— Justement, le poumon.
ARGAN.— Il me semble parfois que j’ai un voile devant les yeux.
TOINETTE.— Le poumon.
ARGAN.— J’ai quelquefois des maux de cœur.
TOINETTE.— Le poumon.
ARGAN.— Je sens parfois des lassitudes par tous les membres.
TOINETTE.— Le poumon.
ARGAN.— Et quelquefois il me prend des douleurs dans le ventre, comme si c’était des coliques.
TOINETTE.— Le poumon. Vous avez appétit à ce que vous mangez?
ARGAN.— Oui, Monsieur.
TOINETTE.— Le poumon. Vous aimez à boire un peu de vin?
ARGAN.— Oui, Monsieur.
TOINETTE.— Le poumon. Il vous prend un petit sommeil après le repas, et vous êtes bien aise de dormir?
ARGAN.— Oui, Monsieur.
TOINETTE.— Le poumon, le poumon, vous dis-je. Que vous or donne votre médecin pour votre nourriture?
ARGAN.— Il m’ordonne du potage.
TOINETTE.— Ignorant.
ARGAN.— De la volaille.
TOINETTE.— Ignorant.
ARGAN.— Du veau.
TOINETTE.— Ignorant.
ARGAN.— Des bouillons.
TOINETTE.— Ignorant.
ARGAN.— Des œufs frais.
TOINETTE.— Ignorant.
ARGAN.— Et le soir de petits pruneaux pour lâcher le ventre.
TOINETTE.— Ignorant.
ARGAN.— Et surtout de boire mon vin fort trempé.
TOINETTE.— Ignorantus, ignoranta, ignorantum. Il faut boire votre vin pur; et pour épaissir votre sang qui est trop subtil, il faut manger de bon gros bœuf, de bon gros porc, de bon fromage de Hollande, du gruau et du riz, et des marrons et des oubliés, pour coller et conglutiner. Votre médecin est une bête. Je veux vous en envoyer un de ma main, et je viendrai vous voir de temps en temps, tandis que je serai en cette ville.
ARGAN.— Vous m’obligez beaucoup.
TOINETTE.— Que diantre faites-vous de ce bras-là?
ARGAN.— Comment?
TOINETTE.— Voilà un bras que je me ferais couper tout à l’heure, si j’étais que de vous.
ARGAN.— Et pourquoi?
TOINETTE.— Ne voyez-vous pas qu’il tire à soi toute la nourriture, et qu’il empêche ce côté-là de profiter?
ARGAN.— Oui, mais j’ai besoin de mon bras.
TOINETTE.— Vous avez là aussi un œil droit que je me ferais crever, si j’étais en votre place.
ARGAN.— Crever un œil?
TOINETTE.— Ne voyez-vous pas qu’il incommode l’autre, et lui dérobe sa nourriture? Croyez-moi,
faites-vous-le crever au plus tôt, vous en verrez plus clair de l’œil gauche.
ARGAN.— Cela n’est pas pressé.
TOINETTE.— Adieu. Je suis fâché de vous quitter si tôt, mais il faut que je me trouve à une grande consultation qui se doit faire, pour un homme qui mourut hier.
ARGAN.— Pour un homme qui mourut hier?
TOINETTE.— Oui, pour aviser, et voir ce qu’il aurait fallu lui faire pour le guérir. Jusqu’au revoir.
ARGAN.— Vous savez que les malades ne reconduisent point.
BÉRALDE.— Voilà un médecin vraiment, qui paraît fort habile.
ARGAN.— Oui, mais il va un peu bien vite.
BÉRALDE.— Tous les grands médecins sont comme cela.
ARGAN.— Me couper un bras, et me crever un œil, afin que l’autre se porte mieux? J’aime bien mieux qu’il ne se porte pas si bien. La belle opération, de me rendre borgne et manchot!

Comprehension C.
How old does the doctor (Toinette) say he is? What does he attribute his youthful appearance to?
He scorns the following diseases: de maladies ordinaires, à ces bagatelles de rhumatismes et de fluxions, à ces fiévrottes, à ces vapeurs, et à ces migraines.
He is interested in the following diseases:
de bonnes fièvres continues, avec des transports au cerveau, de bonnes fièvres pourprées, de bonnes pestes, de bonnes hydropisies formées, de bonnes pleurésies, avec des inflammations de poitrine,
Can you translate the words in bold?

Teachers
You can use this as an opportunity to revise health/illness role-plays of going to the doctor and parts of the body.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/audio/french/ (Section on Role-plays Doctors).

Comprehension D
Toinette takes Argan’s pulse. What is the word for ‘pulse’ in French?
Argan says his former doctors attribute his illness to problems with his ‘foie’ or ‘rate’. What are these?
Where does Toinette say all his problems lie?
Describe the symptoms that Argan complains of having.
What is Toinette’s explanation to each of these?
Does Argan say he eats and drinks?
What have the doctors recommended he eat?
What does Toinette advise instead?
Toinette then turns to discuss amputation. What does she suggest should be chopped off? What else does she suggest pulling out?
How does Argan feel about this?
What do you find funny in this scene? (Look out for repetitions of words, movement on stage, reactions, who is in control in the scene and the effect this has, the audience’s perspective and that of Argan).

Thinking about the play

The Body
Much of this play focuses on the physical body, with grotesque bodily functions and fluids (purgings, urine, rectal injections (clystères) which are presented so as to disgust us, make us giggle and remind us of the corporeal (bodily) dimension of our existence. Comedy often emphasises this, especially farce (with its tumbles, routines, chases and choreographed moves).

In the same way that Argan thinks his sick body needs a remedy, we can see that the other members of the household see the situation as diseased and need to find a remedy/solution to purge themselves of the problematic behaviour of Argan.

Trickery
A common theme is the comic mechanism. In many of Molière’s play we see people disguising themselves, lying to others, hiding and thinking up intricate ruses to get what they want. In *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* for example, Monsieur Jourdain wants to marry his daughter to someone well-born. The man she loves does not fit the bill, so her mother, maid and her beloved all come together and fool Monsieur Jourdain into thinking that the daughter’s beloved is the son of a sultan and they disguise themselves in elaborate costumes and pretend to speak Arabic. They perform a ceremony, the ‘mamaouachi’ where they fool Monsieur Jourdain into believing they are bestowing him with an illustrious title.

What examples of trickery can we find in *Le Malade imaginaire*?

Dramatic Irony
When characters trick other characters on stage, the audience is usually aware of the truth, of the plan to trick and see how one character is manipulating and fooling another. The term ‘dramatic irony’ is used to describe a situation on stage in which there is a gap between a character’s reading of a situation and its actual significance (known to the other character playing the trick and the audience). This type of asymmetry where we have a different perspective from the character/victim of the ruse generates a unique kind of pleasure. We can smirk at their foolishness, as we know the truth of the situation, we can enjoy the stratagem unfolding whilst possessing a superior position over the one being fooled.

The fact that it seems obvious to the other members of the household and to the audience that the doctors are abusing Argan, makes him all the more ridiculous and blind in his obsession. The fact that we know that Argan cannot just become a doctor by putting on the robes makes us laugh at how serious he takes the ceremony.

Satire
The ceremony can also point to another comical device, it is not just Argan who is the butt of the comedy. Molière may also be suggesting that doctors are just fakes themselves, dressing up and adopting elaborate language to convince others of their expertise. In this way Molière is satirizing (poking fun at a specific institution or individual) the medical profession. Throughout the play he has not shown doctors in a favourable light (they are greedy, tyrannical and content to play up to Argan’s phobias). The final scene of the play can therefore been read as a climax of Molière’s mocking portrayal of these individuals.
Other scenes you might like to act out:

*Le Malade imaginaire:*
Act II.8, when Argan is trying to glean information from his youngest daughter Louison
Act III.5, when Monsieur Purgon curses Argan for snubbing his treatment
Act III.13 and 14, when Angélique, the daughter thinks her father is dead
Act III.15, when they perform the ceremony in Latin to ‘make’ Argan a doctor

*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme:*
Act IV.5, the mufti and mamouchi celebration to trick Monsieur Jourdain

*Dom Juan*
Act II.4, when Dom Juan has to juggle two women at the same time

*L’Avare*
Act IV.7, when Harpagon (the miser) discovers his money chest has gone missing

*Le Tartuffe*
Act I.4, when Orgon (the head of the household, obsessed with Tartuffe) wants to know how Tartuffe is and Dorine (the maid) explains that it is his wife for whom he should be concerned)

**Answer Key for questions**

*Section 1*
1. ‘Humanity in comedy is much harder to find than in tragedy’. 
(elle), it, refers to ‘l’humanité’

2. ‘There are no particular dance moves since they are actors and not dancers. So, it’s really something that I think up with them’.

3. Owing to its difficulty, the comédie française rarely performs the singing and dancing version of the play. The extra ‘e’ on each of the words shows that these adjectives are feminine, agreeing with the feminine noun they are describing (la version).

*Section 2*

**Comprehension A**

*Answer Key*
Toinette is disguised as a doctor. She says she has come to perform all the blood-letting and purging that he requires.

**Comprehension B**

*Answer Key*
Toinette leaves the room, changes back into her normal clothes and comes back in the room saying that she thought Argan had called for her.

‘Demeure’.

No she does not stay. She says she has things to do and that she has seen enough.

Voyais-voir
Croirais-croire
If I were not looking at the the two of them, I would think/believe that there was only one of them.
I would have sworn

Comprehension C

Answer Key
1. He says he is 90 (‘J’en ai quatre-vingt-dix’). He attributes his youthful appearance to the secrets of his art which keep him looking so fresh and vibrant.

maladies ordinaires, ordinary diseases
de rhumatismes rhumatism
et à ces migraines.
bonnes fièvres continues, serious continual fevers
cerveau brain
fièvres pourprées purple fevers
poitrine chest

Comprehension D

Answer Key
Toinette takes Argan’s pulse. What is the word for ‘pulse’ in French ? ‘pouls’

Argan says his former doctors attribute his illness to problems with his ‘foie’ or ‘rate’. What are these?
Liver and spleen

Where does Toinette say all his problems lie?
In his lung (‘poumon’)

Describe the symptoms that Argan complains of having.
Sometimes he has headaches, sometimes it is as if he has a veil over his eyes, sometimes he has pains in his heart, sometimes he feels weakness in his arms and legs and sometimes he has pains in his stomach as if he had colic.

What is Toinette’s explanation to each of these?
His lung

Does Argan say he eats and drinks?
Yes

What have the doctors recommended he eat?
Soup, poultry, veal, broths, fresh eggs and little prunes

What does Toinette advise instead?
Pure wine, good fat beef, good fat pork, good cheese from Holland, gruel, rice, chestnuts and wafers.

Toinette then turns to discuss amputation. What does she suggest should be chopped off?
What else does she suggest pulling out?
One of his arms. An eye.

How does Argan feel about this?
That it seems a little bit hasty. He says he needs his arm. He says it seems rushed to take his eye out.
When the doctor is gone he voices his exasperation expressing confusion that the doctor would chop off an arm and take out an eye so that his other arm and eye work better. He says he would prefer them not to be working well if that means they won’t be amputated. He expresses indignation that the operation could leave him a one-eyed one-armed man.
What do you find funny in this scene? (Look out for repetitions of words, movement on stage, reactions, who is in control in the scene and the effect this has, the audience’s perspective and that of Argan).

Funny:
Toinette dressed up fooling Argan (rushing in and out)
Her persona and all the details she makes up.
The astonishment, and credulity of Argan
Toinette is in control here, manipulating Argan. The way in which the servant controls the Master shows the subversion of normal hierarchical systems and seems rebellious and daring.
The audience knows that Toinette is tricking Argan can laugh at him, sharing the superior position of Toinette.
Argan is ignorant. He is blind (as he fears he will be if the ‘doctor’ takes out an eye) because he cannot see the truth. He is not fully in control of himself or his body (as he fears he will be if the ‘doctor’ amputates his arm) because he is being manipulated like a puppet by Toinette.