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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide

The Misanthrope

by Molière

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms

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The Misanthrope

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define irony and satire and point out instances in this play where they occur.
2. identify and discuss the targets of Molière's satire:
 - the types of people he satirizes
 - the aspects of his society that he satirizes
3. discuss the artistry of Molière and comment on those features in Molière's plays that are universal.
4. discuss and trace the development of the following themes in this play:
 - the happy life consists in avoiding extremes and pursuing all things in moderation.
 - living in this world involves accepting it with all its shortcomings.
5. identify and comment on the techniques Molière uses to create his comedy.
6. define the term *foil* and explain how Éliante and Philinte act as foils in this play.
7. define the word *misanthrope* and discuss the character Alceste in relation to this term. In doing so, prove that Alceste is or is not a misanthrope by citing comments or incidents from the play.
8. define the term *farce* and point to what extent, if any, this comedy contains elements of farce.
9. in an essay, prove whether the satire in this play is an incidental part of the play or at the heart of it.

The Misanthrope

Questions For Essay and Discussion

1. Define and discuss the three types of irony; supply an example of each from the play.
2. The aim of satire is said to be to reform through ridicule. In the play, who or what is being ridiculed?
3. This play is considered one of the world's great comedies. Identify those things in the play you find humorous, and discuss the techniques Molière uses to create his comedy.
4. Define the term *satire* and distinguish between the forms of satire. State whether the tone of the satire in this play is meant to be one of bitterness or tolerant amusement; support your opinion by citing comments and incidents from the text.
5. In an essay, point out what there is about this play that makes it as popular today in the United States as it was three hundred years ago in France.
6. In an essay, support the following thesis by citing comments and incidents from the play: "The happy life is one of moderation."
7. Define the terms *sarcasm* and *foil*, and illustrate your definitions by citing comments and/or incidents from the play.
8. Write an argument for or against the following thesis: "While Alceste is not a misanthrope at the beginning of the play, by the play's end, he is a complete misanthrope."
9. In a paragraph, define the term *farce*, and explain why this play is or is not a farce.
10. Using examples to illustrate, explain why the characters in this play are called "stock characters" or stereotypes.

stifle – to smother

unction – a notion, an idea

vagaries – whims, notions

vexation – a frustration, an exasperation

whim – a caprice, a fancy

Zounds – a mild curse (a shortening of the words “God’s wounds”)

1. As this scene opens, why does Alceste chastise Philinte?

2. Alceste says that “preference must be based on esteem, and to esteem every one is to esteem no one.” Would you agree with that statement? What is Philinte’s response?

3. Would you agree with Philinte when he says, “...it is well to conceal your feelings sometimes”?

4. For what reason does Alceste say it is his intention to break with all mankind?

Act II – Scenes V, VI, and VII

Vocabulary

abate – to lessen, decrease
abominable – horrible, dreadful; hated
assenting – agreeing
avowed – admitted
cavil – a complaint
censure – to condemn; disapprove
condescension – arrogance, contempt
cudgels – sticks, clubs
culpable – faulty, guilty
diadem – a crown
esteemed – respected
execrable – terrible, awful
extol – to praise
gainsaying – arguing, disputing
grimaces – sneers, smirks
impertinently – boldly; shamelessly
impute – to credit, ascribe
inveighs – complains; criticizes
obsolete – old-fashioned
raillery – kidding, teasing
reticent – discreet
slandorous – insulting
slattern – a loose woman
vies – competes

1. As this scene opens, we see Alceste has changed his mind and is staying. What does he seem determined to do?

2. Although she is a terrible gossip, why do readers find Célimène's comments about other people clever?

Act V – Scenes I and II

Vocabulary

arrant – complete, extreme
devising – planning
disobliging – rude, discourteous
dissimulation – dishonesty, subterfuge
fluent – confident; eloquent
incensed – angered
intimations – suggestions
knave – a scoundrel, a rascal
peremptorily – emphatically; allowing no contradiction
posterity – future generations, descendents
probity – integrity
tractable – meek; obedient
trumped-up – invented, made-up

1. We learn that another court case has gone against Alceste. He claims that he lost the case even though justice was on his side. Do you suppose that is true?

2. Alceste tells us that Oronte has also conspired against him and that he, Alceste, “shall never obtain Oronte’s sincere forgiveness because [he] did not think that [Oronte’s] sonnet was good.” How is Alceste still missing the point?

3. With what comparison does Alceste conclude his speech?
