French Neoclassical Ideals

A. Decorum: a term which meant that all dramatic characters should behave in ways based on their age, profession, sex, rank, and the like. Each Character should follow this set behavior.

B. Verisimilitude: all drama was to be “true to life.” Thus, because they were not observed in everyday life, such things as ghosts, apparitions, and supernatural events were forbidden.

C. The Unities: Time, Place, Action.
   1. Unity of time: Required that the dramatic action in a play should not exceed the 24-hour rule. A few radical neoclassicists argued that time should be limited to 12 hours. Their argument for unity of time was based on their belief that audiences could not accept a long passage of time as “truthful”.
   2. Unity of place: restricted the action of a play to one locale.
   3. Unity of action: required one central story, involving a relatively small group of characters. No Sub-plots.

D. Purity of Dramatic Types: Comedy and Tragedy should not be mixed. Tragedy dealt with royalty, Comedy dealt with common people; Comedy must resolve happily, Tragedy must resolve calamitously.

E. No deus ex machina.

F. No soliloquy

G. Purpose of Drama: Teach and Please
   Must teach a Moral Lesson and entertain at the same time.
French Neoclassicism

1. When was the French renaissance?

1630 to 1700.

2. Who is France's greatest comic playwright?

Jean Baptiste Poquelin (1622-1673), better known as Moliere.

3. Why did Jean Baptiste Poquelin change his name to Moliere?

Jean Baptiste Poquelin's father was a minor official (royal upholsterer and furniture maker) in the court of King Louis XIII (reigned 1610-1643). When Jean Baptiste decided to become an actor, (his father wanted him to become a lawyer) and organized the Theatre Illustre in 1643, his father requested that he change his name so Jean would not embarrass either his family or the King's court. Acting was still an unacceptable profession in France.

4. What two types of comedies did he write?

Moliere's ten major works are divided into two groups: (1) the farcical comedies (primarily influenced by the Commedia) and the (2) high comedies (comedy of character).

5. List the title of one major work from each group?

Farcical comedy-- *The Doctor In Spite of Himself* (1666), *The Tricks of Scapine* (1671) (sometimes known as Scapino

Comedy of character-- *Tartuffe* (1664), See the Play Synopsis on page A-3 in the Appendix. *The Miser* (1668), *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673)
6. How did he die? Where?

He collapsed, on stage, during the fourth performance of *The Imaginary Invalid* and died later that evening at his home.

7. Why was he buried in a private ceremony?

Because he had not reconciled with the church and did not die in a state of grace. Molière was an actor, as well as a playwright, and all actors had been excommunicated from the church since the middle ages. Since he died before he had a chance to confess his sins, he could not be "legally" buried in hallowed ground. It was only after the intervention of King Louis XIV, that his body was buried after dark in a private (and probably secret) ceremony in the graveyard at St. Joseph's in the parish of *St Eustache* in Paris.

In 1792, after the French Revolution and the establishment of the Empire, his remains were moved to Alexandre Lenoir's newly established *Musée des Monuments Français* (Museum of French Monuments). In 1817 his remains were again moved, this time to their final resting place in the *Cemetery Père Lachaise* in Paris. (Note: There are those who believe that when Molière's body was exhumed in 1792 the wrong grave was opened and it is therefore not his body in the monument at *Père Lachaise*.)

The Académie Française

The *French Academy*, is the pre-eminent French learned body on matters pertaining to the French language. The Académie was officially established in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu, the chief minister to King Louis XIII. Suppressed in 1793 during the French Revolution, it was restored in 1803 by Napoleon Bonaparte (the Académie considers itself to have been suspended, not suppressed, during the revolution. It is the oldest of the five académies of the *Institut de France*.

The Académie consists of forty members, known as *immortels* (immortals). New members are elected by the members of the Académie itself. Académicians hold office for life, but they may be removed for misconduct. The body has the task of acting as an official authority on the language; it is charged with publishing an official dictionary of the language. Its rulings, however, are only advisory; not binding on either the public or the government.