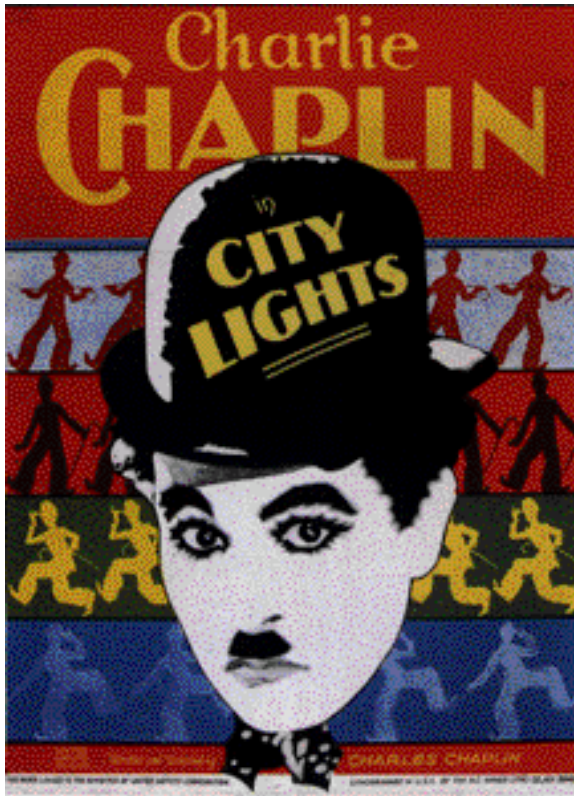


Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____ Due: _____



***City Lights* (1931) directed by Charlie Chaplin**

Cast

Charlie Chaplin as The Tramp
Virginia Cherrill as The Blind Girl
Florence Lee as The Blind Girl's Grandmother
Harry Myers as The Eccentric Millionaire
Hank Mann as A Prizefighter
Al Ernest Garcia as The Butler

Crew

Director: Charlie Chaplin
Producer: David Weisbart
Writer: Charlie Chaplin
Editor: William H. Ziegler
Directors of Photography: Ernest Haller
Music: Leonard Rosenman

Distribution/Studio Company: United Artists
MPAA Rating: PG-13
Running Time: 87 minutes

Background and Introduction to *City Lights*

By 1931, most filmmakers in Hollywood embraced sound in cinema, resigned themselves to their inevitable popularity, or simply didn't make films anymore, yet filmmaker Charlie Chaplin still believed that a script he had been working on since 1928 would still work as a silent film. Some critics suggest that Chaplin was afraid that his beloved and iconic character, the Little Tramp, would not be as successful in sound films. Although Chaplin made *City Lights* a technical crossover because of its soundtrack, synchronized music, sound effects, and some unintelligible sounds that copied speech patterns, the film is mostly considered a silent film because dialogue is presented on title cards. Whether reluctant to change or stubbornly committed to the silent medium, Chaplin maintained his vision and released *City Lights* to nearly universal critical and public success. The film earned \$5 million at the box office (which would be around \$78 million if adjusted to inflation today), and most film buffs consider *City Lights* to be not only one of Chaplin's best accomplishments but also one of the greatest films ever made. The film is also Chaplin's personal favorite out of all his works.

While many know of Chaplin's success as an actor, many do not know that he also wrote, produced, directed, and edited his films. For *City Lights*, Chaplin even composed the film's score himself. To be frank, he was a Renaissance filmmaker, a noted perfectionist who meticulously crafted every aspect of his films. Compared to other directors, he would take several "takes" and some scenes could be shot over weeks. As his own producer and distributor (part owner of United Artists), Chaplin could do whatever he wanted, which usually worked out well for him artistically, the business financially, and film lovers culturally.

City Lights, whose plot simply revolves around the Tramp's adventures with a blind girl and millionaire, is currently ranked as the 11th greatest American film of all time by the American Film Institute for its 2007 edition of *100 Years... 100 Movies*. AFI also chose the film as the best romantic comedy of American cinema in 2008's "10 Top 10". The Tramp was number 38 on AFI's list of the 50 Best Heroes, and the film ranked at 38th among the funniest films, 10th among the greatest love stories, and 33rd on the most inspiring films. The film is also considered a favorite by many filmmakers, most notably Orson Welles, who directed what many critics believe to be the *greatest* film ever made, *Citizen Kane*. What I am interested in seeing is if the film holds up and is timeless in its pantomime to *you* and your peers, or is the film simply too dated and just an overhyped piece of film history? (All images/screenshots © United Artists, 1931.)

Comprehension Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions during or after the movie.

1. What **sound effect** or **musical instrument** is applied to the mayor and other people who speak, and what is the effect of this choice? Why did Chaplin choose it?
2. You'll note the Tramp's physical humor quickly when he attempts to get off the monument. What jokes do you note? Which ones humor you, and which ones don't?
3. Note how Chaplin walks. How is even this mere action humorous? Note the importance of body language and what it expresses, especially in a silent film, throughout the film.
4. How does the blind girl mistake the Tramp for someone rich? Note this **motif** of mistaken identities and misunderstandings throughout the film. What is the effect of this **motif**?



5. The **close-ups** of the Blind Girl are some of the first that we see. What is conveyed in them?
6. When the Tramp attempts to save the rich man's life, note the **sound effect** that accompanies several movements (e.g. the rock hitting the Tramp's foot, both men falling in the water, etc.). This is called **Mickey-mousing**, a term we'll learn in Ch. 5 – Sound. What is the effect of these **sounds** on you, the viewer, and how do they enhance the film?
7. What does the flower that the Tramp receives from the Blind Girl **symbolize** to him?
8. How do the Tramp and the Eccentric Millionaire serve as **foils**? What characteristics does each possess that contradicts against the other? How do the two complement or balance one another?



9. How is the Eccentric Millionaire a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde character? How does the relationship between him and the Tramp change throughout the film?
10. What **conflicts** and obstacles do the Tramp and Blind Girl counter?
11. Who wins the match between the white and black boxer? Why is this outcome necessary socioculturally?
12. Note the **fast motion** in the boxing scene and other action sequences in the film. What is the effect of this mechanical distortion of time?
13. How does Chaplin film the Tramp's fantasy sequence in between matches? What do we all infer all motivates the Tramp? Note the **mise en scene** matching of where the characters are placed in both shots.
14. Why does the Tramp go to jail? Why is this plot point necessary for **characterization** and the **plot**?
15. A **resolution** for the Eccentric Millionaire is never provided. Why does Chaplin neglect to resolve his relationship with the Tramp in a positive manner, and what **theme** may he be implying with this choice?
16. Are the Tramp and the Blind Girl **dynamic** or **static characters** by the **resolution**? Why?
17. The film is considered a romance, but the film doesn't explicitly show the Tramp and the Blind Girl kissing or implying a budding romantic relationship. Why does Chaplin end the film this way?
18. **Close-ups** of the Tramp are rare. What is implied in this **close-up**, the last shot in the film?



Discussion Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions after you watch the film.

1. The film is filled with a series of comic vignettes. Does the **plot** of the film work cohesively as the sum of these comic vignettes, or does the **plot** feel simply like a loose strand of vignettes? How does this affect the film as a whole to you?
2. What are the serious issues or topics do you note that Chaplin analyzes or exposes in the film through comedy? For example, consider the relationship between the poor and rich.
3. Much of the humor within the film comes from misconceptions, mistaken identities, and misunderstandings, especially when someone is intoxicated. What examples are there of this **motif**, why are they humorous, and what **theme** about human nature is Chaplin exposing or ridiculing?
4. Chaplin's mother died during pre-production and stalled the film for several weeks. Psychologist Stephen Weissman has hypothesized that *City Lights* is highly autobiographical with the Blind Girl representing Chaplin's mother while the Millionaire represents Chaplin's father. Given this interpretation, analyze how the Blind Girl is matronly and the Eccentric Millionaire is like a father towards the Tramp.
5. Charlie Chaplin's Tramp is one of the most widely recognized characters in cinema history. His costume also acted as the inspiration for clown and pantomime outfits today. **Chaplin said that his Tramp costume is "a contradiction."** Briefly identify how each garment contradicts another garment on his person.



In your opinion, is this outfit funny? Why or why not?