

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



Modern Times (1936) directed by Charlie Chaplin

Cast

Charlie Chaplin as A Factory Worker
Paulette Goddard as A Gamin

Crew

Director: Charlie Chaplin
Producer: Charlie Chaplin
Writer: Charlie Chaplin
Editor: Williard Nico

Directors of Photography: Ira H. Morgan and Roland Totheroh
Music: Charlie Chaplin and Alfred Newman

Distribution/Studio Company: United Artists
MPAA Rating: G (Based on 1972 Re-Release)
Running Time: 87 minutes

Background and Introduction to *Modern Times*

As some of you know from your history studies, the Great Depression hit America and the world in a very drastic way. Many people felt that big business and industrialization were the two biggest causes of the Great Depression. Those individuals felt that big business didn't care about the working men and women who made industrialization possible. Charlie Chaplin was one such person, and *Modern Times* is one of his funniest films, but it's also one of his most politically-themed films. The film doesn't paint a flattering picture of the industrial society, and the film spewed a lot of controversy when it was initially released, especially with companies who financed or shared stock in United Artists.

Some of you have read John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, which showcases how the Great Depression affected migrant, agricultural workers. Factory workers who dwelled in the city were affected, too, and a lot of them had just as much trouble in urban areas as those who did in rural areas. In fact, it can be argued that the plight of those who lived in the city was much more difficult than those who worked on farms because the concentration of people who lived in the cities was much higher in urban areas, thus making it more competitive to find labor. *Modern Times* is about one such factory worker, of course played by Charlie Chaplin, and his friendship with a slum girl who has also fallen on hard times. Chaplin's character, the Tramp, attempts to establish a home for him and the girl despite the obstacles that come their way.

Modern Times is also an allegory for the emergence of sound into cinema. By 1936, a lot of studio companies had already crossed over to making "talkies," but some were still reluctant to do so. These filmmakers saw the invention of sound into cinema as a precursor to something bad or taboo, especially filmmakers who were famous in the Silent Era (a movie that focuses on how the sound development affected famous silent film actors is *Sunset Boulevard*). Some actors and actresses were particularly vulnerable because they lacked the vocal prowess to be successful in "talkies." Although Charlie had a great voice, people fell in love with his Tramp character in the Silent Era, and many felt that his pantomime could not be as successful in a talkie. Although *Modern Times* isn't a "talkie," it does feature a synchronized soundtrack with a musical score and sound effects. Note *how* sound is used and *why* it is used throughout the film. The Tramp finally speaks near the end of this film, but even in his first onscreen vocalization, the Tramp delivers another joke about sound in cinema. Finally, notice the plethora of comedic styles and techniques Chaplin uses and what messages he delivers through his comedy. *Modern Times* is Chaplin's last "silent" film, and it marks the end of "classic Chaplin" in the silent era.

Grammar Mini-Lesson – Relative Pronouns – That vs. Who, Who vs. Whom, and That vs. Which

Relative pronouns express a relationship between two different clauses in a sentence. Because pronouns take the place of nouns, **relative pronouns** *relate* to a noun that is stated earlier in a sentence.

Example: Mr. Thompson is the teacher **who** teaches film studies at our school.

In this sentence, **who** is the relative pronoun that refers back to the noun Mr. Thompson.

Here are the three most important rules to remember about relative pronouns:

1. Use **who** and **whom** for people, and **that**, **what** and **which** for things, places, ideas or emotions.

Examples: This is the girl **who** broke my heart.
This is the cheeseburger **that** clogged my arteries.

2. **Who** is used for subjects, giving the action in the clause they introduce. **Whom** is used for objects, receiving the action in the clause they introduce.

Examples: George Washington is the only president **who** didn't live in the White House.
George Washington is the president for **whom** the Washington Monument was built.

3. Use **that** in a *defining* or *essential* relative clause acting like an adjective. Use **which** in a *describing* or *non-essential* relative clause acting like an adjective.

Examples: The Washington Monument is the one monument **that** is an obelisk.
The Washington Monument, **which** is 555 feet high, honors George Washington.


Directions: Choose the correct relative pronoun in each sentence according to the rules stated above.

1. Charlie Chaplin, (that/who) is the star of *Modern Times*, was one of the greatest comedians.
2. The role (that/which/who) Chaplin is most famous for is “the Tramp,” a vagrant with the refined manners and dignity of a gentleman.
3. “The Tramp’s costume, (that/which) includes several differently sized garments, is a contradiction,” said Chaplin. Each element (that/which) he wears contradicts another garment. Contradiction or juxtaposition is one of the main tools (that/which) comedy is based on.
4. In 1916, The Mutual Film Corporation, the company (that/who/whom) Chaplin worked for, paid him \$670,000 to produce a dozen two-reel comedies.
5. Chaplin’s story improvisation and relentless perfectionism, (that/which) resulted in days of effort and thousands of feet of film being wasted, often proved very taxing for Chaplin, (that/which/who) in frustration would often lash out at his actors and crew, keep them waiting idly for hours or, in extreme cases, shutting down production altogether.
6. *Modern Times* was the first film where Chaplin's voice is heard, (that/which) takes place in the nonsense song at the end of the film. However, for most viewers it is still considered a silent film — and the end of an era.
7. Hetty Kelly was Chaplin's true first love, a dancer with (who/whom) he "instantly" fell in love when she was fifteen and he was nineteen. Unfortunately, she died of the Great Flu Pandemic in 1918.

8. Charlie Chaplin is a comedian for (who/whom) all clowns and mimes should credit.
9. Out of all the other silent film actors, no one seems to know (who/whom) Chaplin liked the most.
10. Charlie Chaplin is a comedian (who/whom) all clowns and mimes should credit.
11. Chaplin wondered to (who/whom) he should give the role of the Gamin. He chose Paulette Goddard.
12. Chaplin's politics, (that/which) seem moderate by some contemporary standards, were seen by many as communistic in the 1940s.
13. J. Edgar Hoover, (that/who/whom) had instructed the FBI to keep extensive secret files on Chaplin, tried to end his United States residency because Chaplin was considered a communist sympathizer.
14. When Chaplin came out of his exile to accept his Academy Award, he received the longest standing ovation in Academy Award history, (that/which) lasted a full five minutes.
15. In 1978, a small group of Polish mechanics (that/who/whom) wanted to extort money from Chaplin's family stole Chaplin's corpse. His body, (that/which) was reburied under two meters of concrete to prevent further attempts, was returned, and the mechanics were captured and arrested.
16. Do you know (who/whom) Chaplin consulted for music advice? Himself! He wrote his own scores.
17. Chaplin delivers great visual jokes to (whoever/whomever) is willing to watch his films.
18. Chaplin, (who/whom) his wives didn't trust, frequently dated a lot of his female co-stars.
19. Paulette Goddard, (who/whom) Chaplin discovered, went on to make several pictures for Paramount.
20. Pam, (that/who/whom) is on the television show *The Office*, dressed as Chaplin for Halloween.

Character Analysis – Understanding Costumes

Directions: Charlie Chaplin's Tramp is one of the most popular and widely recognized characters in cinema history. The Tramp's costume also acted as the inspiration for clown and pantomime outfits that continue to be popular 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?

Comprehension Questions

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

1. Similar to *Back to the Future*, what image and **motif** does Chaplin establish early in the film?



2. Using the film technique of editing, Chaplin makes a visual **metaphor** about workers in the opening shots when he cuts from workers to a herd of sheep. What does Chaplin suggest with this metaphor?

3. **Characterize** the president of the Electro Steel Company.



4. What is humorous about *the sale* of the eating machine? Who *or what* is *actually* making the sale?

5. What statement on technology does Chaplin make with the eating machine?



6. Why doesn't the Tramp want to leave prison? What is Chaplin saying about the prison system?

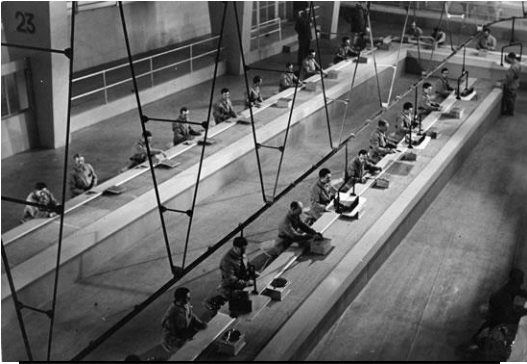
7. What happens when both the Tramp and the Gamin finally land a steady job together?

8. What advice does the Tramp offer the Gamin at the end of the film? What do you make of the ending of the film? Is it "a Hollywood ending" or not? Why?



Photography Review

Directions: To review the types of shots, angles, and lighting concepts we learned in chapter one, briefly explain the type of shot and angle for each shot. Afterwards, briefly explain why you think that Chaplin chose that particular shot and angle for that shot. Why is the shot effective?



Shot: _____

Angle: _____

Why did Chaplin choose the following shot and angle?



Shot: _____

Angle: _____

Why did Chaplin choose the following shot and angle?



Shot: _____

Angle: _____

Why did Chaplin choose the following shot and angle?



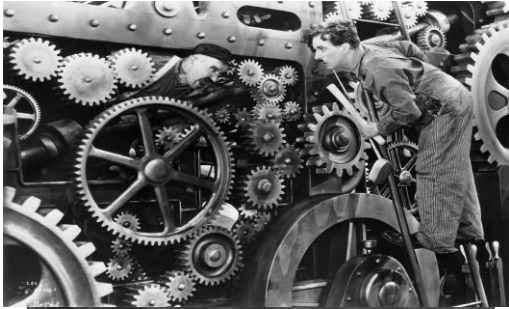
Shot: _____

Angle: _____

Why did Chaplin choose the following shot and angle?

Photography Review (continued)

Directions: To review the types of shots, angles, and lighting concepts we learned in chapter one, briefly explain the type of shot and angle for each shot. Afterwards, briefly explain why you think that Hitchcock chose that particular shot and angle for that shot. Why is the shot effective?



Shot: _____

Angle: _____

Why did Chaplin choose the following shot and angle?



Shot: _____

Angle: _____

Why did Chaplin choose the following shot and angle?



Shot: _____

Angle: _____

Why did Chaplin choose the following shot and angle?



Shot: _____

Angle: _____

Why did Chaplin choose the following shot and angle?

Grammar Answers from Page 3-4

1. who
2. that
3. which; that; that
4. that
5. which; who
6. which
7. whom
8. whom
9. whom
10. whom
11. whom
12. which
13. who
14. which
15. who; which
16. whom
17. whoever
18. whom
19. whom
20. who

Discussion Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions after you watch the film. We'll discuss them in a seminar.

1. Based on how Chaplin uses sound in his last "silent" film, what does *Modern Times* suggest about sound in cinema as well as other general technological advances?
2. Many industrial employees were offended by the way they were pretended, especially the portrayal of the president. Considering the Tramp's perseverance, is the film an attack on the growing industrial world, or is it one in favor of it? Cite evidence and scenes from the film.
3. How would you characterize the relationship between the Tramp and the Gamin? What do they provide one another? How?
4. How are the police force and the law portrayed in this film?
5. Write one political subtext or **theme** for *Modern Times* and explain it in detail.
6. This comedy features political subtexts. Do politics and comedies mix well together? In general, what are viewers supposed to do with political messages that are within films?