

Name:

Date:

Modern Times

(1936, directed by Charlie Chaplin)

This is a lighthearted satire of urban industrial life in the first half of the 20th century. *Modern Times* is acknowledged to be the last of the great silent movies. Although it does have some sound, there is no spoken dialogue.

Selected Awards: *1936 National Board of Review Awards*: Ten Best Films of the Year. This film has been selected for the National Film Registry as culturally, historically or aesthetically important.

Featured Actors: Charles Chaplin, Paulette Goddard, Henry Bergman, Stanley Sanford, Gloria DeHaven, Chester Conklin.

Helpful Background Info:

- The first assembly line in the U.S. was built by Henry Ford in the 1920s when he put car parts on a conveyor belt. The men worked on the parts as they passed by on the belt. The assembly line increased efficiency and reduced costs. Soon the assembly line spread throughout the manufacturing industry in countries throughout the world. As shown in the movie, work on an assembly line is highly repetitive and dehumanizing.
- During the Great Depression (1929 - 1939), the U.S. economy collapsed, many banks failed, and millions of people were thrown out of work. Full recovery occurred only as the U.S. geared up for war production just before World War II. The American labor movement first came into its own in the 1930s. There were strikes, marches, and demonstrations by workers as they sought better working conditions and wage increases. The police were often used to break up pro-union demonstrations and strikes. A few of the unions were led by communists and this frightened many people. However, opponents of unions often charged that anyone associated with a union was a communist just to discredit them. In *Modern Times*, the Little Tramp is labelled as a communist when he is accidentally caught up in the front of a labor union demonstration.
- Charlie Chaplin was one of the world's greatest comedians and movie makers. He also wrote much of the music for his films. His signature character was the Little Tramp. *Modern Times* was the last occasion in which the Little Tramp appeared and the last major feature length silent film.

Questions (to be completed on a separate sheet of paper)

1. Why do you think the Little Tramp was, and is, such an endearing figure for audiences?
2. Why did the Little Tramp want to stay in jail a little longer?
3. Did the Little Tramp do the right thing by letting the Gamin into the department store?
4. How did the lack of talking in this film affect your ability to understand it?
5. At the beginning of the movie the Gamin was stealing bananas to feed her younger sisters. Was this right?
6. How does Chaplin characterize the relationship between people and machines?
7. What is the interest of those who control the machines in the film?
8. What do you think is the message of this movie? Do you agree or disagree with it?
9. Did anything that happened in this movie remind you of something that has occurred in your own life or that you have seen occur to others?