

What is Funny Week 3: Charlie Chaplin Required class equipment this week: two forks, two longish bread rolls.

Charles Chaplin was born on 16 April 1889 in East Street, Walworth, London. His parents, both music hall performers, separated before he was three. His father was to die of alcoholism at 37, while his mother suffered permanent mental breakdown; and Charles and his older half-brother Sydney experienced periods in institutions for destitute children. At 10 he began his professional life as a member of a juvenile clog-dance troupe, went on to act on the legitimate stage in touring productions of *Sherlock Holmes*, and finally became a star of Fred Karno's music hall sketch companies. Touring the USA with Karno, in 1913 he was recruited by the Keystone Film Company, and in his second one-reel comedy created the character of the Little Tramp which was to become universally recognized and loved. He soon began to direct as well as perform in his own films. In search of greater independence and bigger salaries he passed in turn to the Essanay, Mutual and First National companies. Among his most notable films from this period are *Easy Street*, *The Immigrant*, *Shoulder Arms* and *The Kid*. In 1919, with Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford and D. W. Griffith, he established United Artists, through which he distributed such masterworks as *A Woman of Paris*, *The Gold Rush*, *The Circus*, *City Lights*, *Modern Times*, *The Great Dictator*, *Monsieur Verdoux* and *Limelight*. As a foreigner and suspected radical, in the late 1940s he fell victim to America's McCarthyist witchhunts, and from 1952 made his home in Europe, where he directed two more films, *A King in New York* and *A Countess from Hong Kong*, as well as completing his autobiography. Following a chequered marital and romantic life, in 1943 he married Oona O'Neill (daughter of the playwright Eugene O'Neill), by whom he had eight children. In 1972 he briefly re-visited the United States to receive an honorary Academy Award; and in January 1975 he was appointed KBE. He died on Christmas Day 1977 at his home in Vevey, Switzerland.

Charlie Chaplin was a self-educated south Londoner whose father was an alcoholic and whose mother was mentally ill. For years he was thought to be Jewish but in fact was recently discovered to have had gypsy ancestry through his father, whom he never knew.

You can see and feel this absence of the father throughout Chaplin's films. He is always alone, always The Tramp, broke, unknown - but always dignified and ready to seize an opportunity.

In the biopic *Chaplin*, Robert Downey Junior imaginatively recreates the moment Charlie Chaplin became his lifelong creation: The Tramp. Here he is, finding the outward skin of the first universally loved fictional character: the hat, the cane, the baggy trousers, the jacket, the shoes, the moustache and, finally, the walk:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1d9CIFdOYY>



5. Chaplin (circled) at the Hanwell Schools, 1897

In one of his first great movies, *The Kid*, an unmarried mother abandons her baby, whom the Tramp adopts and brings up in a partnership of crime. The Kid breaks windows, The Tramp mends them. Eventually social workers try to put the Kid into care, but The Tramp rescues him and the Kid is reunited with his mother, now a successful opera star.

When Chaplin fought for the Kid, he was reliving his own tragedy. When he was seven years old, Chaplin was taken from his mother, who had lost her mind, and placed in a home for destitute children, (above).



The Kid is a real tear-jerker, and it's a hoot, and it's beautiful in so many unexpected ways. Chaplin filmed 50 times as much footage for this film as he needed, just to get it right, and his interaction with the child actor playing The Kid, Jackie Coogan, is extraordinary.

The film was edited in secret in a hotel in Salt Lake City just so Chaplin could get away from a mistaken marriage and the producers of The Kid. The Kid was released in February 1921. It was a huge artistic and commercial triumph. Jackie Coogan became Chaplin's first and perhaps only real co-star.

Let's watch some of The Kid:

- 1. 05:00-9:40 The Morning Promenade: finding The Kid (and trying to get rid of him) until the Kid's mother changes her mind and searches for him...**
- 2. 10:30 – 16:48 Bringing up the Kid: the perfect partnership.**
- 3. 20:52 -22:13 The mother pays a charitable visit to the slum, actually meets her son unknowingly – & walking away**
- 4. 24:47 – 27:54 Then continuing with more comic business – the Kid gets in a fight with the younger brother of a local bully, then the bully turns on the Tramp - until the mother returns**

And here's the great gift of Chaplin: light and dark. It's never unrelieved hilarity. The tragedy always has a silver lining. The comedy always has a purpose. The tragedy has to happen.

The Gold Rush was Chaplin's favourite, the film he wanted to be remembered for. It was inspired by the Klondike Gold Rush of 1896 and by the Donner Party Disaster Incident of 1846 when a party of immigrants became snowbound in the Sierra Nevada and were

reduced to eating their own shoes and the bodies of their dead comrades.

1:06-2:19 The opening scene, narrated by Chaplin, shows the Tramp as the ‘undaunted lone prospector...’

4:48-8:36

The Tramp arrives at criminal Black Larsen’s cabin hoping for shelter and a little hospitality. Larsen tells him to get out but the wind is a little strong, and then Big Jim who has found gold gets propelled to the cabin by the wind & trouble ensues

13:05-21:46 Big Jim & the Tramp share the Cabin while Black Larsen goes out and gets killed. It’s Thanksgiving. Desperate for food, they cook up a boot & eat it as one might a chicken or a turkey, down to the wishbone (a bent nail) – but the boot does not stave off the pangs of hunger, and Big Jim begins to see things... and takes Chaplin for a chicken. And he’s starving. Eventually they fight and then a bear visits and it’s out with the rifle and - dinner time.

23:42-26:59 “And out of that waste a city grew...” Chaplin introduces the romantic interest: Georgia, who works in a bar, and is ill-treated by Jack (“Jack was a ladies man”). Georgia works as a



dance hall girl. And out of the night came the little fellow to the dance hall, ‘that retreat of lost dreams...’ And we’re back in the tragedy, the romance – and The Tramp is an outsider, unknown, a bum, a joke – and then Georgia smiles at someone near the Tramp, and the Tramp thinks her smile is

for him, and he is smitten (❤️). Later, Georgia and her friends stumble on a cabin near the mining town where the Tramp is staying. Georgia discovers a torn photo of herself hidden under The Tramp’s pillow, and they decide to have a little fun with him.

40:45-42:36 Georgia and friends say they’ll come for dinner

on New Year's Eve. To them it's a joke. To The Tramp it's a promise of happiness, and he throws himself around the cabin for sheer delight until she comes back for her gloves, and maybe begins to wonder what she's let him in for.

44:00-47:57 New Year's Eve, time of new hopes and dreams – The Tramp has scrimped and saved and ducked and dived to pay for the New Year's Eve dinner for Georgia and her friends. He lays the table. Crackers, place names, chicken in the oven... Dressed to the nines, washed and brushed up, he waits, and waits, and nobody comes except a mule. As midnight strikes and the New Year begins he falls into a reverie and imagines that they are there, and he is with

them and not alone, and that he is a somebody, a proud and gallant host – and in this reverie he says, “I can't do a speech but I'll do a



dance” – and a dance he does, with the rolls.

This inspired and graceful display of comic genius is a huge hit with the girls and Georgia, and she kisses him, and he faints. But it's just a dream. Here it is again:

<http://videosift.com/video/Charlie-Chaplin-makes-two-bread-rolls-dance>

And here's Johnny Depp and Robert Downey Jr trying it:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FovWU9sGIg8>

Big Jim reappears: he's lost his memory & can't find his gold claim but he sees The Tramp and says he'll make him a millionaire if he helps him find the cabin, for the claim is nearby.

54:33-54:38: Georgia apologises and The Tramp forgives her completely and declares his everlasting love for her in 8 seconds flat.

56:30-01:03:41 They find the cabin, and after some hazardous behaviour by the weather and gravity, Jim finds his gold claim and cries, “We'll be millionaires!”

‘And so they were...’