

Writing a film review

1. Have a quick look at those three texts about the film *The Great Dictator*, are they a film review or just the plot or summary of the story?

The Great Dictator is a comedy film written, directed, produced by, and starring Charlie Chaplin. First released in October 1940, it was Chaplin's first true talking picture, and more importantly was the only major film of its period to bitterly satirize Nazism and Adolf Hitler.

The film is unusual for its period, as the United States was still formally at peace with Nazi Germany. Chaplin's film advanced a stirring, controversial condemnation of Hitler, fascism, antisemitism, and the Nazis, the latter of whom he excoriates in the film as "machine men, with machine minds and machine hearts".

The film was Chaplin's first "talkie", as well as his most commercially successful film

During the last days of the First World War, a clumsy soldier saves the life of devoted military pilot Schultz. Unfortunately, their flight from the advancing enemy ends in a severe crash with the clumsy soldier losing his memories. After quite some years in the hospital, the amnesia patient gets released and reopens his old barber shop in the Jewish ghetto. But times have changed in the country of Tomania: Dictator Adenoid Hynkel, who accidentally looks very similar to the barber, has laid his merciless grip on the country, and the Jewish people are discriminated against. One day, the barber gets in trouble and is brought before a commanding officer, who turns out to be his old comrade Schultz. So, the ghetto enjoys protection from then on. Meanwhile, Dictator Hynkel develops big plans, he wants to become Dictator of the whole world and needs a scapegoat for the public. Soon, Schultz is being arrested for being too Jewish-friendly, and all Jews except those who managed to flee are transported into Concentration Camps. Hynkel is planning to march into Osterlich to show off against Napaloni, Dictator of Bacteria, who already has deployed his troops along the other border of the small country. Meanwhile, Schultz and the barber manage to escape, disguised in military uniforms. As luck would have it, Schultz and the barber are picked up by Tomanian forces and the barber is mixed up with Hynkel himself. The small barber now gets the once-in-a-lifetime chance to speak to the people of Osterlich and all of Tomania, who listen eagerly on the radio.

Charlie Chaplin's first talkie, made over a decade after the introduction of sound, stands as a brave and controversial piece of filmmaking. Entering production in 1937, at a time when many Americans saw Hitler as an ally rather than an enemy, the film was first released in 1940, prior to the United States' entry into the Second World War.

Satirising Adolf Hitler, Chaplin plays a dual role: firstly as Adenoid Hynkel, the great dictator of the title and despotic ruler of Tomainia; and secondly - in a stroke of genius - as an amnesiac Jewish barber, who

returns from the trenches of the First World War to discover that his shop is now part of a ghetto presided over by thuggish stormtroopers.

Playing on the coincidental similarity between Chaplin's moustachioed tramp and Hitler himself, "The Great Dictator" was frequently criticised for attempting to turn the Nazis' rise to power into comedy. Indeed, Chaplin claimed that he would never have tried to burlesque mass genocide once the truth of the Holocaust became known after the film's release.

Strangely, though, what remains so powerful about the film's satire is its outright silliness. Exaggerating Hitler's animated demagogic style at the microphone into complete absurdity, Chaplin's childish satirical swipes work because of - and not in spite of - their refusal to accept Nazism as anything other than an outrageously bad joke.

Ridiculing the anti-Semitic policies of the party (after the Jews, Hynkel promises to wipe out the brunettes; he, of course, is both) and demoting Hitler to the level of a clown, "The Great Dictator" exposes the farcical base of fascism, bursting the swollen bubble of reactionary pomposity with deafening finality.

The result is an incredibly effective satire. No wonder Hitler, Mussolini and Franco banned it outright.

2. Complete the first column with information from the previous film reviews

	The great Dictador	My favourite film
Type of film		
Director's name		
Leading actor/Actress		
Main topic or subject matter		
Background information		
Hints about the plot		
Degree of success		
Personal opinion		

3. Now complete the second column with information about your favorite film and then try to write your own film review.

1. the first and the third piece are reviews, the second one is a summary of the film (plot)

2.

	The great Dictador
Type of film	comedy
Director's name	Charlie Chaplin
Leading actor/Actress	Charlie Chaplin
Main topic or subject matter	It satirizes Nazism (Hitler)
Background information	the last days of the First World War
Hints about the plot	Satirising Adolf Hitler, Chaplin plays a dual role: firstly as Adenoid Hynkel, the great dictator of the title and despotic ruler of Tomainia; and secondly - in a stroke of genius - as an amnesiac Jewish barber
Degree of success	was Chaplin's first "talkie", as well as his most commercially successful film
Personal opinion	The result is an incredibly effective satire. No wonder Hitler, Mussolini and Franco banned it outright.

3. Free answers (to be checked by your tutor)