**8th Form National Poetry Recitation Contest**

**Title of speech**: Speech from “The Great Dictator”

**Writer**: Charlie Chaplin

**Listen to the full speech**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7GY1Xg6X20>

**Excerpt:**

Greed has posioned men's souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed.  
We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in.  
Machinery that gives us abundance has left us in want.  
Our knowledge has made us cynical.  
Our cleverness, hard and unkind.  
We think too much, and feel too little.  
More than machinery, we need humanity.  
More that cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness.  
Without these qualities life will be violent, and all will be lost.  
The aeroplane and the radio have brought us closer together.  
The very nature of these inventions cries out for the goodness in men - cries out for universal brotherhood - for the unity of us all.

**About the Speaker:**

Charlie Chaplin [KBE](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knight_Commander_of_the_Order_of_the_British_Empire) (16 April 1889 – 25 December 1977) was an English comic actor, filmmaker, and composer who rose to fame in the era of [silent film](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent_film). He became a worldwide icon through his screen persona, "[The Tramp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tramp)", and is considered one of the most important figures in the history of the film industry. His career spanned more than 75 years, from childhood in the Victorian era until a year before his death in 1977, and encompassed both adulation and controversy.

Chaplin's childhood in London was one of poverty and hardship, as his father was absent and his mother struggled financially, and he was sent to a workhouse twice before the age of nine. When he was 14, his mother was committed to a mental asylum. Chaplin began performing at an early age, touring [music halls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_hall) and later working as a stage actor and comedian.

Chaplin wrote, directed, produced, edited, starred in, and composed the music for most of his films. He was a perfectionist, and his financial independence enabled him to spend years on the development and production of a picture. His films are characterized by slapstick combined with pathos, typified in the Tramp's struggles against adversity. Many contain social and political themes, as well as autobiographical elements. He received an Honorary Academy Award for "the incalculable effect he has had in making motion pictures the art form of this century" in 1972, as part of a renewed appreciation for his work. He continues to be held in high regard, with The Gold Rush, City Lights, Modern Times, and The Great Dictator often ranked on lists of the greatest films of all time.

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**About the speech:**

Chaplin spent many months drafting and re-writing the speech for the end of the film The Great Dictator, his first film with sound. The speech is a call for peace. Many people criticized the speech, and thought it was superfluous to the film. Others found it uplifting. Regrettably Chaplin’s words are as relevant today as they were in 1940.

**Discussion Guide:**

Can you do a Charlie Chaplin impersonation? Describe him

Did you listen to the whole speech? What do you think of it?

Is it possible for a funny man to be taken seriously? Say why or why not.