Teaching the factory scenes

Ages 12–16. Plan 45 minutes of activity plus viewing and replay time.

Students connect observations to interpretations, examine physical needs at work, and explain an effect of movement or sound.

Prepare the viewing

Cue the **conveyor belt routine**, including a change in pace, and the **feeding machine** pitch and test. Use scene cues because editions differ. The full film is not required.

Introduce this 1936 Great Depression comedy. Examine the factory as a comic construction, not a complete record of working conditions. Preview excerpts and arrange film access.

Momo's workshop is an imagined scene for observation practice. For the optional sound discussion, cue the later café song; use a separate discussion or part of the redesign time.

A 45-minute activity

Time	Activity
5 min	Picture warm-up: distinguish a visible detail from its interpretation.
12 min	Conveyor evidence in pairs: compare two readings of one detail.
10 min	Trace the feeding machine's promise, result and human need.
12 min	Redesign one part; explain the need and a plausible trade-off.
6 min	Write the exit response; share a claim made more precise by evidence.

ASK THE CLASS

What would you need to test before calling your change an improvement? Let partners point, sketch or discuss before writing.



Offer "I noticed…" and "This could suggest…". Students can dictate. Describe action aloud when needed; use captions and identify heard voices.

Reward the reasoning

Conveyor: repeated gestures may suggest that the job sets the body's rhythm. Students might instead emphasise skill, coordination or an interruption's comic timing. Ask for the exact gesture or sound.

Feeding machine: the pitch promises more working time; the test makes eating difficult. A stop control, slower setting or proper break could address a need, with costs or lost production time as possible trade-offs. Accept other workable proposals.

Optional sound: the boss speaks through a screen; the sales pitch is recorded. Later, the Tramp sings invented words. Students may contrast authority and play, or fixed instructions and improvisation, using visible and audible details.

Four assessment criteria

Look for	A successful response
Specific evidence	Identifies a movement, object, sound or event.
Reasoning	Links detail to interpretation; distinguishes a guess from an observation.
Workable change	Addresses a human need and recognises a plausible trade-off.
Attention to film	Explains an effect of performance, rhythm or sound.

Optional scoring: 0 = not yet shown; 1 = partly explained; 2 = clearly supported. Four criteria, 8 points.

LOOK AGAIN

When readings differ, return to the detail. An answer may value efficiency and still question who controls it. Judge the reasoning, not agreement with a sample.



Sources and use

Chaplin official site — Filming Modern Times: scenes, production and voices.

MoMA — Charles Chaplin's Modern Times: physical needs, performance and sound.

Ohio State History Teaching Institute — The Automobile: classroom use of factory scenes.

MIT OpenCourseWare — Capital, Labor, and the Standardization of Work: teaching context.

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