

From HARD TIMES

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CHARLES DICKENS

Decline (1833–1901)

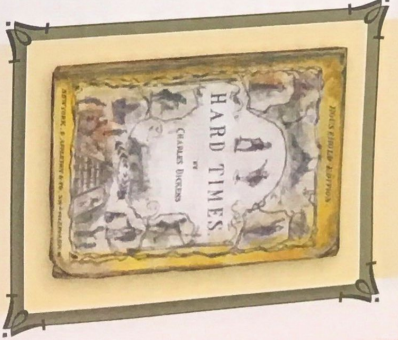
BACKGROUND OF THE MANY BELIEFS IN HIS SOCIETY WITH WHICH DICKENS TOOK ISSUE, THE UTILITARIANISM OF PHILOSOPHER JEREMY BENTHAM (1748–1832) PARTICULARLY IRRITATED HIM. BENTHAM BELIEVED THAT STATISTICS AND LOGIC COULD BE APPLIED TO ALL HUMAN AFFAIRS, AND HE VIEWED HUMAN BEINGS AS ESSENTIALLY INTERESTED ONLY IN THEIR OWN HAPPINESS. HE SAW THE PURPOSE OF SOCIETY AS “THE GREATEST HAPPINESS FOR THE GREATEST NUMBER.” WITH HAPPINESS CALCULATED IN TERMS OF INDIVIDUAL PLEASURES AND PAINS, DICKENS BELIEVED UTILITARIANISM DISCOUNTED OR EVEN SOUGHT TO NEGATE VIRTUES LIKE IMAGINATION AND SYMPATHY. IN *HARD TIMES*, DICKENS USED HIS CHARACTER MR. GRADGRIND TO POKE FUN AT THIS PHILOSOPHY.

CHAPTER 1 THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!”

The scene was a plain, bare, **monotonous** vault of a schoolroom, and the speaker’s square forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster’s sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellars in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker’s **obstinate** carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders—nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was—all helped the emphasis.

“In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir: nothing but Facts!” The speaker, and the schoolmaster, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels, then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.



Artist rendering of cover of first edition of *Hard Times*

Vocabulary 3
monotonous (mə nō'tən əs)
adj. without variation
obstinate (əb' ste nət)
adj. stubborn; dogged

▶ **Critical Viewing** 5
Judging from the details in this illustration, what was school like in England during Victorian times? [Speculate]

▶ **Reading Check** 6
What does Gradgrind aim to do for students?

World LITERATURE CONNECTION 8

The Nineteenth-Century Novel

In the nineteenth century, technological advances allowed newspaper and magazine publishers to print large runs at affordable prices. For the first time, this made reading material widely available to the middle classes. For these publications, writers contributed their own stories, often serialized in weekly or monthly issues. British authors Charles Dickens, George Eliot, William Thackeray, and Thomas Hardy, and American authors Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo, and Russian authors Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy wrote their novels as serials.

Connect to the Literature

How do you think contemporary readers might have responded to the weekly installments of *Hard Times*, which Dickens joked were “teaspoon servings”?

CHAPTER 2 MURDERING THE INNOCENTS

Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of fact and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir—peremptorily Thomas—Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. You might hope to get some other nonsensical belief into the head of George Gradgrind, or Augustus Gradgrind, or John Gradgrind, or Joseph Gradgrind (all suppositious, non-existent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind—no, sir!

In such terms Mr. Gradgrind always mentally introduced himself, whether to his private circle of acquaintance, or to the public in general. In such terms, no doubt, substituting the words “boys and girls,” for “sir.” Thomas Gradgrind now presented Thomas Gradgrind to the little pitchers before him, who were to be filled so full of facts.

Indeed, as he eagerly sparked at them from the cellar-age before mentioned, he seemed a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away.

“Girl number twenty,” said Mr. Gradgrind, squarely pointing with his square forefinger. “I don’t know that girl. Who is that girl?”

“Sissy Jupe, sir,” explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtsying.

“Sissy is not a name,” said Mr. Gradgrind. “Don’t call yourself

Sissy. Call yourself Cecilia.”

“It’s father as calls me Sissy, sir,” returned the young girl in a trembling voice, and with another curtsy.

“Then he has no business to do it,” said Mr. Gradgrind. “Tell him he mustn’t. Cecilia Jupe. Let me see. What is your father?”

“He belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir.”

Mr. Gradgrind frowned, and waved off the objectionable calling with his hand.

“We don’t want to know anything about that, here. You mustn’t tell us about that, here. Your father breaks horses, don’t he?”

“If you please, sir, when they can get any to break, they do break horses in the ring, sir.”

“You mustn’t tell us about the ring, here. Very well, then. Describe

your father as a horsebreaker. He doctors sick horses, I dare say?”

“Oh yes, sir.”

“Very well, then. He is a veterinary surgeon, a farrier and horse-

breaker. Give me your definition of a horse.”

“Sissy Jupe thrown into the greatest alarm by this demand, girl number twenty unable to define a horse!” said Mr. Gradgrind.

“Girl number behof of all the little pitchers. “Girl number twenty for the general behoof of all the little pitchers. “Girl number twenty possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals! Some boy’s definition of a horse. Bitzer, yours.”

The square finger, moving here and there, lighted suddenly on the square because he chanced to sit in the same ray of sunlight Bitzer, darting in at one of the bare windows of the intensely white-washed room, irradiated Sissy. For, the boys and girls sat on the face of the inclined plane in two compact bodies, divided up the center by a narrow interval, and Sissy, being at the corner of a row on the sunny side, came in for the beginning of a sunbeam, of which Bitzer, being at the corner of a row on the other side, a few rows in advance, caught the end. But, whereas the girl was so dark-eyed and dark-haired, that she seemed to receive a deeper and more lustrous color from the sun when it shone upon her, the boy was so light-eyed and light-haired that the self-same rays appeared to draw out of him what little color he ever possessed. His cold eyes would hardly have been eyes, but for the short ends of lashes which, by bringing them into immediate contrast with something paler than themselves, expressed their form. His short-cropped hair might have been a mere continuation of the sandy freckles on his forehead and face. His skin was so unwholesome, deficient in the natural tinge, that he looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white.

“Bitzer,” said Thomas Gradgrind. “Your definition of a horse.”

“Gquad-uped. Gramhityvorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four

grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring. In manly countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.” Thus (and much more) Bitzer.

“Now girl number twenty,” said Mr. Gradgrind. “You know what a horse is.”

She curtsyed again, and would have blushed deeper, if she could have blushed deeper than she had blushed all this time. Bitzer, after rapidly blinking at Thomas Gradgrind with both eyes at once, and so catching the light upon his quivering ends of lashes that they looked like the antennae of busy insects, put his knuckles to his freckled forehead, and sat down again.

The third gentleman now stepped forth. A mighty man at cutting and drying, he was; a government officer; in his way (and in most other people’s too), a professed pugilist; always in training, always with a system to force down the general throat like a bolus¹, always to be heard of at the bar of his little Public-office, ready to fight all England. To continue

¹bolus small, round mass, often of chewed food.

“GIRL NUMBER TWENTY UNABLE TO DEFINE A HORSE!”

Vocabulary
deficient (def fish’ ant)
adj./ lacking an essential quality

Spiral Review
Plot How would you summarize the events of *Hard Times* up to this point in the plot?

Reading Check 9

What type of answer to his question does Gradgrind accept?

...the Duchess? How do you know?
...back here...

Vocabulary
adversary (ad' ver ser' e)
n. opponent; enemy

Reading Strategy
Analyzing the Author's Purpose What does the reaction of the class hint about Dickens's purpose in this scene?

"WHAT IS CALLED TASTE, IS ONLY ANOTHER NAME FOR FACT."

in fistic phraseology, he had a genius for coming up to the scratch, wherever and whatever it was, and proving himself an ugly customer. He would go in and damage any subject whatever with his right, follow up with his left, stop, exchange, counter, bore his opponent (he always fought All England²) to the ropes, and fall upon him neatly. He was certain to knock the wind out of common sense, and render that unlucky adversary deaf to the call of time. And he had it in charge from high authority to bring about the great public-office Millennium, when Commissioners should reign upon earth.

"Very well," said this gentleman, briskly smiling, and folding his arms. "That's a horse. Now, let me ask you girls and boys, Would you paper a room with representations of horses?"

After a pause, one half of the children cried in chorus, "Yes, sir!" Upon which the other half, seeing in the gentleman's face that Yes was wrong, cried out in chorus, "No, sir!"—as the custom is, in these examinations.

"Of course, No. Why wouldn't you?"

A pause. One corpulent slow boy, with a wheezy manner of breathing, ventured the answer, Because he wouldn't paper a room at all, but would paint it.

"You *must* paper it," said Thomas Gradgrind, "whether you like it or not. Don't tell us you wouldn't paper it. What do you mean, boy?"

"I'll explain to you, then," said the gentleman, after another and a dismal pause, "why you wouldn't paper a room with representations of horses. Do you ever see horses walking up and down the sides of rooms in reality—in fact? Do you?"

"Yes, sir!" from one half. "No, sir!" from the other.

"Of course no," said the gentleman, with an indignant look at the wrong half. "Why, then, you are not to see anywhere, what you don't see in fact; you are not to have anywhere, what you don't have in fact. What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact."

Thomas Gradgrind nodded his approbation.

"This is a new principle, a discovery, a great discovery," said the gentleman. "Now, I'll try you again. Suppose you were going to carpet a room. Would you use a carpet having a representation of flowers upon it?"

There being a general conviction by this time that "No, sir!" was always the right answer to this gentleman, the chorus of No was very strong. Only a few feeble stragglers said Yes; among them Sissy Jupe.

"Girl number twenty," said the gentleman, smiling in the calm strength of knowledge.

Sissy blushed, and stood up.

"So you would carpet your room—or your husband's room, if you were a grown woman, and had a husband—with representations of flowers, would you," said the gentleman. "Why would you?"

2. fought All England fought according to the official rules of boxing.

Vocabulary
indignant (in dig' nent)
adj. outraged; filled with righteous anger

approbation
(re ba' shen) n. official approval

...form to analyze

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"If you please, sir, I am very fond of flowers," returned the girl. "And is that why you would put tables and chairs upon them, and have people walking over them with heavy boots?"
"It wouldn't hurt them, sir. They wouldn't crush and wither if you please, sir. They would be the pictures of what was very pretty and pleasant, and I would fancy—"
"Ay, ay, ay! but you mustn't fancy," cried the gentleman, quite elated by coming so happily to his point. "That's it! You are never to fancy."
"You are not, Cecilia Jupe," Thomas Gradgrind solemnly repeated, "to do anything of that kind."

"Fact, fact, fact!" said the gentleman. And "Fact, fact, fact!" repeated Thomas Gradgrind.

"You are to be in all things regulated and governed," said the gentleman, "by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have, in any object of use or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact. You don't walk upon flowers in fact; you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don't find that foreign birds and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls. You must use," said the gentleman, "for all these purposes, combinations and modifications (in primary colors) of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is the new discovery. This is fact. This is taste."

The girl curtsied, and sat down. She was very young, and she looked as if she were frightened by the matter of fact prospect the world afforded.

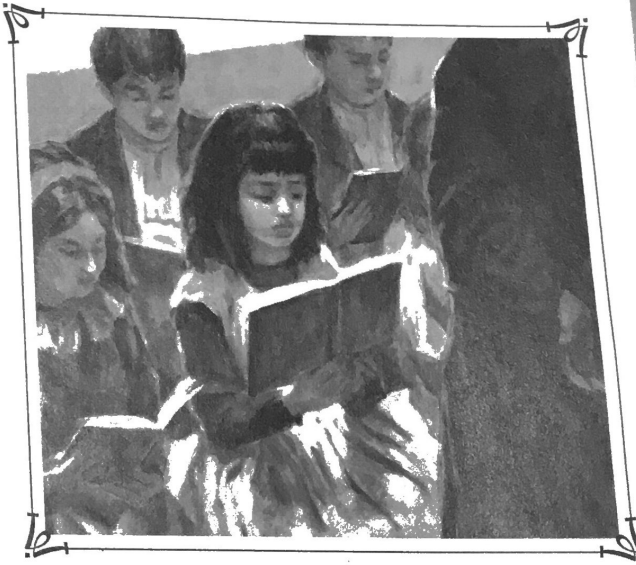
"Now, if Mr. M'Choakumchild," said the gentleman, "will proceed to give his first lesson here, Mr. Gradgrind, I shall be happy, at your request, to observe his mode of procedure."

Mr. Gradgrind was much obliged. "Mr. M'Choakumchild, we only wait for you."

So, Mr. M'Choakumchild began in his best manner. He and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. He had been put through an immense

Literary Analysis
Ethical and Social Influences What point about imagination does Dickens make through the teacher's literal-minded understanding?

13 Critical Viewing What does this picture of Sissy suggest about her relationship with her classmates and Gradgrind? [Infer]



13 Reading Check

Why does the third gentleman object to horses on wallpaper and flowers on rugs?

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ards the Duchess? How do you know?

Vocabulary

etymology (et' ə mel' ə jə)
n. the study of word origins
syntax (sin' taks) n. the study of sentence structure

variety of paces, and had answered volumes of head-breaking questions. Orthography, **etymology**, **syntax**, and prosody, biography, astronomy, geography, and general cosmography, the sciences of compound proportion, algebra, land-surveying and leveling, vocal music, and drawing from models, were all at the ends of his ten chilled fingers. He had worked his stony way into Her Majesty's most Honorable Privy Council's Schedule B, and had taken the bloom off the higher branches of mathematics and physical science, French, German, Latin, and Greek. He knew all about all the Water Sheds of all the world (whatever they are), and all the histories of all the peoples, and all the names of all the rivers and mountains, and all the productions, manners, and customs of all the countries, and all their boundaries and bearings on the two-and-thirty points of the compass. Ah, rather overdone, M'Choakumchild. If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more!

He went to work in this preparatory lesson, not unlike Morgiana in the *Forty Thieves*:³ looking into all the vessels ranged before him, one after another, to see what they contained. Say, good M'Choakumchild. When from thy boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar brim full by and by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within—or sometimes only maim him and distort him!

3. **Morgiana in the Forty Thieves** In the tale "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," Ali Baba's clever servant, Morgiana, saves him from the thieves who are hiding in large jars.

"IF HE HAD ONLY LEARNT A LITTLE LESS... HE MIGHT HAVE TAUGHT MUCH MORE!"

Cite textual evidence to support your responses.

Critical Reading

- 1. **Key Ideas and Details (a)** What does Mr. Gradgrind believe is the key to all learning? **(b) Connect:** In what ways does he put this belief into practice? **(c) Interpret:** What attitude does the description of the children as "little pitchers" reflect?
- 2. **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (a) Compare and Contrast:** Compare and contrast Sissy's and Bitzer's performances in the classroom. **(b) Analyze:** With whom does Dickens's expect the reader to sympathize? Why?
- 3. **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas** What values does Dickens believe a system of education should teach? Explain, using two of these Essential Question words: *imagination, sympathy, conform, society, fact.* [Connecting to the Essential Question: How does literature shape or reflect society?]

Critical Commentary

**"Charles Dickens"
George Orwell**

George Orwell (1903–1950), an important author in his own right (see p. 1317), wrote a brilliant and highly readable essay on Charles Dickens. In the essay, Orwell comments specifically on the criticism of Victorian education that Dickens made in *Hard Times* and elsewhere.

Except for the universities and the big public schools, every kind of education then existing in England gets a mauling at Dickens's hands. But as usual, Dickens's criticism is neither creative or destructive. He sees the idiocy of an educational system founded on the Greek lexicon and the wax-ended cane; on the other hand, he has no use for the new kind of school that is coming up in the 'fifties and 'sixties, the "modern" school, with its gritty insistence on "facts." What, then, does he want? As always, what he appears to want is a moralized version of the existing thing—the old type of school, but with no caning, no bullying or underfeeding, and not quite so much Greek.

Orwell also explains how he visualizes Dickens and what he values most about him.

When one reads any strongly individual piece of writing, one has the impression of seeing a face somewhere behind the page. It is not necessarily the actual face of the writer. . . . What one sees is the face that the writer *ought* to have. Well, in the case of Dickens I see a face that is not quite the face of Dickens's photographs, though it resembles it. It is the face of a man of about forty, with a small beard and a high color. He is laughing, with a touch of anger in his laughter, but no triumph, no malignity. It is the face of a man who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is *generously angry*—in other words, of a nineteenth-century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls.

Key Ideas and Details According to Orwell, what kind of a school does Dickens favor? What picture of Dickens does Orwell have in mind as he reads the Victorian author?

"Charity begins at home, and justice begins next door."

▼ **Critical Viewing** Does this caricature of Dickens by David Levine capture any of the qualities Orwell discusses? Why or why not? [Connect]

