

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

# *Hard Times*

by Charles Dickens

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# Hard Times

## Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. cite incidents from the text to support the following themes and discuss the ways the themes intertwine:
  - An industrialized society sacrifices the welfare of the working class for economic gains.
  - Children need more than a utilitarian education; they also need amusements and freedom to use their imaginations.
  - Men and women of all social classes need a lawful way to obtain a divorce.
  - Many of the upper class are unjustifiably arrogant, snobbish, lazy, and self-important.
2. recognize that *Hard Times* has elements of allegory in which classes of people in an industrialized society are representative; discuss what abstract ideas or moral qualities the characters might represent.
3. cite instances in the story illustrating the motif of watching or keeping someone under surveillance.
4. point out instances of the following literary devices:
  - foreshadowing
  - allusion
  - metaphor
  - simile
  - personification
5. recognize the many cliffhangers in the story and discuss why Dickens often ends chapters in this way.
6. discuss the significance of the chapter titles, including how the titles relate to the themes and why some of the titles are ironic.
7. recognize other instances of irony in the story.
8. discuss the significance of character names including the following:
  - how the names add humor to the story
  - the ways the names help to enhance characterization
  - Dickens' use of epithets to enhance characterization

# Hard Times

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Assuming that *Hard Times* is an allegory, what might each of the following characters represent?
  - Bounderby
  - Mr. Gradgrind
  - Mr. Childers
  - Mr. Kidderminster
  - Mr. Sleary
  - Sissy
  - Tom, Bitzer
  - Louisa
  - Mrs. Sparsit
2. In what ways does Mrs. Sparsit unwittingly harm Bounderby?
3. The Notes at the beginning of the book discuss Charles Dickens' life and life in the Dickensian era. Answer the following questions based on the Notes.
  - Why did Dickens support easier divorce laws?
  - What impact did this novel have on the social issues of the time?
4. Read the table of contents which lists the chapter titles. Which titles are ironic? Which titles seem to point to Louisa's potential decline into immorality?
5. List three vocabulary words describing Bounderby's character.
6. Write a character sketch of Louisa. Be sure to include an explanation of why she is often described as staring into fire.
7. What are the two main plot lines in the story? Discuss the ways each plot line illustrates the following themes:
  - An industrialized society sacrifices the welfare of the working class for economic gains.
  - Children need more than a utilitarian education; they also need amusements and freedom to use their imaginations.
  - Men and women of all social classes need a lawful way to obtain a divorce.
  - Many of the upper class are unjustifiable arrogant, snobbish, lazy, and self-important.
8. Cite two instances of dramatic irony in the story.

# Hard Times

## Study Guide Student Copy

### BOOK THE FIRST – SOWING

#### Chapter I – The One Thing Needful

##### Vocabulary

cellarage – space in a cellar

commodious – offering plenty of room; spacious; roomy

1. *Hard Times* was originally written in weekly installments for the magazine “Household Words.” In this first, brief chapter, Dickens introduces one of the major themes of the novel: the failure of the educational system to provide children with both a factual and an artistic, spiritual, imaginative education. Find a passage in this chapter reflecting this idea.

Use the following passage to answer the next two questions:

“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 cellarage 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, at it was, – all helped the emphasis.” (Pg. 1)

## BOOK THE SECOND – REAPING

### Chapter I – Effect in the Bank

#### Vocabulary

balm – healing or soothing

decamped – went away suddenly and secretly

dissipated – scattered, squandered or wasted

edifice – a large building

exemplary – serving as a model or example

gamed – to gamble

improvident – failing to provide for the future, lacking foresight or thrift

magnanimous – generous; rising above pettiness or meanness

pauperize – to make a pauper of; impoverish

self-laudatory – expressing praise about oneself

truckle bed – a low bed on wheels that can be pushed under another bed when not in use

visages – faces

1. Dickens often uses satiric wit in his novels, employing ironic language to say one thing and mean another. Find an example of this.
  
2. Which two themes does the following passage illustrate?

“What are the restless wretches [the common laborer] doing now?” asked Mrs. Sparsit.

“Merely going on in the old way, ma’am. Uniting, and leaguings, and engaging to stand by one another.”

“It is much to be regretted,” said Mrs. Sparsit, making her nose more Roman and her eyebrows more Coriolanian in the strength of her severity, “that the united masters allow of any such class-combinations.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Bitzer.

“Being united themselves, they ought one and all to set their faces against employing any man who is united with any other man,” said Mrs. Sparsit. (Pg. 85)

## BOOK THE THIRD – Garnering

### Chapter I – Another Thing Needful

#### Vocabulary

abjectly – miserably

bereft – deprived of

jaded – tired; worn-out

repose – to lay or place for rest

1. What is the definition of garnering? Based on this definition, what do you think Book Three will tell the reader about the characters?
2. How does Louisa feel about her father at this point in the story?
3. It is important that a plot and the behavior of the characters in a story are believable. In this chapter, Mr. Gradgrind seems to understand, accept, and is sorry for the mistakes he made raising Louisa. Is this change of attitude believable? Cite incidents from the story to support the answer.
4. Some critics believe that Sissy represents the “ideal woman” in this story. What special qualities does she demonstrate in this chapter which help to support this idea? What qualities is she lacking that Dickens seems to be saying are unnecessary for a woman to possess?