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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Hard Times

by Charles Dickens

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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ISBN: 978-1-58049-297-3

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Item No: 300450

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 amusement 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
9. define vocabulary words from the text.

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

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.

2. What basic idea or principle does Dickens' description of Coketown suggest to the reader that might be essential for the reader to understand the chapter?

3. In what sense are Louisa and Thomas Gradgrind analogous to the people of Coketown?

Chapter VI – Sleary's Horsemanship

VOCABULARY

abashed – made embarrassed and ill at ease
absconded – ran away and hid
bismuth – a hard, brittle metal
carmine – a red or purplish-red pigment
cheeking – disrespectful boldness, sauciness
conciliate – to win over; soothe the anger of
dudgeon – anger or resentment
ejaculated – to say suddenly
ethereal – very light, airy, delicate
obtrusive – calling attention to oneself in a displeasing way
ponging – stinking
supercilious – disdainful or contemptuous

1. The image of a horse is a recurring motif in this story. Find an example of this motif in this chapter.

2. What future event does Mr. Gradgrind's conference with Bounderby and his request to have a talk with Louisa in the morning suggest to the reader?

3. Why do you think Tom warns Louisa about her father's talk with Bounderby? What does Tom want from his sister?

Chapter XV – Father and Daughter

VOCABULARY

aggregate – a whole; total
discomfited – made uncomfortable
recumbent – lying down; reclining

1. Mr. Gradgrind seems to be ill at ease when Louisa asks him, "Do you think I love Mr. Bounderby?" He is described as "extremely discomfited by this unexpected question." Why do you think he considers this question uncomfortable?

Chapter II – Mr. James Harthouse

VOCABULARY

appellation – a name or title
enervate – to deprive of strength
epitome – a short statement of the main points
jocular – joking; humorous
predilection – a preconceived liking
salubrious – promoting health or welfare; healthful
superscribed – written, marked, or engraved
wry – turned or bent to one side; twisted

1. How does Mr. James Harthouse feel about Louisa when he meets her for the first time?

2. Find a passage in this chapter that supports the following statement: Mr. James Harthouse is a young man who has no strong opinions or convictions of his own.

3. At the end of the chapter, Mr. Harthouse seems to be developing a relationship with Tom. Tom makes faces to show his contempt for Bounderby. Mr. Harthouse “encouraged him much in the course of the evening, and showed an unusual liking for him....” Why do you think Mr. Harthouse is befriending Tom?
