




Reading a classic novel

In the nineteenth century, some writers wanted their readers to understand more about the lives of others. In those days before television and the Internet, books were one of the most important ways of **persuading** people to think about the rest of the world.

In Chapters 5 and 17 of his novel *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens describes Coketown, an industrial city in the north of England. Read his description of Coketown in these **extracts**.



It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; ... It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next.

... The streets were hot and dusty on the summer day, and the sun was so bright that it even shone through the heavy vapour drooping over Coketown, and could not be looked at steadily. Stokers emerged from low underground doorways into factory yards, and sat on steps, and posts, and palings, wiping their swarthy visages, and contemplating coals. The whole town seemed to be frying in oil. There was a stifling smell of hot oil everywhere. The steam-engines shone with it, the dresses of the Hands were soiled with it, the mills throughout their many storeys oozed and trickled it ... their inhabitants, wasting with heat, toiled languidly in the desert. But no temperature made the melancholy-mad elephants more mad or more sane. Their wearisome heads went up and down at the same rate in hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, fair weather and foul. The measured motion of their shadows on the walls, was the substitute Coketown had to show for the shadows of rustling woods; while, for the summer hum of insects, it could offer, all the year round, from the dawn of Monday to the night of Saturday, the whirr of shafts and wheels.

Reading and understanding



Answer these questions about both the **extracts**.

Charles Dickens uses more detail than many modern writers would. Why do you think this is?

.....

.....

Dickens uses many long sentences and repeats words. What effect does this have on the reader?

.....

.....

Find as many **adjectives** describing **colors**, **sounds**, and **smells** as you can. Write them here.

Remember: An **adjective** is a describing word.

.....

.....

.....

Find a **metaphor** for smoke and write it here.

Remember: A writer uses a **metaphor** to describe something as if it were something else.

.....

Find a **simile** for a steam-engine and write it here.

Remember: A **simile** is used to compare one thing with another to create an image in the reader's mind. It often includes the words **like** or **as**.

.....

Here are some of the words that you may have found unfamiliar or difficult. Draw a line to match each one with its meaning. The first one has been done for you.

interminable	very sad
monotonously		leaked slowly
melancholy		endless
counterpart		weakly
wearisome		same
stokers		in the same dull way
visage		furnace feeders
oozed		boring and tiring
languidly		face



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You will probably need to help your child read this extract. Reading extracts from classic texts will help familiarize your child with older styles and language and will prepare him or her for reading an entire classic novel in later years.

Reading and understanding



Answer these questions about both the **extracts**.

Charles Dickens uses more detail than many modern writers would. Why do you think this is?

Unfamiliar scenes had to be described in detail because people did not have
TVs or videos showing pictures of them.

Dickens uses many long sentences and repeats words. What effect does this have on the reader?

It conveys the monotony of Coketown life and gives structure and rhythm
to the text. It is like the rhythm of machinery.

Find as many **adjectives** describing **colors**, **sounds**, and **smells** as you can.
Write them here.

Remember: An **adjective** is a describing word.

red, black, purple, ill-smelling, rattling, trembling, swarthy, stifling, rustling
.....
.....

Find a **metaphor** for smoke and write it here.

Remember: A writer uses a **metaphor** to describe something as if it were something else.

Interminable serpents
.....

Find a **simile** for a steam-engine and write it here.

Remember: A **simile** is used to compare one thing with another to create an image in the reader's mind. It often includes the words **like** or **as**.

like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness
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You may need to discuss some of these questions with your child. You might like to point out that Dickens was a journalist as well as a fiction writer and his novels have an informative and persuasive purpose as well as an entertainment value.