

Hard Times

Charles Dickens

FOCUS: SATIRE

Chapter I: 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 school-room, 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, as it was, — all helped the emphasis.

"In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!"

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

cellarage — here, storage space, as if in a wine cellar.

carriage — here, posture; manner of bearing the body.



What is the "cellarage"?

A. The cellarage refers to the eye sockets from which Thomas Gradgrind's eyes peer, as if from a cave.



How does Dickens use parallelism to characterize the speaker?

A. Dickens' repetition of sentences beginning with "The emphasis was helped by" underscores his characterization of the speaker as a thoroughly rigid, single-minded, and self-aggrandizing individual.



What image does Dickens project by repeatedly using the word "square" as an adjective to describe the speaker?

A. Unlike circles, which are soft and fluid, a square is made of sharp corners and rigid lines. The imagery helps to emphasize the relentlessly stern and inflexible character of the speaker.

What is the "cellarage"?

How does Dickens use parallelism to characterize the speaker?

What image does Dickens project by repeatedly using the word "square" as an adjective to describe the speaker?



What is the extended metaphor in this paragraph?

A. The children are compared to empty containers that are lined up in a factory, waiting to be filled to the brim (in this case with facts).



What contradiction is implied in the phrase, “to measure any parcel of human nature”? How does this statement provide the key to Dickens’ social criticism?

A. One thing that *cannot* be measured is human nature; neither can it be neatly wrapped as if it were a parcel. Gradgrind’s depersonalizing of humanity is the key to the anger Dickens feels.



Identify the metaphors in the second column, and explain what they imply.

A. a. The students are compared to empty pitchers into which Gradgrind will pour facts. The implication is that Gradgrind does not value any of the life-experiences or pre-conceived concepts that the children will bring to the classroom. **b.** Gradgrind is compared to a cannon set to explode any vestiges of sensitivity to beauty and emotion that might conflict with his Utilitarian, materialistic philosophy. The use of the word *cannon* is disturbing in its hint of the mental violence and the not-so-subtle persuasion that Thomas Gradgrind will exert to brainwash his students. **c.** Gradgrind is also compared to a galvanizing apparatus in that he will attempt to “electrify” the children into becoming non-creative, non-imaginative, factually oriented adults.

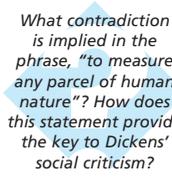


What is Gradgrind’s purpose in calling the children by number?

A. By using numbers instead of names, Gradgrind depersonalizes the children, reducing them to statistics, and implying that they are objects to be manipulated. Any right to individual thought and expression is obviously impossible if the “item” referred to is deprived of its humanity.



What is the extended metaphor in this paragraph?



What contradiction is implied in the phrase, “to measure any parcel of human nature”? How does this statement provide the key to Dickens’ social criticism?



Identify the metaphors in the second column, and explain what they imply.



What is Gradgrind’s purpose in calling the children by number?

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.

Chapter II: Murdering The Innocents

Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts 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 supposititious,* non-existent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind — no, sir!

1 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 sparkled at them from the cellarage 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.

A CLOSER LOOK

In Dickens’ time, **galvanizing** was a process (no longer used) involving the application of an electrical stimulus to the human body for medicinal or therapeutic purposes. Here, Thomas Gradgrind wishes to “cure” his students by destroying any desire to use their imagination.

A CLOSER LOOK

The phrase **nothing over** is an arithmetical term meaning “remainder zero.” It has been employed by generations of British schoolchildren, and is used here with a double meaning to emphasize the idea that, according to Gradgrind, facts are always immutable and unchangeable.

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

“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.”

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

imperial gallons — (British) units of measurement equal to 4.544 liters; approximately 20% more than American gallons.

rule — here, a ruler; a measuring stick.

supposititious — imaginary; hypothetical.

1 Point out to students that the use of the name “Gradgrind” adds to the characterization.