

# Example of literature review on thomas gradgrind in hard times

[People](#), [Charles Dickens](#)



One of the key intellectual tenets of the Enlightenment was the superiority of reason over emotion. Through reason, the thinking went, all of the major problems of the world could easily be solved. The passions (which included religion, for many) only served to distract people from the true solutions to problems and, as a result, the passions should be repressed. This didn't end up working out so well for movements such as the French Revolution, which placed logic above emotions in its official statements of position but ended up serving as one of the primary examples of unleashed anger throughout history. Thomas Gradgrind, the retired merchant-turned-teacher who is the main character of Dickens' *Hard Times*, serves as Dickens' allegorical representative of Reason; the events that unfold for his children demonstrate the limits of living by pure reason. The way Dickens portrays Gradgrind is instrumental in describing Dickens' view of a philosophy devoted to pure reason.

The beginning of the book contains Dickens' physical description of Gradgrind: a man with "square coat, square legs, square shoulders" (Dickens). All of this demonstrates his inflexible nature, as he appears to be a man without any rounded contours. This summarizes his pedagogical approach as a teacher; rather than including any of the enjoyable, delightful parts of education, all he teaches is the cold, hard factual elements of his subject areas. His voice is a monotone, and the words that appear in that voice only contain one dimension as well – that of fact. All that is affective, or emotional, or beautiful about learning has been squeezed out by the approach that Mr. Gradgrind takes toward information. Throughout this physical description, Dickens demonstrates a definite lack of creativity or

spark in Mr. Gradgrind's personality: he has paved over all of the passionate elements of education with the concrete of facts.

Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy is just as unyielding as his physical description, at least in the earlier parts of the novel. Because he believes that logical principles can define and command human behavior, he says that he can "weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you what it comes to" (Dickens). Because he has used measurements and value systems to build up wealth in the hardware business, he applies that philosophy to education – which is a much less concrete field, but Mr. Gradgrind believes that what worked in one field will work just as well in another. Of course, the struggles that his children develop in emotional matters show that a belief in pure reason is very limited – Thomas deals with trouble by turning to a dissipated lifestyle, and Louisa finds that her marriage is not satisfactory on a number of levels.

## **Works Cited**

Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*. Web. Retrieved 26 March 2012 from [http://www. online-literature. com/dickens/hardtimes/](http://www.online-literature.com/dickens/hardtimes/)