

# Hard times for these times

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



Hard Times For These Times In order to improve the sales of his own weekly magazine, Household Words, in which sales had begun to decline in 1854, Charles Dickens (lived 1812 – 1870) began to publish a new series of weekly episodes in the magazine. Hard Times For These Times, an assault on the industrial greed and political economy that exploits the working classes and deadens the soul, ran from April 1 to August 12, 1854. In the opening scenes that take place in the classroom, you become familiarized with the Gradgrind School and its fundamentals. The Gradgrind philosophy, based on the Facts, Facts, and more Facts of reality, is demonstrated as being not only cruel and destructive to the workers – the "Hands" of society – but is also humanly inadequate to the Gradgrind family it served. Mrs. Gradgrind observed that her husband has missed something in his life, yet, "not an ology at all." Louisa and her brother Tom, "the whelp," are nearly destroyed by the strictly mechanical principles of Gradgrindery. It was Hard Times for everyone. Sissy Jupe, who grew up among Sleary's Horse Riding Circus, and was not exposed to the harsh doctrine of the Gradgrind family until later in life, represents the imaginative creativity and generosity that the Gradgrind family misses. The coming together of Sissy and Loo, at the conclusion of the novel at the circus, represents what Dickens believes industrial England needs. "Let me lay this head of mine upon a loving heart," Loo says to Sissy at the end. In his novel Hard Times, Charles Dickens wonderfully illustrates many characters. Some of which include Mrs. Sparsit, one of Bounderby's pride-and-joys, Sissy Jupe, the young girl taken in by Mr. Gradgrind, Bitzer, one of Mr. Gradgrind's old pupils, Mr. Harthouse, the bored world traveler, Mr. Gradgrind, the elder of the Gradgrind family, Mr. Bounderby, banker and

friend of the Gradgrind family, and finally, Louisa, the beautiful but imaginatively under-nourished daughter of Mr. Gradgrind. They both relate to Victorian society, as well as playing a key role in the plot of the storyline; it has been hard to prove, however, that any of these characters actually played a part as a significant person or event in Dickens's life. Even still, without the two unforgettable characters of Sissy Jupe and Mr. Gradgrind (with whom Dickens shared one trait – a love for Facts), the complete effect of the story would have been rather hard to obtain. We first become acquainted with the fanciful young girl Sissy Jupe in the classroom of Mr. Gradgrind, when he calls upon her to ask for the definition of a horse. Her father had sent her to the Gradgrind School in order to educate her, but she was left in the care of Mr. Sleary when he suddenly abandoned her while she was running an errand. Unlike the realistic Gradgrind family, Sissy had been raised in the fun and imaginative Sleary's Horse Riding Circus. Her father had been a clown in the circus, and at the time of his desertion, had been very depressed because of a lack of worthy performances. When Mr. Gradgrind was asked by Sleary to take in Sissy and educate her, he hesitantly agreed, and even though she had been taken into the Gradgrind family, she never lost her inner touch of creativity and lively verve. Throughout the novel, she exhibits her tender love and care for humanity. She displays this love when, for example, Stephen Blackpool leaves Coketown because he is convicted of robbing Mr. Bounderby's bank. Sissy and Louisa go to comfort Rachael and convince her he is coming back to prove he is an innocent man. At the end of the novel, Sissy is said to have embodied the idea of which Dickens believed the country of England needed: not the industrial cupidity that was common

among society, but a loving regard for human life. Aside from Sissy, another important character is Mr. Gradgrind himself. Thomas Gradgrind is the head of the Gradgrind School and the elder of the Gradgrind Family. He is not to be confused, though, with the young Tom Gradgrind, otherwise known as, "the whelp." Mr. Gradgrind is perceived at the beginning and throughout most of the novel up until the end, as a man of Fact and nothing but Fact, not allowing any other extension of one's self to replace its high-and-mighty glory. He has raised his son, Tom, and his daughter, Louisa, to be bound by the same philosophy as that which is enforced in his school. In fact, he even verbally chastised them when they were caught peeking through a hole in a fence to look at Sleary's circus. He is also a friend of Mr. Bounderby, who apprenticed his son Tom and courted his daughter Louisa. However, the latter event proved to be the downfall of the entire Gradgrind structure, including Mr. Gradgrind himself. When he dramatically learned that Louisa had had an affair with Mr. Harthouse and only married Mr. Bounderby because of the situation, his life began to crumble before him, and he realized that he had missed the point of life completely. After picking himself up, he broke the news to Mr. Bounderby, and as a consequence of Bounderby's arrogance, their life-long friendship ends in seemingly a blink of an eye. Charles Dickens has published many works during his lifetime, including *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41), *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44), *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Bleak House* (1852- 53), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1855- 57), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1861), *Our Mutual*

Friend (1864-65), and Edwin Drood (unfinished) (1870). He had also been an office boy, freelance reporter, and lover of the stage.