

Literature often reflects the time period in which it was written. **Hard Times** is a novel written by the author Charles Dickens in 1854 during the height of the Industrial Revolution. The book evaluates English society and is aimed at highlighting the social and economic problems of the times. The book follows several characters from different levels of society. One of these characters is Stephen Blackpool, a worker in an industrial mill in the fictional city of Coketown.

**Task:** As you read the excerpts from *Hard Times*, look for three passages that relate the living and working conditions of industrial revolution. Using the chart, explain how the passage you chose relates to history.

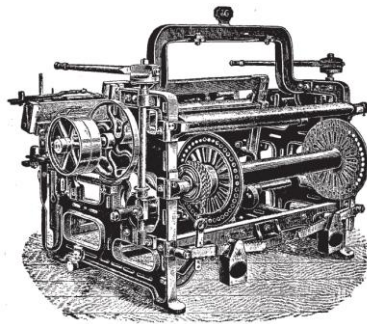


“...The factories burst into light, before pale morning showed the monstrous serpents of smoke trailing themselves over Coketown. A clattering of shoes upon the pavement; a rapid ringing of bells; and all the steam engines, polished and oiled up for the day’s **monotony**, were at their heavy exercise again. Stephen Blackpool, forty years of age, made his way up the hill to his work. Stephen looked older, but he had a hard life. It is said that every life has its roses and thorns; there seemed, however, to have been a misadventure or mistake in Stephen’s case, because it seemed that somebody else had gotten ahold all of his roses, and he had only ended up only with the thorns, and perhaps somebody else’s thorns as well.

**monotony:** boring, repetitive work

Stephen bent over his **loom**, quiet, watchful, and steady, as every man was in the forest of looms where Stephen worked, carefully avoiding the crashing, smashing, tearing piece of mechanism at which he and all the others labored....

**loom:** machine for making cloth



So many hundred workers in this **mill**; so many hundred horses of steam power. It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the machine will do. But what you cannot calculate is the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for how this machine impacts the souls of its workers...

**mill:** factory

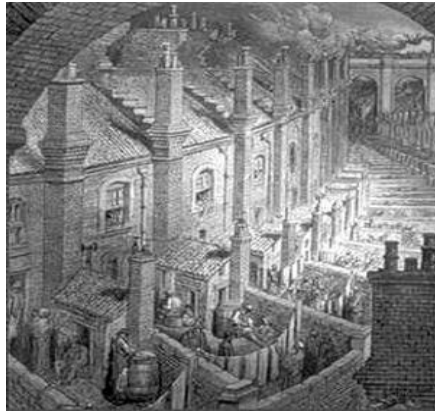
The day grew strong, and showed itself outside, even against the flaming lights within. The lights were turned out, and the work went on. The rain fell, and the smoke-serpents trailed themselves upon the earth. In the waste-yard outside, the steam from the escape-pipe, the litter of barrels and old iron, the shining heaps of coals, the ashes everywhere, were **shrouded** in a **veil** of mist and rain...

**shrouded:** partially hidden  
**veil:** mask

The work went on, until the noon-bell rang. More clattering upon the pavements. The looms, and wheels, and workers, all out for to lunch for forty five minutes...

The afternoon and in to night were more of the same....Time went on in Coketown like its machinery: unrelenting, unstopping. Finally, after hours in that wilderness of smoke and brick, the machinery slackened. Throbbing **feebly** like a fainting pulse, it finally stopped. The bell again; the glare of light and heat **dispelled**; the factories, looming heavy in the black wet night- their tall chimneys rising up into the air....

Stephen came out of the hot mill into the damp wind and cold wet streets, **haggard** and worn. He turned from his own factory, taking nothing but a little bread as he walked along, towards the hill on which Rachel worked to make their way home. Rachel and Steven both lived in the hardest working part of Coketown; where the sky was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in; at the heart of the **labyrinth** of close streets upon streets, which had come into existence **piecemeal**, and the whole an unnatural family of the city, shouldering, and trampling, and pressing one another to death; in the last close **nook**, where the chimneys, for want of air to make a **draught**, were built in an immense variety of stunted and crooked shapes as though every house put out a sign of the kind of people who lived there...



They had walked some distance, and were near their own homes. The woman's was the first reached. It was in one of the many **serpentine** streets. She stopped at the corner, and putting her hand in his, wished him good night.

When she was lost to his view, he pursued his homeward way, glancing up sometimes at the sky, where the clouds were sailing fast and wildly. But they were broken now, and the rain had ceased, and the moon shone- looking down the high chimneys of Coketown on the deep **furnaces** below, and casting giant shadows of the steam engines at rest. He made his way to his own home, in such another street as the first, saving that it was narrower, and over a little shop...."

**feebly**: weakly  
**dispelled**: went away, stopped

**haggard**: exhausted

**labyrinth**: maze  
**piecemeal**: piece by piece, randomly, as you go along  
**nook**: corner  
**draught**: ventilation

**serpentine**: snake-like

**furnaces**: heat producing engine