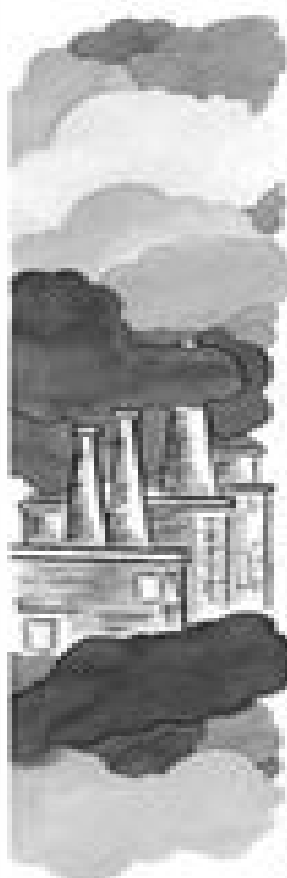




Reading a classic novel

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 3 and 17 of his novel *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens describes Coketown, an industrial city in the north of England. Read his descriptions 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 monstrous shapes of smoke stalked themselves for ever and ever, and never got unrolled. 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 run like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went to and fro at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavement, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the consequence 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 dropping over Coketown, and could not be looked at steadily. Men emerged from low underground passages into factory yards, and sat on steps, and porches, and passages, wiping their sweating visages, and contemplating coals. The whole town seemed to be lying in oil. There was a stifling smell of hot oil everywhere. The steam-engines shone with it, the houses of the Hand were scalded with it, the mills throughout their many nozzles roared and rattled it ... their inhabitants, sweating with heat, walked languidly in the desert. But no temperature made the melancholy and elephants more mad or more sane. Their workmen's heads went up and down at the same rate as hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, hot weather and food. The measured motion of their shoulders on the walls, was the substance Coketown had to show for the darkness of rattling wheels, while, for the summer heat of streets, it could offer, all the year round, from the dawn of Monday to the night of Sunday, the wheel of shafts and wheels.