



## Reading a classic novel

In the nineteenth century, some writers managed 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 8 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 interminable serpents of smoke crawled themselves like great and ever, and never got encircled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with all swelling dye, and east piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a swishing all day long, and where the grates of the steam-engine worked incessantly up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all crooked one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people much like the one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the consequence of the time and the place.

... The streets were hot and dusty on the summer day, and the sun was so bright that it even shone through the heavy vapour drifting over Coketown, and could not be looked at steadily. Shoppers emerged from low underground passages near factory walls, and sat on steps, and paws, and pilings, wiping their sweating visages, and counterbalancing roofs. The whole town seemed to be living in oil. There was a stifling smell of heat and overheat. The main-complex domes with in, the domes of the Flaxmill were filled with oil, the walls throughout their mass were oiled and wrinkled in ... their inflections, waving with heat, called longitudinal in the dust. But no temperature made the innumerable small elephants move mad or more wise. Their wretched heads went up and down at the same rate in hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, fair weather and foul. The increased motion of their shadows on the walls, upon the adjacent Coketown had to show the shadows of rattling wheels, while, for the number bams of insects, it could offer, all the poor round forms the domes of Monday to the right of Saturday, the whiteness of death and hell.