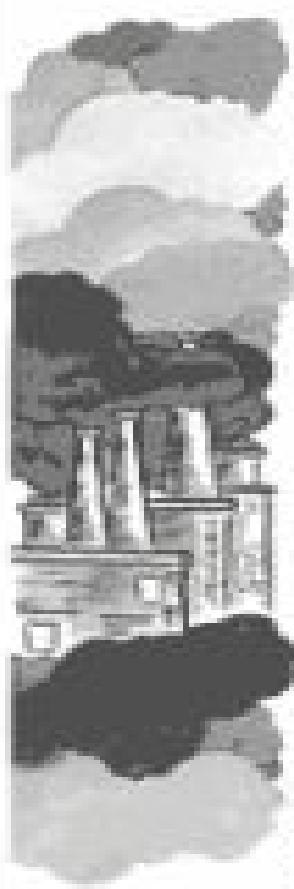




Reading a classic novel

In the nineteenth century, when writers wanted their readers to understand more about the lives of others, by 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 *Mind Games*, Charles Dickens describes Coketown, an industrial town 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 like snakes; a town of iron, and cotton, and sugar, and soap, and glass, and building full of windows where there was a mangle and a scrubbing-brush all day long, and where the gables of the houses projected seawards seawards up and down, like the back of a crocodile in a state of melancholy rancour. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets half like the big ones, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went to and from at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and no one knew any day who was the master carpenter and mason, and who was the mason of the last and the first.

... The streets were hot and dusty on the summer day, and the sun was so bright that it even shone through the heavy fog that enveloped most Coketown, and could not be looked at steadily. People emerged from hot underground galleries into factory yards, and sat on steps, and pouts, and ledges, wiping their sweaty visages, and panting like seals. The whole town seemed to be living in oil. There was a ringing sound all over everywhere. The steam engines chuntered with it, the drivers of the blinds were pulled with it, the mills throbbed with it, every street crowd and thronged it ... these inhabitants, working with heat, rolled languidly in the dust. But the temperature made the melancholy mud elephants move mad at times now. Their monstrous heads went up and down at the same time in hot, sultry and cold, wet weather and dry, dry weather and cool. The enormous masses of their darkness on the roofs, over the whitewashed walls, had no shame for the shadows of running rivers; while, for the towering bins of sugar, it could raise all the sun round, from the shores of Mincing to the ridge of Barnetts, like a bank of clouds and smoke.