

Hard Times – Facts, sir!

Exercise 1

The following passage sees Mr Gradgrind (who spoke about facts in the listening passage) showing his model school to his friend Mr Bounderby, who has some questions for the students. How would you define the different world views of these two gentlemen on the one hand, and Sissy Jupe on the other?

1 'Very well,' said this gentleman, briskly smiling, and folding his arms. 'That's a horse.
2 Now, let me ask you boys and girls, Would you paper a room with representations of
3 horses?'

4 After a pause, one half of the children cried in chorus, 'Yes, sir!' Upon which the other
5 half, seeing in the gentleman's face that Yes was wrong, cried out in chorus, 'No, Sir!' – as
6 the custom is, in these examinations.

7 'Of course, No. Why wouldn't you?'

8 A pause. One corpulent boy, with a wheezy manner of breathing, ventured the answer,
9 Because he wouldn't paper a room at all, but would paint it.

10 'You *must* paper it,' said the gentleman, rather warmly.

11 'You must paper it,' said Thomas Gradgrind, 'whether you like it or not. Don't tell *us* you
12 wouldn't paper it. What do you mean, boy?'

13 'I'll explain to you, then,' said the gentleman, after another and a dismal pause, 'why you
14 wouldn't paper a room with representations of horses. Do you ever see horses walking up
15 and down the sides of rooms in reality – in fact? Do you?'

16 'Yes, Sir!' from one half. 'No, Sir!' from the other.

17 'Of course, No,' said the gentleman, with an indignant look at the wrong half. 'Why, then,
18 are you not to see anywhere, what you don't have in fact. What is called Taste, is only
19 another name for Fact.'

20 Thomas Gradgrind nodded his approbation.

21 'This is a new principle, a discovery, a great discovery,' said the gentleman. 'Now, I'll try
22 you again. Suppose you were going to carpet a room. Would you use a carpet having a
23 representation of flowers upon it?'

24 There being a general conviction by this time that 'No, Sir!' was always the right answer
25 to this gentleman, the chorus of No was very strong. Only a few feeble stragglers said Yes;
26 among them Sissy Jupe.

27 'Girl number twenty,' said the gentleman, smiling in the calm strength of knowledge.

28 Sissy blushed, and stood up.

29 'So you would carpet your room – or your husband's room, if you were a grown woman,
30 and had a husband – with representations of flowers, would you?' said the gentleman. 'Why
31 would you?'

32 'If you please, Sir, I am very fond of flowers,' returned the girl.

33 'And is that why you would put tables and chairs upon them, and have people walking
34 over them with heavy boots?'

35 'It wouldn't hurt them, Sir. They wouldn't crush and wither, if you please, Sir. They would
36 be the picture of what was very pretty and pleasant, and I would fancy ----'

37 'Ay, ay, ay! But you mustn't fancy,' cried the gentleman, quite elated by coming so
38 happily to his point. 'That's it! You are never to fancy.'

39 'You are not, Cecilia Jupe,' Thomas Gradgrind solemnly repeated, 'to do anything of that
40 kind.'

41 'Fact, fact, fact!' said the gentleman. And 'Fact, fact, fact!' repeated Thomas Gradgrind.

42 'You are to be in all things regulated and governed,' said the gentleman, 'by fact. We
43 hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will
44 force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing by fact. You must discard the word
45 Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have, in any object of use
46 or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact. You don't walk upon flowers in fact; you
47 cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don't find that foreign birds and
48 butterflies come and perch upon your crockery; you cannot be permitted to paint foreign
49 birds and butterflies upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and
50 down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls; you must use,' said the
51 gentleman, 'for all these purposes, combinations and modifications (in primary colours) of
52 mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is the new
53 discovery. This is fact. This is taste.'

54 The girl curtsied, and sat down.

Exercise 2

Are the following statements true, false, or impossible to judge from the passage? Write *T* or *F* or ? next to each statement.

1. The students are practised at guessing what the teacher wants them to say.
2. Only Sissy and a few students like flowers. Most of the students don't.
3. The two gentlemen see 'fancy' as the opposite of 'fact', and oppose it.
4. The two gentlemen have plain white plates at home.
5. The two gentlemen do not admit there could be any valid view other than their own.