

The definition of a horse p163 analysis task 3

Underline in different colours on your textbook

Physical appearance	Interests	Instruments of work
Square forefinger (lines 21-22, 47)	Clean out the regions of childhood at one discharge (line 18);	Multiplication table (line 5).
A kind of cannon (line 17);	Ready to replace the tender imagination with facts (lines 18-20)	
His eyes are set in cellarage (line 16);	To weigh and measure any parcel of human nature (lines 5-6);	Rule and a pair of scales (line 4);
A galvanizing apparatus (lines 18-19).		

2 What overall impression do these details create?

All these details make an overall impression of a threatening, unattractive person ready to destroy the children's imagination in favour of facts.

3 What does he represent?

Gradgrind represents the wisdom of the head. His philosophy is based on utilitarianism, which seeks to promote 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'. This philosophy is based on scientific laws that dictate that nothing else is important but profit, and that profit is achieved by the pursuit of cold, hard facts. Everything that isn't factual is considered 'fancy', or imagination.

4 His name is composed of two words. Gradgrind = *grade* (a particular standard or level of quality of a product) + *grind* (to crush into powder). The onomatopoeic sound and the inferred meaning of this name suggest a lot about this educator's personality. Which definition would you choose to describe him?

He crushes the children and their imagination with his rules

Ex 4

1. Look at lines 14-5
2. Look at line 21

Additional question : A characteristic of Dickens's style is the creation of CARICATURES , by means of exaggerations and hyperboles . Can you find examples in the passage?

Commentary 'The Definition of a Horse' from 'Hard Times' by C.Dickens (1854)

The scene is set in a school, where Mr. Gradgrind, the teacher, is giving a lesson to his students. Children are separated into two halves, i.e., boys and girls occupy different areas of the big, whitewashed classroom.

Mr. Gradgrind is teaching the importance of facts; he picks on a new pupil, calling her 'girl number twenty'. 'Girl n° 20' is Sissy Jupe, a poor girl whose father works in the horse business. The teacher first objects to the girl's nickname, then, to her father's job. He says her father 'has no business' in calling her 'Sissy' and that 'Cecilia' is her real name. Mr. Gradgrind dislikes the feeling of affection that is normally attached to nicknames. He thinks fathers should never show affection for their children not to spoil them.

He also objects to Cecilia's father's humble job and it seems he does not intend to speak about it. However, he goes on asking her questions about it thus giving evidence to his contradictory attitude.

Then, he asks the girl to provide a definition of a horse. When the girl proves unable to do it, he calls Bitzer.

Bitzer is a student and he is remarkable for his unwholesome pallor as well as for his passive acceptance of Mr. Gradgrind's teaching method. We have the impression Mr. Gradgrind likes boys more than girls; he shows a misogynist attitude to Cecilia and he clearly despises her father's humble occupation.

Bitzer provides a pseudo-scientific definition of a horse, based on pompous, lifeless terms and is praised by the teacher. Mr. Gradgrind is a typical Victorian teacher; he is strict and cruel, he refers to his pupils as 'little pitchers', empty vases to be filled with facts. He thinks imagination, creativity and intuition have nothing to do with education, they may even slow down the learning process or damage it. His students are mainly depersonalized and passive.

Cecilia stands out both for her physical appearance and her attitude to the teacher. Her dark colors are symbolic of her vivid imagination while Bitzer's light colors stand for his passive attitude and acceptance of facts and his teacher's system. The sunbeam which hits Bitzer on one end and Cecilia on the opposite end, is a symbol of rationality. Too much rationality does not damage Cecilia's powerful imagination (it makes her dark colors even more lustrous) but it turns Bitzer into a dehumanized machine.

C. Dickens uses a particular technique to suggest to us the main features of his characters' personality. Their names often reveal their character.

The name 'Gradgrind' is made up of two words, i.e., 'grade' and 'grind'. 'Grade' is related to Maths and Science while 'grind' is a verb and it means 'to crush into powder'. Indeed, Mr. Gradgrind is a man of facts, as is clearly evidenced in his physical description (see the repetition of the word 'square' in lines 21-22-47), in his interests ('to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature' ll. 5-6; 'ready to replace the tender imagination with facts' ll. 18 to 20) and in the instruments of work he uses ('a rule and a pair of scales' l.4; 'a multiplication table' l.5). His task as a teacher is to destroy (i.e., crush into powder) his pupils' imagination, creativity and intuition. He is compared with a 'kind of cannon' (l. 17) and a 'galvanizing apparatus (ll- 18-19) ready to 'clean out the regions of childhood at one discharge' (see line 18).