011

# Coketown

## WARM UP

**1.** 'Coketown' is a compound name made of the words 'coke' (a mineral used to produce iron) and 'town'. How do you imagine the city? Share your ideas with the rest of the class.

**Coketown is the fictional name of the town where the novel is set. The following passage is a description of it.**

**1.** Coketown [...] was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it[1]; but as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage.

It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled[2].

It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye[3], and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling[4] 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 very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like 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 counterpart of the last and the next. [...]

**2.** You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful[5]. If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel there — as the members of eighteen religious persuasions[6] had done — they made it a pious warehouse[7] of red brick, with sometimes (but this is only in highly ornamented examples) a bell in a birdcage[8] on the top of it. The solitary exception was the New Church; a stuccoed edifice with a square steeple[9] over the door, terminating in four short pinnacles like florid wooden legs. All the public inscriptions in the town were painted alike, in severe characters of black and white. The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital[10] and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchasable in the cheapest market and salable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen.

1 had allowed it: l'avessero permesso
2 never got uncoiled: non si fermavano mai
3 ill-smelling dye: tinta maleodorante
4 rattling: sferragliare
5 workful: pensato per essere efficiente
6 persuasions: convinzioni, persuasioni
7 warehouse: magazzino
8 birdcage: gabbia
9 steeple: campanile
10 lying-in hospital: reparto maternità

## COMPREHENSION

**2.** Read the text and choose the correct option in the following statements.

1 Coketown is *a small, lively village / an ugly industrial town.*
2 It is *quiet / noisy.*
3 The air is *polluted / clean.*
4 People *have / never have* fun.
5 All the inscriptions in town have *different / the same* font.
6 Buildings *are all alike / differ according to function.*

## ANALYSIS

**3.** Focus on the narrative structure of the passage. Define the type of narrator. Choose the correct option.

a 1st person never interacting with the reader.
b 3rd person omniscient explicitly interacting.

**4. Focus on the first paragraph (lines 1-13).**

1 Which adjective does Dickens use to describe the colours of the city?

2 What does Dickens compare the city to?

3 Dickens uses a metaphor to describe the smoke that pollutes the city. Can you find it?

4 Which animal does Dickens compare the steam-engine to?

5 What is peculiar about this animal?

6 What idea(s) does Dickens want to convey through this animal imagery? Choose the correct option.

a The city is alive. b The city is a wild and irrational place.

**5. Which words/expressions suggest the idea of:**

1 unhealthiness / pollution 2 monotony 3 cacophony

**6. Find evidence in the second paragraph (lines 14-27) to support the following statements.**

1 In Coketown all buildings look the same.

2 In Coketown churches are made of bricks.

3 In Coketown there is no difference between life and death.

**7. What are the most repeated words in the passage? Choose among the following:**

a brick b fact c work d same

## INTERPRETATION

**8. How does Dickens underline the inhumanity of the city in this passage? Explain in your own words.**

**9. What effect does the repetition of the words 'fact' and 'same' have on the reader? What idea does it convey? Choose the correct option.**

a lack of imagination b uniformity c variety

**10. The city of Coketown is made of bricks. What do you think bricks can symbolise in the novel? Think about their shape and their weight. Choose the correct option.**

a Bricks are perfectly square and identical and can be used to create anything.

b Bricks symbolise the efficiency and the monotony of the city.

c Bricks symbolise the variety of Coketown's architecture.

**11. What is the life of the inhabitants of Coketown like? Describe it in your own words.**

## YOUR VOICE

**12. Imagine you were the mayor of Coketown. Would you change the city? If so, what would you change about it? Write a short text in which you explain your plan for the city.**

**13. This is an engraving representing the Manchester cotton factories in the early 19th century. What elements contained in Dickens' description of Coketown can you find here?**

◀ The cotton mills in Union Street, Manchester (c.1835).