

Mr Bounderby

5 He was a rich man: a banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not. A big, loud man with a stare and a metallic laugh. A man made out of a coarse material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much of him. A man with a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open, and lift his eyebrows up. A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start. A man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man. A man who was always proclaiming, through the brassy-speaking trumpet of a voice of his, his old ignorance and his old poverty. A man who was the Bully of humility.

10 A year or two younger than his eminently practical friend, Mr Bounderby looked older; his seven or eight and forty might have had the seven or eight added to it again, without surprising anybody. He had not much hair. One might have fancied he had talked it off; and that what was left, all standing up in disorder, was in that condition from being constantly blown about by his windy boastfulness.

15 In the formal drawing room of Stone Lodge, standing on the hearthrug, warming himself before the fire, Mr Bounderby delivered some observations to Mrs Gradgrind on the circumstance of its being his birthday. He stood before the fire, partly because it was a cool spring afternoon, though the sun shone; partly because the shade of Stone Lodge was always haunted by the ghost of damp mortar; partly because he thus took up a commanding position from which to subdue Mrs Gradgrind.

20 'I hadn't a shoe to my foot. As to a stocking, I didn't know such a thing by name. I passed the day in a ditch, and the night in a pigsty. That's the way I spent my tenth birthday. Not that a ditch was new to me, for I was born in a ditch.

25 Mrs Gradgrind, a little, thin, white, pink-eyed bundle of shawls, of surpassing feebleness, mental and bodily; who was always taking physic without any effect, and who, whenever she showed a symptom of coming to life, was invariably stunned by some weighty piece of fact tumbling on her; Mrs Gradgrind hoped it was a dry ditch?

30 'No! As wet as a sop. A foot of water in it,' said Mr Bounderby.
 'Enough to give a baby cold,' Mrs Gradgrind considered.
 35 'Cold? I was born with inflammation of the lungs, and of everything else, I believe, that was capable of inflammation,' returned Mr Bounderby. 'For years, ma'am, I was one of the most miserable little wretches ever seen. I was so sickly that I was always moaning and groaning. I was so ragged and dirty, that you wouldn't have touched me with a pair of tongs.'

Chapter 4 'Hard Times' by Charles Dickens

Short answer questions - practise identifying and selecting information.

1. From lines 1-7 list four things we learn about Mr Bounderby's appearance.
2. From lines 6-10 pick out three quotations which show that Mr Bounderby was a man who thought very highly of himself.
3. From lines 28-32 give three examples which show that Mrs Gradgrind is a weak woman.

Longer questions

4. How does Dickens add humour to the presentation of Mr Bounderby?

You should consider:

- his choice of language
- the use of structure.

5. How does the writer use structure to interest the reader in the character of Mr Bounderby?
6. Evaluate how successful Dickens is in making Mr Bounderby seem both overbearing and yet also a comic figure.

OR

Critics say that Mr Bounderby is shown as both an overbearing yet comic character. Do you agree?

Vocabulary and language work

1. In the first paragraph find two other words Dickens uses which mean the same as 'puffed' (line 4).
2. In the first paragraph find another word which means the same as 'stretched' (line 3).
3. Find a simile in the first paragraph. Why has Dickens chosen it?
4. Mr Bounderby is described as 'the Bully of humility'. What does this mean?
5. Find another quotation which suggests that Mr Bounderby is being presented as a bully.
6. Use a dictionary to help you find another word for
 - a mortar (line 22)
 - b sop (line 33)
 - c physic (line 29)
 - d pervading (line 6)
 - e eminently (line 11)

Looking at language questions

1. In line 2 Dickens describes Mr Bounderby as having 'a metallic laugh'. What is the effect of the metaphor used here?
2. Dickens says Mr Bounderby had 'a stare and a metallic laugh'. How does the addition of the word 'stare' make the metaphor more effective?
3. Look at lines 8-9. Pick out two words or phrases which are used to describe how Mr Bounderby speaks and write about the effect of the words or phrases you have chosen.
4. Look at lines 22-23. With what do you normally associate the words 'commanding' and 'subdue'? What does this tell you about the relationship between Mr Bounderby and Mrs Gradgrind?
5. Look at line 31. What is the effect of the choice of the verb 'tumbling'?

Comprehension questions

1. Mr Bounderby is compared to two items in paragraph one. What are they?
2. Look again at paragraph one and make a list of the **facts** about Mr Bounderby and then list the **impressions** we are given of what he is like.
3. Mr Bounderby is a boastful man. Write down three quotations which would tell you this.
4. Do you think that Dickens wants us to like Mr Bounderby? Give reasons for your answers and support what you say with examples from the text.

Group task

In groups of two or three choose one of the following cards to work on. Be ready to feed back to the rest of the class.

<p>a Find the following words or phrases in the extract:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • big • loud • metallic laugh • stare • brassy speaking trumpet • made out of coarse material <p>What links are there between these words?</p> <p>What do they tell us about the character?</p> <p>How effective is the word choice?</p>	<p>b Find the following words or phrases in the extract:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stretched • puffed • swelled • strained • inflated like a balloon • proclaiming <p>What links are there between these words?</p> <p>What do they tell us about the character?</p> <p>How effective is the word choice?</p>
<p>c Find the following words or phrases in the extract:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commanding • subdue • Bully of humility (note the capital 'B') <p>What links are there between these words?</p> <p>What do they tell us about the character?</p> <p>How effective is the word choice?</p>	<p>d Find two examples of lists in the extract:</p> <p>Look at the effect of using a list.</p> <p>Look at the words on the lists - what do they tell us about Mr Bounderby?</p> <p>How effective are the lists in showing the reader what Mr Bounderby is like?</p>
<p>e Find the following words or phrases in the extract:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proclaiming • vaunt • brassy speaking trumpet • blown about by his windy boastfulness <p>What links are there between these words?</p> <p>What do they tell us about the character?</p> <p>How effective is the word choice?</p>	<p>f Find examples of exaggeration or humour in the extract.</p> <p>Try to find three examples and explain their effect.</p>

Creative task

Dickens is clever at introducing characters. He makes great use of similes, metaphors, well-chosen verbs, adjectives and adverbs and employs repetition and lists to good effect. Mr Bounderby is shown to be a loud, boastful man who is proud, domineering and exaggerated enough to be funny. Dickens does not so much tell us what the character is like but shows us by the way he behaves and speaks as well as his effect on Mrs Gradgrind.

- Choose a real or imagined person of your own.
- Put their name (real or made up) in the middle of an A4 sheet of paper.
- Write round it, as a mind map, three or four main characteristics of that person.
- For each characteristic, write down ideas about how you can show this characteristic.

Think about

- metaphors and similes
- word choice - remember a well-chosen verb or noun is often more effective than a long list of adjectives
- how your character behaves, speaks, stands or sits
- what your character might say
- what effect they may have on those around them.

Write your own introduction to the character, as Mr Gradgrind is described in the extract.

Ask a partner to read it and suggest improvements.

Remember - sometimes you can make a description better not just by adding to it but by removing unnecessary words.

Challenge:

Can you make your description amusing?

Suggested answers

Short answer questions

1. Big
Puffed head
Puffed forehead
Swollen veins in his forehead
His eyes and eyebrows seem to be lifted up by his forehead
He seems to look like an inflated balloon
2. 'Inflated like a balloon' (this is both a reference to physical appearance but also a representation metaphorically of his character).
'vaunt'
'self-made man'
'brassy-speaking trumpet of a voice'
'Bully of humility'
3. Physically thin
'surpassing feebleness, mental and bodily'
'white, pink-eyed bundle of shawls' (suggests she is in need of their protection)
'always taking physic without any effect'
'whenever she showed a symptom of coming to life'
'stunned by some weighty piece of fact tumbling on her'

Longer questions

4. Things which might be included are:

- List in line 1 - grand sounding jobs are called into question by the addition of 'what not'.
- Use of metaphors and similes - comparison with a trumpet (links to idea of blowing his own trumpet) and a balloon.
- Description of his hair - standing up in 'disorder' - the opposite of what we might expect and the visual imagery of his hair being blown around by his own 'hot air'.
- Physical description including his eyes being forced open by his skin being so stretched over his head and forehead.
- The use of his own words: he is boasting about spending his tenth birthday in a ditch and having inflammation of the lungs. There is humour in his need to exaggerate his plight. 'So dirty you wouldn't have touched me with a pair of tongs' seems a strange thing to boast about.
- Structure - starts with a man described as a rich banker and ends with his own description of his childhood in a ditch and pig sty.
- Use of repetition ('A man'), as if we need reminding he is a man or a reflection of his own boastfulness perhaps.

5. Structural details include:

- lists which also contain contrast (line 1)
- repetition - excessive use of 'I' when he speaks and the repetition of 'A man'
- use of short sentences: for example 'A man who was the Bully of humility.'
- use of direct speech
- contrast between the picture given in paragraph 1 and that at the end of the text
- contrast with Mrs Gradgrind.

6. Answers might include the content of question 4 and:

- selection of verbs to describe his speech ‘vaunt’, ‘proclaiming’ and the metaphor ‘brassy-speaking trumpet’
- metaphors relating to his hair
- the way he stands to be dominant over Mr Gradgrind who is already depicted as weak
- he is described as the ‘Bully of humility’
- choice of adjectives: ‘strained’, ‘puffed’, ‘swelled’, ‘strained’.

Students must say why these techniques work or do not work, not merely identify them.

Vocabulary and language work

1. ‘swelled’
‘inflated’
2. ‘strained’
3. ‘Inflated like a balloon’ - shows Mr Bounderby’s appearance which reflects his arrogant and boastful character; also a balloon is easily burst and perhaps seems rather a showy or even childish thing, suggesting we should not take him too seriously.
4. Humility is the opposite of arrogance and it suggests that he will dominate any sign of it in himself. It shows how arrogant he is. Dickens’ use of the capital ‘B’ implies he does not just bully any humility in himself but also in others and even the very concept itself.
5. ‘Commanding position’ or ‘subdued’
6. a. ‘mortar’ - cement (used to stick bricks together)
b. ‘sop’ - wet food, soup or bread soaked in milk but also can mean a weak person
c. ‘physic’ - medicine
d. ‘pervading’ - general, overall or spreading
e. ‘eminently’ - prominently

Looking at language questions

1. Metal sounds hard, loud and cold. It links to the trumpet metaphor used to describe his speaking later. A cold laugh can seem sinister and unfriendly and not a laugh others would share in.
2. ‘Stare’ is also a cold word implying a lack of friendliness. The metallic laugh and stare may suggest coldness and the creation a barrier between him and others. Both could be a way of appearing dominant.
3. ‘proclaiming’, ‘the brassy-speaking trumpet of a voice’: both phrases suggest he speaks confidently and loudly. Both imply a boastfulness. Think about the phrase ‘blowing one’s own trumpet’. Neither includes any sense of letting anyone else speak or listening.
4. These seem to be almost military terms and suggests that Mr Bounderby has complete control over Mrs Gradgrind who is presented as little other than a bundle of shawls.
5. The choice of verb makes the fact seem huge, physical and overwhelming - it implies she is physically knocked over or even crushed by it. It also suggests the falling is beyond control and erratic.

Comprehension questions

1. A balloon and a trumpet.
- 2.

Facts	Impressions
he is a banker, manufacturer and a merchant big head eyes seem to stay open and eyebrows raised skin tight loud big	noisy confident cold boastful fat domineering

3. 'vaunt himself'
'proclaiming'
'his windy boastfulness'
4. Suggested answer is no - he is presented with humour and made to seem an arrogant, noisy bully with little to endear himself to the reader.

Group task

Card A: the words show Mr Bounderby as loud, coarse, cold and noisy.

Card B: these words are all linked to his physical size but also represent his arrogance.

Card C: words which present him as domineering and a bully.

Card D: line 1 - list has a dismissive contrast to the grand sounding jobs by adding 'what not' which causes us to question the validity of the boastful list.

Paragraph 3 has a list of reasons why he stands - the last being the most important and closest to the real truth as well as reflecting on his character.

The list of sentences in paragraph one which all start with 'A man ...' had to his arrogance.

Card E: all show his boastful way of speaking

Card F: they might look at the last paragraph where he is trying to make out how terrible his childhood was and so boasts about how miserable he was. There are lots of other examples but this final one truly makes him seem ridiculous.