**ACTIVITIES:**

**Mr. Bounderby (extract taken from Charles Dickens’ Hard Times)**

1. List all the  words and phrases describing Mr. Bounderby

* Mr. Bounderby was as near being Mr. Gradgrind's bosom friend
* A man perfectly devoid of sentiment
* He was a rich man: 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 that brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice of his, his old ignorance and his old poverty. A man who was the Bully of humility.
* 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.

1. Collect the 4 phrases which explicitly convey the narrator’s opinion of Mr. Bounderby’s character and find in a dictionary adjectives of the same meaning.

A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start.

**inflated** = bloated, exaggerated, hyperbolized, outsize, overblown, overdrawn, overweening

A man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man.

**self-made man** = self-reliant, audacious, resourceful, self-confident, bold

A man who was the Bully of humility.

**bully** = persecutor, oppressor, tyrant, ruffian, tough, hectorer, heckler, harasser, tormentor, intimidator

And that what was left, all standing up in disorder, was in that condition from being constantly blown about by his windy boastfulness.

**boastful** = bragger, pretentious, egotistic, cocky, conceited, proud, arrogant, vain

**3**. Now go back to the list you made for exercise 1. Which of the other items on it are connected with one or more of the author’s comments.

The characterization of Mr. Bounderby is strictly connected to Charles Dickens’ comments on the character, since the description is filtered through a third person intrusive narrator.

**4**. The surname of the character contains the word bounder on purpose. Look it up in the dictionary. Which of the phrases you have listed reinforces the meaning of the surname?

Bounder is an adjective which refers to a man who behaves badly or in a way that is not moral, especially in his relationships with women, an extreme ungentlemanly man. The phrase that more reinforces the meaning of the surname is “he was the bully of humility”.

**5**. Mr. Bounderby is described as coming from a poor family, without education and self-made. In other contexts these attributes might be presented as worthy of sympathy and/or admiration. Why aren’t they here?

In the extract taken from Hard Times, the writer wanted to highlight some aspects of Mr. Bounderby’s character. The lack of education and self-made and his poor origin are not presented as worthy of sympathy and/or admiration, however the writer provides an exaggerated portrait of the character thanks to a hyperbolic use of the language which conveys a grotesque effect. Therefore his lack of education and self-made and his humble origin become negative attributes.

**6**. Now go on reading and see if what Bounderby says is consistent with the description of his character.

Mr. Bounderby’s words fully reflect the narrator’s previous description of the character himself. Indeed Mr. Bounderby’s words reveal his personality.

**7**. Which aspect/s of Bounderby’s character is/are emphasized in what he says?

In Mr. Bounderby’s words, the focus is on the self-reliant ascent of the character, on his determination to progress in the social ladder, on his will to overcome his humble origin.

**9**. Consider the way Bounderby speaks.

a)  Underline any repetition of pronouns, words or sentence  pattern in the extract you have read .

b) How would you define his way of talking

c) How does his way of talking fit in with his character as described by the narrator?

a)

NOT being Mrs. Grundy, who was Mr. Bounderby?

Why, Mr. Bounderby was as near being Mr. Gradgrind's bosom friend, as a man perfectly

devoid of sentiment can approach that spiritual relationship towards another man perfectly

devoid of sentiment. So near was Mr. Bounderby - or, if the reader should prefer it, so far off.

He was a rich man: 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 that brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice of his,

his old ignorance and his old poverty. A man who was the Bully of humility.

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.

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.

'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.'

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?

'No! As wet as a sop. A foot of water in it,' said Mr. Bounderby.

'Enough to give a baby cold,' Mrs. Gradgrind considered.

'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.'

Mrs. Gradgrind faintly looked at the tongs, as the most appropriate thing her imbecility

could think of doing.

'How I fought through it, I don't know,' said Bounderby. 'I was determined, I suppose. I

have been a determined character in later life, and I suppose I was then. Here I am, Mrs.

Gradgrind, anyhow, and nobody to thank for my being here, but myself.'

b) Mr. Bounderby’s way of talking is very heavy and repetitive; the pronoun “I” is often repeated on the purpose to catch the readers’ attention.

c) He is self-assured and confident in exhibiting his life: his words perfectly fit in with the character’s description made by the narrator.