The Industrial Revolution

The period between 1760 and 1890 in Britain is called The Industrial Revolution. It was one of the most important periods of change in British history. At the start of this period, Britain was a rural country. Towns were small. There were some large cities, but not many. Most people lived and worked on farms.

But British farms were changing. Richer farmers with lots of land began to take over the smaller farms. This caused a lot of unemployment in the countryside. At the same time, towns were growing bigger. Unemployed farmers left the countryside and tried to find work in towns.

Many towns grew because of factories. Factories were large buildings which contained machines. These machines produced goods very quickly and much more cheaply than before. Instead of one person making something in their home, for example, the factory could make many more objects, much more quickly, because there were so many workers to share the work.

But conditions in the factories and the workers’ houses were very bad. Factory workers worked thirteen hours every day for very little money. Two-thirds of them were children, and the youngest were only six years old. They had to do dirty and dangerous jobs. Lots of people lived together in a small space and diseases could spread easily. Eventually, people in government began to realise how terrible the conditions were for factory workers, and reforms began to take place. A new law, The Factory Act of 1833, meant that children under the age of 13 could work no more than nine hours a day. They also had to go to school for three hours a day. As reforms took place, slowly conditions began to get better for workers.

In the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century, inventions such as the railway, the telegraph, the telephone and the car helped Britain’s trade and industry enormously. Britain became the most important economic power in the world. The Industrial Revolution spread throughout Western Europe and North America and changed the rest of the world forever. But it did not happen without a lot of suffering for many people.

1 Leggi il brano e rispondi alle domande. ES

When was the Industrial Revolution in Britain?

It was between 1760 and 1890.

1 Why did unemployed farmers go to the towns?

2 Why could factories produce more goods, more cheaply and quickly?

3 How many of the factory workers were children?

4 How old were the youngest children?

5 What were their working conditions like?

6 When were shorter working hours introduced for child workers?

7 Which countries did the Industrial Revolution spread to?
Coketown was a town built on Fact. It was a town of machines and tall chimneys, and of red brick, blackened by years of endless smoke and dirt. The streets were all like each other, and people, all the same, went in and out at the same time every day. High buildings, full of windows, shook all day long with the noise of their great machines, and every week, every year, was just the same as the one before.

1. When was *Hard Times* written?
2. What does Dickens mean when he describes Coketown as a town built on Fact?
3. What effect has the smoke and dirt had on the appearance of the brick buildings?
4. What is making the buildings shake?
5. What are these buildings?