Dorothea Dix and Insane Asylum/Prison Reform
Jacob Bretz, 2009 Summer Institute Lesson Plan

Abstract:
The following lesson plan will deal with the efforts of Dorothea Dix in the early to mid 1800s to reform the treatment of mental patients in the United States. The lesson will highlight the biographical background of Dorothea Dix, the inhumane treatment of mental patients throughout the 19th century, as well as the instrumental role Dorothea Dix played in reforming prisons and mental institutions in Illinois.

Essential Questions/Enduring Understandings:
• Who was Dorothea Dix and how did she impact the reform of mental institutions/prisons and treatment of mental patients/convicts during the 19th century?
• How did the treatment of mental patients/convicts change in America as the 19th century progressed?
• Has the United States today completely reformed its treatment of mental patients and convicts or is there still work to be done?

Assessment:
Students will complete a graphic organizer and document analysis sheet in regards to pictures of 19th century insane asylums and firsthand accounts of mental patients. Students will end this short lesson by writing a paper answering essential question number three based on information learned, research, and a PBS Frontline film entitled The New Asylums.

Setting the Purpose:
Students will be given images of insane asylums and tolls used to impose inhumane treatment upon mental patients in the 1800s to spark their interest on the topic.

Analysis of Local Primary Sources:
Students will read and interpret excerpts of Dorothea Dix’s Memorial to the Illinois 15th General Assembly which resulted in the founding of the first state mental hospital in Jacksonville, Illinois.

Ties to National Primary Sources:
Students will compare Dix’s Memorial to the Illinois General Assembly in 1847 to firsthand accounts of mental patients across the country to see if her claims are truly accurate.

Dorothea Dix Lesson Plan: (may take several days)
• Take students to the computer lab and have them look up images of 19th century insane asylums
  o The websites listed below may prove helpful...
    • http://www.abandonedasylum.com/
    • http://www.mantenostatehospital.com/gallery.html
After perusing the websites above students should choose an image or series of similar images that interest them.

Using the images they have chosen students should complete a Photograph Document Analysis Sheet available at the following website...


After students have completed their Photograph Analysis Sheets come together as a class and discuss:

- Students should share inferences they have made from the photographs about what insane asylums were like in the 19th century.
- After students have shared their inferences share with them a brief overview about how mental patients were treated and viewed during the 19th century.

Pass out to each student the 1880 NY Times article *Out of an Insane Asylum* along with a Written Document Analysis Sheet found at the following website:

  - Students should complete the document analysis looking for information regarding the common treatment of mental patients who were commonly placed in prisons.
  - Student responses should be discussed.

For homework students should read the memorial given by Dorothea Dix to the 15th General Assembly of Illinois (pages 19-22):

- Students should complete the Dorothea Dix Memorial Graphic Organizer.

Make sure students fully understand the problems with the Illinois Prison system, the reforms Dorothea Dix suggested, and why she suggested them.

Show students the PBS Frontline documentary *The New Asylums* and have them complete the corresponding worksheet:

- The documentary can be found online at the following website...

After viewing the film students should write a 1-2 page paper answering essential question number three.