

# Behind Closed Doors: Reforms in the Treatment of the Mentally Ill

By Matt Goerss  
2009 Summer Institute

## Abstract:

In this lesson, students will learn about a variety of treatments that have been used “behind closed doors” in mental hospitals in Illinois and across the country over the past century. They will investigate primary sources related to these treatments, and they will learn about reforms in treatments and mental institutions that have occurred over the past fifty years. Students will also use primary sources to create diary entries of patients who lived in mental institutions in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Essential Questions:

- How have mentally ill patients been treated in asylums both in the early-1900s and in more recent history?
- How have the treatments for mental disorders been reformed over time, and have these reforms benefited the patient?

## Assessment:

In this lesson, students will be assessed based on the diary entries they create highlighting the treatment of patients in mental institutions throughout the last century. Students will also be assessed based on their ability to link reform movements to the improvement or lack of improvement in treatments in the nation’s mental institutions.

## Activities:

- 1) *Setting the Purpose:* The teacher should begin this lesson by asking students to brainstorm reasons why a person may need to be institutionalized. Students should also think about what types of treatments might be used in asylums, as well as stereotypes that exist about mentally ill patients and mental institutions. Students should be familiar with basic mental disorders and treatments prior to this lesson.
- 2) The teacher should divide the students into 6 groups and create 6 stations around the classroom. Each of the seven stations will include information about treatments that were used in mental institutions in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century. The teacher should also hand out the Treatment Analysis Sheet to the students. The stations should include information about the following:

Station #1: Bloodletting

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/01/Blood\\_letting.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/01/Blood_letting.jpg)

Station #2: Hollow wheels

[http://www.behavioral.net/Media/PublicationsArticle/016\\_BHC0606\\_fig1.jpg](http://www.behavioral.net/Media/PublicationsArticle/016_BHC0606_fig1.jpg)

Station #3: Utica crib

[http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3085/2818046353\\_ccd9131408.jpg?v=0](http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3085/2818046353_ccd9131408.jpg?v=0)

Station #4: The Gyrator and O'Halloran Swing

[http://www.behavioral.net/Media/PublicationsArticle/016\\_BHC0606\\_fig3.jpg](http://www.behavioral.net/Media/PublicationsArticle/016_BHC0606_fig3.jpg)

Station #5: Hydrotherapy

[http://www.cqlr.cn/a\\_files/Image/ssww/feature4.jpg](http://www.cqlr.cn/a_files/Image/ssww/feature4.jpg)

Station #6: Sensory Deprivation

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/92/Sensory\\_deprivation.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/92/Sensory_deprivation.jpg)

- 3) If possible, the teacher should then take the students to the computer lab to investigate mental institutions in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century. Students should analyze the information and primary sources on the following websites to use in their diary entries:

<http://www.mantenostatehospital.com/>

<http://www.kirkbridebuildings.com/index.html>

<http://www.abandonedasylum.com/index.html>

Students should focus on the following questions when viewing the websites:

- How are the mental institutions designed? Why are they designed this way?
  - How might the design of these institutions impact the patients?
  - In what ways might these institutions need to be reformed or improved?
- 4) The teacher should conclude the lesson by discussing reforms in psychological treatments and mental institutions over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The teacher may want to talk about modern day medical and behavioral treatments, as well as the structure of mental institutions today.
- 5) After completing the lesson, the teacher should assign the diary entry assignment to the students. Students must first assume the role of a patient in a mental institution in the early-1900s and compose one entry using the sources they have analyzed in class. Students should then assume the role of a patient in a mental institution in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century and compose another entry using the sources they have analyzed in class and their knowledge of reforms in treatment. As an alternate assignment, students may compose a letter to a Congressmen detailing the treatment of mentally ill patients in the early-1900s and suggesting reforms that could be made in patient care.

### **Analysis of Local Primary Sources:**

In this lesson, students will analyze primary sources related to mental institutions in Illinois, such as the Manteno State Hospital and Kankakee State Hospital. They will also investigate current mental institutions in the state.

**Ties to National Primary Sources:**

In this lesson, students will link information about institutions and treatments used in Illinois to institutions that existed across the country in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century. Students will also view Illinois institutions as examples of mental institutions and reforms that existed nationwide.

**List of Sources:**

“Confronting Chaos,” by Stephen M. Soreff and Patricia H. Bazemore, *Behavioral Healthcare*, <http://www.behavioral.net/ME2/dirmod.asp?sid=&nm=&type=Publishing&mod=Publications%3A%3AArticle&mid=64D490AC6A7D4FE1AEB453627F1A4A32&tier=4&id=EB3AC5FA177148F882CCBE731AB65DE4>

Websites linked above

Treatment Analysis Sheet

Diary Entry Assignment Sheet