

INFORMATIONAL READING COMPREHENSION:

Biography of Dorothea Dix

Read the text below and answer the questions that follow.



Dorothea Dix was a dedicated teacher, activist, and **humanitarian** of the nineteenth century. She is best known for her efforts to improve the treatment of people with mental illnesses. Through her extraordinary determination and persistence, Dorothea Dix helped better the lives of less fortunate people around the world.

EMERGING STRONG

Dorothea Dix was born in 1802 in Hampden, Maine. Little is known about her early childhood, but historians believe it was often difficult and plagued by poverty and neglect. At age 12, Dorothea Dix moved to Boston, Massachusetts, to live with her wealthy grandmother. She later moved in with her aunt in nearby Worcester, where she started teaching at a school for girls at the age of just 14.

In 1821, when Dorothea Dix was still a teenager, she founded the first of many schools she would run over the next decade. One of the schools she started was free to attend, giving poorer girls the opportunity to learn at a time when educating women was rare. Dorothea Dix's life of service to others had begun.

Unfortunately, Dorothea Dix faced several bouts of ill health during her teaching years. When she could not work at her schools, though, she refused to be idle. She wrote several popular books, including an 1824 science textbook called *Conversations on Common Things*. Many of her books encouraged clear moral standards for young women.



Dorothea Dix

STUNNED BY EXPERIENCE

In 1841, Dorothea Dix accepted an offer to teach at a Boston women's prison, the East Cambridge House of Correction. Her experience working there propelled her into the life of activism that would eventually come to define her legacy.

In that era, there was little oversight of prisons. Dorothea Dix was appalled by the horrific conditions she saw at East Cambridge, especially the poor treatment of inmates with mental disorders. She began investigating other institutions around the state and documenting her observations. She found dirty, unheated cells and prisoners without proper clothing. Inmates had few rights, and their jailers often mistreated them.

At that time, there was little understanding of mental illness. It was often seen as something to be feared and forcibly controlled. People with psychological disorders were often locked away and severely mistreated. Though Dorothea Dix was not the first to recognize this problem, her work would transform treatment of this population and how people thought about mental illness.

In 1843, Dorothea Dix launched a formal campaign to change the inhumane conditions she had seen. She presented detailed and heart-wrenching accounts of her observations to the lawmakers of Massachusetts. At first, the legislature denied her request for funds and new laws, but Dorothea Dix persevered and continued to **advocate** for reforms. She finally convinced lawmakers to dedicate funds to expand and reform the state mental hospital in Worcester.

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COMPREHENSION

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Continue reading. Then, answer the questions that follow.

**GALVANIZED BY SUCCESS**

Fueled by the triumph in Massachusetts, Dorothea Dix expanded her efforts to neighboring states. She soon achieved similar reforms in places like Rhode Island and New York.

In 1848, Dorothea Dix took her cause to Washington, D.C. She set out to convince the U.S. Congress to create a large public fund to be used for the benefit of mentally ill people and others in need of help. Both the Senate and House of Representatives passed the bill, but President Franklin Pierce vetoed it.

Though disappointed, Dorothea Dix wasn't **deterred**. She continued her reform efforts at the state and international levels. She traveled throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. She even met with the pope! As a result of her continued advocacy, many places in the U.S. and beyond built brand-new hospitals designed for the treatment of mentally ill patients. Others expanded and improved existing hospitals to **elevate** the level of care for the residents. Sixty years before women even had the right to vote in the United States, Dorothea Dix influenced changes in mental health care that ultimately improved understanding and treatment of people suffering from mental illness.

STRICT SERVICE

Dorothea Dix's commitment to serving others extended beyond her activism for the mentally ill. Soon after the start of the American Civil War in 1861, she volunteered for service in the Union Army. She was appointed as the superintendent of nurses. Her duties included setting up and managing operations for field hospitals and recruiting and training nurses. Unsurprisingly, Dorothea Dix brought her high standards to the post and set strict requirements for the nurses whom she supervised. She worked tirelessly not only to care for the patients but also to bring respect to the nursing profession. Dorothea Dix intended to elevate doctors' respect for female nurses. While her approach and rigid policies sometimes caused resentment, she remained as determined as ever to help others and bring about positive change.

SANCTUARY

After the war, Dorothea Dix spent the remaining decades of her life continuing to lobby for the causes she believed in. She lived out her final years, from 1881-1887, in quarters set aside for her in one of the hospitals she had helped establish in New Jersey. She lived there not as a patient but as the revered advocate who had made such a **sanctuary** a reality for so many others.



Answer the questions about the biography.

1. What are **two** central ideas in the passage?
 - A. Dorothea Dix's high standards and persistence helped her succeed in making positive change.
 - B. Dorothea Dix continued to work even when she was in poor health.
 - C. Dorothea Dix wrote letters to lawmakers sixty years before women could vote in the United States.
 - D. Dorothea Dix's efforts helped to improve the treatment of people suffering from mental illness.
 - E. Dorothea Dix's strict requirements were unpopular but ultimately helped the nursing profession.
2. What is the overall organization of the passage?
 - A. cause and effect
 - B. order of importance
 - C. chronological order
 - D. compare and contrast

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Keep going! Answer the questions about the biography.

3. Explain how the **Stunned by Experience** section contributes to the development of Dorothea Dix's story.

4. What details in the passage support the claim that Dorothea Dix was a “dedicated . . . humanitarian” with “extraordinary determination and persistence”? Give at least **two** supporting ideas.

1. _____

2. _____

5. Write the letter of the correct definition next to each bold word based on context clues from the passage.

___ humanitarian	A. argue in support of a cause
___ advocate	B. stopped from doing something
___ deterred	C. raise in status or condition
___ elevate	D. a place where someone or something is protected or given shelter
___ sanctuary	E. a person who works to make other people's lives better

6. Read the following paragraph from a different biography of Dorothea Dix and answer the question below.

After closing her schools due to her illness, Dorothea Dix traveled to England with friends to recover. While there, she met several groups of advocates who wanted to improve the lives of the mentally ill. She returned home and took a post at a prison in Boston. Soon, she was also crusading for better treatment of those suffering with mental illness.

In what key way does the paragraph relate to the information presented in the passage?

- A. It puts in doubt that Dorothea Dix wrote textbooks during her bouts of ill health.
- B. It suggests that Dorothea Dix's awareness about treatment of the mentally ill started before her job at a prison.
- C. It questions whether Dorothea Dix was actually the reason conditions changed in hospitals in the U.S.
- D. It contradicts the idea that people didn't like Dorothea Dix's strict ways and high standards.