Dorothea Dix, Petition to Massachusetts Legislature (1843)

Dorothea Dix was a reformer who successfully raised awareness for the problems and poor treatment of the mentally ill. Her work eventually led to the creation of state-sponsored institutions for the mentally ill in Massachusetts and other states.

Desolate (adj.): something dismal or empty

Advocate (n.): a person who publicly supports a cause

Almshouse (n.): a house built by a charitable organization

"I come to present the strong claims of suffering humanity. I come to place before the Legislature of Massachusetts the condition of the miserable, the desolate, the outcast. <u>I come as the advocate of the helpless, forgotten, insane, and idiotic men and women</u>; of beings sunk into a condition from which the most unconcerned would start with real horror; of beings wretched in our almshouses."

1. Where has Dix traveled in order to present this petition?
2. Explain the underlined section in your own words. **What does she mean?** Start by figuring out the main idea of the statement.
3. What is the purpose of Dix's petition?

Disadvantageous (adj.): creating unfavorable conditions

Curable (adj.): able to be cured or fixed

"In Dedham, Massachusetts: An insane man has been disadvantageously placed in the jail. In the almshouse, two females in stalls, situated in the main building; lie in wooden bunks filled with straw; always shut up. One of these subjects is supposed to be curable. The overseers of the poor have declined giving her a trial at the hospital, I was informed, on account of expense."

4. What has happened to the mentally ill man at the beginning of this passage?
5. What are two things we know about the living conditions of the two women in the almshouse?
6. Looking at both passages, explain how Dorothea Dix's efforts for reform have been influenced by the Second Great Awakening.

Source: Dix, Dorothea, *Memorial to the Legislature of Massachusetts.* **Boston: Munroe & Francis, 1843.**

At the bottom of your page, list any additional words that you did not understand