

Activities to Pre-teach Vocabulary in the Mental Health Case Study

The following vocabulary activities are based on words used in the Mental Health case study. There are two vocabulary activities focused on the history of mental health and treatment of those diagnosed with mental illness in the United States.

Activity Outcome

Students learn words often associated with mental health and discuss 1) the meanings of each word in the context of mental health and this case study, 2) different meanings of each word and how they may apply to other contexts, and 3) word roots and affixes that can help us remember each word's meaning.

Instructions for Activity

1. Distribute the partially blank table to students.
2. Introduce or remind students that mental health treatment in the United States has seen vast changes in the ways people generally view mental health and how people diagnosed with a mental illness are treated.
3. Discuss each word, its meaning in the context they will encounter it in the JIA case study, its meaning in at least one other context (not mental health), and any word affixes that may be helpful in remembering the meaning of the word. Have students record a student-friendly definition of each word along with the examples and affixes discussed in class.
4. After the table is complete, connect the vocabulary activity to the case study portion of the assignment with the following discussion questions:
 - What differences do you notice in how mental health as a topic is treated in conversations today compared to the 1800s?
 - What does it mean to condemn a system or practice, and how can that condemnation lead to social reform?
 - How does labeling people influence the way they are treated? How did labels impact mentally ill people in the 1800s? How does labeling impact people today?

Resources for Activity

- Partially blank table with terms related to mental health (for students)
- Completed table (draft for teacher)

Completed Teacher Draft

Word	Mental Health Context with Example	Other Context with Example (if applicable)	Helpful Roots and/or Affixes and their meanings
Committed (v)	Definition: To send someone to a place to live Ex: Mentally ill people are sometimes committed to special hospitals	Definition: To devote oneself to someone else Ex: Married people are committed to each other.	Com: (Latin) together; with Mit: (from Latin mitto): send (e.g., community; transmit)
Degenerate (n OR v)	Def: (n) A person whose behavior or condition is considered to have declined from a previous or expected state of mental or moral health. Ex: In early 20th-century institutions, patients with severe mental illness were often labeled as 'degenerates,' reflecting a stigmatizing view of their condition.	Def: (v) To decline or deteriorate physically, mentally, or morally. Ex: The abandoned building began to degenerate after years of neglect.	De: (Latin) down, away Genus: (Latin) birth, origin Ate: (Latin) to make or become (e.g., decline; generation, create)
Barbaric (adj)	Def: Savage, not civilized; Describing treatment or conditions that are cruel, inhumane, or lacking compassion in mental health settings. Ex: The use of restraints without cause was thought to be barbaric by mental health advocates.	N/A	-ic: (Greek/Latin) pertaining to (e.g., pandemic, logic)
Asylum (n)	Def: A historical term for an institution providing care for	Def: Protection granted to someone fleeing danger,	A-: (Greek) without

	individuals with mental illness. Ex: Many 19th-century asylums were overcrowded and underfunded, leading to poor conditions.	especially political refugees. Ex: The journalist sought asylum in a neighboring country after receiving threats.	(e.g., asymptomatic, asynchronous)
Usher (in) (v) Usher (n)	Def: To lead or guide into a new phase Ex: The work of activist journalists ushered in a new way of thinking about mental health in the United States.	Def: A person who leads or guides others Ex: The usher led us to our seats in the balcony before the concert.	N/A
Institution (n)	Def: A facility or organization providing long-term care for individuals with mental illness Ex: She spent several years in a mental institution receiving treatment	Def: An established organization or practice, such as a university or a legal system Ex: Harvard is a world-renowned academic institution.	N/A
Condemn (v)	Def: To sentence someone to a particular punishment Ex: Mentally ill people were often condemned to live in isolation or with other mentally ill people for their lifetimes.	Def: (a) To declare something or someone as wrong, guilty, or unfit OR (b) To express strong disapproval of Ex: (a) The building was condemned after the fire. (b) The organization condemned the use of harsh punishments for children.	Con: (Latin) with, thoroughly
Rebuke (v)	Def: To criticize or reprimand someone for inappropriate behavior or decisions in a care setting; express sharp disapproval of	N/A	Re: (Latin) back; again

	Ex: The nurse received a formal rebuke for violating patient confidentiality.		
Solicit (v)	Def: To request support, funding, or participation in something Ex: The organization solicited feedback from patients to improve its services.	Def: To ask for something, often persistently Ex: She solicited donations for a local animal shelter	N/A

Partially Blank Table for Students

Word	Mental Health Context with Example	Other Context with Example	Helpful Roots and/or Affixes
Committed (v)			
Degenerate (n or v)		Def: (v) To decline or deteriorate physically, mentally, or morally. Ex: The abandoned building began to degenerate after years of neglect.	
Barbaric (adj)		N/A	
Asylum (n)			
Usher (in) (v) Usher (n)	Def: To lead or guide into a new phase Ex: The work of activist journalists ushered in a new way of thinking about mental health in the United States.		N/A
Institution (n)			N/A
Condemn (v)			Con: (Latin) with, thoroughly
Rebuke (v)		N/A	

Solicit (v)		Def: To ask for something, often persistently Ex: She solicited donations for a local animal shelter	N/A
-------------	--	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

Mental Health Activism: Linking Up to Build Vocabularies

Activity Outcome

Students use vocabulary words in a proper context to describe how activist journalists worked to improve conditions for people diagnosed with mental illness.

Instructions for Activity

1. Print the vocabulary words on slips of paper and have students draw one from a container. (Any method of randomly distributing one word to each student will work. For classes larger than 9 students, words will be used more than once and that is ok!)
2. Teachers will begin with a statement such as, “Journalists in this case study played an important role in the improvement of conditions for people condemned to mental institutions.”
3. Students then look at their words and try to think of a sentence that a) would make sense following the teacher’s sentence AND b) uses their vocabulary word correctly in context.
4. One student volunteers to stand, say their word aloud, provide the definition of it, and then share their sentence with the group. The student then goes to the teacher and links arms.
5. After the other students have heard the new sentence, they think of a sentence that a) would make sense following the student’s sentence AND b) uses their vocabulary word correctly in context.
6. Continue this way until all students have found a way to use their vocabulary word and tell the story of the Journalist’s activism using their key vocabulary words. The teacher can then add a summary statement using another one or two vocabulary words to close the links and make a complete circle.
7. Optional: Teachers may then ask students to go through the entire circle from start to finish and try to retell the information again.

Resources for Activity

- Words on pieces of paper
- Word lists with definitions and contextual examples

The Mental Health case study vocabulary activities were developed by the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning Partners for the PBS NewsHour Classroom’s Journalism in Action website. This partnership is supported by the Library of Congress’s Teaching with Primary Sources Partner Program. June 17, 2025

Words and Their Meaning in Context

Word	Mental Health Context with Example	Other Context with Example (if applicable)	Helpful Roots and/or Affixes and their meanings
Committed (v)	Definition: To send someone to a place to live Ex: Mentally ill people are sometimes committed to special hospitals	Definition: To devote oneself to someone else Ex: Married people are committed to each other.	Com: (Latin) together; with Mit: (from Latin mitto): send
Degenerate (n OR v)	Def: (n) A person whose behavior or condition is considered to have declined from a previous or expected state of mental or moral health. Ex: In early 20th-century institutions, patients with severe mental illness were often labeled as 'degenerates,' reflecting a stigmatizing view of their condition.	Def: (v) To decline or deteriorate physically, mentally, or morally. Ex: The abandoned building began to degenerate after years of neglect.	De: (Latin) down, away Genus: (Latin) birth, origin Ate: (Latin) to make or become
Barbaric (adj)	Def: Savage, not civilized; Describing treatment or conditions that are cruel, inhumane, or lacking compassion in mental health settings. Ex: The use of restraints without cause was thought to	N/A	-ic: (Greek/Latin) pertaining to

	be barbaric by mental health advocates.		
Asylum (n)	Def: A historical term for an institution providing care for individuals with mental illness. Ex: Many 19th-century asylums were overcrowded and underfunded, leading to poor conditions.	Def: Protection granted to someone fleeing danger, especially political refugees. Ex: The journalist sought asylum in a neighboring country after receiving threats.	A-: (Greek) without
Usher (in) (v) Usher (n)	Def: To lead or guide into a new phase Ex: The work of activist journalists ushered in a new way of thinking about mental health in the United States.	Def: A person who leads or guides others Ex: The usher led us to our seats in the balcony before the concert.	
Institution (n)	Def: A facility or organization providing long-term care for individuals with mental illness Ex: She spent several years in a mental institution receiving treatment	Def: An established organization or practice, such as a university or a legal system Ex: Harvard is a world-renowned academic institution.	
Condemn (v)	Def: To sentence someone to a particular punishment Ex: Mentally ill people were often condemned to live in isolation or with other mentally ill people for their lifetimes.	Def: (a) To declare something or someone as wrong, guilty, or unfit OR (b) To express strong disapproval of Ex: (a) The building was condemned after the fire. (b) The organization condemned the use of harsh punishments for children.	Con: (Latin) with, thoroughly
Rebuke (v)	Def: To criticize or reprimand someone for inappropriate	N/A	Re: (Latin) back; again

	behavior or decisions in a care setting; express sharp disapproval of Ex: The nurse received a formal rebuke for violating patient confidentiality.		
Solicit (v)	Def: To request support, funding, or participation in something Ex: The organization solicited feedback from patients to improve its services.	Def: To ask for something, often persistently Ex: She solicited donations for a local animal shelter	