

Name _____



Changing Words, Changing Times

Directions: Read the passage below about how euphemisms have evolved throughout history. Then answer the questions that follow. Think about how language reflects society's changing attitudes toward sensitive topics.

Throughout history, people have found new ways to soften uncomfortable ideas through language. In the 1800s, people referred to hospitals for the mentally ill as “**insane asylums**,” a phrase that today sounds harsh and outdated. As understanding of mental health improved, the term changed to “**mental institutions**,” and later to “**mental health facilities**.” Each change reflected a shift toward greater respect and empathy.

Similarly, the phrase “**crippled**” was once commonly used to describe someone with physical disabilities. Over time, this was replaced by “**handicapped**,” then by “**disabled**,” and now by the phrase “**person with a disability**,” which emphasizes the person rather than the condition. Euphemisms like these reveal how societies try to express difficult truths while showing compassion and dignity.

Even death has seen its share of evolving expressions. Instead of saying someone “died,” people began saying they “**passed away**” or “**departed**.” What may sound gentle or respectful in one era can later seem too vague or even evasive in another. Language continues to adapt as our values, culture, and understanding of others change over time.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What is a euphemism, and why do people use them?
2. How did the term for hospitals for the mentally ill change over time?
3. What is the main reason society moved from using “crippled” to “person with a disability”?
4. Why do you think the language around death continues to change?
5. Write one example of a euphemism you've heard recently and explain what it replaces.