

Mary Seacole

Mary Jane Seacole was born in 1805 in Kingston, Jamaica. An unsung hero of the Crimean War, Mary dedicated her life to caring for sick and injured people.



Early Life

Mary described herself as **Creole**. Her mother was Jamaican and her father was a Scottish soldier. Mary's mother ran a hotel and worked as a healer: she used her knowledge of traditional treatments to care for her patients. Mary learnt about medicine by watching her mother work.

In Jamaica, many Black people at the time of Mary's birth were enslaved. This meant they were denied their freedom and basic human rights and were forced to work without pay. Mary's mother was a free Jamaican, meaning that she was not enslaved. However, she did not have the same civil rights as White people and was not treated as an equal. Although slavery was abolished in Jamaica by 1836, many people still faced **prejudice** and discrimination.

The Crimean War

In 1853, Russia wanted to take control of parts of Europe. Many countries protested, including England and France. Britain declared war in 1854 and over 20,000 British soldiers were deployed to the Crimean Peninsula. Conditions for the soldiers were terrible: living accommodation was cramped and cold and there was not enough food to go around. Over 500,000 soldiers lost their lives during the three years of war, many to diseases such as cholera rather than falling in battle.

When news of the soldiers' circumstances reached Mary Seacole, who lived in London at the time, she asked to go to Crimea along with other nurses so that she could care for the wounded and sick. Frustratingly, she was not allowed to go. Mary believed this was due to racial prejudice. Determined to find her way there, she paid for her own journey and set up a hotel close to the centre of the battle. The aim of the hotel was to offer a safe place for her to look after ill and wounded soldiers. Every day, Mary rode to the **front line** to collect injured soldiers and she was often seen treating wounds on the field of the battle itself.

Known as Mother Seacole by the soldiers who stayed at the hotel, Mary provided them with care, comfort and support during their challenging experience of war.

Mary's Legacy

For a century following her incredible and selfless efforts in Crimea, Mary's inspirational kindness and bravery were almost forgotten. In 2004, she was voted the greatest Black Briton of a poll of 100 important people and finally received the recognition and respect that she deserved. In 2016, a memorial statue of Mary was unveiled in London. This was a particularly significant moment as the statue is thought to be the first memorial statue of a named Black woman in the UK.

Glossary

Creole: A person with parents from different ethnic backgrounds.

prejudice: Unfair behaviour based on unjustified views.

front line: The soldiers closest to the enemy in a battle.

Questions

1. What did Mary Seacole's mother do in Jamaica? Tick **two**.

- worked as a teacher
- worked as a healer
- ran a museum
- ran a hotel

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order they happened in.

- Every day, Mary rode to the front line to collect injured soldiers.
- Over 20,000 soldiers were deployed to the Crimean Peninsula.
- Mary Seacole was born.
- Slavery was abolished in Jamaica.

3. Fill in the missing words.

Mary learnt about _____ by watching her _____ work.

4. Where were British soldiers sent in 1854?

5. Look at the section about **The Crimean War**.

Write down a phrase which describes the living accommodation of the soldiers.

6. **Over 500,000 soldiers lost their lives during the war, many to diseases such as cholera rather than falling in battle.**

Explain why you think this was the case, using evidence from the text.

7. If Mary Seacole were alive today, what job do you think she would have?
Explain your reasoning.

8. Discuss why the unveiling of Mary Seacole's statue was an important event.

Answers

1. What did Mary Seacole's mother do in Jamaica? Tick **two**.

- worked as a teacher
- worked as a healer**
- ran a museum
- ran a hotel**

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order they happened in.

- 4** Every day, Mary rode to the front line to collect injured soldiers.
- 3** Over 20,000 soldiers were deployed to the Crimean Peninsula.
- 1** Mary Seacole was born.
- 2** Slavery was abolished in Jamaica.

3. Fill in the missing words.

Mary learnt about **medicine** by watching her **mother** work.

4. Where were British soldiers sent in 1854?

The soldiers were sent to the Crimean Peninsula.

5. Look at the section about **The Crimean War**.

Write down a phrase which describes the living accommodation of the soldiers.

Living accommodation was cramped and cold.

6. **Over 500,000 soldiers lost their lives during the war, many to diseases such as cholera rather than falling in battle.**

Explain why you think this was the case, using evidence from the text.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that so many soldiers lost their lives to diseases because they were living in very crowded and cold conditions, which meant disease could spread easily.

7. If Mary Seacole were alive today, what job do you think she would have?
Explain your reasoning.

Pupils' own responses, such as: If Mary were alive today, I think that she'd be a doctor because she loves healing people and practising medicine.

8. Discuss why the unveiling of Mary Seacole's statue was an important event.

Pupils' own responses, such as: The unveiling of Mary Seacole's statue was important because it finally showed her the respect that she deserved following her services to soldiers in the Crimean War. It is particularly special because it is thought to be the first statue of a named Black woman in the UK.

Mary Seacole

A true unsung hero of the Crimean War, Mary Jane Seacole (born Mary Jane Grant in 1805) was from Kingston, Jamaica. She dedicated her life to caring for the sick and injured, despite the challenges she faced to be recognised as an equal in society.



Early Life

Mary described herself as **Creole**. Her father was a Scottish soldier and her mother was Jamaican: she ran a hotel and worked as a healer. As part of her role as a healer, Mary's mother used her knowledge of traditional treatments and herbal remedies to cure her patients' ailments. During her childhood, Mary would help her mother to care for the sick people in their community, learning about traditional medicine as she did so.

In Jamaica, many Black people at the time of Mary's birth were enslaved: they were denied their freedom and basic human rights and were forced to work without pay. Mary's mother was a free Jamaican, meaning that she was not enslaved. However, she did not have the same civil rights as White people and was not treated as an equal. Although slavery was abolished in Jamaica by 1836, many people still faced prejudice and discrimination – Mary included.

Unusually for a woman at the time, Mary travelled widely. She visited countries such as Panama, Haiti and Cuba, gaining experience in treating many tropical diseases, including cholera and yellow fever.

The Crimean War

In 1853, Russia wanted to take control of parts of Europe. Many countries protested, including England and France. This led to conflict: Britain declared war in 1854 and over 20,000 British soldiers were deployed to the Crimean Peninsula. Conditions for the soldiers were terrible: living accommodation was cramped and cold and there was not enough food to go around. During the three-year conflict, over 500,000 soldiers lost their lives, many to diseases such as cholera rather than because of the battle.

When news of the soldiers' circumstances reached Mary Seacole, who lived in London at the time, she **petitioned** to join other nurses that were heading to Crimea so that she could nurse the wounded and sick. Frustratingly, she was refused permission to go – Mary believed this was due to racial prejudice. Determined to find her way there, she paid for her own journey and set up a hotel a few miles from the **epicentre** of the battle. The aim of the hotel was to offer a safe place for her to look after ill and wounded soldiers. Every day, Mary rode to the front line to collect injured soldiers (she was often seen treating wounds on the field of the battle itself). She would then bring them back to care for them and allow them to recover in safety.

Known as Mother Seacole by the soldiers that stayed with her, Mary provided them with care, comfort and support during their challenging experience of war.

Mary's Legacy

For a century following her incredible and selfless efforts in Crimea, Mary's inspirational kindness and bravery were all but forgotten. In 2004, she was voted the greatest Black Briton of a poll of 100 important figures and finally received the recognition and respect that she deserved. In 2016, a 12-year campaign led to a memorial statue of Mary being unveiled in the grounds of a hospital in London. This important moment was particularly significant as the statue is thought to be the first memorial statue of a named Black woman in the UK.

Glossary

Creole:	A person with parents from different ethnic backgrounds.
petitioned:	Asked for permission to do something.
epicentre:	The centre of something, typically a difficult or unpleasant situation.

Questions

1. Number the events from 1-5 to show the order they happened in.

- Britain declared war on Russia.
- Mary Jane Grant was born.
- A statue of Mary was unveiled in the grounds of a London hospital.
- Slavery was abolished in Jamaica.
- Mary was voted the greatest Black Briton in a poll.

2. **Every day, Mary rode to the front line to collect injured soldiers.**

What does this tell you about her? Tick one.

- Mary enjoyed riding.
- Mary was courageous.
- Mary used holistic medicine in her treatments.
- Mary used her own money to treat the soldiers.

3. Look at the introduction about Mary Seacole.

Find and copy a word which means the same as **unacknowledged**.

4. Look at the section titled **The Crimean War**.

What does the word '**cramped**' tell you about the soldiers' living accommodation?

5. What did Mary have to do to get to Crimea?

6. How do you think that Mary felt when she heard about the soldiers' circumstances in Crimea?

Explain your reasoning using evidence from the text.

7. Explain why Mary was known as 'Mother Seacole'.

8. What do you think would be a title of one of the chapters of Mary Seacole's autobiography? Explain your reasoning.

9. Summarise in 25 words or fewer why Mary Seacole is an inspirational figure.

Answers

1. Number the events from 1-5 to show the order they happened in.

- 3 Britain declared war on Russia.
- 1 Mary Jane Grant was born.
- 5 A statue of Mary was unveiled in the grounds of a London hospital.
- 2 Slavery was abolished in Jamaica.
- 4 Mary was voted the greatest Black Briton in a poll.

2. **Every day, Mary rode to the front line to collect injured soldiers.**

What does this tell you about her? Tick one.

- Mary enjoyed riding.
- Mary was courageous.**
- Mary used holistic medicine in her treatments.
- Mary used her own money to treat the soldiers.

3. Look at the introduction about Mary Seacole.

Find and copy a word which means the same as **unacknowledged**.

Unsung

4. Look at the section titled **The Crimean War**.

What does the word '**cramped**' tell you about the soldiers' living accommodation?

The word cramped tells you that many soldiers were living together in a very small space.

5. What did Mary have to do to get to Crimea?

Mary had to pay for her own journey to Crimea.

6. How do you think that Mary felt when she heard about the soldiers' circumstances in Crimea?

Explain your reasoning using evidence from the text.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that Mary was horrified when she heard about the condition of the soldiers – that is why she was determined to find a way to help them, despite being refused permission.

7. Explain why Mary was known as 'Mother Seacole'.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Mary was known as 'Mother Seacole' by the soldiers in Crimea because she set up a hotel which provided them with a safe place to rest, recover and heal. The soldiers thought she was like a mother because of her kindness.

8. What do you think would be a title of one of the chapters of Mary Seacole's autobiography? Explain your reasoning.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that one of the chapters in Mary's book would be titled 'The Front Line' and would describe her experiences treating soldiers in the middle of a battle.

9. Summarise in 25 words or fewer why Mary Seacole is an inspirational figure.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Mary Seacole is an inspirational historical figure because she spent her life selflessly treating the sick and injured despite facing discrimination and inequality.

Mary Seacole

A true unsung hero of the Crimean War, Mary Jane Seacole (born Mary Jane Grant in 1805) was from Kingston, Jamaica. Both determined and resourceful, she dedicated her life to caring for the sick and injured, despite the challenges she faced to be recognised as an equal in society.



Early Life

Mary described herself as Creole (a person with parents from different ethnic backgrounds). Her father was a Scottish soldier while her mother was Jamaican: she ran a hotel and worked as a healer. As part of her role as a healer, Mary's mother used her knowledge of traditional Jamaican and African treatments and herbal remedies to cure many ailments. During her childhood, Mary would help her mother to care for patients in the community, learning about holistic and traditional medicine as she did so.

In Jamaica, many Black people at the time of Mary's birth were enslaved: they were denied their freedom and basic human rights and were forced to work without pay. Mary's mother was a free Jamaican, meaning that she was not enslaved. However, she did not have the same civil rights as White people and was not treated as an equal. Although slavery was abolished in Jamaica by 1836, many people still faced prejudice and discrimination – Mary included.

Unusually for a woman at the time, Mary travelled widely. She visited countries such as Panama, Haiti and Cuba, gaining experience in treating many tropical diseases including cholera and yellow fever. In 1836, she married Edwin Seacole.

The Crimean War

In 1853, Russia wanted to take control of parts of Europe. Many countries, including England and France, protested this, leading to conflict. Britain declared war in 1854 and over 20,000 British soldiers were deployed to the Crimean Peninsula (a piece of land in eastern Europe surrounded almost completely by water). Conditions for the soldiers were deplorable: living accommodation was cramped and cold and there was not enough food to go around. During the three-year conflict, over 500,000 soldiers lost their lives – many to diseases such as cholera, rather than because of the battle itself.

When news of the soldiers' terrible circumstances reached Mary Seacole, who was residing in London at the time, she petitioned for passage to Crimea so that she could nurse the wounded and sick. Frustratingly, while others were granted permission, she was refused more than once – Mary believed this was due to racial prejudice. Determined to find her way there, she financed her own journey and set up a hotel a few miles from the epicentre of the battle. The aim of the hotel was to offer a safe place for her to treat ill and wounded soldiers. The hotel also acted as a restaurant and general store; all profits from these facilities were used to buy medicines. Every day, Mary rode to the front line to collect injured men (she was often seen treating wounds on the field of the battle itself). She would then bring them back to care for them and allow them to convalesce in safety.

Known as Mother Seacole by the soldiers that she nursed, Mary provided them with care, comfort and support during their challenging experience of war.

Mary's Legacy

Following the war, Mary returned to London without finances and in ill health. Although some soldiers that she had cared for had put on a concert to try and raise money for her, she still had little money. She continued to look after the injured and sick while simultaneously writing her autobiography. This was published in 1857 with the title 'The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands'. Remarkably, the book is still in print today.

For a century following her incredible and selfless efforts in Crimea, Mary's inspirational kindness and bravery were all but forgotten. It was not until 2004, when she was voted the greatest Black Briton in a poll of 100 prominent figures, that the spotlight returned to her and she finally received the recognition and respect that she deserved. In 2016, a 12-year campaign led to a memorial statue of Mary being unveiled in the grounds of a London hospital. This seminal moment was particularly significant as the statue is thought to be the first memorial statue of a named Black woman in the UK.

Questions

1. Draw **four** lines and complete each sentence.

Following the war, Mary returned to London without finances...

and over 20,000 British soldiers were deployed to the Crimean Peninsula.

Britain declared war in 1854...

Mary financed her own journey and set up a hotel a few miles from the epicentre of the battle.

Her mother was Jamaican: ...

and in ill health.

Determined to find her way there...

she ran a hotel and worked as a healer.

2. **Unusually for a woman at the time, Mary travelled widely.**

What does this tell you about women at the time? Tick **two**.

- That Mary was an exceptional woman.
- That it was illegal for women to travel.
- That women did not have the opportunity to travel much.
- That men liked to travel.

3. What did Mary have experience in treating?

4. Look at the section titled **The Crimean War**.

Write down **two** words which mean the same as **dire**.

- _____
- _____

5. Fill in the missing words.

A few miles from the battle, Mary set up a _____ as a safe place to treat ill and _____ soldiers.

6. Compare the experiences of Mary Seacole and her mother. Discuss the similarities and differences in their stories.

7. Mary Seacole travelled to many wonderful lands during her life. What sort of experiences do you think she had while she was abroad? Explain your reasoning using evidence from the text.

8. **Soldiers that Mary Seacole had cared for performed a concert to raise money for her.** What do you think this tells you about Mary Seacole? Explain your reasoning.

9. Summarise in 25 words or fewer how Mary Seacole helped soldiers in the Crimean War.

10. Explain why Mary Seacole is thought to be an unsung hero using evidence from the text.

Answers

1. Draw **four** lines and complete each sentence.

Following the war, Mary returned to London without finances...	and over 20,000 British soldiers were deployed to the Crimean Peninsula.
Britain declared war in 1854...	Mary financed her own journey and set up a hotel a few miles from the epicentre of the battle.
Her mother was Jamaican: ...	and in ill health.
Determined to find her way there...	she ran a hotel and worked as a healer.

2. **Unusually for a woman at the time, Mary travelled widely.**

What does this tell you about women at the time? Tick **two**.

- That Mary was an exceptional woman.**
- That it was illegal for women to travel.
- That women did not have the opportunity to travel much.**
- That men liked to travel.

3. What did Mary have experience in treating?

Mary had experience in treating cholera, yellow fever and other tropical diseases.

4. Look at the section titled **The Crimean War**.

Write down **two** words which mean the same as **dire**.

- **deplorable**
- **terrible**

5. Fill in the missing words.

A few miles from the battle, Mary set up a **hotel** as a safe place to treat ill and **wounded** soldiers.

6. Compare the experiences of Mary Seacole and her mother. Discuss the similarities and differences in their stories.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Mary Seacole and her mother were both healers who ran hotels. They used traditional Jamaican and African medicines in their treatments. However, Mary Seacole travelled widely and worked close to the frontline during a battle while her mother only lived and worked in Jamaica.

7. Mary Seacole travelled to many wonderful lands during her life. What sort of experiences do you think she had while she was abroad? Explain your reasoning using evidence from the text.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that Mary Seacole spent a lot of time abroad learning how to nurse people with diseases such as cholera because this is how she gained experience in treating these illnesses.

8. **Soldiers that Mary Seacole had cared for performed a concert to raise money for her.** What do you think this tells you about Mary Seacole? Explain your reasoning.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that this shows that Mary Seacole was a kind and generous person who was very dedicated to looking after her patients. In my opinion, the soldiers must have liked and respected her very much to try and help her when she returned to London with no money.

9. Summarise in 25 words or fewer how Mary Seacole helped soldiers in the Crimean War.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Mary Seacole helped soldiers in the Crimean War by setting up a hotel and treating them when they were sick and injured.

10. Explain why Mary Seacole is thought to be an unsung hero using evidence from the text.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that Mary Seacole is thought to be an unsung hero because she helped many sick and injured soldiers in very dangerous conditions with no support. It was not until 2016 (a long time after her work was finished) that a statue was unveiled in her honour, showing that for many years she was not recognised as the hero that she was.