

## FACT FILE / OPEN DISCUSSION

Mary Seacole : 23 November 1805 – 14 May 1881



### Who was she?

Mary Seacole was from a Jamaican and Scottish background. Whilst her mother was a black Jamaican woman, her father James Grant was a white Scottish army officer, Mary was subsequently born 'a free person.'

### What did she do?

At only 12 years old, Mary helped run the boarding house where there were many sick and injured soldiers. She then, travelled to England which enabled her to acquire knowledge about modern European medicine which added to her training in traditional Caribbean techniques. She pursued her travels to Cuba, Haiti and the Bahamas and returned to Kingston in 1826.

Seacole nursed victims of the Kingston cholera epidemic as well as victims of the yellow fever epidemic. Furthermore, she asked the British War Office to send her out as an army nurse but was refused, but this didn't stop her. She funded her own trip to Crimea and established the British Hotel with Thomas Day that provided respite for the sick and recovering soldiers. Whilst providing a hospice, she also visited the battlefield to nurse the wounded. Unfortunately, Mary fell ill but in 1875 a fund-raising gala was held for her over four nights on the banks of the River Thames. Over 80,000 people attended whether they were soldiers, generals, or members of the royal family. In 2004, Mary was voted the Greatest Black Briton, as well as in 2016, the statue of Mary Seacole was finally unveiled in the grounds of St Thomas' Hospital.

Florence Nightingale : 12 May 1820 – 13 August 1910

### Who was she?

Nightingale was born in Florence, Italy. Her father was a wealthy banker and was able to provide a privileged life for his two daughters. Although women in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were not allowed to receive an education, her father was keen to provide his daughters with one.

### What did she do?

In the Victorian Era, women were not expected to work however at 16 years old, she believed that she must carry out important work to help those suffering, hence, why she wanted to be a nurse.



Nursing was not a respected profession however, Nightingale was determined. She was allowed to study nursing at a Christian school for women in Germany and that is where she acquired the skills to care for patients. By 1853, she was running a women's hospital in London. The Minister for War – Sidney Herbert - asked Florence to lead a team of nurses to help aid at the Crimea War. The conditions were poor, she Florence decided to utilise her funds from home, to export better medical equipment and paid for workmen to clear the drains. She would constantly visit the soldiers to make sure they were comfortable and would help write letters for those were not able to. After the war, Florence was commended greatly and in 1856 she met with Queen Victoria to discuss ways to improve military medical systems. In 1860, the Nightingale Training School for Nurses opened at St Thomas' Hospital in London. Florence was the first woman to receive an Order of Merit.