



Mary Seacole; information for teachers

- 17th & 18th century black women recorded as domestic servants, seamstresses, laundry maids and children's servants.
- They left few written records – lack of access to literary education.
- Mary Seacole's autobiography one of very few books written by black women at that time.
- Mary Seacole (nee Grant) born **1805** in Kingston, Jamaica, daughter of free black woman and a Scottish Army Officer.
- Slavery still rife in British colonies at that time.
- Mary Seacole learnt medicine from her mother.
- Mary Seacole flamboyant and colourful. Liked to dress in conspicuous colours like red and yellow. Loved bonnets decorated with lots of red ribbons.
- **1836** married Edwin Horatio Seacole
- **1850** cholera swept Jamaica. She worked alongside doctors developing medicines. She observed the illness and studied scientifically what worked and what didn't. Developed a strong interest in medicine and healing the sick.
- Travelled to Panama. Opened a boarding house in Cruces. Hot humid weather plus poor sanitary conditions led to a cholera outbreak. Nursed the sick there.
- Learnt about the value of cleanliness, good food and fresh air.
- Mary Seacole loved to travel – unique as a Victorian woman travelling alone.
- **1853** nursed the yellow fever epidemic in Kingston, Jamaica.
- Mary Seacole one of the most significant women of her time. As famous as Florence Nightingale during that period.
- **1853** war between Britain & Russia (Crimea)
- **1854** Britain & France sent troops in defence of the Russian invasion of the Turkish empire.
- **1854** Mary Seacole headed to London. Applied to the War Office to offer her services as a nurse. Was rejected. She believed that this was because of her colour.
- Mary Seacole funded her own trip.
- En route she visited Istanbul and Florence Nightingale's hospital in Scutari. Offer of work again refused.
- **1855** Mary Seacole sailed for Balaclava. Treated sick and wounded as they waited to be boarded onto a ship bound for Florence Nightingale's distant hospital.
- Set up British Hotel between Balaclava and the front line. She sold provisions (sutler) and kept supplies of herbal remedies and medical equipment.
- During Crimean War, 20,000 British Officers lost their lives: 3,000 killed, 17,000 due to disease!
- Became a favourite. Her work was reported in the newspapers and she became a 'star'
- Peace bankrupted Mary Seacole. Had only just paid for new stores. Readers of her adventures in the Times and Punch magazine were appalled and launched a fund for her benefit.
- **1857** Mary Seacole published her autobiography. It becomes a best seller.
- A four day concert is held in her honour at the Royal Surrey Gardens Music Hall.
- Long after the war ended, the Government awarded her with the Crimean medal for services rendered to the sick and injured.
- **1881** Mary Seacole died. Book went out of print. No family or institution to carry on her name. Becomes a forgotten heroine.
- **1984** autobiography republished.



Mary Seacole Quotes

Herself:

I am a Creole, and have good Scotch blood coursing through my veins. Many people have traced to my Scottish blood that energy and activity which are not always found in the Creole race, and which have carried me to so many various scenes: and perhaps they are right.

I must say that I don't appreciate your friend's kind wishes with respect to my complexion. If it had been as dark as a nigger's, I should have been just as happy and useful, and as much respected by those whose respect I value: and as to his offer of bleaching me, I should, even if it were practicable, decline it without any thanks.

p13 I have a few shades of deeper brown upon my skin which shows me related to those poor mortals you once held enslaved, and whose bodies America still owns. Having this bond, and knowing what slavery is, having seen with my eyes and heard with my ears proof positive enough of its horrors, is it surprising that I should be somewhat impatient of the airs of superiority which many Americans have endeavoured to assume over me.

p2 I have always noticed what actors children are.....whatever disease was most prevalent in Kingston, be sure my poor doll soon contracted it.....before long it was very natural that I should seek to extend my practice, and so I found other patients in the cats and dogs around me.

Whilst in Cruces a statement that illustrates her driving force;

and wherever the need arises - and on whatever distant shore - I ask no higher or greater privilege than to minister to it

*Selecting from my **medicine chest** (I never travel anywhere without it) what I deemed necessary, I went hastily to the patient. It was a very obstinate case, but by dint of mustard emetics, warm fomentations, **mustard plasters**, on the stomach and calomel at first in large and then in gradually smaller doses, I succeeded in saving my first cholera patient. (The medicines would have caused the patients to be sick)*

*The simplest remedies were perhaps the best. When my patients felt thirsty I would give them water in which **cinnamon** had been boiled. Another patient a girl, I rubbed over with warm oil, camphor and spirits of wine...*

She applied to the War Office for the post of hospital nurse in the Crimea

knowing that I was well fitted for the work, and would be the right woman in the right place.

She was refused, she was bitterly disappointed and wrote

Doubts and suspicions rose in my heart for the first and last time, thank Heaven. Was it possible that American prejudices against colour had some root here? Did these ladies shrink from accepting my aid because my blood flowed beneath a somewhat duskier skin than theirs?

Describing war:

We saw Russians fall slowly back in good order, while the dark-plumed Sardinians and red-pantalooned French spread out in pursuit, and formed a picture so excitingly beautiful that we forgot the suffering and death they left behind.

On battle:

My first experience of battle was pleasant enough....It was very pretty to see them advance and to



watch how every now and then little clouds of white smoke puffed up from behind the bushes and crests of hills, and were answered by similar puffs from the long line of busy skirmishers that preceded the main body. This was my first experience of actual battle and I felt that strange excitement which I do not remember on future occasions, coupled with an earnest longing to see more of warfare, and to share in its hazards. It was not long before my wish was gratified.

But the reader must not forget that all this time, although there might be only a few short and sullen roars of the great guns by day, few nights passed without some fighting in the trenches; and very often the news of the morning would be that one or other of those I knew had fallen. These tidings often saddened me, and when I awoke in the night and heard the thunder of the guns fiercer than usual, I have quite dreaded the dawn which might usher in bad news.

And as often as the bad news came, I thought it my duty to ride up to the hut and do my woman's work. But I felt it deeply. How could it be otherwise? There was one poor boy in the Artillery, with blue eyes and long golden hair, whom I nursed through a long and weary sickness, borne with all a man's spirit, and whom I grew to love like a fond old fashioned mother. I thought if ever angels watched over any life, they would shelter his: but this one day, but a short time after he had left his sick bed, he was struck down on his battery, working like a young hero. It was along time before I could banish him from my mind and thought of him as I saw him last, the yellow hair, stiff and stained with his life blood, and the blue eyes closed in the sleep of death.

The British Hotel:

The reader may judge of the manner in which we had stocked the interior of our store from the remark oft repeated by the Officers, that you might get everything you needed from Mother Seacole's from an anchor to a needle.

I often used to roast a score or so of fowls daily, besides boiling hams and tongues. Either these, or a slice from a joint of beef or mutton, you would be pretty sure of finding at your service in the larder of the British hotel.

Caring:

*Don't you think, reader, if you were lying with parched lips and fading appetite, thousands of miles from mother, wife or sister, loathing the rough food by your side, and thinking regretfully of that English home where nothing that could minister to your great need would be left untried – don't you think that you would welcome the familiar figure of the stout lady whose bony horse has just pulled up at the door of your hut, and whose panniers contain some cooling drink, a little broth, and some homely cake, or a dish of **jelly or blancmanche** – don't you think that under such circumstances, that you would heartily agree with my friend 'Punch's' remark:*

*That berry brown face, with a kind heart's trace
Impressed on each wrinkle sly,
Was a sight to behold, though snow-clouds rolled,
Across that iron sky.*

....and the grateful words and smile which rewarded me for binding up a wound or giving a cooling drink was a pleasure worth risking life for at any time.



Quotes about Mary Seacole

the yellow woman from Jamaica with her cholera medicine

Doctor Douglas Reid

*She did not spare herself if she could do some good to the suffering soldiers, and at her own expense supplied hot tea to the sufferers while they waited to be lifted into the boats.....she was always at her chosen post, and her **stove and kettle**, in any shelter she could find, brewing tea for all who wanted it, and there were many.....*

She had a store at Kadikoi, near Balaclava, for some time, where she sold all sorts of commodities, clothing and articles of food that were luxuries to us.

Officers & Soldiers:

Arthur C, Commanding Staff Officer, having been attacked one evening with a very bad diarrhoea at Mrs Seacole's, took some of her good medicine. It cured me before the next morning and I have never been attacked since.

She was a wonderful woman.... All the men swore by her, and in case of any malady, would seek her advice and use her herbal medicines, in preference to reporting themselves to their own doctors. That she did effect some cure is beyond doubt, and her never failing presence amongst the wounded after a battle and assisting them made her beloved by the rank and file of the whole army.

The black Nightingale

The people's nurse

The Times correspondent William Russell

I have witnessed her devotion and courage; I have already borne testimony to her services to all who needed them. She is the first who has redeemed the name of 'sutler' from the suspicion of worthlessness, mercenary baseness and plunder; and I trust that England will not forget one who nursed her sick, who sought out her wounded to aid and succour them and who performed the last offices for some of her illustrious dead.