

Y5 Information Text: Biography

Annotated Genre Features

Who Was Mary Seacole?

¹an introduction that summarises the main events of the person's life

Mary Seacole (born Mary Grant) was a British-Jamaican woman who became⁴ famous in the 19th century as 'Mother Seacole' due to her work caring for injured soldiers in the Crimean War.

²information about the key events in the person's life in chronological paragraphs

³specific facts about achievements, influences and significant people

⁴verbs written in past tense and third person

⁵their feelings about different points and events in their life

⁶quotes from the person themselves or other key people in their life

⁷a conclusion about how they are/ will be remembered

Mary's Early Life

Mary Anne Grant was born in 1805³ in Kingston, Jamaica. Her father was a Scottish soldier and her mother was a well-known Jamaican 'doctress', who treated⁴ people using herbal remedies (such as aloe vera and ginger). Mary also had⁴ two siblings, Edward and Louisa.

As a child, Mary was fascinated by her mother's work⁵ and practised the skills she learned using dolls and pets as patients. By the age of 12, she was helping her mother as a nurse³. Because of her father's connections, she was also able to travel twice to visit England in her teens³ and this made⁴ her quite unusual for a black person at that time.

When she was 31, Mary married a naval officer called Edwin Horatio Seacole³. She was a good businesswoman³ and together they ran⁴ a successful store. Unfortunately, her husband died⁴ only eight years later. In 1853, she went to Panama, where her brother lived⁴, and opened a hotel for the gold miners there. She continued⁴ to look after ill people and even risked her own life to care for the victims of an illness called cholera³.



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The Crimean War

The Crimean War began in 1854. Mary was⁴ determined⁵ to help the soldiers so she travelled to London and offered⁴ to go with Florence Nightingale's nurses. However, this was a time of racial prejudice, which meant that black people were ⁴ not allowed to do certain things. The government refused to co-operate with her, probably because of racial narrow-mindedness.

Instead, Mary and Thomas Day (a family friend) went to Crimea together³ taking medicines and stores. There they set up the 'British Hotel'³, which was a simple building that provided medicine and hot food to fortify the soldiers. Additionally, she sold⁴ clothing and blankets to make them comfortable. Unlike Florence Nightingale, Mary Seacole treated the soldiers' injuries even in the thick of the fighting³. They called her 'Mother Seacole' because she was so kind. She said in her autobiography, "It was the grateful words and smiles which rewarded me."^{5&6}

Mary's Old Age

At the end of the war in 1856, Mary returned to England ³ with very little money. However, veteran soldiers started a campaign to help her and she was therefore able to live comfortably until her death on 14th May, 1881³. Some people have criticised her fame because she was not a real nurse like Florence Nightingale but she must be regarded nowadays as an excellent role model for doing good work in difficult and dangerous situations.⁷