



Black History Month: Mary Seacole

Citizenship & Science

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Mary Jane Grant was born in Jamaica in 1805. Her mother was Jamaican and her father was a Scottish soldier. Despite being born a '[free person](#)', she had few rights because she was mixed race. She could not vote nor join a [profession](#). Mary's mother ran a lodging house in Kingston, Jamaica, where she cared for injured soldiers. It was through her mother than Mary learnt traditional Jamaican [treatments](#) and medicines.

Mary travelled widely. At age 15, she travelled to England and stayed with relatives. Here, she learnt about European medicines. In 1826, she moved back to Jamaica. In 1850, the cholera outbreak hit Kingston. Mary nursed the victims of this [epidemic](#). People were impressed with Mary's knowledge of traditional medicine and European medical practices. She was invited by the medical authorities [to oversee](#) the nursing services in the British army headquarters in Kingston. Mary formed strong attachments to the soldiers she cared for and she felt called to care for them as they went to fight in the Crimean War.



Mary travelled to England and asked the British War Office to be sent to Crimea. They refused. [Undeterred](#), Mary funded her own trip to Crimea and founded the British Hotel, a place which cared for sick and recovering soldiers. Mary was so close to the front line that she would visit the battlefields to look after sick soldiers. Her [patients](#) referred to her as 'Mother Seacole'. In 1856, Mary returned to Britain with very little money, however, the soldiers wrote to the newspapers about the work Mary had done. A fundraising event for Mary was attended by all those who admired her work. Her autobiography, published in 1857, became a bestseller. In 2003, she was voted the greatest black Briton.

Match the words with a definition:

free person

•

a rapid spread of one disease in an area

profession

•

to manage or organise a project

treatment

•

a person who is not a slave

epidemic

•

a type of job that needs particular training or a particular skill

to oversee

•

a person who is being looked after

undeterred

•

the use of medicine and exercises to overcome an illness or injury

patient

•

continuing despite facing a bad situation

Read the text again and answer the questions:

1 Where was Mary Seacole born?

2 How did Mary learn her medical knowledge?

3 Who did Mary care for?

4 Why did Mary travel to Crimea?

5 What was the name the soldiers called Mary?

6 How did the soldiers celebrate the work Mary had done?



Discuss with a friend, teacher, or your class

What obstacles did Mary have to overcome?

Why do you think Mary was voted as the greatest black Briton?

Which modern or historical figures would you consider to be great black Britons?

Curriculum link: Science

Design a poster explaining the ways diseases can spread through a population.