Discover how one remarkable woman changed the face of nursing forever…

Today, nurses are recognised as **important**, **super-skilled professionals**. But that hasn't always been the case. Believe it or not, at the start of the 19th century, nurses usually had no training at all, and they weren't even paid for the 'menial' work they did! But one woman changed all that… meet the amazing **Florence Nightingale**.

Who was Florence Nightingale?

Born: 12 May 1820 in Florence, Italy
Lived in: England, UK
Occupation: Nurse
Died: 13 August 1910
Best known for: Founding modern nursing
Also known as: Lady with the Lamp

Florence Nightingale was born in the city of Florence, Italy, on 12 May 1820 whilst her parents were enjoying a long honeymoon. And that's how she got her name! Her parents were called William and Fanny Nightingale, and she had one older sister, too – Frances Parthenope, AKA 'Pop'.

William Nightingale was a wealthy banker and was able to provide his family with a very privileged life. They had servants and two lovely houses – a winter home in Hampshire and a summer home in Derbyshire.

At the time that Florence was a youngster, most girls didn't go to school – in fact, many didn't receive any education at all! But William was keen for his daughters to learn, and gave them lessons in lots of different subjects, including science, history and maths.

What did Florence Nightingale do?

In Victorian Britain, wealthy women like Florence weren't expected to work – their job was to marry and look after the home. Daily life was spent seeing to servants, entertaining guests, reading, sewing and attending social events. But Florence saw something very different for her future. When she was 16 years old, she believed she heard a voice from God calling for her to carry out important work to help those suffering. She wanted to be a nurse.

When Florence broke the news to her parents, they weren't too happy! Nursing was not a respectful profession and, what's more, hospitals were filthy, horrible places where sick people died – certainly no place for a wealthy girl like Florence! William tried hard to change his daughter's mind, but Florence was determined. In 1851, he gave in, and allowed Florence to study nursing at a Christian school for women

in Germany. There, she learned important skills in caring for patients and the importance of hospital cleanliness.

It wasn't long before Florence put her new skills to the test. By 1853 she was running a women's hospital in London, where she did a fantastic job improving the working conditions as well as patient care.

The Crimean War

In 1854, the Crimean War broke out – a war with Britain, France and Turkey on one side, and Russia on the other. British troops went off to fight in the Crimea – an area in the south of Russia, now part of Ukraine. News soon reached home of soldiers dying from battle wounds, cold, hunger and sickness, with no real medical care or nurses to treat them. Help was needed fast, and the Minister for War – called Sidney Herbert – knew just the person. He asked Florence to lead a team of nurses to the Crimea!

When they arrived, the nurses found the Army hospital in Scutari (the area where wounded soldiers were sent) in a terrible state. It was overcrowded and filthy, with blocked drains, broken toilets and rats running everywhere. Imagine the smell! There weren't enough medical supplies or equipment, and wounded soldiers had to sleep on the dirty floor, without blankets to keep warm, clean water to drink or fresh food to eat. Not surprisingly, disease spread quickly and most of the soldiers died from infection.

Florence Nightingale to the rescue!

Florence knew that the soldiers could only get well again if the hospital conditions improved. With funds from back home, she bought better medical equipment and decent food, and paid for workmen to clear the drains. And together with her team, she cleaned the wards, set up a hospital kitchen and provided the wounded soldiers

with quality care – bathing them, dressing their wounds and feeding them. As a result of all the improvements, far fewer soldiers were dying from disease.

Why was Florence Nightingale known as the Lady with the Lamp?

Florence Nightingale truly cared for her suffering patients. At night, when everyone was sleeping, she'd visit the soldiers to make sure they were comfortable. She'd also write letters home for those who could not write themselves. Since Florence carried a lantern with her on her night visits, the soldiers would call her '**The Lady with the Lamp'**.

Florence after the Crimean War

By the time Florence returned to England in 1856, she'd made quite a name for herself. After newspapers wrote about her work in the Crimea, people thought of her as a heroine. Queen Victoria wrote her a letter to say thank you for everything she had done. But Florence had no care for fame, and even though the war was over, there was still work to be done. She set about writing letters to important people telling them what was wrong with Army hospitals, and in September 1856 she met with Queen Victoria to discuss ways to improve military medical systems. Huge reform took place – the Army started to train doctors, hospitals became cleaner and soldiers were provided with better clothing, food and care.

In 1860, the **Nightingale Training School for Nurses** opened at St Thomas's Hospital in London. Not only did the school provide excellent nurse training, it made nursing a respectable career for women who wanted to work outside the home.

How is Florence Nightingale remembered?

Florence suffered from illness for much of her later life, largely because of all her hard work helping sick people. In fact, during her final 40 years she spent many days confined to her bed. But she was greatly appreciated for everything she did for nursing, and for saving the lives of thousands of people. In 1907, Florence became the first woman to receive the **Order of Merit**, an award given by the queen for super-special work.

Sadly, Florence Nightingale died on 13 of August 1910, but she will forever be recognised as the **founder of modern nursing.**

Questions:

1. Why were Florence's parents against her becoming a nurse?

2. Where did Florence study to become a nurse? What did she learn there?

3. What were the conditions for injured soldiers like during the Crimean war?

4. Why was Florence known as 'The Lady with the Lamp'?

5. How did Florence continue to contribute to nursing after the Crimean War?

6. What award did Florence receive from Queen Victoria? What was it for?

7. List 4 differences between nursing when Florence was a nurse, and nursing now.

Diary entry

Choose between these two options.

Write a diary entry as Florence Nightingale on the day she first arrives to the injured soldiers hospital during the Crimean war. Describe, her feelings, what she sees and how she think she can help.

OR

Write a diary entry as a modern day nurse who is working on the frontline against coronavirus. Write about their emotions, what the hospital is like, what their day entails etc.