MARY SEACOLE
IN FOCUS

Information and Activities for Teachers of Key Stages 1 to 4

Mary Seacole
by Albert Challen, 1869
(NPG 6856)
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Information and Activities for Teachers of Key Stages 1 to 4

Introduction

In 2008 the National Portrait Gallery made a hugely significant acquisition with the support of the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund. This was for the only known painted portrait of the Crimean heroine Mary Seacole. This is a small oil painting, created on a mahogany board only nine and a half inches high and just over six inches wide (240mm x 180mm), but its importance far exceeds its diminutive size, as the character it portrays was far larger than life. Mary Seacole was the nurse, hotel keeper, traveller and author who in 2004 was voted number one in the Hundred Great Black Britons poll.

The painting itself has an exciting history, fulfilling the dreams of all those people who hope one day to pick up something really special that has been overlooked in a car boot sale. This discovery in turn led to the detective work of identification of the sitter and authentication of the painting itself. Such a major addition to the National Portrait Gallery would not have been possible without the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, allowing this highly important image to remain in public ownership for ever.

This resource is designed in three main sections to assist teachers from Key Stages 1 to 4 to make use of Mary Seacole’s portrait in teaching a wide range of subjects including history, citizenship, art and literacy.

The first section explores Mary Seacole’s life through a short biography, extracts from her book the Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands (referenced throughout the resource as extracts 1-7), a timeline, and a comparison between Mary Seacole and Florence Nightingale.

The second section focuses on the portrait itself, looking at how the painting was discovered and the sitter’s identity established, and also what is known about the artist and how the painting was authenticated.

The third section turns to teaching providing a guided discussion of the painting, curriculum links with suggested activities across different ages and subjects, and an image bank with links to portraits, landscapes and objects. A bibliography, suggested websites, and a glossary are included. First mentions of glossarised words are in bold.
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Mary Grant (later Mary Seacole) was born in Jamaica in 1805, at a time when many of the inhabitants were still slaves working on the sugar plantations. Her father was a Scottish soldier and her mother was a free Creole — it is unclear whether they were married. Mary had a strong affinity with her British identity, even before she visited, describing Britain as her ‘home’. She was also proud of her West Indian heritage. Her mother was a ‘doctress’, a herbal healer in the Caribbean tradition of a holistic approach to medicine, who practised in the capital, Kingston, where she ran a boarding house. Mary learnt her nursing skills first by watching, and later by helping her mother care for invalid British soldiers and their families (see extract 1).

In her teens Mary travelled abroad and twice visited England, the country of her dreams, as she records. Now a doctress herself and a business woman, in 1836 Mary married Edwin Horatio Hamilton Seacole, a godson, she states in her autobiography, of Admiral Nelson. When left a widow in 1844, Mary set up her own boarding house for her patients. In 1850 her skills were in high demand during a major cholera outbreak in Jamaica, in the course of which over 30,000 people died. Long before the discovery of antibiotics, her mustard and senna remedy appeared effective, and she used it again when faced with another epidemic in Panama, where she was visiting her brother. She had set up a boarding house on a gold prospecting route there and saved many lives, despite racist taunts by some American prospectors. To further her own knowledge she secretly carried out a partial autopsy on a young boy who had died of cholera, something completely unthinkable for a woman in the European or North American medical tradition at that time (see extract 2).

Having moved on to nurse cholera patients in Cuba, she returned to Kingston to a yellow fever epidemic in 1853. She was so well-respected that she says she was put in charge of the nursing services for the British military headquarters in Jamaica. The following year the Crimean War broke out, pitting Russian soldiers against the combined forces of Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire, whose powerbase was Turkey. The fighting took place to the north of the Black Sea, in what is now part of Ukraine, and illness took a toll on both sides, especially the combined forces. As reports came back of the pitiful condition of sick and wounded British soldiers, particularly those published in the Times whose reporter on the ground, W.H. Russell, strongly influenced public opinion, the government was forced to act. It responded by sending Florence Nightingale and her small band of nurses out to the military hospital – in reality just a Turkish barracks – at Scutari, on the opposite shore from Constantinople (now Istanbul).

As the British troops stationed in Jamaica embarked for the Crimea, Mary Seacole had hopes of offering her services to the British government to nurse in Turkey. When that failed, and she was also rejected by the organisation in London that sent nurses out to Florence Nightingale, she paid for herself to travel to Turkey with her cousin and business partner, Thomas Day. On arrival she offered herself directly to Florence Nightingale at Scutari (see extract 3 and ‘Mary Seacole and Florence Nightingale – a comparison’). Rejected again, she went to the battlefields and set up in business as a ‘sutler’, supplying the army with provisions from the ‘British Hotel’, which she established near Balaklava, extremely close to the front
Biography: Mary Seacole (1805-1881)

Florence Nightingale receiving the wounded at Scutari
by Jerry Barrett, 1857
(NPG 6202)
© National Portrait Gallery, London

line. She used the money she earned from British officers to finance her medical work with the ordinary soldiers, among whom she was affectionately known as ‘Mother Seacole’. She seemed to be impervious to danger and even went on to the battlefield to tend the wounded (extract 4). At one point she was visited by the famous French chef Alexis Soyer, who, like Mary, had travelled independently to the Crimea, where he worked for Florence Nightingale (extract 5). When Sevastapol, the Russian stronghold, fell to the British in the autumn of 1855, Mary Seacole was the first woman to enter the captured city (extract 6).

However, none of this won her any official recognition from the British government and in 1856 the war suddenly ended. Mary Seacole found herself owed money and obliged to sell off her belongings in a hurry, at a considerable loss. On returning to Britain she faced financial ruin, ‘beggar’d as she put it. Friends rallied to support her and started a fund for her assistance – W.H. Russell publicised her plight to readers of The Times while Punch also advertised her cause. Two military aristocrats, Lord Rokeby and Lord Paget, set up a four-evening-long benefit parade but it was organised so badly that it made her little money. It was Mary herself who recovered her finances by swiftly writing her famous book, the Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands, with an introduction by W.H. Russell. It was a gripping tale, well-told, if occasionally a little shaky on precise details as Mary herself freely admitted (extract 7); it sold out in 1857 and was reprinted in 1858.

From 1859 onwards Mary Seacole began to disappear from the public eye. For a while she went back to Jamaica, but later returned to Britain. By 1867 she was destitute again and Queen Victoria successfully revived the Seacole Fund; the portrait of Mary was painted by Albert Charles Challen two years later. In 1871 Mary seems to have been employed as a masseuse to Alexandra, princess of Wales, while the Queen’s nephew Victor, later Count Gleichen, a former patient from her Crimean days, sculpted a terracotta bust of her. She divided her remaining years between Britain and Jamaica, dying in London in May 1881, and
Section 1 – Life Story

Biography: Mary Seacole (1805-1881)

Evacuation of the Crimea by the Allies
after R. T. Landells
Wood engraving
© National Portrait Gallery, London
Published in Illustrated London News, 30 August 1856, pp. 214-15

Mary Seacole and Alexis Soyer are among the group in the foreground.

was buried in Kensal Rise Cemetery. Appreciative obituary notices appeared both in the country of her birth and in her adopted country, Britain, which she had served so faithfully in the Crimean War twenty five years before.

A century later, however, her life and achievements were totally forgotten and Florence Nightingale was the only Crimean heroine remembered. Supporters from the Jamaican community and the nursing profession in Britain successfully revived Mary Seacole’s fame, and in 2004 she was voted the ‘Greatest Black Briton’ in history.

Further Images

Map of Crimea

British soldiers in the Crimea
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O90535/photograph-hardships-in-the-camp-colonel/

Mary Seacole at the British Hotel with Alexis Soyer hotel
http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/seacole/adventures/front-page.jpeg

Ward at Scutari with Florence Nightingale
Mary Seacole’s Life in her Own Words

Extracts from Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands, edited by Ziggi Alexander and Audrey Dewjee (Falling Water Press, Bristol, 1984).

Extract 1

As a child, Mary Seacole started by nursing her doll: ‘I found other patients in the dogs and cats around me. My luckless brutes were made to simulate diseases which were raging among their owners, and had forced down their reluctant throats the remedies which I deemed most likely to suit their supposed complaints…Despairing of finding another human patient, I proceeded to try my simples [herbal remedies] and essences upon – myself. When I was about twelve years old I…used to assist [my mother] in her duties; very often sharing with her the task of attending upon invalid officers and their wives…As I grew into womanhood I began to indulge that longing to travel which will never leave me while I have health and vigour…’ p. 57.

Extract 2

Mary Seacole’s ‘first and last post-mortem examination’ was carried out on a young orphaned boy who had died of cholera. She and the man sent to bury him had to perform it in thick bushes by the river so as not to be seen. ‘It seems a strange deed to accomplish, and I’m sure I could not wield the scalpel…but at that time the excitement had strung my mind up to a high pitch of courage and determination; and perhaps the daily, almost hourly, scenes of death had made me somewhat callous….The results of my operation…were what every medical man well knows.’ p. 82.

Extract 3

Mary Seacole visited Scutari: ‘Directly I entered the hospital, and came upon the long wards of sufferers lying there so quiet and still, a rush of tears came to my eyes, and blotted out the sight for a few minutes. But soon I felt at home and looked around me with great interest… Now and then the female nurses, in their quiet uniform, passed noiselessly on some mission of kindness….’ Taken to see Florence Nightingale, she found her ‘in the nurses’ dress; with a pale, gentle, and withal firm face, resting lightly in the palm of one white hand, while the other supports the elbow….Standing thus in repose but keenly observant…was Florence Nightingale – that English woman whose name shall never die, but sound like music on the lips of British men until the hour of doom.’ pp. 132-3 and 136.
Mary Seacole’s Life in her Own Words

Extract 4

Mary Seacole often found herself ‘under fire’. ‘More frequently than was agreeable, a shot would come ploughing up the ground and raising clouds of dust, or a shell whiz above us. Upon these occasions those around us would cry out, ‘Lie down, mother, lie down!’ and with very undignified and unladylike haste I had to embrace the earth and have to remain there until the same voices would laughingly assure me that the danger was over, or one more thoughtful than the rest, would come and give us a helping hand, and hoping that the old lady was neither hit nor frightened.’ p. 195.

Extract 5

‘Miss Nightingale came to supervise the Balaclava hospitals, and, before long, she had practical experience of Crimean fever. After her came…the great high priest of the mysteries of cookery, Monsieur Alexis Soyer…with the most smiling of faces and in the most gorgeous of…uniforms, and never failed to praise my soups and dainties. I always flattered myself I was his match, and with our West Indian dishes could of course beat him hollow, and more than once I challenged him to a trial of skill; but the gallant Frenchman only shrugged his shoulders…with many flourishes of his jewelled hands declaring that Madame proposed a contest where victory would…be more disastrous than defeat. And all because I was a woman, forsooth. What nonsense to talk like that, when I was doing the work of half a dozen men.’ p. 187-8.
Mary Seacole’s Life in her Own Words

Extract 6

“For weeks past I had been offering bets to everyone that I would not only be the first woman to enter Sebastopol from the English lines, but that I would be the first to carry refreshments into the fallen city. And now the time I had longed for had come. I borrowed some mules… and loaded them with good things…I soon obtained a pass…and entered the city…Many parts of it were still blazing furiously – explosions were taking place in all directions – every step had a score of dangers; and yet curiosity and excitement carried us on and on. I was often stopped to give refreshment to officers and men, who had been fasting for hours.’ p. 209-10.

Extract 7

“My memory is far from trustworthy, and I kept no written diary…unless I am allowed to tell the story of my life in my own way, I cannot tell it at all.’ p.185.
## Section 1 – Life Story

### Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mary Seacole 1805 - 1910</th>
<th>Britain 1805 - 1910</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1807</td>
<td></td>
<td>Abolition of British Slave Trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td></td>
<td>Battle of Waterloo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819</td>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria (later Queen Victoria) born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td></td>
<td>Florence Nightingale born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td></td>
<td>French chef Alexis Soyer comes to London.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td></td>
<td>Partial abolition of slavery in British colonies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Marries Edwin Horatio Hamilton Seacole.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria becomes queen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td></td>
<td>Full abolition of slavery in British colonies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Home destroyed in Great Fire in Kingston.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Husband and mother die.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Alexis Soyer runs relief kitchens in Ireland during Potato Famine.</td>
<td>Albert Charles Challen (later an artist) born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Nurses patients in cholera outbreak in Jamaica.</td>
<td>Florence Nightingale trains as a nurse in Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851-3</td>
<td>In Panama nursing cholera patients and running British Hotel.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>In Jamaica nursing yellow fever patients.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853-4</td>
<td>Returns to Panama.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854-5</td>
<td>In London trying to sign up to nurse in Crimea but rejected.</td>
<td>Britain, allied with France and Ottoman Turkey, declares war on Russia in the Crimea. Battle of Balaklava, including 'Charge of the Light Brigade'. Florence Nightingale and her nurses arrive at Scutari.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Writes <em>Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole</em>. Sells out and is reprinted the following year. Benefit concerts make little money. Offers to go to India but is rejected.</td>
<td>Rebellion against the British in India (called at the time 'The Indian Mutiny').</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Section 1 – Life Story

### Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>Mary Seacole returns to Jamaica, probably through lack of money.</td>
<td>Florence Nightingale writes <em>Notes on Nursing</em>, frequently reprinted, and founds Nightingale School for Nurses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Queen Victoria’s mother and husband die. Florence Nightingale begins three decades of establishing nursing in Britain and advising British and foreign armies on reforming medical services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Protests in Jamaica lead to severe reprisals by the British. Mary Seacole seen as a British sympathizer. She returns to Britain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>In need of money – Seacole Fund revived, supported by Queen Victoria.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Painted by Albert Challen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Terracotta bust sculpted by Count Gleichen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.1873</td>
<td>Photographed by Maull &amp; Co.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Makes her will.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Dies and is buried at Kensal Rise cemetery.</td>
<td>Albert Charles Challen, artist of Mary Seacole portrait, dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Queen Victoria dies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Florence Nightingale awarded Order of Merit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Florence Nightingale dies.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In general discussion, Mary Seacole is sometimes described as ‘the black Florence Nightingale’, or is seen as competing with Nightingale. These approaches are unhelpful and do a disservice to both women, who each tried, at least in public, to play down any suggestion of rivalry between the two of them. The many differences between the two, however, are striking, emphasising the variety of different roles played by them and by other women during the Crimean War.

The two women’s contrasting backgrounds set them on very different paths in life. Seacole, as a nurse and doctress, was born into a strong Caribbean tradition of healing, treating illnesses with herbal remedies. In the West Indies this was, as in Seacole’s case, often combined with being a lodging-house keeper, providing meals and accommodation as well as caring for the sick. Nightingale, born into a wealthy British family over a century before the establishment of the National Health Service, was struggling in her turn to establish nursing as a totally new profession respectable enough to attract middle-class women. Each had remarkable force of character but yet both were definitely products of their time and culture, with the prejudices and snobberies that entailed. It is therefore as futile to berate Nightingale for her unwillingness to allow Seacole to join her nurses or be in any
Mary Seacole and Florence Nightingale – a comparison

way associated with them, as it is to condemn Seacole for her enthusiasm for all things British and for ignoring the plight of her oppressed black compatriots.

While Nightingale was sent by the British government to improve conditions in the military barracks in Turkey that served as a hospital, Seacole financed her own expedition as a business venture. She made money from wealthy officers by providing food and drink as well as treatment, basing herself close to the battlefields where she treated impoverished soldiers for free. It seems mainly to have been Seacole’s association with alcoholic drink that led Nightingale, a strict teetotaller, to reject her offer of help in the Crimea, and may also explain why Queen Victoria never met her, though other members of the Royal family were clearly friendly and supportive. However, Florence also wanted nurses who were younger than Mary, light on their feet and, no doubt, more biddable.

Mary Seacole was careful in her book only to speak highly of Florence Nightingale, whatever she might have personally thought about ‘The Lady with the Lamp’ (see extract 3). A private letter by Nightingale, written to her brother-in-law in 1870 and marked ‘burn’, survives to show what she really felt about Seacole:

‘She was very kind to the men & what is more, to the officers & did some good & made many drunk. (A shameful ignorant imposture was practised on the Queen who subscribed to the ‘Seacole Testimonial’.) ...Anyone who employs Mrs Seacole will introduce much kindness – and also much drunkenness and improper conduct, wherever she is.’*

However, there is nothing in this letter or Nightingale’s other writings to suggest that she herself was motivated by racism, although the organisation in London sending out nurses to Scutari certainly was, rejecting one applicant as ‘too dark’. Neither is there any evidence that racism influenced Queen Victoria’s attitude to Mary Seacole.

On their return, Nightingale continued to work on reforming the British Army’s medical provision and on establishing the training of nurses. Seacole, however, was left to her own resources. Despite the success of her book describing her adventures she found herself forced to rely on donations and on a small amount of money raised at a benefit concert. These differences in their lives help explain why there is so much more information available about Florence Nightingale than about Mary Seacole. It is the scarcity of visual representations of Mary Seacole that makes this, the only known painting of her, such an important image.

* Quoted in Jane Robinson, Mary Seacole: The charismatic black nurse who became a heroine of the Crimea (London, 2005) p. 191. This subject is discussed at various points throughout the book.
The story of how the portrait was found

A degree of mystery surrounds the finding of this portrait. The story starts with a car boot sale in Oxfordshire, where an art dealer bought a print in a frame, which had quite possibly come from a house clearance locally after someone had died. On the back was an inscription ‘A. C. Challo[n] 1869’. Intrigued, the dealer took off the frame, turned the backing board over and then found the painting we now know to be of Mary Seacole, which had previously been hidden from view. How it had travelled from London to Oxfordshire and what had been its fate in the intervening decades is unknown - as is why it had been turned face inwards. Although it is not mentioned in her will, it is possible, if Mary Seacole had owned the painting, that she gave it to her nephew William James Kent and his wife in Brixton, to whom she made other bequests – but all of this can only be conjecture.

After passing through several hands, in 2003 the newly-rediscovered portrait was identified by the writer, historian and Russian expert Helen Rappaport, who had studied the Crimean War and was researching Mary Seacole’s life. From 2005 it was lent to the National Portrait Gallery and in 2008, with the invaluable assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the portrait was bought for the nation. Since then it has been displayed in the Victorian Galleries at the National Portrait Gallery in London.
There are eight known likenesses of Mary Seacole, not all created from life. The best comparisons are with a photograph taken by Maull & Co in about 1873, distributed as a carte-de-visite, and a terracotta bust by Queen Victoria’s nephew, later Count Gleichen, made in 1871 and first exhibited the following year. In both of these she wears the medals that also appear in the painting, thought to be the British Crimea medal, the Turkish Medjidie and the French Legion of Honour. Although the photograph was itself identified by comparison with other known images of Mary Seacole, they all clearly show the same distinctive face. Her thumb in the photograph mirrors the injury she describes in her book, ‘my only wound during the campaign. I threw myself too heavily to the ground…and fell heavily on the thumb of my right hand, dislocating it…It has never returned to its proper shape’. 
The artist who painted this portrait of Mary Seacole was called Albert Charles Challen. Fortunately he signed the painting 'ACC', and the back records the name 'A.C. Challo[n] 1869', otherwise we would have no clue as to who created it. However, we still know very little more than his name, as he died aged only 34, in 1881, the same year as Mary Seacole. Albert Charles Challen was a Londoner, born in Islington in 1847 and baptised in Marylebone; he was living in Camberwell with his parents and younger siblings in the year of his death. In the census of 1881 and on his death certificate he is described as an 'Artist', but no other artworks by him have been found. The portrait, though striking and of an important British sitter, is a reasonably amateur piece of painting, suggesting perhaps that Challen was not particularly successful in his chosen career.

At the National Portrait Gallery, over a century later, conservation and curatorial experts were concerned to establish that the painting dated genuinely from Mary Seacole's lifetime, and was not a later image based on the sculpture of her or the photograph. Mary Seacole's sudden rise to recent prominence in the Hundred Great Black Britons made them wary of a possible attempted forgery. The Conservation Department looked at the board on which the portrait is painted and analysed the pigments used, also exploring the layers of paint that lie underneath the visible image.

Although it is impossible to say definitively that it does date from Mary Seacole's lifetime, there is nothing to suggest that it could not be of that period. The board is typical of the time and the pigments, including vermilion and Prussian blue, were available at that date, though they continued in use subsequently. The name and date written on the back are also in the appropriate style for that time. The most likely moment for Seacole to have been painted would have been while she was still relatively well-known – the late 1850s or 1860s – rather than later when she was living in greater obscurity. The board is mahogany and interestingly had already been painted on before the portrait was started. As the main colours found underneath were shades of green, it seems likely to have been a landscape of some sort. The pigments used in this hidden painting are the same as those visible on the surface, so it was probably painted by the same hand as the portrait itself. This would fit with the idea of Challen as a not particularly successful or well-off artist, reusing his materials.
Mary Seacole in focus
National Portrait Gallery
Guided discussion of the Mary Seacole portrait

Activity

Looking at the painting

These questions to ask your class about a reproduction of the portrait are similar to those that we use in the Gallery - suggested pupil answers are given in brackets. You may need to adapt the wording to the age of your pupils and if necessary ask more questions to elicit a fuller response. This can also be used to develop visual literacy writing and reading activities around the portrait.

- What can you tell about her age from this portrait?
  *(Older woman, with some white in her hair; the back of the painting actually has the date 1869 on it, making her about 64 years old)*

- What is she wearing that might give you some clues about her life?
  *(Her medals from the Crimean War)*

- Mary Seacole was known for her colourful clothing; how is colour used in the painting?
  *(Bright red scarf and lips - strong colour contrasts between the blue and the red; also contrasts between the light shining on her skin and the dark background.)*

- Where is she looking?
  *(To her right, the viewer’s left)*

- What do we call a face viewed from this angle?
  *(A profile; pupils could think about the different possible angles for a portrait and give their opinions)*

- Is this a true profile? *(Perhaps compare with the present Queen’s head on a coin.)*
  *(Not quite - in a true profile only one half of the face should appear, but in this portrait you can see part of Mary’s other eye and eyebrow)*

- Comparing this portrait with one where the sitter meets your gaze, how different does this lack of eye-contact make you feel? *(Subjective, but sometimes viewers report feeling less engaged without eye-contact and see the sitter as being wrapped up in their own thoughts)*

- Where is the light coming from in this painting?
  *(The top left of the painting, from a source outside the picture)*

- Where does the light particularly fall?
  *(On her forehead, across her hair, on her nose and around her mouth, also picking out her medals and her earring)*

- How would you describe her face?
  *(Lined and wrinkled, shiny skin, quite narrow eyes, red lips and so on)*

- What sort of expression does she have?
  *(Proud and self-confident, maybe slightly weary; pupils should say how it appears to them)*

- What might she be thinking about?
  *(Any aspect of her life that pupils choose - her childhood in Jamaica, her boarding house in Kingston, her time in Panama, her work in the Crimea, being welcomed in Britain on her return and so on)*
Guided discussion of the Mary Seacole portrait

Activity

Compare the portrait of Mary Seacole with Florence Nightingale receiving the Wounded at Scutari.

One important difference is size – Florence Nightingale’s picture is over two metres wide while Mary Seacole’s is less than 25cm high.

- What are the advantages and disadvantages for the artist of portraying a sitter in a crowded setting rather than as an isolated individual against a plain background?
  (An advantage of a setting with other people might be to show more of the sitter’s life or work; a disadvantage might be that the sitter stands out less in a crowd. Clearly having a lone sitter places emphasis on that person but might make it harder to convey so much about the sitter’s life.)

- How has the artist made Florence Nightingale stand out among all the other people in the picture?
  (Using light – in the same way that the viewer is directed to important elements in Mary Seacole’s portrait)

- If you were to portray Mary Seacole in an active setting, which scene from her life would you choose and what age would she be then?
  (Choose any key moment - the timeline will help you work out her age.)

Further Images

Florence Nightingale receiving the wounded at Scutari
by Jerry Barrett, 1857
(NPG 6202)
© National Portrait Gallery, London

NPG 6202 Florence Nightingale receiving the wounded at Scutari
http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait.php?Text=Florence+nightingale&submitSearchTerm%5Fx=12&submitSearchTerm%5Fx=9&search=ss&OConly=true&firstRun=true&LinkID=mp03298&page=1&rNo=8&role=sit

NPG 6856 portrait of Seacole
http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait.php?Text=Seacole&submitSearchTerm%5Fx=13&submitSearchTerm%5Fx=8&search=ss&OConly=true&firstRun=true&LinkID=mp70879&rNo=0&role=sit
Section 3 – Teaching and Learning

Teaching with the portrait of Mary Seacole – Suggested curriculum links and activities

Although these suggestions are divided into curriculum areas, many of these activities offer opportunities for cross-curricular work. Mary Seacole is also an ideal subject for school assemblies with pupils of all ages. Please see pages 30 and 31 for the National Portrait Gallery’s programme to support learning about Mary Seacole’s portrait through gallery visits, videoconferences and web resources.

Key Stage 1

History

Content: ‘Pupils must study the lives of significant men, women and children drawn from the history of Britain and the wider world’ and ‘past events from the history of Britain and the wider world’.

A project might be angled towards one or more of the following skills, which build on each other within each key stage, as well as ensuring progression through the key stages.

Skills:

• Chronological understanding - sequencing some key events in Mary Seacole’s life.

• Knowledge and understanding of people - if work on Florence Nightingale such as QCA unit 4 ‘How do we remember Florence Nightingale?’ has already been carried out, then, as well as studying Mary Seacole as a famous person in her own right, comparisons could be made between the two women. This would allow pupils to find similarities and differences between them.

• Historical interpretation - structuring a historical enquiry about the posthumous reputations of each – why was Florence Nightingale always remembered while Mary Seacole went through a long period of obscurity, until her story was rediscovered in the later twentieth century?

• Organisation and communication – creating a portrait or sequence of portraits of Mary Seacole showing the events in her life that made her famous.

• For further suggestions and teaching ideas see Teacher Assessment Activities History Key Stage 1, published by QCA in 2006.

Citizenship

Content: People who help us in looking at medical people who help us, pupils could study the roles of Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole in the early years of women’s professional involvement in medicine in Britain. Mary Seacole was clearly ahead of her time in seeking status similar to that of a doctor, while Florence Nightingale concentrated on establishing nursing as a profession.

(See also Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, the first woman doctor in Britain: http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person.php?%5FText=Elizabeth+Garrett+Anderson&submitSearchTerm%5FxFx=12&submitSearchTerm%5Fy=8&search=ss&OConly=true&firstRun=true&LinkID=mp65487)
Section 3 – Teaching and Learning

Teaching with the portrait of Mary Seacole – Suggested curriculum links and activities

Key Stage 2

History

Content: Victorian Britain.

A project might be angled towards one or more of the following skills, which build on each other within each key stage, as well as ensuring progression through the key stages.

Skills:

- Chronological understanding and knowledge and understanding of events, people and changes in the past – setting Mary Seacole’s life, including images of her, among key events in Victorian Britain and in the lives of Florence Nightingale and Queen Victoria, creating a class or group timeline.

- Historical interpretation – charting and explaining the rollercoaster reputation of Mary Seacole over the past century and a half, from being a Crimean heroine to being totally forgotten, and then back again to having her book republished in 1984 (see Bibliography), being mentioned in the National Curriculum from the early 1990s onwards and being the winner in the Hundred Great Black Britons vote in 2004. Draw this as a graph (or similar visual representation) with decades on the x axis from the 1850s to the present decade and labels on the y axis ranging from ‘totally unknown’ to ‘a household name’ (add other gradations in between).

- Historical enquiry – why did Mary Seacole arrive back from the Crimea so poor while Florence Nightingale was comfortably off, and how did Victorian society respond to each of them? (include the evidence of portraits)

- Organisation and communication – using what has been discovered about Victorian society in the enquiry to design an advertisement for Mary Seacole’s benefit parade or the Seacole Fund to make it appeal as fully as possible to as many Victorians as possible (use images and write persuasive text).

Art

2D work - Portraits in profile

- Collecting portraits in profile (remembering to include coins, banknotes and stamps) – using internet sites that retrieve images to help search, using terms like ‘profile portrait’ and ‘silhouette’ [NB Do not just use ‘profile’ as you get Facebook profiles of a highly unsuitable kind].

- Discussing why profile is used in different images. Drawing profiles freehand, remembering that the eyes normally come roughly half way down the head and that the mouth is usually roughly equidistant between the end of the nose and the chin.

- Using a light to cast shadows and create silhouettes – identifying class members from their profiles or silhouettes.
Section 3 – Teaching and Learning

Teaching with the portrait of Mary Seacole –
Suggested curriculum links and activities

3D work – Making medals

- Looking at Mary Seacole’s medals in her portrait and collecting other examples of designs for medals.
- Designing a new medal for Mary Seacole, using either air drying clay (follow the instructions for use) or plaster of Paris, using following technique:
  - Create a plasticine mould, beginning with a thick plasticine base in the size and shape that the medal will be. Draw the design into this base, remembering that any lines engraved into the plasticine will appear raised from the surface of the final medal.
  - Build a wall of plasticine about 5 cm tall around the base, leaving no gaps, then pouring in liquid plaster of Paris (following all health and safety recommendations). Before it sets, insert a loop of wire to hang the medal by (freezer bag wire closers are ideal).
- When set, remove medal from mould and decorate with acrylic paint and metallic permanent markers.

Literacy

Biography and autobiography

- Reading extracts from the Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole. Does she make what happened to her sound interesting (remembering that she was writing 150 years ago, so it won’t sound exactly the same as writing from today)? She needed to get her book published in a hurry and it has been suggested that she dictated, rather than wrote, the first draft. Get pupils to think of an incident in their lives and record themselves telling someone about it, then write an account of the same incident. Comparing the two – how far are they the same and how far are they different? Does the class now think that Mary Seacole wrote or dictated her first draft? (As we will never know which she actually did, the thinking and discussion generated are more important than the conclusion reached).
- Discussing whether autobiography can be trusted or if biography is more reliable (would the author of an autobiography change anything on purpose or by mistake? – see extract 7).

Drama

- Using some of the extracts, get pupils to put themselves in the place of Mary Seacole or of the person she is interacting with, first describing what they can see, hear, smell etc and then describing how they are feeling in that situation.
- At various times in her life Mary Seacole was an outsider – as a woman in a man’s world in the Crimea, and as a foreigner in the various countries where she went to live. Pupils should identify some of these situations in Mary’s life, and also talk about times when they have felt an outsider, for example when joining a existing group activity for the first time. They then choose a particular time that Mary would have been an outsider and role play her speaking about her emotions and how she plans to cope with that ‘outsider’ feeling.
- In pairs, role playing the conversation between Mary Seacole and Florence Nightingale (see extract 3); the conversation ends with Mary asking to spend the night at Scutari having missed the boat back to where she was staying, and Florence agreeing to this. Then pupils work in fours – two role playing the conversation and the other two adding what each woman is really thinking while they are talking (rather like a cartoon with speech bubbles and thought bubbles - see Mary Seacole and Florence Nightingale – a comparison).
Section 3 – Teaching and Learning

Teaching with the portrait of Mary Seacole – Suggested curriculum links and activities

Key Stage 3

History

Content: ‘movement of diverse people to the British Isles’; ‘the way in which the lives, beliefs, ideas and attitudes of people in Britain have changed over time’; ‘the British Empire and its impact on different people in Britain and overseas’ including ‘the nature and effects of the slave trade’; ‘the changing nature of conflict and cooperation between countries’.

A project might be angled towards one or more of the following concepts and processes, which build on each other within each key stage, as well as ensuring progression through the key stages.

Concepts and processes:

- Cultural, ethnic and religious diversity - ‘Understanding the diverse experiences and ideas, beliefs and attitudes of men, women and children in past societies and how these have shaped the world’ – how far has Mary Seacole’s changing reputation reflected the increasing diversity of Britain itself?

- Significance - ‘Considering the significance of people in their historical context and in the present day’ – why has Mary Seacole’s significance changed over time? Pupils should both be aware of existing criteria for evaluating significance* and devise their own criteria, sharing and discussing them with other class members.

- Interpretation - ‘Understanding how historians and others form interpretations’ and ‘Evaluating a range of interpretations of the past to assess their validity.’ Both Florence Nightingale and Mary Seacole have suffered adverse critical interpretations – Florence Nightingale first in Lytton Strachey’s Eminent Victorians published in 1918, as being an intensely difficult woman (though not attacking her achievements) and more recently from medical historians for her rejection of germ theory and lack of enthusiasm for women doctors, although she was generally a supporter of women’s rights. Mary Seacole, over the years, and more recently in The Voice ‘Why Mary Seacole is not a black hero’ (Issue 1401, 7 December 2009 http://www.voice-online.co.uk/content.php?show=16719 ) has been criticised for being self-promoting - ‘the Katie Price of her day’ - for failing to support African struggles against the British and for using racist language in her writing. Discussing why interpretations of one or both women have changed over time.

- Historical enquiry - ‘Reflect critically on historical questions or issues’ – pupils plan their own enquiry into Mary Seacole’s significance (drawing on their previous experience of carrying out historical enquiries) – selecting issues to explore, formulating a question, setting significance criteria, gathering evidence and designing a museum display (see below).

- Using evidence - ‘Identify, select and use a range of historical sources including textual and visual sources’ – carrying out the historical enquiry above, including Florence Nightingale for comparison where appropriate.

Section 3 – Teaching and Learning

Teaching with the portrait of Mary Seacole – Suggested curriculum links and activities

- Communicating about the past and Curriculum opportunities – ‘Appreciate and evaluate the role of museums and galleries in preserving and presenting and influencing people’s attitudes towards the past’. Design a small display using the evidence gathered above, to be shown in a museum of gallery. Write a 200 word text panel on Mary Seacole’s significance with images with captions. Try out the text and images on other people, asking them stand up to read and look at them. Is the text persuasive and interesting enough to keep them reading to the end, and does it encourage them to look closely at the images?

Citizenship

Diversity
Debating what role a figure like Mary Seacole does or does not have today in promoting community cohesion. If she has a role, how might her portrait be used in a campaign to promote community cohesion?

Taking informed and responsible action
Mary Seacole and Florence Nightingale present two historical contrasting models of taking action, in large part reflecting their contrasting positions within Victorian society, but also their own personalities. Florence, using her network of upper class contacts, worked from within the political system during the Crimean War and afterwards went on to make changes to that system, establishing the profession of nursing and reforming army medical practices. Mary was always an outsider, exhibiting great compassion and courage in the Crimea but not able or apparently wishing to make fundamental changes to how things were organised beyond the scope of her own actions. Explore these contrasting models of taking action, alongside others of a similar period, for example the consumer boycott of sugar as part of the campaign for the abolition of slavery (incidentally the first mass action of its kind) or, later, the campaigns for female suffrage (both non-violent and violent). Which model do pupils feel is best for taking action?

‘Our Own Vivandière’
Unknown artist
Wood engraving, published in
Punch, 30 May 1857, p. 221
© National Portrait Gallery, London
Teaching with the portrait of Mary Seacole –
Suggested curriculum links and activities

**Key Stage 4**

**History**

**GCSE SHP Medicine and Public Health through Time**

While the focus is on Florence Nightingale, Mary Seacole’s medical background as a ‘doctress’ provides an interesting comparison with Florence’s view of the roles of doctor and nurse. Comparisons could also be made between Florence Nightingale’s *Notes on Nursing* and Mary Seacole’s remedies.

Notes on Nursing: [http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/nightingale/nursing/nursing.html](http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/nightingale/nursing/nursing.html)

Mary Seacole’s book mentions several of the herbs she used: see Image Bank below ‘In Mary Seacole’s Medicine Chest’.

**Science – Biology**

**OCR GCSE 21st Century Science - Biology**

Possible subjects for a case study might include: ‘Who did more for medicine: Florence Nightingale or Mary Seacole?’ or comparing and assessing the western and the traditional herbal approaches to medicine in their work (see suggested sources under History above).

**Art**

Develop a portrait project taking elements from the Mary Seacole portrait as the starting point, including –

- materials (board, oil or acrylic paint)
- scale and pose
- use of direction of line, light and tone to describe the form
- colour temperature, using warm and cool colours effectively including complementary opposites.

**Further drawing activity:**

Volume drawing or contour drawing of each others’ profile using graphite sticks to practise direction of line.

**Sketchbook/Work Journal development:**

1) Collect images of aging faces, from newspapers or magazines, and respond to the skin textures in particular through observational drawings using a wide variety of materials, including pencil, fine-line pen, biro, collage, string etc.

2) Draw a self portrait using a 6B pencil and age yourself, concentrating on texture and tone.

3) Collect images of a variety of portraits with different skin tones, including your own (friends and family). Mix acrylics in a colour wheel or line, to collage the range of skin tones observed.
Mary Seacole image bank with links

See also links throughout this resource

**Images of Mary Seacole**

**NPG 6856 portrait of Seacole**
http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait.php?sText=Seacole&submitSearchTerm%5Fx=13&submitSearchTerm%5Fy=8&search=ss&OConly=true&firstRun=true&LinkID=mp70879&rNo=0&role=sit

**In the British Hotel with Alexis Soyer hotel**
http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/seacole/adventures/front-page.jpeg

**Photo c.1873**
http://www.voice-online.co.uk/content.php?show=16719 (detail)

**Objects relating to Mary Seacole**

**Wonderful Adventures cover**
http://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/media/image/n/t/mrs_seacole_large.jpg

**English Heritage blue plaque**
http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/upload/img_400/Seacole_M9405.jpg

**Grave**
http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/REseacole2.jpg

**In Mary Seacole’s medicine chest**

**Quinine**
http://www.nhm.ac.uk/jdsml/nature-online/seeds-of-trade/page.dsmi?section=crops&ref=quinine

**Opium**
http://www.nhm.ac.uk/jdsml/nature-online/seeds-of-trade/page.dsmi?section=crops&page=&ref=poppy

**Aloe**
http://www.nhm.ac.uk/jdsml/nature-online/seeds-of-trade/page.dsmi?section=crops&ref=aloe

**Arrowroot**
http://piclib.nhm.ac.uk/piclib/www/image.php?img=61033
Mary Seacole image bank with links

Camphor
http://piclib.nhm.ac.uk/piclib/www/image.php?img=52205

Senna
http://piclib.nhm.ac.uk/piclib/www/image.php?img=52211

Mustard
http://piclib.nhm.ac.uk/piclib/www/image.php?img=52321

Cinnamon
http://piclib.nhm.ac.uk/piclib/www/image.php?img=61002

Ginger
http://piclib.nhm.ac.uk/piclib/www/image.php?img=52753

Cascara
http://piclib.nhm.ac.uk/piclib/www/image.php?img=52337

Images of Florence Nightingale
http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/saction.php?sText=Florence+Nightingale&search=ss&OConly=true&firstRun=true&submitSearchTerm.x=7&submitSearchTerm.y=4

Images of other people in Mary Seacole’s story
Search for them by name:
http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search.php

General images of the Crimea

Balaklava

Embarkation of the sick at Balaklava
Section 3 – Teaching and Learning

Mary Seacole image bank with links

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**Sevastapol**


http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O147628/watercolour-position-of-russian-fleet-sebastopol/

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**Images of soldiers in action**


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**Soldiers off duty**

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O90535/photograph-hardships-in-the-camp-colonel/

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**Christmas**


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**More Crimean images**

For over 100 more Crimean images on 11 pages see

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_results.aspx?orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&searchText=Crimewar&images=on&fromDate=&toDate=&fromADBC=ad&toDate=&toADBC=ad&x=9&y=11
Section 4 - Further Research

Bibliography, web links, National Portrait Gallery school visits, videoconferences and webquests

Bibliography

Ziggi Alexander and Audrey Dewjee (eds) Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands (Bristol, 1984).


Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Teacher Assessment Activities History Key Stage 1, (London, 2006).


Jane Robinson, Mary Seacole: The charismatic black nurse who became a heroine of the Crimea (London, 2005).


Web links

Florence Nightingale, Notes on Nursing (1860)
http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/nightingale/nursing/nursing.html

Tony Sewell, ‘Why Mary Seacole is not a black hero’, The Voice, Issue 1401, 7 December 2009 http://www.voice-online.co.uk/content.php?show=16719

Sites about Mary Seacole
http://www.maryseacole.com/maryseacole/pages/
http://www.100greatblackbritons.com/bios/mary_seacole.html
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tExWXU0O3s
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uonBT0JeMJ8

Teachers’ Notes Mary Seacole in focus

National Portrait Gallery
Section 4 - Further Research

Bibliography, web links, National Portrait Gallery school visits, videoconferences and webquests

National Portrait Gallery school visits, videoconferences and webquests

The following gallery sessions and videoconferences can include the portrait of Mary Seacole (please specify this when booking):

- **Key Stage 1** – Famous people
- **Key Stage 2** – Victorians
- **Key Stage 3** – Victorians
- **Key Stage 4** – Medicine through Time

For details of booking gallery sessions see:

For details of booking videoconferences see www.global-leap.org. Please note that bookings for videoconferences are not taken directly by the Gallery.

The following webquests feature the portrait of Mary Seacole. Webquests are innovative problem-solving activities for primary and secondary pupils, using nine national museum collections, to foster enquiry-based learning in history, art and citizenship.

- **Key Stage 1 Florence Nightingale** (a history webquest)

- **Key Stage 2 Portrait Prize** (an art webquest)

- **Key Stage 2 Victorian Magic Lantern** (a history webquest)

- **Key Stage 3 Diversity** (a history and citizenship webquest)
  http://www.npg.org.uk/webquests/
Section 4 - Further Research

Glossary

Balaklava
Port on the southern side of the Crimean peninsula (often spelt Balaclava by the British in the nineteenth century).

Conservation
The preservation of artworks following the investigation of the materials and techniques used to create them.

Creole
A person of mixed white and West Indian descent.

Crimea
A peninsula to the north of the Black Sea, now in Ukraine.

Doctress
A West Indian herbal healer.

Ottoman Empire
An empire centred on Turkey, which lasted for over 600 years from 1300 onwards, and at its height stretched across North Africa, to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and also to Vienna. From the 1850s it began slowly to decline and became labelled ‘The sick man of Europe’.

Pigment
The element in paint giving it colour, in the past usually consisting of finely ground minerals. To make paint, pigment is mixed with various kinds of sticky liquid; in the case of oil paint this is linseed oil. On drying it adheres to the surface on to which it has been painted.

Prussian blue
A synthetic pigment (not one created by grinding a mineral) first made in about 1704 in Berlin, in Prussia. It was the first synthetic pigment to be created in recent history and soon became widely used.

Senna
A medical herb inducing vomiting.

Sevastapol
The major town on the Crimean peninsula, to the north west of Balaklava (often spelt Sebastopol by the British in the nineteenth century).

Simples
Herbal remedies.

Sitter
The person in a portrait.

Sutler
A person who provides food and drink for the army. Mary Seacole also provided some accommodation as part of her business.

Terracotta
A clay usually brownish in colour because of its iron content, which a sculptor models and then fires in a kiln (terra cotta is Italian for ‘baked earth’).

Vermilion (also called cinnabar)
A bright red pigment made from mercuric sulphide.

Vivandière (French)
See ‘sutler’ above.
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