

Florence Nightingale

Reading Comprehension

Florence Nightingale was a nurse, who dedicated her life to her profession and is regarded as the founder of modern-day nursing. Her forward-thinking enabled there to be many advancements and improvements in hospitals at the time, which still influence how hospitals are run today.

Early life

Florence was born in the city of Florence in Italy on 12th May 1820. Her family were wealthy and originally from England - they moved home in 1821. Intelligence and an educated mind were important to wealthy families, so Florence's education started when she was young.

A calling to nursing

It is reported that Florence heard a voice from God telling her to dedicate her life to serving others, so she decided to become a nurse. Nursing at the time was not seen as a respectable career choice as conditions in hospitals were very poor. Nurses were untrained and poorly paid. Her parents did not want her to become a nurse as they felt that it was a job 'beneath' her social status. At the time, many women did not work at all. Her parents were further dismayed when Florence turned down a marriage proposal from a wealthy merchant as she felt getting married would take time away from nursing.



In 1844, Florence became a nursing student in Germany at The Lutheran Hospital of Pastor Fliedner, which seemed more focused on religious care than actual nursing skills. Upon completion, she returned to England and got a job at Middlesex Hospital in London. Her skills and impressive attitude were spotted straight away and she was promoted quickly. During her time at the hospital, Nightingale was determined to improve unhygienic conditions and facilities. She managed to reduce the death rate.



Artwork from the Wellcome Collection dedicated to Florence's time at war

The Crimean war

Florence is best known for her medical mission abroad in 1854 - she felt compelled to go and help the soldiers who were fighting in the Crimean war as she had seen reports about the horrifying conditions for the wounded soldiers. There were over 18,000 wounded soldiers and no female nurses to take care of them. Conditions in the hospitals were extremely poor – there were insanitary facilities, inadequate medicine and a lack of bed space.



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Soldiers had to lie on dirty floors and were catching infections, which were killing them. There were no toilets and the food was mouldy. Florence wanted to improve the conditions, so introduced new initiatives. They started regular hand washing, which helped to thwart the spread of germs. A chef was hired in order to provide fresh food for the soldiers. She was known to carry an oil lamp when she checked the soldiers at night, which earned her the nickname 'The Lady with the Lamp'.

Her impact on the soldiers was tangible – the death rates saw a significant drop. When she returned, she wrote a book named 'Notes on Nursing', which is still influential today.

A meeting with Queen Victoria

Such was her status after her Crimean war exploits, she was invited to meet with Queen Victoria. They had a discussion about improvements necessary in army hospitals. The Queen awarded Florence with an engraved brooch and a substantial amount of money. Florence used this money to further the education of others and to help with opening the Nightingale Training School for Nurses. As a result of this meeting, conditions were improved in the country's hospitals. Suddenly, the role of a nurse was not looked down upon in society. Instead, many wealthy women began to follow in Florence's footsteps.



A homage to Florence at a London Museum

A lasting legacy

Florence set up the Nightingale Training School in London, where nurses received formal nursing education. Around the world, other countries used Nightingale's model with a set curriculum, paid teachers, and equipment for practice to help educate nurses.

In her lifetime, Florence wrote over 200 books and other guidance regarding health standards. Much of her guidance influenced practices, which are still in place today.

Florence was awarded the Royal Red Cross by Queen Victoria in 1883. She received the Order of Merit in 1907, and in 1908 she was awarded the Freedom of the City of London.



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The profession of nursing is now unrecognisable compared to the underappreciated and inefficient practice it was in Florence's time. Singlehandedly, Florence changed it into a respected, training-based practice, which helped to lower the death rate nationally. This has made her a significant person in history as her legacy and determination for the nursing profession still lives on today.

A generous gesture

When Florence died in London on 13th August 1910, her family were offered a place in Westminster Abbey as she was so revered. This offer was declined, and Florence was buried in East Wellow, Hampshire instead.

