



2025 History Essay Contest

Homeschool 7/8th Grade Winner

A Lighted Lamp Illuminating Dark Places: Florence Nightingale

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A young nurse disembarks from a ship in Scutari. Arriving at an army hospital, she carefully steps around mangled bodies and blood-stained beds. Sewage is everywhere. Grime an inch thick conceals the floor. The fetid stench of death lurks around every corner. Somewhere in the maze of beds and bodies, a man utters his dying groan. The courtyard is overcrowded with dead and rotting animals. There is no clean water. As she searches for something to eat, she finds every particle of food either contaminated, rotten, or moldy.

This young nurse was Florence Nightingale, a girl with a burning desire to help those around her. Feeling that God was calling her to serve other people, she cared for the sick and poor in her village, even as a teenager. She had a determined mind, and her hardworking nature enabled her to excel at everything she put her mind to. With her father as her guide, she progressed from a brilliant student and a kind neighbor as a child, to a compassionate nurse and an understanding psychologist as an adult.

After landing in Scutari, any normal person seeing the sewage covering the floor would have been perfectly horrified, and left – and no one would have blamed them. But Miss Nightingale was not any normal person. Naturally, she was also horrified, but instead of leaving, she viewed it as an

opportunity to help others. As she dedicated hours of her time to the seemingly impossible task of cleaning the whole hospital from top to bottom, she held fast to her saying, “I think one's feelings waste themselves in words; they ought all to be distilled into actions which bring results”.

Her burning compassion for the poor soldiers in the horrific conditions of Scutari won out. She and her team of 38 nurses cleaned the entire hospital from roof to floor and adopted the now common custom of handwashing frequently when in a hospital. They also began to feed, dress, and bathe the soldiers regularly. But that wasn't enough – not for Nightingale. Nightingale's fame had been growing, and up until that point, she had avoided it, going by the pseudonym, Miss Smith. But now, she utilized her fame to meet with Queen Victoria, who thoroughly believed in her cause. She convinced the queen to set up a Royal Commission to investigate the health of the army. With the help of statisticians from the sanitary commission, Nightingale found out that 16,000 out of 18,000 deaths at the little army hospital were on account of diseases caused by a lack of sanitation. She invented the rose diagram, which is a circular visual chart that shows increasing and decreasing numbers. Florence used it to convey the decrease in fatalities after the work of the sanitary commission.

While in Scutari, Nightingale contracted Crimean Fever, a painful disease that caused her to be bedridden at different times throughout her life. Even while sick, Nightingale worked as hard as she had before, often riding her horse until ten o'clock and eating nothing all day but some brandy and water. She went back to England and began to work on improving the health system so that impoverished people could also access healthcare. Her compassion for the needy also moved her to send trained nurses into workhouses to administer healthcare. In an attempt to make healthcare readily available to everybody, Nightingale unknowingly set the standard for what would become the National Health Service.

However, improving healthcare in two different countries still wasn't enough for Nightingale. She then began to improve the health of the British army in India. She accepted the germ theory, and used it to emphasize the need for clean, uncontaminated water in India. She worked for famine relief and improved sanitary conditions. She connected many of the reasons for the high death toll there as being the same reasons for the high death toll in Scutari.

After all of her hard work saving thousands of lives, Nightingale became the first woman to be awarded the Order of Merit, an award granted to those who have given exceptional service to the British

crown. She died later at the age of 90. Some might ask how someone could change the way hospitals operated, find out how important proper sanitation is, improve healthcare in three different places, and make healthcare readily available to the poor in Britain, all in one lifetime. Because she was doing what she believed God was calling her to do, He enabled her to do it. Through the grace of God, we can always accomplish His mission for us no matter how big, as demonstrated by the life work of Florence Nightingale.

A young nurse disembarks from a ship in Crimea. Arriving at an army hospital, she travels across spotless floors and observes orderly rows of clean beds and smiling patients. Everywhere, there is a smell of fresh air and a vase of flowers contributes to the sweet perfume in the atmosphere. Somewhere in the neatly organized column of beds, a soldier exclaims his delight at having been cured from what was earlier thought to be a fatal disease. A shipment of clean, fresh meat has just come in. As she inspects the kitchens, searching for something to eat, she sees organized cupboards with a plenitude of fresh fruits and vegetables. All of this was because of another young nurse who, instead of walking away from the horrible conditions, changed the world around her – a young nurse, named Florence Nightingale.

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