Florence Nightingale

DIRECTIONS: Read the article. Answer the questions.

Florence Nightingale was born in 1820. Her family was quite rich, and she was homeschooled by her father. Florence wanted very much to become a nurse, but her parents didn't want her to, since at that time nursing was not considered a "respectable" profession. But Florence felt "suffocated" by the expectations of her upbringing, and trained to be a nurse anyway. Several men proposed to her, but Florence did not want to get married. She wanted to live and serve in a much larger capacity than would be possible if she settled down to care for a house and a family.

When Florence was 33 years old, the Crimean war began. It was a very violent conflict and many people on both sides were hurt. One of the most striking aspects of this war was how little support there was for the wounded. Many had to go without even basic first aid treatment, and a lot of soldiers died that probably would have lived if they had received medical treatment. When the situation was reported in the British news, the public was outraged. In 1855, Florence was asked to go to Crimea and help put together a group of nurses. Florence was very strict about the nurses she chose.

Florence was happy to go to Crimea and be of use as a nurse, but the difficult living conditions and the chaos of the war were overwhelming. The "hospital" where she worked was dirty and infested with wildlife and disease. There wasn't enough room for all of the patients, and Florence described the situation as "the nearest thing to hell on earth."

At first the nurses weren't allowed to do anything but clean the hospital, only the doctors were allowed to actually help a patient. But when the number of wounded became too much for the doctors alone to deal with, the nurses were called in to help. Florence and her team stepped up. They made a profound difference, and reports of her work eventually began to be reported back home.

Florence Nightingale became a national heroine. But when she returned home after the war she didn't let it go to her head. She kept working, always striving to improve hospital conditions, often writing to people of influence to ask for their support in improving the hygiene in hospitals. She founded a nurse's training school in London. Her lasting contribution to science was to develop and champion the use of statistical methods to show which medical practices

were the most effective. Using her methods she found that not all of her own medical practices were the best, but her application of the scientific method improved hospital standards and quality of care. Florence Nightingale was 90 years old when she died in 1910.

1. What does it say about Florence Nightingale's character that she trained as a nurse despite her parents' disapproval?

2. Would you pursue a career that was really important to you, even if your parents thought it was a bad idea?

3. Explain what Florence Nightingale meant when she described the hospital in Crimea as "the nearest thing to hell on earth".

4. What were Florence Nightingale's lasting contributions to the field of medicine?