

Unsung heroes

Worksheet 1

1 Megan Coffee

In 2010, Haiti was struck by a massive earthquake, which destroyed more than 250,000 homes. Dr Megan Coffee, an American expert in infectious diseases, set off to Haiti to help. She knew that diseases like tuberculosis (TB) would spread quickly in a place where people were having to live without clean water or adequate shelter.

Coffee didn't have a hospital, so she set up a tent where people could come for treatment and advice. Six years later, she's still in Haiti. She gave up her job, which was at a top university back in the United States, and she now does not receive a salary. Since she arrived, however, she has saved thousands of lives.

2 Mary Seacole

Mary Seacole was a Jamaican nurse who risked her life to treat wounded soldiers during the Crimean War. When Mary heard about the war, she immediately travelled to England, but found that the War Office refused her offer of help because she was black. Seacole was determined, however, and she decided to set up her own hospital, which she called a hotel, in Kadikoi, Crimea. She treated hundreds of soldiers there, and on the battlefield, for their wounds and also for diseases such as cholera, which took enormous bravery as she could easily have been killed or caught a fatal disease herself.

3 Hilary Lister

In 2005, Hilary Lister made history by sailing solo across the English Channel. Many people had done this before, but none were quadriplegic, which means not being able to use any part of your body from the neck down. Hilary was not born quadriplegic, but gradually lost the use of her body due to a disease.

At first Hilary felt that she had lost everything, but when she first tried sailing, she felt that 'it turned a light back on inside me'. She controls the boat through a computer, which is operated by her mouth.

4 Mary Anning

Mary Anning was born in 1799, the daughter of a poor carpenter. Yet, she became one of the most important female scientists in history. Mary and her father, Richard, used to collect fossils to sell to tourists. A fossil is an animal or plant which turned to rock thousands of years ago, but, at that time, people did not really know what fossils were. In 1812 Mary found the skeleton of a huge dinosaur, an ichthyosaur, which changed what people believed about the beginning of the world. Mary made many other important discoveries, but her work was not taken very seriously because she was a woman and uneducated.

5 Irena Sendler

Irena Sendler, who was a social worker in Warsaw, Poland, during the Second World War, is thought to have saved at least 2,500 Jewish children from being sent to the Nazi prison camps. Sendler found ways of getting the children away to safety. In 1943 she was caught by the Nazi soldiers, but would not tell the Nazis the names of the children she had saved or the people who had helped them. She was sentenced to death, but escaped and began her work again, using a different name.