



0. WILLIAM WILBERFORCE - Story Preface

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This image depicts William Wilberforce's birthplace, located at 25 High Street in the town of [Hull, England](#). It is online via [Hull City Council website](#).

*O be not weary of well doing!
(the vilest that ever saw the sun)
shall vanish away before it.*

[John Wesley](#)
[Letter](#) to William Wilberforce
February 24, 1791

[William Wilberforce](#) was a man on an impossible mission. Utterly devoted to his cause, he wanted Britain to end the country's African slave-trade.

He was not always burdened about the plight of slaves. [Born](#) in the town of [Hull](#), in 1759, William was part of a wealthy family. He had friends - like the Prime Minister, [William Pitt](#) - in high places. His melodic voice, and superb oratory skills, would lead to a special nickname: "Nightingale of the House of Commons."

As a student at [St. John's College](#), Cambridge, Wilberforce was a self-absorbed, seventeen-year-old whose primary goal in life was making a name for himself. He later [recalled](#) (see page 20) his initial shock at the non-academic side of university life:

I was introduced on the very first night of my arrival to as licentious a set of men as can well be conceived. They drank hard, and their conversation was even worse than their lives. (Quoted by Edward Gilliat in *Heroes of Modern Crusades: True Stories of the Undaunted Chivalry of Champions of the Downtrodden*)

He soon fit in however, well-suited to the environment which had once astonished him. Yet, the Rev. T. Gisborne noted Wilberforce was different:

There was no one at all like him for powers of entertainment. Always fond of repartee and discussion, he seemed entirely free from vanity and conceit. (Gilliat, page 20.)

After concluding his university studies, William thought he might do well as a member of the Commons. Aged twenty-one, he was just old enough to attempt election. Successful, he became MP of Hull and Britain's youngest member of Parliament. Before long, he represented [all of Yorkshire](#).

Then, at age twenty-five, something happened which changed his life.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/WILLIAM-WILBERFORCE-Amazing-Grace>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/WILLIAM-WILBERFORCE-Amazing-Grace>

Questions 2 Ponder

Who Was the “Nightingale of the House of Commons?”

Born to a wealthy family, William Wilberforce was not always dedicated to abolishing Parliament’s law allowing the slave-trade.

Someone who knew him - while he was a student at St. John’s College, Cambridge University - described him with these words:

There was no one at all like him for powers of entertainment. Always fond of repartee and discussion, he seemed entirely free from vanity and conceit.

At the age of 21, when he finished his university studies, he was just old-enough to stand for a seat in Parliament. When he was elected, he was the MP for Hull, and - at the time - Britain’s youngest Member of Parliament.

How would you describe Wilberforce at this stage of his life?

What does his nickname - “The Nightingale of the House of Commons” - tell you about Wilberforce?

Media Stream



William Wilberforce Portrait

Image online, courtesy the [National Portrait Gallery](#).

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William Wilberforce - As a Young Boy

Image online, courtesy the [National Portrait Gallery](#).

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Hull - A Town in England

Image online, courtesy Wikipedia.

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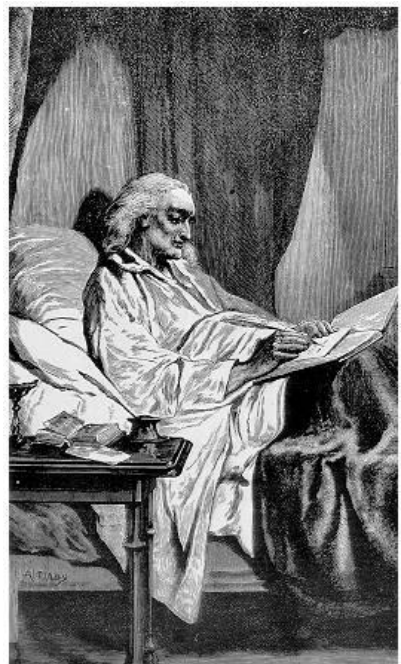
William Pitt the Younger

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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J. Wesley Writes to W. Wilberforce

John Wesley on His Deathbed

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St. John's College

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Yorkshire Location in England

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WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

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