

## Nellie Bly

Journalist Elizabeth Cochrane Seaman, better known as Nellie Bly, was a famous reporter in the late 1800s. This was no small accomplishment for a woman at that time. Bly got her first job as a journalist after she wrote a letter to the editor criticizing an article in the newspaper that bore the headline, “What Girls Are Good For.” The newspaper editor apparently liked what Bly had to say. He printed her letter in the paper and sent her five dollars. He also offered her a job.

When she went to work at the paper, she adopted the pen name Nellie Bly, after a character in a Stephen Foster song. Bly wrote stories about how factories were exploiting female workers. Her stories were widely read, but advertisers complained, and Bly was sent to work on the newspaper's society section.

Bored with traditional female assignments, Bly left for Mexico, where she wrote about corruption in the government. When the Mexican government asked her to leave the country, she returned to the United States. Bly continued to be a crusader, writing about topics like sweatshops, crooked business in the state legislature, and atrocious conditions in mental hospitals.

In 1889, Bly got an assignment to see if she could travel around the world in less than 80 days. The idea for the story came from the Jules Verne novel, *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Verne's character, Phileas Fogg, had many adventures as he circled the globe. So did Bly in her travels.

Bly traveled in ships, trains, and other rudimentary vehicles to make the trip in just 72 days and 6 hours. She filed stories about her trip as she made her way around the world. The stories made her one of the most famous reporters of the time. Her editors rewarded her by giving her a column with her own byline on it.

## Unit 5

In 1895, Bly married a New York businessman and didn't resume her journalism career until 1919, when she began writing a column for the *New York Evening Journal*. She wrote the column until her death at age 55 in 1922.

- Do you think that Nellie Bly ever wished for a more tranquil life? Why or why not?
  
- How difficult do you think it was for Nellie Bly to accomplish tasks once she resolved to do them? Why?
  
- In what ways did Nellie Bly affect traditions in the newspaper business?