

Inspiring Woman - Nellie Bly (May 5, 1864 – January 27, 1922)

130 years ago Nellie Bly set out to go around the world in less than 80 days, to beat the record set in the fictional book written about Phileas Fogg, an eccentric English gentleman, called ‘Around the World in 80 Days’. She set off with just the clothes on her back on 14 November 1889. Seventy-two days later, she broke the record for the fastest trip around the world and became an international celebrity.

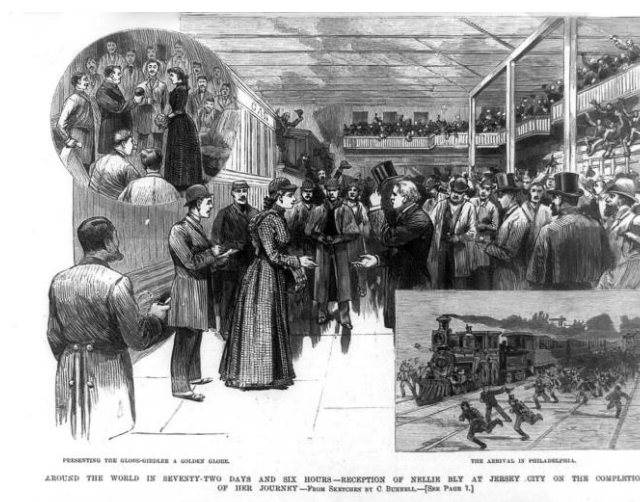
When she told her editor she wanted to go around the world in less than 80 days, he told her she would have to go with a man because she would need a chaperone. He also said that because she was a woman she would want to take too much luggage. Nellie challenged her editor and won.

She travelled with only one dress, a coat, a hat and a few other items she could squeeze into a small bag. On her voyage she crossed many oceans and countries including France, Italy, Yemen, Sri Lanka, China and Japan. She won her race against time on 25 January 1890.

To this day, she is one of the world’s top 10 female adventurers and is recognized as one of the 12 feistiest historical women that ever lived – women that challenged conventional, traditional ideas and achieved the ‘impossible.’

Nellie is best known for her global journey but even more importantly she developed investigative journalism that exposed wrong-doing and gave vulnerable people a voice. Her stories led to real change such as asylums, orphanages and prisons that had to reform and change their systems and practices to focus more on the needs of the individuals they served. She burst into male-only newsrooms and opened the doors for women who wanted to work within the media industry.

Nellie was born Elizabeth Jane Cochran in a Cochran’s Mills, Pennsylvania. Nellie Bly was her pen name (the name she used when she wrote). She was only six-years-old when her father died. Her family was plunged into poverty. Perhaps some of Nellie’s resilience and courage came from trying to overcome that tragedy. She spent her final years using her journalism to promote social justice and champion the causes of mental health, unemployment, poverty and homelessness.



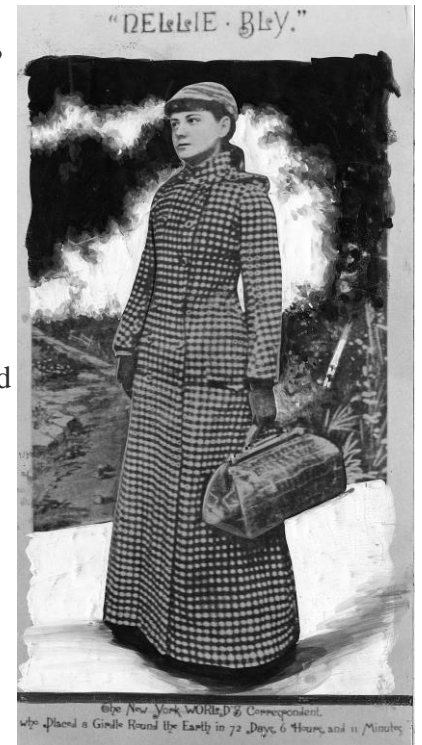
Nellie's motto: "Nothing is impossible if one applies a certain amount of energy in the right direction."

1. Have you heard of Phileas Fogg or the book "Around the world in 80 days"? What does the fictional character have in common with Nellie Bly?

2. What was the focus of Nellie Bly's career?

3. Nelly could have written about anything: travel, fashion, or other topics that women were expected to write about: why do you think she committed to investigative journalism?

4. What did Nellie Bly's editor say when he heard her idea? What stereotypes did he impose on her?



5. What was Nellie Bly's reaction to her editor? Did she give up? What characteristics did she show as she set out to prove him and the World wrong?

6. Did Nellie Bly want to beat the record to become famous? If not, what was her motivation? What are your goals? What motivates you?



7. What other feisty woman do you know? Is it somebody famous or woman from your surroundings? Why do you think she was feisty?