

Nellie Bly: A Pioneer for Women's Rights

By Cindy Grigg



¹ *Caption: Nellie in her traveling suit (age 25).*

² Elizabeth Jane Cochran was born on May 5, 1864, in Pennsylvania. Her father died when she was only six. Her mother remarried three years later. Nellie's stepfather mistreated her mother, and so she sued for divorce. In that time period, it was very hard for a woman to get a divorce. Elizabeth testified in court against her abusive stepfather. The divorce was granted. In 1880, Elizabeth's mother moved her children and herself to Pittsburgh.



³ A column in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* saying that women belonged in the home taking care of children caused Elizabeth Cochran (she changed the spelling of her last name) to write a letter to the editor defending the rights of women. The editor liked her writing and spirit so much that he offered the young woman a job. There were few female newspaper writers at the time. Those few women writers always used pen names because it was thought "improper" to use their own names. Elizabeth became "Nellie Bly." She chose the name from a song by Stephen Foster.

⁴ From the beginning of her career, Nellie focused on women's rights. Nellie wrote a series of articles about female factory workers. She wrote about slums, sweatshops, and corruption in government. When she was twenty-one, she spent six months in Mexico. She reported on the lives and customs of the Mexican people. She later published these as a book titled *Six Months in Mexico*. While there, she protested the government. When threatened with arrest, she returned to the United States.

⁵ In 1887, Nellie moved to New York City. She took an undercover assignment for the *New York World* newspaper. She pretended to be insane and spent ten days in an insane asylum. She wrote about the horrible food, being forced to bathe in cold water, and sitting for hours on hard benches in the cold. She wrote about abusive nurses who beat patients if they didn't do as they were told.

⁶ After ten days, the *New York World* came to her rescue. Nellie was released from the asylum. She wrote a book about this experience. It was a sensation and brought her fame. It also helped reform mental institutions and improve funding for them.

⁷ Nellie wrote many articles that helped women. But she is perhaps most famous for her trip around the world. In 1888, Nellie suggested to her editor that she take a trip around the world. She wanted to try to beat Jules Verne's fictional hero's trip in *Around the World in Eighty Days*. People laughed at the idea of circling the globe in so short a time. Stories from her trip were published daily. Many readers eagerly awaited the next day's installment. She completed her trip in less than seventy-three days! She was greeted with parades and fireworks. Nellie was only twenty-five years old.

⁸ Nellie Bly became a role model for women. She traveled through England, France, Italy, the Suez Canal, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, and Japan, among other places. She went alone, without a male accompanying her, which was against the custom in those days. Her book about the trip, *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days*, became a best seller.

⁹ In 1894, Nellie married manufacturer Robert Seaman. She quit reporting and became the president of the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company. She invented and patented six items, including three trash cans, two milk cans, and a stand.

¹⁰ Her husband died in 1904. Nellie took over the entire management of the company. For about ten years, she was one of the leading women industrialists in the United States. She wanted her workers treated well. She offered them health care and physical fitness programs. There were even libraries inside the

factories to teach employees how to read. Perhaps because of these benefits, her company went bankrupt. She returned to reporting. She later covered such events as the women's suffrage parade in 1913.

¹¹ Nellie happened to be in Europe when World War I began. She sent reports about the fighting on Europe's eastern front back to a newspaper in the United States. Nellie was the first female war correspondent. She stayed in Europe until after the end of the war.

¹² Nellie Bly has been called the inventor of investigative reporting. *The New York Journal* called her "the best reporter in America." She died of pneumonia in 1922 at the age of 57. Nellie Bly was a role model for women in the late 19th century.

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Name _____



Date _____

Nellie Bly: A Pioneer for Women's Rights

<p>1. What was Nellie Bly's real name?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>2. Nellie Bly first made a name for herself doing which of these things?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Writing newspaper articles about women factory workers</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Marrying a wealthy man</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Writing a book about an insane asylum and the patients' treatment there</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Becoming the president of the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company</p>
<p>3. Why did Nellie leave Mexico?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A She was getting married.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B She was offered a new job in New York.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C She had to go to Europe to write about World War I.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D She was threatened with arrest for protesting about the government.</p>	<p>4. Nellie might be most famous for _____.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Her libraries in factories teaching workers to read</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Her books</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Her newspaper stories</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Her trip around the world</p>
<p>5. How long was Nellie's trip around the world?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Seventy-three days</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Twenty-five days</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Seventy-one days</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Eighty days</p>	<p>6. How were Nellie's factories different from most factories of the time period?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A They had libraries to teach workers how to read.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B They offered workers physical fitness programs.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C They offered workers health care.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D All of the above</p>
<p>7. You can infer that a reporter writing about a war is called a _____.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Industrialist</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B War correspondent</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Design patent</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Pseudonym</p>	<p>8. Nellie's time in a mental institution was important because:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

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9. Who was Nellie's husband?

10. What did *The New York Journal* call Nellie Bly?

- A The best war correspondent
- B The best reporter in America
- C A muckraking reporter
- D A show-off

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divorce
suffrage
leading
undercover

assignment
seller
career
entire

installment
improper
traveled
benefits

bankrupt
reform
abusive

Directions: Fill in each blank with the word that best completes the reading comprehension.

Caption: Nellie in her traveling suit (age 25).

Elizabeth Jane Cochran was born on May 5, 1864, in Pennsylvania. Her father died when she was only six. Her mother remarried three years later. Nellie's stepfather mistreated her mother, and so she sued for (1) _____. In that time period, it was very hard for a woman to get a divorce. Elizabeth testified in court against her abusive stepfather. The divorce was granted. In 1880, Elizabeth's mother moved her children and herself to Pittsburgh.

A column in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* saying that women belonged in the home taking care of children caused Elizabeth Cochrane (she changed the spelling of her last name) to write a letter to the editor defending the rights of women. The editor liked her writing and spirit so much that he offered the young woman a job. There were few female newspaper writers at the time. Those few women writers always used pen names because it was thought "(2) _____" to use their own names. Elizabeth became "Nellie Bly." She chose the name from a song by Stephen Foster.

From the beginning of her (3) _____, Nellie focused on women's rights. Nellie wrote a series of articles about female factory workers. She wrote about slums, sweatshops, and corruption in government. When she was twenty-one, she spent six months in Mexico. She reported on the lives and customs of the Mexican people. She later published these as a book titled *Six Months in Mexico*. While there, she protested the government. When threatened with arrest, she returned to the United States.

In 1887, Nellie moved to New York City. She took an (4) _____ (5) _____ for the *New York World* newspaper. She pretended to be insane and spent ten days in an insane asylum. She wrote about the horrible food, being forced to bathe in cold water, and sitting for hours on



hard benches in the cold. She wrote about (6) _____ nurses who beat patients if they didn't do as they were told.

After ten days, the *New York World* came to her rescue. Nellie was released from the asylum. She wrote a book about this experience. It was a sensation and brought her fame. It also helped (7) _____ mental institutions and improve funding for them.

Nellie wrote many articles that helped women. But she is perhaps most famous for her trip around the world. In 1888, Nellie suggested to her editor that she take a trip around the world. She wanted to try to beat Jules Verne's fictional hero's trip in *Around the World in Eighty Days*. People laughed at the idea of circling the globe in so short a time. Stories from her trip were published daily. Many readers eagerly awaited the next day's (8) _____. She completed her trip in less than seventy-three days! She was greeted with parades and fireworks. Nellie was only twenty-five years old.

Nellie Bly became a role model for women. She (9) _____ through England, France, Italy, the Suez Canal, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, and Japan, among other places. She went alone, without a male accompanying her, which was against the custom in those days. Her book about the trip, *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days*, became a best (10) _____.

In 1894, Nellie married manufacturer Robert Seaman. She quit reporting and became the president of the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company. She invented and patented six items, including three trash cans, two milk cans, and a stand.

Her husband died in 1904. Nellie took over the (11) _____ management of the company. For about ten years, she was one of the (12) _____ women industrialists in the United States. She wanted her workers treated well. She offered them health care and physical fitness programs. There were even libraries inside the factories to teach employees how to read. Perhaps because of these (13) _____, her company went (14) _____. She returned to reporting. She later covered such events as the women's (15) _____ parade in 1913.

Nellie happened to be in Europe when World War I began. She sent reports about the fighting on Europe's eastern front back to a newspaper in the United States. Nellie was the first female war correspondent. She stayed in Europe until after the end of the war.

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Name _____



Date _____

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A Becoming the president of the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company

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3. Why did Nellie leave Mexico? <input type="radio"/> A She had to go to Europe to write about World War I. <input type="radio"/> B She was offered a new job in New York. <input type="radio"/> C She was threatened with arrest for protesting about the government. <input type="radio"/> D She was getting married.	4. Nellie might be most famous for _____. <input type="radio"/> A Her trip around the world <input type="radio"/> B Her libraries in factories teaching workers to read <input type="radio"/> C Her newspaper stories <input type="radio"/> D Her books
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Name _____



Date _____

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--	--

Name _____



Date _____
(Key 1 - Answer ID # 0971442)

**Number
of Syllables**

**Divide
into Syllables**

1. improper _____

2. fame _____
3. career _____
4. installment _____
5. suffrage _____

Circle the correct way to divide the word into syllables.

6. imp-r-ov-e im-prove im-p-rove improve
7. court c-ourt cour-t co-urt
8. s-eries ser-ie-s s-er-ies se-ries
9. as-sig-nment as-sign-ment a-ssignm-ent as-s-ignm-ent
10. und-ercove-r un-der-cov-er underc-ove-r und-erc-over
11. asyl-u-m asy-lum a-sylum as-yl-um
12. imp-rope-r imp-ro-per imp-roper im-prop-er

Use the following syllables to fill in the blanks and form words. Cross off each syllable after you use it.

frage	sane	suf	asy
among	best	lum	in

13. _____ + _____
14. _____ + _____
15. _____
16. _____ + _____
17. _____

**Nellie Bly: A Pioneer for Women's Rights -
Answer Key**

Answers:

- 1** Elizabeth Jane Cochran OR Elizabeth Cochran
- 2** **(C)** Writing a book about an insane asylum and the patients' treatment there
- 3** **(D)** She was threatened with arrest for protesting about the government.
- 4** **(D)** Her trip around the world
- 5** **(A)** Seventy-three days
- 6** **(D)** All of the above
- 7** **(B)** War correspondent
- 8** It helped reform mental institutions and improved funding for them.

9 manufacturer Robert Seaman

10 **B** The best reporter in America

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Answer Key

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Answers to Reading Comprehension Questions

- 1 Elizabeth Jane Cochran OR Elizabeth Cochran
- 2 **D** Writing a book about an insane asylum and the patients' treatment there
- 3 **C** She was threatened with arrest for protesting about the government.
- 4 **A** Her trip around the world
- 5 **C** Seventy-three days
- 6 **D** All of the above
- 7 **A** War correspondent
- 8 It helped reform mental institutions and improved funding for them.
- 9 manufacturer Robert Seaman
- 10 **C** The best reporter in America

Answer Key

1. improper	3	im-prop-er	
2. fame	1	fame	
3. career	2	ca-reer	
4. installment	3	in-stall-ment	
5. suffrage	2	suf-frage	
6. imp-r-ov-e	<u>im-prove</u>	im-p-rove	improve
7. <u>court</u>	c-ourt	cour-t	co-urt
8. s-eries	ser-ie-s	s-er-ies	<u>se-ries</u>
9. as-sig-nment	<u>as-sign-ment</u>	a-ssignm-ent	as-s-ignm-ent
10. und-ercove-r	<u>un-der-cov-er</u>	underc-ove-r	und-erc-over
11. asyl-u-m	<u>asy-lum</u>	a-sylum	as-yl-um
12. imp-rope-r	imp-ro-per	imp-roper	<u>im-prop-er</u>

frage	sane	suf	asy
among	best	lum	in

13. **s u f + f r a g e**

14. **a s y + l u m**

15. **b e s t**

16. i n + s a n e

17. a m o n g