Get ready to join Nellie Bly in a race against time!

Nellie Bly was one of America’s first investigative reporters. Brave and outspoken, if someone told her, “It can’t be done, Nellie Bly,” she went right ahead and did it anyway. After reading Jules Verne’s novel, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, Nellie dared herself to circle the globe even faster, while reporting on her journey. Nellie was eager to face almost any obstacle—sea sickness, violent storms, and strange foods—to get her story. But an unexpected twist turned Nellie’s adventure into a high-stakes race. Shocked and worried, Nellie was still determined to win. But can it be done?

"Fun, factual, and well written."

—School Library Journal
Back in the year 1888, there were several big newspapers in New York City. One of them was called *New York World*. A reporter named Nellie Bly worked for the *World*. But she was no ordinary reporter.

For one thing, Nellie Bly was young. She was just twenty-four years old.

For another thing, she was a woman. In those days, very few women wrote for newspapers. The ones who did usually wrote about “ladylike” subjects such as tea parties and charity balls.

Instead, Nellie Bly wrote about the social problems of her time. These social problems had nothing to do with parties and balls. She wrote about factory workers who were treated badly at their jobs. She wrote about poor people who didn’t have heat in their
apartment buildings on cold winter days. She wrote about crooked politicians who took illegal bribes.

If Nellie Bly felt that a story should be told, nothing kept her from telling it. She didn’t mind risking her safety or even her life to research and write that story.

Of course, not everyone was happy with Nellie Bly.

“A woman shouldn’t be writing about such things!” some said.

“She should be stopped!” said others.

But Nellie Bly was unstoppable. She was fearless and stubborn. If someone told her, “It can’t be done, Nellie Bly,” she went right ahead and did it anyway.

One day, Nellie Bly came up with a story idea that went beyond anything she had ever written. Even she described it as possibly being “too wild and visionary.”

Fifteen years earlier, a French science fiction writer named Jules Verne had published a novel called *Around the World in Eighty Days*. In it, an adventurous man named Phileas Fogg travels around the world in eighty days.

Today, with superfast planes, a person can circle the globe by air in less than a week. So the idea of going all the way around the world in eighty days may seem like no big deal.
But back then, there were no airplanes. People usually got around by trains, horse-drawn carriages, and wagons. Traveling tens of thousands of miles in eighty days sounded impossible to most people.

By 1888, no real person had come close to matching Phileas Fogg’s pretend record in *Around the World in Eighty Days*. That gave Nellie Bly her “wild and visionary” idea.

She studied dozens of ship routes and schedules. She considered the new railroad network that stretched all the way across North America, from California to New Jersey.

She decided that Phileas Fogg’s record could be beaten. And that she was just the person to do it!

Nellie Bly talked to the editors in charge of the *World*. She asked them if they would let her go on this dangerous and difficult journey. She said that she could write articles about it along the way and send them back to the *World* to be published. She told them that readers were sure to be interested in her journey. And she reminded them that more readers would mean more newspaper sales for the *World*.

As it turned out, the editors of the *World* had already discussed the idea of sending a real person to try to beat Phileas Fogg’s record. But if they did this, they
wanted to send a male reporter, not a female one. They insisted that a woman could not travel alone without a man to protect her. They said, too, that a woman would require too many suitcases for all her clothes, which would surely slow her down.

“No one but a man can do this,” one of the editors said.

“Very well,” Nellie Bly replied in a huffy voice. She told them to go ahead and send a male reporter on the trip. “I’ll start the same day for some other newspaper and beat him.”

The editors didn’t want her to do that. They discussed and debated the matter. After a while, they promised Nellie Bly that if and when they decided to send someone around the world, they would send her.

Time passed. Nellie Bly worked on other assignments. But the idea of the trip never left her thoughts.

A year later, in November of 1889, the editors finally decided to send a reporter around the world. They kept their promise to Nellie Bly. They told her that she could be that reporter, if she still wanted to do it.

She said yes.

There was one catch. Could she leave this Thursday?
Aboard the Augusta Victoria
Aboard the Augusta Victoria

Nellie Bly said yes again.
Now all she had to do was get ready for an almost three-month-long trip in just three days!

Most people would probably panic if they had only three days to get ready for a trip around the world. So much packing to do! So many details to arrange!

But Nellie Bly did what she always did. She went into action.

The following morning, she went to see a dressmaker named William Ghormley. She ordered one traveling gown that she could wear for most of the trip. She told Mr. Ghormley that she needed it immediately.

Mr. Ghormley accomplished just this and delivered the finished gown to Nellie Bly on Wednesday morning. The cloth was woven in a blue plaid pattern. It was made of a strong kind of fabric called broadcloth.

Another dressmaker, Florence Wheelwright, made Nellie Bly a lighter gown that would be better for warm weather. She, too, finished the gown in a day.

At the World, Nellie Bly’s coworkers were busy helping her get ready for the trip. She didn’t have a
It Can’t Be Done, Nellie Bly!

passport, and she needed one to travel to other countries. So the newspaper sent someone to Washington, DC, to get her a temporary passport. James G. Blaine, the secretary of state who served under President Harrison, made up a passport for Nellie Bly overnight. Normally, she would have had to wait weeks, maybe even months, to get a passport.

Nellie Bly was eager to visit Jules Verne, the author of *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Monsieur Verne lived with his wife in France. So another coworker at the *World* wrote to him, trying to arrange a visit. Hopefully, Monsieur Verne would be just as eager to meet Nellie Bly, since she wanted to beat the record of his character, Phileas Fogg.

The editors at the *World* had been worried about sending Nellie Bly because they believed that women needed a lot of trunks and suitcases to travel. But Nellie Bly packed only one small bag. It was seven inches tall and sixteen inches wide—about the size of a big loaf of bread.

Because the bag was so small, Nellie Bly couldn’t take the warm-weather gown that Florence Wheelwright had made for her. She only had room for a blazer, some underwear, several caps and veils, a dressing gown, a pair of slippers, writing supplies, and a few other items.
Some people had warned Nellie that she should carry a weapon for protection. But she had decided not to. She felt sure that the people she would meet on her trip would welcome her with open arms. And if she did need protection, she figured she would be able to take care of herself somehow.

By the morning of November 14, Nellie Bly was ready to go.

It was a bright, beautiful day. She arrived at the Hoboken Pier to board the steamship *Augusta Victoria*. The ship was bound for England. She had her small bag with her, packed to the brim. She’d also brought a raincoat and an overcoat.

She kept her money in two places: in her pocket and in a tiny bag that was tied around her neck. She had two hundred English pounds, which was the kind of money she would need in England. She took some American money, too.

She wore the William Ghormley dress, which would be her only dress for the entire trip. On her thumb was her special ring, which she called her “lucky thumb ring.” She also carried two watches. One of them would be set on New York time for the whole trip. She planned to reset the other one with each new time zone she crossed. England was five hours ahead of
New York, for example. So if her New York watch said two p.m. when the ship arrived in England, she would have to reset the other watch for seven p.m.

Nellie Bly had bought a ticket to get her to England. But that was it. She would have to get the rest of her tickets there and at other places along the way.

Some of Nellie Bly’s friends came to the pier to see her off on her journey. “Keep up your courage,” they told her.

The whistle blew. Nellie Bly waved her goodbyes. Minutes later, the SS *Augusta Victoria* glided into the bay.

Nellie Bly was off on her trip around the world. She stood on the deck and watched her friends on the pier grow farther and farther away. She wondered about the terrible things she might run into on her travels. There might be storms, shipwrecks, diseases, or even worse.

The twenty-five-year-old reporter was usually very brave. But now, she experienced a rare moment of fear. She was not only leaving the shores of her home. She was also leaving behind her family, her friends, and her work. She had no idea what she would face over the next few months.

“I am off,” she said to herself. “And shall I ever get back?”