CHAPTERS I–III: Idea for a Story

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter I: A Delicate Mission, paragraphs 4–9

I shuddered to think how completely the insane were in the power of their keepers, and how one could weep and plead for release, and all of no avail, if the keepers were so minded. Eagerly I accepted the mission to learn the inside workings of the Blackwell Island Insane Asylum.

“How will you get me out,” I asked my editor, “after I once get in?”

“I do not know,” he replied, “but we will get you out if we have to tell who you are, and for what purpose you feigned insanity—only get in.”

I had little belief in my ability to deceive the insanity experts, and I think my editor had less.

All the preliminary preparations for my ordeal were left to be planned by myself. Only one thing was decided upon, namely, that I should pass under the pseudonym of Nellie Brown, the initials of which would agree with my own name and my linen, so that there would be no difficulty in keeping track of my movements and assisting me out of any difficulties or dangers I might get into. There were ways of getting into the insane ward, but I did not know them. I might adopt one of two courses. Either I could feign insanity at the house of friends, and get myself committed on the decision of two competent physicians, or I could go to my goal by way of the police courts.

On reflection I thought it wiser not to inflict myself upon my friends or to get any good-natured doctors to assist me in my purpose. Besides, to get to Blackwell's Island my friends would have had to feign poverty, and, unfortunately for the end I had in view, my acquaintance with the struggling poor, except my own self, was only very superficial. So I determined upon the plan which led me to the successful accomplishment of my mission. I succeeded in getting committed to the insane ward at Blackwell's Island, where I spent ten days and nights and had an experience which I shall never forget. I took upon myself to enact the part of a poor, unfortunate crazy girl, and felt it my duty not to shirk any of the disagreeable results that should follow. I became one of the city's insane wards for that length of time, experienced much, and saw and heard more of the treatment accorded to this helpless class of our population, and when I had seen and heard enough, my release was promptly secured. I left the insane ward with pleasure and regret—pleasure that I was once more able to enjoy the free breath of heaven; regret that I could not have brought with me some of the unfortunate women who lived and suffered with me, and who, I am convinced, are just as sane as I was and am now myself.
YOUR STUDYSYNC® TV

Discussion Prompt: Imagine you are Nellie Bly. Would you agree to do what she did? How might you go about getting committed to an asylum? Would you take any additional precautions to ensure your own safety that Nellie Bly did not? Or, perhaps, would you choose to infiltrate another kind of institution needing examination and reform? In groups or as a class, discuss how you’d respond to this assignment if you were a reporter like Nellie Bly. Give specific examples.

VOCABULARY

chronicle
chron•i•cle verb
To keep a close record of real events
I needed to chronicle what was happening in front of me somehow, and I didn’t have my phone.

sensational
sen•sa•tion•al adjective
Shocking or dramatic, designed to draw public attention
Newspapers published sensational, attention-grabbing headlines long before the Internet and ‘click-bait’ existed.

deceived
de•ce•ived verb
Tricked or misled someone
Investigators tried to determine whether they deceived their investors into believing that the business was earning money.

confidentially
con•fi•den•tial•ly adverb
In a manner meant to be kept a secret
Without the ability to report their coworkers confidentially, many people wouldn’t have come forward.

assume
as•sume verb
To take on the characteristics or identity of something or someone
Claire tried to assume a manner of confidence, in spite of the fact that she was terribly nervous.

accommodate
ac•com•o•date verb
To shelter someone or fulfill their needs
The cabins can accommodate up to seven groups of five.

CLOSE READ

1. What does Nellie Bly believe is her biggest challenge when pretending to be insane, before she takes her “crazy act” public? Who points it out to her, and how?
2. How does Nellie Bly plan to get to Blackwell’s Island? Does she plan to go by herself, or to be taken there?

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3. How much money does Nellie bring with her on her journey, and how much does she spend when she gets to the boarding house? Explain how she pretends to be mentally ill.

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4. Describe an instance in the boarding house in which Nellie does something that threatens to expose her act. Does this have any consequences?

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5. How do the women in the boarding house treat “Nellie Brown”? Explain any surprising reactions the women have to her “assumed insanity.”

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CHAPTERS IV–V: Acting the Part

KEY PASSAGE  |  Chapter IV: Judge Duffy and the Police, paragraphs 42–53

"Poor child," said Judge Duffy, "she is well dressed, and a lady. Her English is perfect, and I would stake everything on her being a good girl. I am positive she is somebody's darling."

At this announcement everybody laughed, and I put my handkerchief over my face and endeavored to choke the laughter that threatened to spoil my plans, in despite of my resolutions.

“I mean she is some woman’s darling," hastily amended the judge. “I am sure someone is searching for her. Poor girl, I will be good to her, for she looks like my sister, who is dead.”

There was a hush for a moment after this announcement, and the officers glanced at me more kindly, while I silently blessed the kind-hearted judge, and hoped that any poor creatures who might be afflicted as I pretended to be should have as kindly a man to deal with as Judge Duffy.

"I wish the reporters were here," he said at last. “They would be able to find out something about her.”

I got very much frightened at this, for if there is any one who can ferret out a mystery it is a reporter. I felt that I would rather face a mass of expert doctors, policemen, and detectives than two bright specimens of my craft, so I said:

“I don’t see why all this is needed to help me find my trunks. These men are impudent, and I do not want to be stared at. I will go away. I don’t want to stay here.”

So saying, I pulled down my veil and secretly hoped the reporters would be detained elsewhere until I was sent to the asylum.

“I don’t know what to do with the poor child," said the worried judge. “She must be taken care of.”

“Send her to the Island,” suggested one of the officers.

“Oh, don’t!” said Mrs. Stanard, in evident alarm. “Don’t! She is a lady and it would kill her to be put on the Island.”

For once I felt like shaking the good woman. To think the Island was just the place I wanted to reach and here she was trying to keep me from going there! It was very kind of her, but rather provoking under the circumstances.
**YOUR STUDYSYNC® TV**

**Discussion Prompt:** Although he ultimately comes up empty, Judge Duffy tries to think of an alternative to committing Nellie to an asylum. What do you think you would have done? Not knowing that Nellie is faking mental illness, where do you think she should have been sent? Or would you have offered something that is not always provided under the law—a second chance? Discuss what you believe is the most fair and humane thing to do under the circumstances and why.

**VOCABULARY**

- **incredulous**
  - *in-cred-ú-lous* adjective
  - Furious with disbelief
  - Your stepmother was incredulous when she heard how much we had paid for the house.

- **farce**
  - *farce* noun
  - A ridiculous comedy (used metaphorically to imply disorder or elaborate stupidity)
  - The trial was a farce—several of the witnesses lied, one of the lawyers quit, and the jury was unable to reach a verdict.

- **general**
  - *gen•e•ral* adjective
  - Widespread or universal
  - The movie was released to general acclaim from critics.

- **impudent**
  - *im•pu•dent* adjective
  - Cocky, disrespectful
  - Clark deliberately dropped the book on the floor with an insolent grin.

- **excruciatingly**
  - *ex•cru•ci•a•ting•ly* adjective
  - In a severely painful or awkward manner
  - The last class of the day always goes by at an excruciatingly slow pace.

**CLOSE READ**

1. How do Mrs. Caine and the police “convince” Nellie to accompany them to the station? How does their scheme prove that Bly’s act is really working?
2. Describe the courtroom and the different people in there. From whom does Nellie have to hide at this point in her assignment, and why?

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3. Which question posed about Nellie causes the most disagreement at her court hearing? How does the answer to this disagreement complicate Nellie’s plan?

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4. Explain Judge Duffy’s and Mrs. Stanard’s feelings for Nellie Brown, and how they react to the notion of her being sent to Blackwell’s Island. What does this suggest about them?

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5. What does Judge Duffy think is Nellie Brown’s real problem, and what does he do about it? Why is Nellie happy with the result?

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I had hoped to get some rest on this my first night in an insane asylum. But I was doomed to disappointment. When the night nurses came in they were curious to see me and to find out what I was like. No sooner had they left than I heard someone at my door inquiring for Nellie Brown, and I began to tremble, fearing always that my sanity would be discovered. By listening to the conversation I found it was a reporter in search of me, and I heard him ask for my clothing so that he might examine it. I listened quite anxiously to the talk about me, and was relieved to learn that I was considered hopelessly insane. That was encouraging. After the reporter left I heard new arrivals, and I learned that a doctor was there and intended to see me. For what purpose I knew not, and I imagined all sorts of horrible things, such as examinations and the rest of it, and when they got to my room I was shaking with more than fear.

“Nellie Brown, here is the doctor; he wishes to speak with you,” said the nurse. If that’s all he wanted I thought I could endure it. I removed the blanket which I had put over my head in my sudden fright and looked up. The sight was reassuring.

He was a handsome young man. He had the air and address of a gentleman. Some people have since censured this action; but I feel sure, even if it was a little indiscreet, that the young doctor only meant kindness to me. He came forward, seated himself on the side of my bed, and put his arm soothingly around my shoulders. It was a terrible task to play insane before this young man, and only a girl can sympathize with me in my position.

“How do you feel to-night, Nellie?” he asked, easily.

“Oh, I feel all right.”

“But you are sick, you know,” he said.

“Oh, am I?” I replied, and I turned my head on the pillow and smiled.

“When did you leave Cuba, Nellie?”

“Oh, you know my home?” I asked.

“Yes, very well. Don’t you remember me? I remember you.”
“Do you?” and I mentally said I should not forget him. He was accompanied by a friend who never ventured a remark, but stood staring at me as I lay in bed. After a great many questions, to which I answered truthfully, he left me. Then came other troubles. All night long the nurses read one to the other aloud, and I know that the other patients, as well as myself, were unable to sleep. Every half-hour or hour they would walk heavily down the halls, their boot-heels resounding like the march of a private of dragoons, and take a look at every patient. Of course this helped to keep us awake. Then as it came toward morning, they began to beat eggs for breakfast, and the sound made me realize how horribly hungry I was. Occasional yells and cries came from the male department, and that did not aid in making the night pass more cheerfully. Then the ambulance-gong, as it brought in more unfortunates, sounded as a knell to life and liberty. Thus I passed my first night as an insane girl at Bellevue.

YOUR STUDYSYNC® TV

Discussion Prompt: The psychiatric ward of Bellevue Hospital in New York City pops up a great deal in American cultural history—mostly because of the poets and singers who wound up there—to the point that it is almost a synecdoche for institutionalization. A synecdoche is a word or phrase for a part of something that represents the whole, or vice versa. For example: the White House, Hollywood, Wall Street, and Silicon Valley are examples of synecdoche. Can you think of some examples of synecdoche developing around us right now in today’s popular culture?

VOCABULARY

demented
de-men-ted adjective
Deranged or insane; evil
In the movie, he plays a character with a demented plan to poison the city’s water supply.

indiscreet
in-dis-creet adjective
Careless or improper; unnecessarily public
I thought it was rather indiscreet of him to discuss our private business in front of the waiter.

convalescent
con-val-es-cent adjective
Having to do with people who are recovering from an injury or illness
I spent six months in a convalescent home recovering, surrounded all the while by people whose luck was much worse than my own.

stifling
sti-fling adjective
Dense, restrictive or choking
The stifling heat in the restaurant’s kitchen made it impossible to be back there for very long without breaking into a sweat.

edifying
ed-i-fy-ing adjective
Educational or elevating, improving
I felt like I hardly knew anything about the Middle East before attending this week’s edifying lecture series.
CLOSE READ

1. How is Nellie received at Bellevue Hospital? What attitude does she go in with?

2. Why does Nellie come to have “a smaller regard for the ability of doctors than [she] ever had before” after a doctor examines her in Chapter VI? Describe her reaction to her second examination by a so-called expert.

3. What keeps Nellie and the other patients awake all night? What is the nurses’ excuse for the extreme cold in the hospital ward? Describe some of rough conditions at Bellevue on Nellie’s first night.

4. What does Nellie think of Mary, the “maid-of-all-work” at Bellevue? How does Nellie give thanks to Mary in Chapter VII?
5. Describe the conditions on the boat Nellie is led onto at the end of Chapter VII. Where it is headed?
CHAPTERS VIII–X : Blackwell’s Island

KEY PASSAGE  |  Chapter X: My First Supper, paragraphs 4–8

The table reached the length of the room and was uncovered and uninviting. Long benches without backs were put for the patients to sit on, and over these they had to crawl in order to face the table. Placed close together all along the table were large dressing-bowls filled with a pinkish-looking stuff which the patients called tea. By each bowl was laid a piece of bread, cut thick and buttered. A small saucer containing five prunes accompanied the bread. One fat woman made a rush, and jerking up several saucers from those around her emptied their contents into her own saucer. Then while holding on to her own bowl she lifted up another and drained its contents at one gulp. This she did to a second bowl in a shorter time than it takes to tell it. Indeed, I was so amused at her successful grabbings that when I looked at my own share the woman opposite, without so much as by your leave, grabbed my bread and left me without any.

Another patient, seeing this, kindly offered me hers, but I declined with thanks and turned to the nurse and asked for more. As she flung a thick piece down on the table she made some remark about the fact that if I forgot where my home was I had not forgotten how to eat. I tried the bread, but the butter was so horrible that one could not eat it. A blue-eyed German girl on the opposite side of the table told me I could have bread unbuttered if I wished, and that very few were able to eat the butter. I turned my attention to the prunes and found that very few of them would be sufficient. A patient near asked me to give them to her. I did so. My bowl of tea was all that was left. I tasted, and one taste was enough. It had no sugar, and it tasted as if it had been made in copper. It was as weak as water. This was also transferred to a hungrier patient, in spite of the protest of Miss Neville.

“You must force the food down,” she said, “else you will be sick, and who know but what, with these surroundings, you may go crazy. To have a good brain the stomach must be cared for.”

“It is impossible for me to eat that stuff,” I replied, and, despite all her urging, I ate nothing that night.

It did not require much time for the patients to consume all that was eatable on the table, and then we got our orders to form in line in the hall. When this was done the doors before us were unlocked and we were ordered to proceed back to the sitting-room. Many of the patients crowded near us, and I was again urged to play, both by them and by the nurses. To please the patients I promised to play and Miss Tillie Mayard was to sing. The first thing she asked me to play was “Rock-a-bye Baby,” and I did so. She sang it beautifully.
YOUR STUDYSYNC® TV

Discussion Prompt: The staff at the asylum seem to encourage their patients’ worst tendencies to flourish in the isolation of Blackwell’s Island. However, throughout history, many dreamers have also seen islands like Blackwell’s as a place in which to found society anew, to get away from the madding crowd, or to pursue their wildest dreams. What would you do with your island? Discuss what you would build or create if you found yourself in possession of a isle roughly the size of Blackwell’s (Roosevelt) Island.

VOCABULARY

debility
de-bil-i-ty noun
Frailness, sickness or fatigue
Finally faced with increasing debility, Margaret resigned herself to using a wheelchair.

sage
sage adjective
Wise or very knowledgeable
The head monk was a sage old man, a venerable ancient from whom wisdom emanated as if from a cloud.

lithograph
lith-o-graph noun
A print made on a flat plate whose surface is treated to expel or hold ink
Cavendish’s rendering in this 1820 lithograph is the best evidence of what the tower would have looked like before its destruction.

saucer
saucer noun
A small dish or plate, often used to support a tea cup
She banged the teacup down so hard that the tea slurped over into the saucer.

relish
rel-ish verb
To enjoy or savor
I relish my conversations with the old poet and always eagerly anticipate our meetings.

CLOSE READ

1. Which patient is most cruelly denied any chance at all to plead her case in Chapter VIII, and by whom? Describe this unfortunate woman, and explain what is suggested by including this information.
2. Why do many of the staff and some of the patients already know (or think they know) who Nellie is? Explain.

3. Describe Nellie’s meeting with the examining nurse and Dr. Kinier? How do they treat her? What do they make her do?

4. In what ways are the patients mistreated before having dinner? What is the dining room like? How is the food?

5. Describe in a few sentences what happens during and after dinner at Blackwell’s Island.
CHAPTERS XI–XII: Open Neglect

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter XII: Promenading With Lunatics, paragraphs 5–12

A long cable rope fastened to wide leather belts, and these belts locked around the waists of fifty-two women. At the end of the rope was a heavy iron cart, and in it two women—one nursing a sore foot, another screaming at some nurse, saying: “You beat me and I shall not forget it. You want to kill me,” and then she would sob and cry. The women “on the rope,” as the patients call it, were each busy on their individual freaks. Some were yelling all the while. One who had blue eyes saw me look at her, and she turned as far as she could, talking and smiling, with that terrible, horrifying look of absolute insanity stamped on her. The doctors might safely judge on her case. The horror of that sight to one who had never been near an insane person before, was something unspeakable.

“God help them!” breathed Miss Neville. “It is so dreadful I cannot look.”

On they passed, but for their places to be filled by more. Can you imagine the sight? According to one of the physicians there are 1,600 insane women on Blackwell’s Island.

Mad! what can be half so horrible? My heart thrilled with pity when I looked on old, gray-haired women talking aimlessly to space. One woman had on a straightjacket, and two women had to drag her along. Crippled, blind, old, young, homely, and pretty; one senseless mass of humanity. No fate could be worse.

I looked at the pretty lawns, which I had once thought was such a comfort to the poor creatures confined on the Island, and laughed at my own notions. What enjoyment is it to them? They are not allowed on the grass—it is only to look at. I saw some patients eagerly and caressingly lift a nut or a colored leaf that had fallen on the path. But they were not permitted to keep them. The nurses would always compel them to throw their little bit of God’s comfort away.

As I passed a low pavilion, where a crowd of helpless lunatics were confined, I read a motto on the wall, “While I live I hope.” The absurdity of it struck me forcibly. I would have liked to put above the gates that open to the asylum, “He who enters here leaveth hope behind.”

During the walk I was annoyed a great deal by nurses who had heard my romantic story calling to those in charge of us to ask which one I was. I was pointed out repeatedly.
It was not long until the dinner hour arrived and I was so hungry that I felt I could eat anything. The same old story of standing for a half and three-quarters of an hour in the hall was repeated before we got down to our dinners. The bowls in which we had had our tea were now filled with soup, and on a plate was one cold boiled potato and a chunk of beef, which on investigation, proved to be slightly spoiled. There were no knives or forks, and the patients looked fairly savage as they took the tough beef in their fingers and pulled in opposition to their teeth. Those toothless or with poor teeth could not eat it. One tablespoon was given for the soup, and a piece of bread was the final entree. Butter is never allowed at dinner nor coffee or tea. Miss Mayard could not eat, and I saw many of the sick ones turn away in disgust. I was getting very weak from the want of food and tried to eat a slice of bread. After the first few bites hunger asserted itself, and I was able to eat all but the crusts of the one slice.

Superintendent Dent went through the sitting-room, giving an occasional “How do you do?” “How are you to-day?” here and there among the patients. His voice was as cold as the hall, and the patients made no movement to tell him of their sufferings. I asked some of them to tell how they were suffering from the cold and insufficiency of clothing, but they replied that the nurse would beat them if they told.

YOUR STUDYSYNC® TV

Discussion Prompt: When people are forced to confront the least fortunate members of any society—the extreme poor and the mentally ill—reactions typically range from empathy to pity or disgust. Think about a time you have encountered someone who made you react strongly with one of these three emotions. Is there a way to control how we react when confronted with the utmost desperation or misfortune? Discuss strategies for how we could be kinder or more understanding towards those who have the least, using specific examples from this section.
VOCABULARY

contradict
con-tra-dict verb
To oppose, deny, or make an opposite assertion
Attorneys for the Department of Justice hoped that eyewitness testimony would contradict many of the defense’s claims.

pavilion
pa-vil-ion noun
An open shelter, or one of a set of buildings comprising a single institution
The wedding was held in the majestic pavilion overlooking the lake.

oilcloth
oil-cloth noun
Cloth waterproofed on one side to repel liquid or moisture
The oilcloth on the picnic table was covered in coleslaw and mayonnaise by the end of the afternoon.

entrée
en-trée noun
The main serving of a meal eaten in courses
Don’t eat too many appetizers or you won’t have room for the entrée.

skirmish
skir-mish noun
A small and short battle
We ran into skirmish after skirmish with the enemy’s rear guard, who still insisted on fighting despite being in full retreat.

CLOSE READ

1. Describe the bathing conditions in the asylum. What is Nellie’s rather surprising reaction when she is bathed? Why do you think she reacts this way?

3. How is Nellie’s reaction to the inmates she sees on the “rope gang” different than the other reactions she’s had to the institution on Blackwell’s Island?

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4. What particularly alarming health and sanitation issue does Nellie raise in this section? What are the dangers, and how might this issue be corrected?

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5. Describe what happens with the old blind woman at the end of Chapter XII? What is her complaint, and how is she treated by the staff?

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CHAPTERS XIII–XV: Actual Torture

KEY PASSAGE  | Chapter XIV: Some Unfortunate Stories, paragraphs 29–35

One of the patients, Mrs. Cotter, a pretty, delicate woman, one day thought she saw her husband coming up the walk. She left the line in which she was marching and ran to meet him. For this act she was sent to the Retreat. She afterward said:

“The remembrance of that is enough to make me mad. For crying the nurses beat me with a broom-handle and jumped on me, injuring me internally, so that I shall never get over it. Then they tied my hands and feet, and, throwing a sheet over my head, twisted it tightly around my throat, so I could not scream, and thus put me in a bathtub filled with cold water. They held me under until I gave up every hope and became senseless. At other times they took hold of my ears and beat my head on the floor and against the wall. Then they pulled out my hair by the roots, so that it will never grow in again.”

Mrs. Cotter here showed me proofs of her story, the dent in the back of her head and the bare spots where the hair had been taken out by the handful. I give her story as plainly as possible: “My treatment was not as bad as I have seen others get in there, but it has ruined my health, and even if I do get out of here I will be a wreck. When my husband heard of the treatment given me he threatened to expose the place if I was not removed, so I was brought here. I am well mentally now. All that old fear has left me, and the doctor has promised to allow my husband to take me home.”

I made the acquaintance of Bridget McGuinness, who seems to be sane at the present time. She said she was sent to Retreat 4, and put on the “rope gang.” “The beating I got there were something dreadful. I was pulled around by the hair, held under the water until I strangled, and I was choked and kicked. The nurses would always keep a quiet patient stationed at the window to tell them when any of the doctors were approaching. It was hopeless to complain to the doctors, for they always said it was the imagination of our diseased brains, and besides we would get another beating for telling. They would hold patients under the water and threaten to leave them to die there if they did not promise not to tell the doctors. We would all promise, because we knew the doctors would not help us, and we would do anything to escape the punishment. After breaking a window I was transferred to the Lodge, the worst place on the island. It is dreadfully dirty in there, and the stench is awful. In the summer the flies swarm the place. The food is worse than we get...
in other wards and we are given only tin plates. Instead of the bars being on the outside, as in this ward, they are on the inside. There are many quiet patients there who have been there for years, but the nurses keep them to do the work. Among other beatings I got there, the nurses jumped on me once and broke two of my ribs.

“While I was there a pretty young girl was brought in. She had been sick, and she fought against being put in that dirty place. One night the nurses took her and, after beating her, they held her naked in a cold bath, then they threw her on her bed. When morning came the girl was dead. The doctors said she died of convulsions, and that was all that was done about it.

**YOUR STUDYSYNC® TV**

**Discussion Prompt:** History is scattered with places where any trace of mercy and kindness vanished and the most wicked of human rights abuses were allowed to occur. Think about the some of the most infamous of these: the Nazi concentration camps, the Cambodian killing fields of Phnom Penh, or the ethnic cleansing of Yugoslavia, as well as similar massacres in China, Turkey, and Rwanda. What happened in these places that allowed such unimaginable acts of cruelty to occur? Discuss the shared or similar conditions that existed both at these sites and on Blackwell’s Island, giving specific examples.

**VOCABULARY**

**thimble**

*thim•ble noun*
A metal cap to protect a fingertip while sewing
*If you don’t use a thimble you are going to prick your finger with that needle over and over.*

**seldom**

*sel•dom adverb*
Infrequent or rare, referring to an event
*I seldom visit the zoo, considering that it’s so far away.*

**unanimous**

*u•nan-i•mous adjective*
In agreement or accord
*The jury informed the judge that they were able to reach a unanimous verdict.*

**stench**

*stench noun*
A very bad smell
*The garbage truck hadn’t been by in a while, and the stench by the dumpster was getting worse.*

**quench**

*quench verb*
To extinguish a fire or strong thirst
*Let’s stop here so we can buy some water and quench our thirst.*
CLOSE READ

1. What is Tillie Mayard’s main source of suffering, and how does Nellie try to help? How do Dr. Dent and the nurses treat Miss Mayard and the others when they ask for something? Give examples.

2. To whom does Nellie complain about the conditions in the asylum? How is her complaint received by this administrator? How is it received by Nurse Grady?

3. Who recognizes Nellie Bly’s real identity in Chapter XIII? What does Nellie fear as a result of this? Summarize this encounter in your own words.

4. Where do the worst abuses happen on Blackwell’s Island? Explain the horrific incident Bridget McGuinness witnesses and the official “explanation” for what happened.
5. Who carries out the torture—the doctors or the nurses? Explain what happens and how these people take advantage of the situation keep their abuses from being reported.
KEY PASSAGE | Chapter XVII: The Grand Jury Investigation, par. 12–18

The jurors then visited the kitchen. It was very clean, and two barrels of salt stood conspicuously open near the door! The bread on exhibition was beautifully white and wholly unlike what was given us to eat.

We found the halls in the finest order. The beds were improved, and in hall 7 the buckets in which we were compelled to wash had been replaced by bright new basins.

The institution was on exhibition, and no fault could be found.

But the women I had spoken of, where were they? Not one was to be found where I had left them. If my assertions were not true in regard to these patients, why should the latter be changed, so to make me unable to find them? Miss Neville complained before the jury of being changed several times. When we visited the hall later she was returned to her old place.

Mary Hughes, of whom I had spoken as appearing sane, was not to be found. Some relatives had taken her away. Where, they knew not. The fair woman I spoke of, who had been sent here because she was poor, they said had been transferred to another island. They denied all knowledge of the Mexican woman, and said there never had been such a patient. Mrs. Cotter had been discharged, and Bridget McGuinness and Rebecca Farron had been transferred to other quarters. The German girl, Margaret, was not to be found, and Louise had been sent elsewhere from hall 6. The Frenchwoman, Josephine, a great, healthy woman, they said was dying of paralysis, and we could not see her. If I was wrong in my judgment of these patients' sanity, why was all this done? I saw Tillie Mayard, and she had changed so much for the worse that I shuddered when I looked at her.

I hardly expected the grand jury to sustain me, after they saw everything different from what it had been while I was there. Yet they did, and their report to the court advises all the changes made that I had proposed.

I have one consolation for my work—on the strength of my story the committee of appropriation provides $1,000,000 more than was ever before given, for the benefit of the insane.
Discussion Prompt: Overall, Nellie Bly’s mission to reform New York’s treatment of the mentally ill through journalism was a success. *Ten Days in a Mad-House* is a shining example of “muckraking” reportage, which was a staple of news in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Later, this type of reporting lost some of its esteem; muckraking reports were increasingly seen as intrusive and biased. Do you think Nellie’s brand of investigative reporting would play out differently today? How so? Discuss as a class how Nellie Bly’s work would be received in modern society. Give specific examples.

VOCABULARY

**endeavor**

**en-dea-vor** verb
To try hard

The following year, I endeavored to cross the Atacama Desert on foot.

**contemplate**

**con-tem-plate** verb
To think about, consider, or meditate on

Malia needed some time to sit and contemplate her options before making a final decision.

**ascertain**

**as-cer-tain** verb
To figure out or learn

I am trying to ascertain whether your engagement ring got stuck in the pipe or went into the drains.

**ignorant**

**ig-nor-ant** adjective
Unaware of something particularly or generally

Their parents were ignorant of the dangers of riding without a helmet.

**conspicuous**

**con-spi-cu-ous** adjective
Striking or noticeable

When you get to the clearing, look to the west for a mountain with a conspicuous rock formation and hike in that direction.

CLOSE READ

1. What response does Bly get from Dr. Ingram, and from Nurse Grady, to her request for help for herself and Miss Neville?
2. What does Nellie feel upon receiving the news that she is leaving Blackwell’s Island? Explain.

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3. What important event or development between Chapters XVI and XVII goes unmentioned? Why?

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4. Explain how the boat and the asylum on Blackwell’s Island are different when Nellie goes back with the Grand Jury. Are attempts at a cover-up successful or not? Why?

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5. Which of the patients on the island testifies that Nellie’s claims are true? Who is unable to testify, and how does this fact lend support to Nellie’s reportage?

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