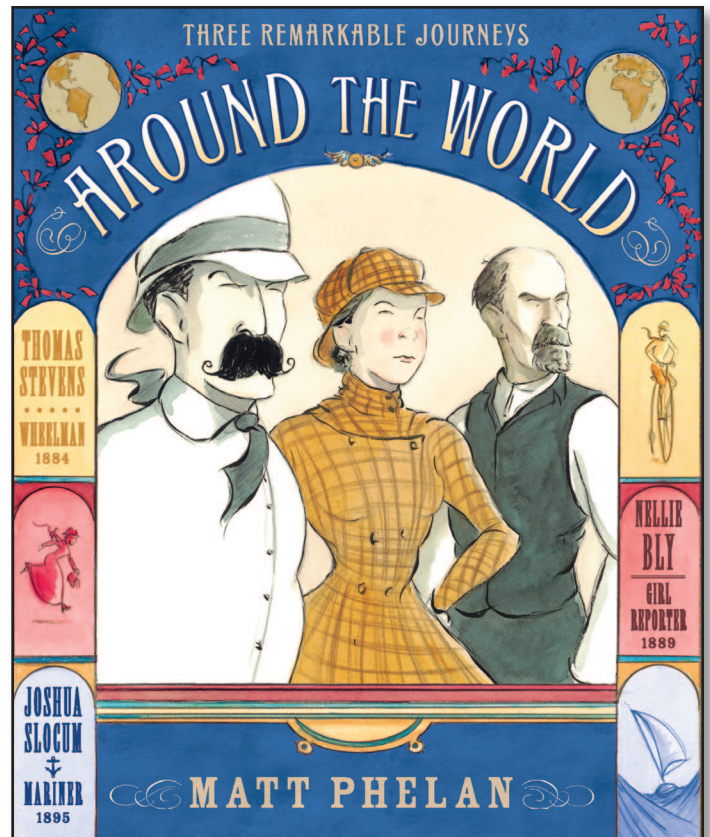


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TEACHERS' GUIDE

# Around the World

by **MATT PHELAN**

A Scott O'Dell Award–winning  
graphic novelist follows three  
dauntless adventurers on a  
Jules Verne–inspired challenge:  
circling the world, solo!



As the nineteenth century wound down, a public inspired by the novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* clamored for intrepid adventure. The challenge of circumnavigating the globe as no one ever had before — a feat assuring fame if not fortune — attracted the fearless in droves. Three hardy spirits stayed the course: In 1884, former miner Thomas Stevens made the journey on a bicycle, the kind with a big front wheel. In 1889, pioneer reporter Nellie Bly embarked on a global race against time that assumed the heights of spectacle, ushering in the age of the American celebrity. And in 1895, retired sea captain Joshua Slocum quietly set sail on a thirty-six-foot sloop, braving pirates and treacherous seas to become the first person to sail around the world alone. With cinematic pacing and deft, expressive art, acclaimed graphic novelist Matt Phelan weaves a trio of epic journeys into a single bold tale of three visionaries who set their sights on nothing short of the world.



  
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## World Travel at the Turn of the Century

Advanced transportation and communication methods developed swiftly in the 1800s. Use of new technologies such as the steam engine and the telegraph expanded dramatically, supporting similarly rapid economic development. This innovation and industrialization, together with the politics of European and American imperialism, enabled new connections between distant lands and disparate cultures. Money, commodities, people, and ideas were all able to travel farther and more quickly than ever before. French writer Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* both reflected the beginnings of globalization and inspired a generation to contemplate world travel.

### Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of Thomas Stevens's tale, Matt Phelan quotes the wheelman: "I am making the journey partly for pleasure and partly for other reasons." Now that you've read his story, what do you think some of the "other reasons" were? Use examples from the text and illustrations to support your response.
2. What unique challenges did Nellie Bly face as a woman at the turn of the century? How did she respond? Identify and discuss elements of Matt Phelan's story that suggest the influence she had on men, women, and children of that time. How do the illustrations help convey this?
3. Matt Phelan uses a narrative technique known as a flashback to help explain Joshua Slocum's backstory and provide some insight into his character. Name three things you learned about Slocum's life before he set sail. How do you think these events from his past affected his future endeavors?
4. As you read *Around the World*, did it seem like the three journeys were dangerous for the travelers? Why or why not? How did the intervention of strangers make their trips easier or more difficult? Each traveler received help from some unlikely sources. Which assistance most surprised you?
5. Pages 54–55 show a near accident when Thomas Stevens and his bicycle (still a fairly new invention) distract a horse cart on the road. Since the turn of the century, we have seen many new personal transportation vehicles, including mopeds, scooters, and Segways. Are personal transportation vehicles commonplace where you live, or would they still distract drivers on the road? How can city planners adapt as we develop new means of transportation?
6. Discuss the ways that Nellie Bly's paper, the *New York World*, was able to "fill in the gaps" in order to "keep the reader involved every single day whether [they had] actual news or not" (pages 92–93). Besides publishing stories of her journey, how did they commercialize her trip around the world? Compare and contrast this process with the production of tabloids, celebrity gossip blogs, and reality television shows today.
7. In the very small living space of his sailboat, Joshua Slocum filled two bookcases with his favorites, a mixture of classics, poetry, popular fiction, and nonfiction. If you were packing your suitcase for a flight across the world or loading up your e-reader before a long journey, what kinds of books would you be sure to bring? Think broadly! Magazines, graphic novels, comics, audiobooks, pop-up books, and other formats count as well as traditional narrative formats, and you can take your pick of genres. In addition to discussing the kinds of reading you'd bring, name at least one book you've read, loved, and wouldn't leave home without, as well as one story you've been waiting to read.



## Activities

1. In the author's note, Matt Phelan explains that his original focus on public journeys of the world travelers (what they did) became more an exploration of their private journeys (why they did it). Often he tells this private story through the emotions on characters' faces as they respond to others. Divide your class into small groups and have each group write 150 words to narrate what characters are thinking and feeling in some of these wordless panels.

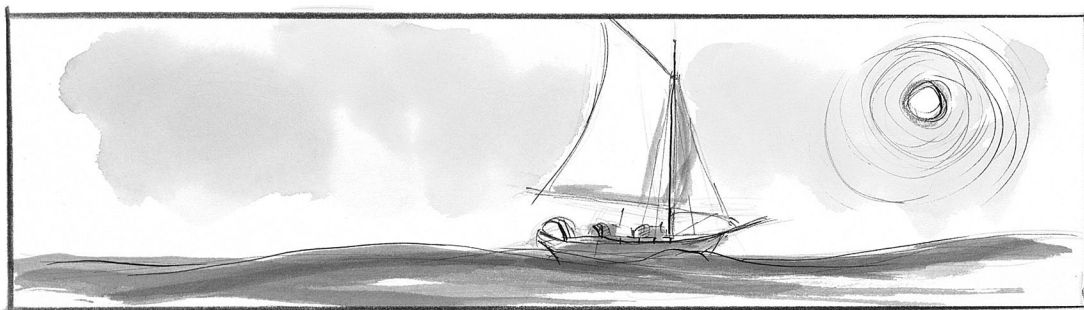
2. Incorporate these words from *Around the World* into your regular vocabulary lessons:

abode	copious	innumerable	procure
astronomical	digression	intrepid	squall
balderdash	eccentricity	lucrative	steadfast
becalmed	exposé	maim	<i>terra incognita</i>
bouquet	fortitude	newfangled	ulster
brazen	hallucination	pen name	whist
brevity	heiress	phosphorescence	
carpers	helm	phytoplankton	

3. Thomas Stevens's friends tease him for never having ridden a bicycle. Nellie Bly is laughed at for being seasick at the start of her trip. And Joshua Slocum's community is skeptical of the wrecked sailboat he starts to repair. In the end, all three adventurers prove their doubters wrong. How are they able to persevere and overcome their obstacles? Have students complete the following chart for each character:

Keys to Success

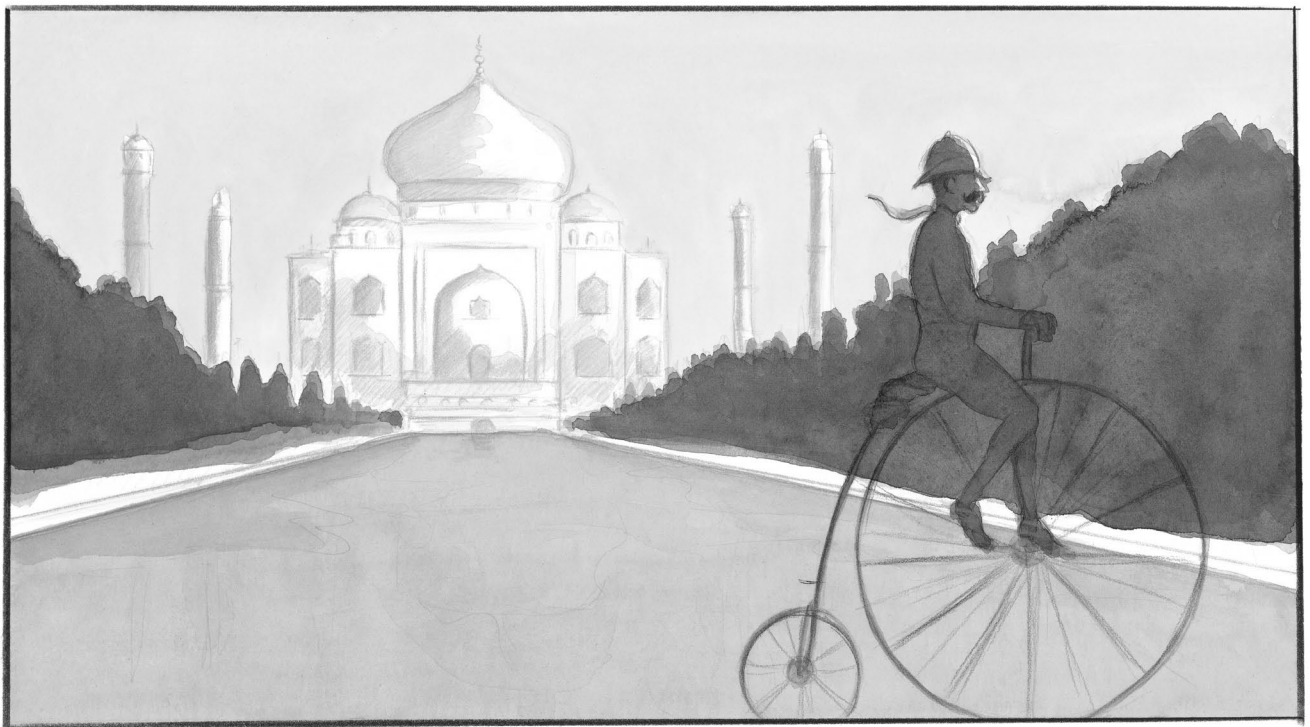
	Personality Traits	Skills & Knowledge	Actions	Support	Other
Thomas Stevens					
Nellie Bly					
Joshua Slocum					





## Activities *(continued)*

4. Matt Phelan begins each of the three stories with a map of the route the character took around the world more than a hundred years ago. Have each student chart his or her personal course for a tour around the world today, using either print or online maps. Students should mark five points along their routes and either find or create a picture of what they might see at each point.  
*This activity can be further extended by having students create travel brochures with facts and features to promote their routes to others.*
5. Matt Phelan wrote this book because he was inspired by three of his favorite stories. Challenge each of your students to take one of the stories he or she loves most and retell a favorite scene using words and/or pictures.
6. Two of the three adventurers in *Around the World* also served as roving ambassadors, learning a bit about different cultures and climates on their journeys. Have your students break into small groups and come up with plans to show off your town to a foreign visitor. They'll need to pick an activity, landmark(s), and food(s) that represent your community and present their itinerary and artifacts to the class.
7. As world travelers, the characters in the book used a variety of means to communicate across language barriers. Help your students step into their shoes. Pair off the class, assigning one person in each pair a role as a local and the other as a foreign visitor. Assign everyday topics (such as locating a bathroom or getting something tasty from the cafeteria) for the visitors to convey to the locals without using spoken or written English. Give students a time limit suitable to the topics you select. Then bring everybody back together for a facilitated discussion. Help students reflect on their experiences and evaluate their efforts. Where they able to communicate effectively? Efficiently? How did they feel?



## Extension Activities

1. Go back to the story that started it all. Matt Phelan says that millions have read Jules Verne's novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* and "pondered the possibility of racing around the planet Earth" (page 11). Take some time with your students to read the original novel or one of its graphic-novel adaptations and/or to see a film version of the tale.
2. Have your class break into small groups to research the cities and countries highlighted in *Around the World*.
3. Use print and electronic resources to learn more about the economy, politics, and culture of the Gilded Age in America. Students could present from a list of topics or contribute artifacts to a bulletin board, digital poster, or class encyclopedia entry.
4. Have students research other adventurers and world travelers and give brief presentations on their chosen explorers. Encourage them to select individuals throughout history and from different geographic regions.
5. In the epilogue to Nellie Bly's story, Matt Phelan writes that she received little credit or money for her fantastically high-selling serialized reports in the *New York World*. A decade later, newsboys of that same paper (and others) went on strike and held protests against the newspaper companies. Have your class research and discuss journalism conditions for reporters and newsboys at the turn of the century in the U.S. They may also want to watch the Disney musical *Newsies*.
6. In reference to Thomas Stevens's book *Through Russia on a Mustang*, Matt Phelan says: "But that is another story" (page 69). That "other story" is available online, as are both volumes of *Around the World on a Bicycle*. Have your students explore excerpts from these firsthand accounts and present them to the class using text, drawings, audio, or whatever medium or approach they would like.



## About Matt Phelan

Matt Phelan is the author-illustrator of the highly acclaimed and award-winning graphic novel *The Storm in the Barn*. He is also the illustrator of many books for young readers, including *Always* and *I'll Be There* by Ann Stott and *The Higher Power of Lucky* by Susan Patron, winner of the 2007 Newbery Medal. He lives in Philadelphia.

Teachers' guide written by Michele Gorman, teen services coordinator, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina, with assistance from Rebecca L. Buck, school library media specialist, Kennedy Middle School, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. Michele Gorman is also a freelance writer and a national speaker and is certified by YALSA as a "Serving the Underserved" trainer. She is the "Getting Graphic" columnist for *Library Media Connection* and the author of the books *Getting Graphic! Comics for Kids* and *Getting Graphic! Using Graphic Novels to Promote Literacy with Preteens and Teens*.



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