

## Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #3

# JOURNALISM

Journalists gather information about what is happening in the world and share it with their audiences. Journalism is important for helping people make *informed* choices. We all have to make choices every day — what to eat, where to shop, what to do with our time. And we also make decisions as community members and citizens, such as who to vote for, what causes to support, and what actions to demand from public officials. **Journalists** provide information necessary for civic engagement.



### Journalism can take many forms:

Journalism includes newspaper articles, magazines, photos, videos, or podcasts. Journalism can be about politics, sports, pop culture, and so much more. But what different forms of journalism have in common is a reliance on *sources* for info.

### Who can be a journalist?

Anybody! But that doesn't mean that everyone who writes about current events is a reliable journalist. To be a reliable journalist, you have to adhere to some important values, like honesty, fairness, and verifying the facts you publish. While journalists may not have access to all the facts when they report stories, they need to gather as many sources of information as possible and evaluate which are the most credible (believable). These sources can be eyewitnesses, documents — or even the experiences of the journalists themselves.



Read the example on the next page and answer the following questions about what makes Nellie Bly's article an example of journalism. Share your responses with a peer in-person or online.

The following source was written by Nellie Bly, an investigative journalist who went undercover at a mental health hospital to learn how patients were treated at the facility. While there, she discovered and endured rampant abuse and neglect. Her report on the facility's poor conditions, "Behind Asylum Bars," prompted public outrage and a push for mental health care reform.

*On the 22nd of September I was asked by THE WORLD if I could have myself committed to one of the Asylums for the Insane in New York with a view to writing a plain and unvarnished narrative of the patients therein and the methods of management, etc. Did I think I had the courage to go through such an ordeal as the mission would demand? ... I said I could and I would. And I did.*

*I was to chronicle faithfully the experiences I underwent, and when once within the walls of the asylum to find out and describe its inside workings, which are always, so effectually hidden by white-capped nurses, as well as by bolts and bars, from the knowledge of the public. "We do not ask you to go there for the purpose of making sensational revelations. Write up things as you find them, good or bad; give praise or blame as you think best, and the truth all the time." ... said the editor.*

Source: "Behind Asylum Bars" by Nellie Bly. The New York World. Oct. 17, 1887. Permission has been granted for educational purposes only, courtesy of NYU Digital Library Services.

Describe what is happening in the excerpt. What did you notice or wonder about?

What sources of information does Bly rely on in this short excerpt?

Why do you think Bly's editor told her to "write up things as you find them, good or bad"?