

Grades 7 and up
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handsome reporter at her father's newspaper—and it becomes all too clear how much she stands to lose if she keeps searching for the truth. But now it might be too late to stop. The past never stays buried forever. Life is dirtier than Jo Montfort could ever have imagined, and this time the truth is the dirtiest part of all.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Jo Montfort is beautiful and rich, and soon—like all the girls in her class—she'll graduate from finishing school and be married off to a wealthy bachelor. Which is the last thing she wants. Jo dreams of becoming a writer—a newspaper reporter like the trailblazing Nellie Bly.

Wild aspirations aside, Jo's life seems perfect until tragedy strikes: her father is found dead. Charles Montfort shot himself while cleaning his gun. One of New York City's wealthiest men, he owned a newspaper and was a partner in a massive shipping firm, and Jo knows he was far too smart to clean a loaded revolver.

The more Jo hears about her father's death, the more something feels wrong. Suicide is the only logical explanation, and of course people have started talking, but Jo's father would never have resorted to *that*. And then she meets Eddie—a young, smart, infuriatingly



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Donnelly is the author of three adult novels, *The Tea Rose*, *The Winter Rose*, and *The Wild Rose*, as well as the young adult novels *These Shallow Graves*, *Revolution*, and *A Northern Light*, winner of Britain's prestigious Carnegie Medal, the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for Young Adult Literature, and a Michael L. Printz Honor Award. She has also written the Waterfire Saga, a series for middle-grade readers, and *Humble Pie*, a picture book. She lives and writes full-time in upstate New York's Hudson Valley. You can visit her at jenniferdonnelly.com.

WOMEN'S ISSUES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BREEDING: Grandmama frequently compares young women to her own dogs, observing at one point, “If you ask me, the best way to settle a girl is to marry her off young and make her a mother before there’s time for any odd ideas to take hold. I see it in my bitches. The longer bad habits are indulged, the harder they are to break” (p. 138).

1. Why does Grandmama compare becoming a bride to breeding dogs?
2. What does that comparison reveal about Grandmama?
3. How do you think Jo feels about her comments?
4. What do Grandmama’s words reveal about women’s roles in society at the time?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1, L.5

DOUBLE STANDARD: When Jo wants to write about the plight of women and pregnant girls in the city’s factories, Trudy chastises her: “The future Mrs. Aldrich must be pure in mind as well as body. Only men are supposed to know about . . . sex” (p. 6).

1. What do Trudy’s comments reveal about the attitudes of Jo’s society?
2. Why are Jo and her friends supposed to stay ignorant about sexual relationships until after marriage?
3. How does this differ from the attitudes of the boys in Jo’s social circle?
4. Do you think this double standard has changed since Jo’s time?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1

HEADSTRONG: When Jo’s servant warns her that “Headstrong girls *always* end badly,” Jo retorts: “Headstrong is just a word, Katie—a word others call you when you don’t do what they want” (p. 143). Earlier in the novel, Jo observes that “when [people] wanted to stop a girl from doing something—they shamed her” (p. 55).

1. What is the definition of “headstrong,” and why does Katie use the word to scold Jo?
2. What does Jo’s response reveal about her character’s development?
3. What are some of the other words that characters use to exert control over women?
4. What are some of the words used in today’s society to shame girls or control their behavior?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1, L.4

CORSETS: As a woman, Jo is often frustrated by restrictions on her behavior: “It chafed ather spirit, as surely as the stays of her corset chafed her body” (p. 9).

1. What are some of the different social, professional, or physical limitations that Jo faces as a woman in her society?
2. Why does the author use the idea of a corset as a simile for Jo’s feelings?
3. Can you find additional examples in the text that use the imagery of a corset?
4. How do these examples relate to Jo’s feelings and experiences?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1, L.5

MARRIAGE: In a conversation about Jo’s marital future, Grandmama asserts, “Passion is for the lower orders . . . We make matches with our heads, not our hearts, in order to preserve our families and our fortunes” (p. 95).

1. What do Grandmama’s ideas reveal about marriage and social class in Jo’s society?
2. Why does she claim that love and passion are only for people of a lower social class?
3. How does Jo feel about Grandmama’s ideas? Can you find other examples in the text that illustrate similar ideas about marriage?
4. In what ways have opinions about marriage and social class changed since Grandmama’s time?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

VOICE: Early in the novel, Jo asserts, “We who have means and a voice must use them to help those who have neither” (p. 7).

1. Who are some of the people in the novel who need a voice to speak for them?
2. How does Jo use her voice to help others? Who speaks for Jo when she needs help, and why?
3. Can you think of people in today’s society who need a voice to speak for them?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1

RIGHT AND WRONG: Eddie tells Jo, “Sometimes you have to do wrong to do right” (p. 114). Later, the Tailor tells her, “Life’s black-and-white uptown, but here in the Bend, it’s a dirty gray” (p. 198).

1. How do Eddie’s and the Tailor’s views reflect their positions in society, compared to Jo’s?
2. How do Jo’s beliefs about right and wrong change throughout the novel?
3. Who determines what is right or wrong in her society?
4. What are some times when Jo does wrong in order to do right?
5. Do you agree with Eddie’s view of right versus wrong?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1

MENTAL ILLNESS: Throughout the novel, Jo pities the beggar Mad Mary, a mentally ill woman who roams the streets. Later, Jo herself is committed to an asylum when her uncle asserts, “Our poor, dear Jo has lost her mind” (p. 407).

1. How does Jo’s society view mental illness and people like Mad Mary?
2. How are mentally ill people treated? Why does Uncle Phillip attempt to have Jo committed to an asylum for the mentally ill?
3. In what ways have society’s attitudes toward mental illness changed, and in what ways have they stayed similar to Jo’s time?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1

EXPLOITATION: After Jo’s hunt for the truth opens her eyes to the many ways humans exploit each other—such as corruption, slavery, and prostitution—her uncle asks her, “How do you think the beautiful life you’ve always lived was funded?” (p. 436).

1. What is the meaning of Uncle Phillip’s question?
2. Why does the author juxtapose Jo’s wealth and status with the poverty of others?
3. Is Jo guilty because she profited from the exploitation of others, even unknowingly?
4. How would you answer Uncle Phillip’s question?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.6; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1

FREEDOM: When Jo asks Fay for help making a decision, Fay tells her, “Freedom. That’s my answer. The freedom to be your own best thing” (p. 290).

1. How does Jo seek her own freedom throughout the novel?
2. Do you think Jo ultimately becomes free? Who are the other characters in the novel who desire freedom, and do they achieve it?
3. How do you define “freedom?” Do you agree with Fay’s advice that “freedom is the best thing?”

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4, CCRA.L.1, L.4

SHALLOW GRAVES: When Jo finally tracks down Jackie Shaw, he tells her, “If you’re going to bury the past, bury it deep, girl. Shallow graves always give up their dead” (p. 187).

1. What is the meaning of Shaw’s comments to Jo?
2. How do they foreshadow Jo’s efforts to find Kinch and uncover the truth?
3. What do Shaw’s comments reveal about the significance of the book’s title?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1, L.5

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

FREEDOM: Reflect on the idea of freedom and how it relates to your life. Do you have the freedom to think and say what you want? Do you have the freedom to read and write what you want? Do you have the freedom to pursue the activities or careers that you want? What are some of the freedoms you might take for granted? What would your life be like if these freedoms were taken away?

CHOICE: Think about the choices you make each day. Do you decide where to go, how to get there, and who you will spend time with? What happens when you need to make a choice with bigger consequences? How do you go about making choices in your life?

WOMEN: Brainstorm a list of women who have changed the course of history. Who are some of the women on the list? What roles did they play in society? Did they make sacrifices in order to achieve their goals? How did these women make a difference?

TRUST: Consider the people closest to you, and the people you rely on. Who are the people you can trust to be honest with you? Why do you trust them? How did you develop that trust, and how long did it take?

WOMEN'S ISSUES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WOMEN'S ROLES: At the Young Patrons' Ball, Jo observes her peers dancing and concludes, "The women must only ever watch and wait. The men were the ones who would decide. They would choose. They would lead. And the women would follow. Tonight and forevermore" (p. 172).

1. Why does Jo come to this conclusion about the role of women in her world?
2. How does Jo feel about her position as a woman?
3. How do you feel about Jo's observations?
4. In what ways have social expectations for women and men changed since Jo's time? Can you think of some ways in which they have remained the same?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1, L.5

THE RULES: Early in the novel, Trudy reminds Jo, "You know the rules: get yourself hitched, then do what you like. But for heaven's sake, *until* you get the man, smile like a dolt and talk about tulips, *not* mill girls!" (p. 9).

1. Why does Trudy give Jo this advice? How do Jo and her friends feel about the rules for their behavior?
2. How are these rules different for women of different social classes?
3. How would you rewrite the rules for behavior in Jo's time?
4. What do you think are the unwritten rules for girls' or boys' behavior today?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1

KNOWLEDGE: Jo's friend Trudy warns her, "You, on the other hand, wish to know things. And no one can forgive a girl for that" (p. 10).

1. Why does Jo's society frown upon her thirst for knowledge?
2. How does Trudy's comment foreshadow the course of Jo's quest for knowledge throughout the novel?
3. In what ways might Trudy's statement also apply to contemporary society?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.5; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1

FIRST DUTY: While discussing Jo's future, Grandmama, the matriarch of high society, declares, "Girls have lost sight of their first duty: marriage and motherhood" (p. 96).

1. What do Grandmama's comments reveal about the changing roles of women in society?
2. How do Grandmama's opinions conflict with Jo's own aspirations for her life?
3. Can you find textual evidence of how Jo's friends view marriage, and how their views differ from Jo's feelings about it?

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4; CCRA.SL.1, SL.4; CCRA.L.1

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

“You’re comparing yourself to Nellie Bly?” (p. 5)

Jo is inspired by the work of undercover reporters like Jacob Riis and Nellie Bly. Use your library or Internet resources to find and read a copy of *Ten Days in a Mad-House*, Bly’s exposé of the horrible conditions at Blackwell’s Island Asylum. Compare her experiences to those of Jo when she is committed to Darkbriar Asylum for the Insane (p. 416).

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.6, R.9; CCRA.L.1, L.4

“She thought about the mill girls she’d spoken with. . . . Their stories had made Jo sad—and blisteringly angry” (p.7).

Use your library and Internet resources to research the history of the “mill girls” during the Industrial Revolution. Then take the perspective of Jo or another reporter from that time period and write your own exposé, reporting on the conditions the mill girls faced, and what their lives were like.

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.7; CCRA.W.2, W.3, W.4, W.7, W.8; CCRA.L.1, L.2

“It was the preferred paper of the upper class: sober, genteel, and a stark contrast to Mr. Pulitzer’s and Mr. Hearst’s papers, with their lurid headlines” (p. 28).

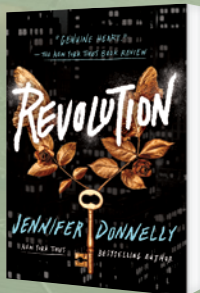
Explore the digital archives of newspapers from Jo’s time by visiting the Chronicling America project at <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>, where you can browse historical newspapers from all over the country. Find an interesting headline from the 1890s in New York, or your own state; then read the article and compare or contrast it with the types of articles that appear in newspapers today.

● CCRA.R.1, R.2, R.3, R.9; CCRA; L.1, L.4

“Fac quod faciendum est” (p. 47)

Jo often recites her family motto, which appears on the Montfort coat of arms on her ancestor’s portrait, translated from Latin as “Do what must be done.” With input from your family members, develop your own family motto, and then translate it into Latin. Write a brief explanation of your new family motto, and design your own coat of arms to go with it.

● CCRA;W.2, L.1, L.2, L.3



ALSO AVAILABLE

- ★ “A sumptuous feast of a novel.”
—*School Library Journal*, Starred
- ★ “Readers . . . will find this brilliantly crafted work utterly absorbing.” —*The Bulletin*, Starred
- ★ “Brilliantly realized. . . . Haunting and beautifully told.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred



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This guide was created by Laura Schick, a librarian at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon.

A hand is shown resting on a weathered wooden plank. The scene is decorated with several vibrant red roses and some dried twigs, creating a rustic and somewhat somber atmosphere. The background consists of several horizontal wooden planks.

BE CAREFUL HOW DEEP
YOU BURY THE PAST

THESE
SHALLOW
GRAVES

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JENNIFER DONNELLY

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Includes Common Core Standards Correlations