



LITTLE WOMEN

Study Guide

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Plot Background

Louisa May Alcott's story Little Women is timeless - and timely. The story written in 1868 relates a fictionalized account of its author's young life with her sisters. While certain aspects of the story have been altered in this musical adaptation, the heart of the tale remains untouched.

Four sisters of the March family: Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy come of age during the U.S. Civil War, while their father is away with the Union Army. Their mother, whom they affectionately call "Marmee," nurtures and encourages these four strong-spirited young women to achieve their dreams. While this approach to raising children may be "conventional," there is little "conventional" about her daughters. Jo, a tom-boyish writer, disregards social standards of how women should behave. Her spirit and drive are the main focus of both Alcott's original novel and Allan Knee's book for the musical.

Throughout the musical, you'll notice certain *themes*.

One of the major understated themes is that of **revision**: From the initial curtain covering the stage, you'll notice many handwritten letters from Jo – many of these pages contain revisions. The pages are seemingly blowing across a great expanse, suggesting the immense life force and vision our main character embodies. While Jo has no specific agenda to change minds or alter social expectations, she lives her life as she sees it – free-spirited, intelligent, caring, and not at all like the "ideal" Victorian woman of the late 1800s. She revises others' ideas of how a young woman should behave and dream with such grace and verve the viewer forgets she is from a poor family living in the midst of one of the bloodiest wars in history.

Throughout the story, Jo's enthusiasm and imaginative creativity invigorate the action: in the beginning of the tale, the four sisters eagerly accept and expand Jo's unique approach to having no Christmas presents as they dream of fantastic tales on the high seas. While living together in Concord, MA, the sisters grow from co-existence with a cranky neighbor, Mr. Laurence to developing solid friendships with him and his grandson, Theodore "Teddy" Laurence (Laurie). They experience first crushes and love— and balance the ideals of Victorian companionate marriage with that of candid enjoyment of sharing another's life. They rally together to support each other: Jo sells her hair to facilitate Marmee's trip to be with her ill husband, Jo chooses her sisters over a potential suitor only to learn to accept Meg's engagement to Laurie's tutor John Brooke, the sisters all accept Amy's eccentricities, Jo moves to New York City to begin a life as a writer (where she meets Professor Fritz Bhaer who becomes her mentor and dear friend), and even through the death of their sister Beth, the family's unwavering friendship and loyalty allow each other to fulfill their dreams and achieve great happiness.

Plot Summary

Act One

As LITTLE WOMEN opens, we see JO MARCH enacting her OPERATIC TRAGEDY for PROFESSOR BHAER, her neighbor in Mrs. Kirk's New York boarding house. Her "blood and guts" saga is clearly not to his taste. He suggests she is capable of more refined writing. After he leaves, Jo ponders whether her writing was BETTER years before, back home in Concord, Massachusetts.

Reminiscing on those days, we venture back to the March family attic of two years previous. Jo is rehearsing her siblings in her new Christmas play. Each sister is trying to find something to be happy about that Christmas; it is difficult with their father away at war, and no money for gifts or a Christmas tree. Jo promises they will no longer want for anything once she is a successful writer, and they will all realize OUR FINEST DREAMS.

As Jo runs off to fulfill one of those dreams, MARMEE comes home with a letter from their father. Marmee reflects on her life with her girls and without her husband in HERE ALONE. To help support the family, Jo has taken up helping AUNT MARCH. Aunt March worries that Jo is not the lady she needs to be to take her place in proper society. Jo wants to tell Aunt March what she thinks of society, but Aunt March offers to bring Jo with her to Europe...if she can change her ways. "COULD YOU?", she asks. "I could change if I wanted to," replies Jo.

Time passes, and older sister MEG has one of her dreams realized: she and Jo are invited to a Valentine's Ball! While younger sister BETH is happy for them, the youngest, AMY, is jealous. Meg worries what to say to potential suitors. "I'LL BE DELIGHTED" is what Marmee suggests. When the glamorous evening arrives, Amy tries to go in Jo's place, as she feels she's more entitled. When Marmee won't allow her, Amy pouts and acts out to show her unhappiness. At the ball, Jo is startled by the appearance of her neighbor LAURIE, who is accompanied by his tutor, MR. BROOKE. Meg is soon smitten by Mr. Brooke, and they leave to dance. Laurie professes his need for friends, and soon he asks Jo to TAKE ACHANCE ON ME. His good nature wins over Jo, and she agrees to take that chance!

Back home, after the ball, Amy and Jo have a little confrontation: It seems Amy's jealousy has gotten the best of her. Marmee tries to intervene, scolds Amy for her actions and explains to Jo that Amy is still very much a child. Jo is still getting over the sting of her tiff with Amy as she starts to express her feelings through her writing.

Time passes, and we find Laurie inviting Jo to a skating race. Beth offers her skates to Amy, as Amy has outgrown her pair. Intent on staying inside, Beth sits at the piano, out of tune as it is. Mr. Laurence, looking for his grandson, comes upon her musical attempts. She soon softens his hard heart, and they find themselves playing a duet *OFF TO MASSACHUSETTS*. He leaves, but not before inviting Beth to come play his (in-tune) grand piano next door. Coming in from skating, we see Amy has fallen through the ice, and rescued by Laurie. Having faced this life or death situation, Jo and Amy resolve their differences, and Jo swears in Laurie as an honorary member of the March family, officially making them *FIVE FOREVER*.

Time passes, and Marmee is making plans to go to Washington to tend to her ill husband, but is short on funds. Jo saves the day, coming up with money to pay her fare. Marmee is just barely gone when Aunt March and Jo have a heated exchange, and Aunt March rescinds her offer of Europe. Instead, Aunt March turns her focus on Amy, to make her into the model society lady that she wished Jo would have been. Before Jo can settle the matter, Mr. Brooke comes in to announce his enlistment in the Union Army, and to ask for Meg's hand in marriage so he could be *MORE THAN I AM*. All of this seems so sudden to Jo, who questions Meg's loyalty to the family; after all, they had sworn to remain together forever. Jo's world is starting to change significantly!

A few weeks later, visiting Jo in her attic, Laurie arrives with news and a declaration. The news: With Mr. Brooke at war, he is headed off to college in Boston. The declaration: He's in love with Jo – and he wants to marry her! All this is too much for Jo. She refuses his advances, sends him off, and questions her future. Will she be able to find her way, without her sisters or her best friend? As Act One ends, she vows her life will be *ASTONISHING*, no matter what!

Act Two

Back in New York, 1866. The war has ended, and Mrs. Kirk and Professor Bhaer are holding a telegram for Jo. Jo, however, bursting in, has her own news to share. She has sold her first story to *THE WEEKLY VOLCANO PRESS*! Soon all are privy to its contents—she sold her *OPERATIC TRAGEDY* encountered earlier on, only now it's better, thanks to the Professor's advice! Once Jo comes down to earth, Mrs. Kirk remembers the telegram: Beth is gravely ill. Jo packs to leave New York immediately. She hastily makes her goodbyes.

Back in Concord, Mr. Laurence has his own plan to make Beth well—he moves his piano into the March home. Beth and her family are overwhelmed by his generosity, and soon all join in another rendition of *OFF TO MASSACHUSETTS*. After the song, Jo sends a note to Professor

Bhaer, telling him of her plans to take Beth and Marmee to Cape Cod with her earnings. She asks him what's new in New York. He tries over and over, but just can't quite find the way to tell her HOW I AM.

Once on the Cape, Jo splurges her meager earnings on her mother and sister. All put up a brave front concerning Beth's health, but Jo and Beth privately admit to one another SOME THINGS ARE MEANT TO BE.

Back in Concord, eventually Amy and Aunt March return from Europe. Much has changed. MEG is now a mother, Jo is now a published writer, and Beth has passed on. Things are different for Amy, too: she is engaged to Laurie, who consoled her in Europe when Beth died. Together they break the news to Jo; after all, it was THE MOST AMAZING THING.

Later, in her attic, Jo asks Marmee how she has been able to handle the loss of Beth. Simply, Marmee insists Beth will always be with them, and that Jo, too, will find she has DAYS OF PLENTY. Jo takes in what her mother has said, and finally sees how she can go on... and how she can keep Beth's memory alive.

Jo begins work on what is to become her greatest achievement: LITTLE WOMEN the novel. THE FIRE WITHIN ME fills her attic, and her heart, as she brings her family to life on paper.

The day of Amy and Laurie's wedding arrives. Amidst the last minute details, Jo and Aunt March finally resolve their issues. Aunt March will leave Jo her house, with the suggestion that she open a school. Her generosity touches Jo in ways she never expected. Suddenly, in the flurry of wedding excitement, a confused Professor Bhaer enters, looking for Jo. He apologizes for arriving on so auspicious a day, but he comes with good news and a declaration of his own. First, Jo's manuscript has been bought! Jo March is a novelist! As for his declaration....Well, he bought a kite!

From this point, he proceeds to pour his heart out to Jo, admitting how he's fallen in love with her, and that he's not only share his SMALL UMBRELLA IN THE RAIN but his hand in marriage as well. Jo, always skeptical, questions their chances. Theirs would be a new kind of relationship for a new world. With the courage, grace, and enthusiasm that defines our heroine, we leave the musical trusting in the new love she and Professor Bhaer will share.

Meet the Cast



EMILIA TAGLIANI



KIRA TROILO



SIRENA ABALIAN



ABIGAIL MACK



LEIGH BARRETT

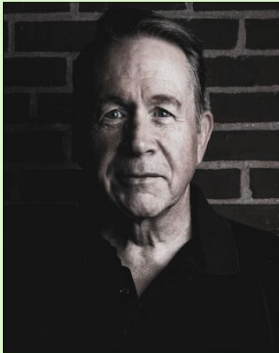
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GAMALIA PHARMS



NEIL GUSTAFSON



DWAYNE P. MITCHELL



MAXWELL SEELIG



JARED TROILO

Scenes And Musical Numbers

ACT 1

Scene One

- Summer 1865, Mrs. Kirk's boarding House "An Operatic Tragedy" "Better"
- Christmas 1863, the March family attic "Our Finest Dreams" "Here Alone"

Scene Two

- Early Winter 1864, Aunt March's house "Could You"

Scene Three

- Winter, 1864, the March Parlor "I'd Be Delighted" Annie Moffat's ball "Take a Chance on Me "Better" (reprise)

Scene Four

- Late Winter 1864, March family parlor "Off to Massachusetts" "Five Forever"

Scene Five

- Early Spring, 1865, outside of March house "More Than I Am"

Scene Six

- Late Spring 1865, the attic "Take A Chance On Me" (Reprise) "Astonishing"

ACT 2

Scene One

- Early Summer, 1866, Mrs. Kirk's boarding house "The Weekly Volcano Press"

Scene Two

- Summer 1866, March family parlor "Off to Massachusetts" (Reprise)
- Late Summer 1866, Mrs. Kirk's boarding house "How I Am"

Scene Three

- Fall 1866, Falmouth, Cape Cod "Some Things Are Meant To Be"

Scene Four

- Winter 1867, the March parlor "The Most Amazing Thing" "Days of Plenty" "The Fire Within Me"

Scene Five

- Spring 1867, outside the March house "Small Umbrella In The Rain" "Sometimes When You Dream"

Meet the Author



Louisa May Alcott

My book [Little Women] came out, and people began to think that topsy-turvy Louisa would amount to something after all . . .

~Louisa May Alcott, 1855 Journal

Louisa May Alcott was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania on November 29, 1832. She and her three sisters -- Anna, Elizabeth, and [Abba] May -- were educated by their father, teacher/philosopher A. Bronson Alcott, and raised on the practical Christianity of their mother, Abigail May.

Louisa spent her childhood in Boston and in Concord, Massachusetts, where her days were enlightened by visits to Ralph Waldo Emerson's library, excursions into nature with Henry David Thoreau, and theatricals in the barn at "Hillside" (now "The Wayside"). Like the character of "Jo March" in *Little Women*, young Louisa was a tomboy. "No boy could be my friend till I had beaten him in a race," she claimed, "and no girl if she refused to climb trees, leap fences . . ."

For Louisa, writing was an early passion. She had a rich imagination and her stories often became the basis of melodramas she and her sisters would act out for friends. Louisa preferred to play the "lurid" parts in these plays -- "the villains, ghosts, bandits, and disdainful queens," as she put it.

At age 15, troubled by the poverty plaguing her family, she vowed, "I will do something by and by. Don't care what, teach, sew, act, write, anything to help the family; and I'll be rich and famous and happy before I die, see if I won't!" Confronting a society that offered little opportunity to women seeking employment, Louisa nonetheless persisted: ". . . I will make a battering-ram of my head and make my way through this rough and tumble world." Whether as a teacher, seamstress, governess, or household servant, for many years Louisa did any work she could find.

Louisa's career as an author began at the age of eight with poetry, and later short stories that appeared in popular magazines. In 1854, when she was 22, her first book, *Flower Fables*, was published. A major critical milestone along her literary path was *Hospital Sketches* (1863), a truthful and poignant account of her service as a Civil War nurse in Washington, DC inspired by the letters she wrote home to her family in Concord.

In 1868, when Louisa was 35 years old, her publisher, Thomas Niles, asked her to write "a girls' story." The 492 pages of *Little Women*, Part I were dashed off within three months at the desk Louisa's father built for her in her Orchard House bedchamber. The novel is largely based on the coming of age stories of Louisa and her sisters, with many of the domestic experiences inspired by events that actually took place at Orchard House.

Virtually overnight, *Little Women* was a phenomenal success, primarily due to its timeless storytelling about the first American juvenile heroine, "Jo March," who acted from her own individuality -- a free-thinking, flawed person, rather than the idealized stereotype of feminine perfection then prevalent in children's fiction.

In all, Louisa published over 30 books and collections of short stories and poems. She died on 6 March 1888, only two days after her father, and is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord.

About the Alcotts



Amos Bronson Alcott

("Mr. March" in Little Women)

Educator, Transcendental philosopher, writer, and social reformer



Abigail May Alcott

("Marmee" in Little Women)

A strong, independent woman who was one of the first paid social workers in Boston



Anna Alcott Pratt

("Meg" in Little Women)

A wife and mother who exhibited a flair for acting and was a nurturing caregiver



Louisa May Alcott

("Jo" in Little Women)

Author, Civil War nurse, and reform advocate, as well as seamstress, governess, and teacher



Elizabeth Sewell Alcott

("Beth" in Little Women)

The "Angel in the House," who passed away just prior to the Alcotts' move into Orchard House



[Abba] May Alcott Nieriker

("Amy" in Little Women)

A talented artist and early teacher of noted sculptor Daniel Chester French

About Orchard House

"A visit to Orchard House is like a walk through Little Women!"



In 1857, Amos Bronson Alcott purchased 12 acres of land with a manor house that had been on the property since the 1660s for \$945. He then moved a small tenant farmhouse and joined it to the rear of the larger house, making many improvements over the course of the next year, as he detailed in his journals. The grounds also contained an orchard of 40 apple trees which greatly appealed to Mr. Alcott, who considered apples the most perfect food. It is not surprising, then, that he should name his home "Orchard House."

After moving more than twenty times in nearly thirty years, the Alcotts had finally found their anchoring place at Orchard House, where they lived until 1877. The house is most noted for being where Louisa May Alcott wrote and set her beloved classic, *Little Women*, in 1868 at a "shelf desk" her father built especially for her.

Fortunately, there have been no major structural changes to the house since the Alcotts' time, with ongoing preservation efforts adhering to the highest standards of authenticity. Since approximately 80% of the furnishings on display were owned by the Alcotts, the rooms look very much as they did when the family lived here, causing many modern-day visitors to comment that, "A visit to Orchard House is like a walk through *Little Women*!"

Take a Virtual Tour at: <https://louisamayalcott.org/virtual-tour>

About the Playwright-Allan Knee



Allan Knee has written for the stage and film. His play, THE MAN WHO WAS PETER PAN, was released by Miramax Films as FINDING NEVERLAND in October 2004. SYNCOPATION won an American Critics Theater Award. His musical version of LITTLE WOMEN won a Richard Rodgers Musical Theater Award. His plays have been produced at Jewish Repertory Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee Rep, Long Wharf Theater, Manhattan Punchline, Theatreworks/USA among many others. He is a founding member of the Workshop Theater Company.

About the Composer-Jason Howland



JASON HOWLAND is a 1993 graduate of Williams College with an Honors degree in Music Composition. Howland has worked as an arranger, conductor, writer and producer on a number of recording projects including the Grammy-nominated cast album of Jekyll & Hyde (Musical Director/Conductor/Vocal Arranger). He has conducted in concert across the country for such notables as Ray Charles, Natalie Cole, Brandy, Bebe & Cece Winans, Carl Anderson, Linda Eder, Sebastian Bach and Davis Gaines, and was musical director and conductor for the opening ceremonies of 1998 The Goodwill Games held in New York City.

(<http://www.pcpa.org/pdf/littlewomenstudyguide.pdf>)

History of the Late 1800's

Hmmm. Why should we be concerned with these ideas of genre, history and context? How is that important to our understanding of Little Women? The story of Little Women is important to American history because it challenges stereotypical (at that time, Victorian) ideals of how women should live. Throughout the story, there is a tension between Aunt March and Jo regarding this very issue. Should women be quiet and bite their tongue so they may attract an appropriate suitor? Or, should women be bold and chase their dreams – even if others think they are crazy dreams?

What was happening in the 1860s that could have influenced this work of art, anyhow? It is crucial to remind your students of how different life in the 1860s was – although most students can quickly agree that life must have been different, few can truly state how it was different. Young Americans have not lived through a civil war in their own country, they may be unable to conceive of a time when women could not vote, or even that “popular culture” revolved around things like reading and theater (instead of T.V., concerts, and radio stations playing their favorite songs). Since the aspect of historical contextualization is so critical to our understanding of not only Little Women, but of any piece of literature, any song, any musical or any other text, we now turn our attention to contextualizing this very important aspect.

UNITED STATES HISTORY OF THE LATE 1800s - Recap of 1840-1860 -Westward expansion/battles over territory

POLITICAL SITUATION OF THE LATE 1800s - North/South/beginning of Civil War - Lincoln's presidency (domestic/foreign)

ECONOMY OF THE LATE 1800s - Industrializing North balances issues like child labor, 14 hour-work days, irregular wages. 1873, J.S. Mill dies (the official “end of capitalism”) and Karl Marx publishes Das Kapital. Trade unions form at that time, however the resentment of the working classes is mounting during the 1860s. - The depression of 1839 has crippled many of the working class even in the 1860s, with limited mobility to recover from devastating losses. - The South's plantation economy is also buckling under the decreased value in the market of tobacco prices. - Trade matters in relation to RR and the whiff of unionization.

RELIGION IN THE LATE 1800s -Protestantism (evangelicalism) reinforces the ideas that women are to raise a family in a very closed manner. - Revivals of the early 1830s have lasting impact on who was to transmit religious information to children – namely, women.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE LATE 1800s - Literature is changing dramatically from Victorian-styled “proper” and moral stories to more explorative, thanks in part to the transcendentalist movement. There are two forms of transcendentalists: (a) those who rebelled against those Victorian conventions (these authors tended to be well-educated Northern citizens who wrote prior to the Civil War – their topic revolved around the division that war created, for the most part – by doing this, they were trying to create a unique American literature rather than copying convention from Europe) AND (b) those who tried to define spirituality and religion in the face of an increasingly “materialistic” society (and to express that spirituality in more emotive terms and “less rational terms” – i.e. perhaps religion is a feeling rather than a rule book.) These influential writers included Emily Dickenson, Ralph Waldo Emerson (with whom Alcott had contact), Thomas Wentworth Higginson, James and Harriet Martineau, Theodore Parker and Margaret Fuller. These authors are contemporaries of Alcott, although Alcott is typically not considered a true “transcendentalist.”

With all of these activities, the ideas that predominated most literature and other cultural “texts” were those that impressed grander dreaming – was that because of the stifling nature of labor? Population increases and proportionately increasingly difficult and cramped living situations? The Civil War? Westward expansion? All of these issues certainly influenced individual choices – how do your students think this set of events influenced Alcott’s character choices?

Read through this timeline with your students, and reinforce the idea that although they may just see “dates” and “events,” that real people lived through these events at these times – and the story they are about to enjoy is born partially out of this historical circumstances and context:

Timeline: Entering the time of Little Women

1830 Christian (Evangelical) revivals – religious gatherings that lasted for days – are prevalent throughout the northern United States. These revivals promoted the idea that women were to serve their husbands, among the overt religious messages.

1833 The American Anti-Slavery Society is organized.

1834 New York Female Reform Society (whose mission was to reform “wayward women” and lead the spiritually poor) was founded; Female workers at the Lowell Mills in Massachusetts stage their first strike.

1847 After an economic depression 1839-1843, several religious and artistic communities form their own utopian communes throughout the northeast and promote ideas of equality and freedom beyond the “expected” ideas of political and religious freedom in the United States.

1848 Seneca Falls (NY) Convention outlines a program for women’s rights.

1850 The first national women’s rights convention is held in Worcester, Massachusetts (roughly 30 miles west of Concord)

1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe (a contemporary writer to Louisa May Alcott) published Uncle Tom’s Cabin, which crystallized abolitionist sentiments against slavery.

1860 Democratic Party splits into northern and southern factions. The Constitutional Union party forms. Abraham Lincoln is elected president over Southern Democratic candidate John C. Breckenridge (among other candidates).

1861 Harriet Jacobs publishes Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. The Lower South secedes from the Union. Fort Sumter is bombarded, Civil War begins. (Did you know? The Civil War began more as a battle to reunify the United States? After the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, and in an attempt to boost the Union Army’s morale, the focus on the Civil War re-shifted its focus to abolishing slavery?)

1862 U.S. paper money is printed for the first time. To help pay for the Civil War, the U.S. Congress establishes the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Port Royal Experiment of returning land to freed black slaves begins.

1863 Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address. Union Army draft riots in New York. Louisa May Alcott publishes Hospital Sketches. Large cities begin to receive free home delivery of mail. New York City draft riots.

1864 Lincoln re-elected. Alexander Graham Bell and his brother develop a "speaking automaton." Quadruplex Telegraph invented by Thomas Edison. Railroads hook on mail cars. General Grant takes control of all Union troops.

1865 Federal troops take over Richmond, VA and General Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox Court House. Lincoln is assassinated. Andrew Johnson succeeds to the presidency and unveils his Reconstruction plan. Louisa May Alcott publishes Moods.

1866 Reconstruction Era begins in the South. The National Labor Union advocates an eight-hour workday. Black Codes developed in the South to rebel against Reconstruction.

1867 The 14th Amendment is passed, whereby "citizen" is defined as "male" – this is the first use of the word "male" in the Constitution.

1868 Little Women is published. The New England Woman Suffrage Association is formed after women are denied the right to be included as voters in the 15th Amendment.

<https://fourseasonstheatre.com/wp-content/uploads/OfficialBroadwayStudyGuide.pdf>

Exploring the Themes

HOPE

Jo has just asked for comments on her story from Professor Bhaer. He tells her she could do “better.” This upsets Jo, and she offers the following song called “Better”:

“BETTER?
BETTER THAN WHAT?
BETTER THAN THIS DAZZLING PLOT?
BETTER?
THIS STORY WILL BE MY 'KING LEAR'.
EACH PHRASE IS BETTER.
BETTER THAN HIM.
BETTER!
EVEN MY SMALLEST WHIM IS BETTER!
HOW CAN HE MISS WHAT’S SO CLEAR?
HOW CAN I DO BETTER THAN WHAT’S ALREADY HERE?
HOW CAN WHAT HE SAID TO ME BE TRUE?
IF I DON’T SUCCEED, WHAT WILL I DO?
TURN AROUND, GO BACK TO CONCORD?
LEAVE NEW YORK BEHIND UNCONQUERED? NO!
HOW DARE HE MAKE ME DOUBT THE WAY I FEEL?
DOUBT THAT EACH THRILLING PAGE IS WHO I AM?
AREN’T THESE WORDS ALIVE WITH PASSION,VIVID AS MY ATTIC WHERE IT ALL BEGAN?”

Discussion Question

This song is sung after Jo has enthusiastically worked on a story. She is enamored with her story – she worked hard on it and she likes it! Then, she is told she can do “better.” Has something similar ever happened to you? What have you done that you liked? What kind(s) of reactions did you receive? Would you give up if someone didn’t like what you produced? Why doesn’t Jo?

SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

Remind students of the social expectations for women of the period. The following lyrics to “Could You,” between proper Aunt March and Jo reflect many of the sentiments of the day – the way a woman should act, what a woman should expect out of life, and more specifically, the way Jo should act.

AUNT MARCH:

YOU COULD NEVER BEND YOUR WILL.

YOU COULD NEVER FOLLOW THROUGH.

YOU COULD NEVER BITE YOUR TONGUE,THOUGH YOUR TONGUE MAY SPLIT IN TWO.

IF YOU WANT TO LIVE YOUR DREAMS,THESE ARE THINGS YOU HAVE TO DO.

HOW COULD YOU CHANGE? YOU CAN'T! NOT YOU.

COULD YOU PRACTICE SELF-CONTROL?

COULD YOU POSSIBLY BE SHY?

COULD YOU WEAR A CORSET TIGHTIN THE HEAT OF MID-JULY?

THESE ARE RULES YOU MUST OBEY,EVERY ONE WHICH YOU DEFY.

YOU'LL NEVER CHANGE.YOU WON'T! THAT'S WHY!

YET SOMEWHERE DEEP WITHIN MY HEART I DO BELIEVE YOU COULD CAPTIVATE THE WORLD.

IF YOU COULD CHANGE THERE IS SO MUCH YOU COULD ACHIEVE.IN TIME

YOU COULD SUCCEED AND TRAVEL VERY FAR INDEED.

YOU COULD BE BEGUILING.

JO:

CHARMING? ME?

AUNT MARCH:

SOMEONE WELL-MANNERED,A MODEL OF GRACE.

LEARN THE ART OF SMILING.

JO:

THAT COULD BE HARD.

AUNT MARCH:

IT ISN'T VERY HARD

FOR SOMEONE FULL OF DREAMS LIKE YOU.

IF YOU WORK YOU'LL FIND THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN'T DO."

Discussion Question

In this first part of the song "Could You," what are some of Aunt March's complaints about Jo? How does Jo react? In saying that there's "nothing [Jo] can't do," is she saying she supports Jo's dreams of being an independent writer? If not, what does she want Jo to become? Why? Has anyone ever asked you to behave differently in exchange for something you want? How did you react?

ACHIEVEMENT

The songs we have learned so far focus on working on your dream –there are many ways to do this. Simply hope it will happen, work toward your dream, or become someone you aren't in order to fulfill what you want. This final song is Jo's reflection on an unexpected interruption to achieving her dreams: Laurie has just proposed, and she has rejected him. She never gives up on herself, however:

"I THOUGHT HOME WAS ALL I'D EVER WANT.
MY ATTIC ALL I'D EVER NEED.
NOW NOTHING FEELS THE WAY IT WAS BEFORE
AND I DON'T KNOW HOW TO PROCEED.
YET DEEP WITHIN ME SOMETHING FLICKERS LIKE A FIRE
AND MAKES ME CERTAIN: I'LL NEVER GIVE UP AND NEVER TIRE.
I DO BELIEVE IN ALL THAT I DESIRE
AND MOST OF ALL I YEARN TO BE ASTONISHING.
THERE'S A LIFE THAT I AM MEANT TO LEAD, ALIVE LIKE NOTHING I HAVE KNOWN.
I CAN FEEL IT AND IT'S FAR FROM HERE.
I'VE GOT TO FIND IT ON MY OWN.
EVEN NOW I FEEL IT'S HEAT UPON MY SKIN:
A LIFE OF PASSION THAT PULLS ME FROM WITHIN.
A LIFE THAT I AM ACHING TO BEGIN.
I'VE GOT TO KNOW IF I CAN BE ASTONISHING. ASTONISHING.
I'LL FIND MY WAY. I'LL FIND IT FAR AWAY
. I'LL FIND IT IN THE UNEXPECTED AND UNKNOWN.
I'LL FIND MY LIFE IN MY OWN WAY - TODAY.
HERE I GO AND THERE'S NO TURNING BACK.
MY GREAT ADVENTURE HAS BEGUN.
I MAY BE SMALL BUT I'VE GOT GIANT PLANS TO SHINE AS BRIGHTLY AS THE SUN.
I WILL BLAZE UNTIL I FIND MY TIME AND PLACE,
I WILL BE FEARLESS, SURRENDERING MODESTY AND GRACE.
I WILL NOT DISAPPEAR WITHOUT A TRACE.
I'LL SHOUT AND START A RIOT, BE ANYTHING BUT QUIET.
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, I'LL BE ASTONISHING, ASTONISHING, ASTONISHING AT LAST.

Discussion Question:

How does Jo think she'll achieve her dreams? By conforming to what Aunt March wants? Laurie? Why do you think she's changed her mind? How is she so hopeful? How do you think she remains so positive? Think about a time that you kept a positive attitude during a difficult time – what did you achieve because of your positive outlook?

Written Reflection

How does the history in which the story was written effect it? Ask students to reflect on how their lives would be different if they had no television, radio, music, and so on. How would they spend their time?

Activity: Role playing

Think about the time period the musical is set in. Have your students partner off. One person should embody the mentality of Aunt March, the other should embody Jo. Have them discuss Jo's dream – however, the dream can be anything the student role-playing as Jo can be – the dream needn't be about writing. For example, the student opposite "Aunt March" can dream of becoming a doctor, actor, lawyer, and so on. The "Aunt March" character may find this objectionable for many reasons: in the 1860s, the world simply didn't need an over-abundance of rock stars, or it was improper for someone to pursue a certain line of work when it was, in fact, more important to be proper. Have your students role play for 5-7 minutes, and walk around the room to make sure they are developing the role play properly.

<http://www.pcpa.org/pdf/littlewomenstudyguide.pdf>

Discussion Topics

For Grades 1–6

- Ask students to imagine how they would feel if they were used to getting presents on holidays or other special days, and then were told that they would not get anything this year. Would they be disappointed? What if they were told they would have one dollar to spend any way they wanted. Would they use it for themselves or for a gift for someone else? What if the other part of the special day was to include an extra special meal? How would they feel about giving their part of the food away to a stranger? Would they want to do it? Would it be hard?
- Does the story end the way you expected? How? Why?
- What are some themes in the story? How do they relate to the plot and characters?
- Do you find the characters likable? Are the characters persons you would want to meet?
- What are the conflicts in *Little Women*? What types of conflict (physical, moral, intellectual, or emotional) did you notice in the play?

For Grades 6–12

- What are some symbols in *Little Women*? How do they relate to the plot and characters?
- Why is the novel usually considered a work of feminist literature?
- What is the role of women in the text? How are mothers represented? What about single/independent women? What is Alcott telling us about how women function in this society? Does *Little Women* accept and/or challenge gender stereotypes? How?
- How do these differing versions of femininity compare to one another? Is there one version that Alcott seems to favor? Look at Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy, Marmee, and Aunt March.
- Remember that this novel was originally published as a children's novel. Is *Little Women* really a children's book? What aspects of it seem directed at or appropriate for a child audience? What aspects of it might appeal more to an adult audience?
- Is the March family realistic? What aspects of their life seem too good to be true? What trials do they face that seem familiar to you?
- Is Jo March still an appealing heroine for twenty-first-century audience? Do you think her problems relate to the experiences of girls today? Do you find aspects of it unrealistic or frustrating?
- How important is the setting to this story? Could the same story take place in nineteenth-century England, or is there something particularly American about it? Could the same story take place in a different century?

Activities

Activity: Performance

Ask the students to brainstorm these themes of Little Women:

- Social Expectations
- Hope
- Women's Rights
- Achieving your dreams or Deferring Your Dreams
- The role of men in society, the role of women in society
- Gender Stereotypes
- Family or Sibling Rivalry
- Love

Ask the students to build a thematic performance devised of song, poetry, spoken word, short scenes to communicate the chosen theme. The devised piece should be 5—7 minutes in length.

Activity: Create a Melodrama

Melodrama was a style or genre of acting in the 19th and early 20th century. The acting style was quite exaggerated, and plays contained archetypes or which their character was based upon. Music accompanied the scenes to highlight the emotional aspect of the scene. This style is still used today in blockbuster films and soap operas. Jo's stories are very melodramatic, indicative of the plays of the time period. There are many examples of the melodramatic acting style in this production. The best melodramatic characters are vivid, larger-than-life and visceral.

Task: Student's devise a simple melodramatic plot: character, setting, conflict, raising of the stakes, conclusion. The style of acting should be large and dramatic. Movements are grandiose and spectacular. Students should have fun with costumes and props. Scenes can be accompanied by instrumental music (or music without words) to help tell the story.

Visit this link from the Kennedy Center for a terrific Melodrama lesson:

https://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/lessons/grade-9-12/Acting_up_a_Melodrama

Activity: Letter Writing

Students are to pretend they are one of the characters, and write a letter to their father to tell him about their Christmas day. They will need to include at least three details from the storyline. If a boy is uncomfortable with this, then he can pretend to be Laurie writing to the girls' Father telling him about what he has seen them do.

Activity: Improvisation

Break the class up into groups of 3-5 students. Give them 10 minutes to decide what are the main five points or events in the story. The group will create tableau pictures (frozen images

that tell a story) to represent each of their main points. Have one person narrate the caption of each tableau. Like a living picture book. Have each group take turns showing their tableau story, and watch each group in turn as they quickly go from one frame to the next, freezing only ten seconds or so in between each to let the audience see. This exercise quickly lets us all discuss what we think are the main events or plot points in the play are.

Activity: Improvisation/Character work

Have each student pick one of the characters to portray—in their portrayals they should think about these things: how fast does their character move? how does his/her body look? Does he have aches and pains? Where? How does he/she feel emotionally at this age? What is his/her focus? In a central playing space (like the front of your classroom) have the students act out a moment in that character's day (this can last about a minute). Have your class guess whom the student is portraying by what they see him/her do, and the way that he/she completes the action. What are the major clues? Is anything confusing? For an Extra Challenge: While the first student is acting, if another student thinks he/she knows who the character is, have that student join in the action. The challenge is to have student B act as his/her character, and also interact with character A in the context of the scene! You can have as many people enter the scene as you like. At some point, say, —Freeze || ! To stop the action. Ask students to determine which characters are being portrayed. Were the students thinking of the right characters? Talk about what movements, gestures, pace, and stance gave clues to the characters.

<http://www.pcpa.org/pdf/littlewomenstudyguide.pdf>



Behind the Scenes

Many people worked to bring the production to life: the director, stage manager, production manager, lighting designer, set designer, costume designer, props, and more!



Take a look at the costume and set renderings created by the designers.



You try it!

Research the clothing worn during the time period and create your own costume renderings.

Take the virtual tour of Orchard House and look at images of homes from the time period.

Create your own set design. You can sketch renderings or create a box model of your set.

Designers create these so that the director can imagine how actors will use the set and how any set changes will occur.

After the Applause

Compare and Contrast

Read the book Little Women and compare the book to the musical.

Different media can portray a story in unique ways. How does the music support the telling of the story? In the book, the author provides descriptions and the thoughts of characters. On the stage, the characters portray the thoughts and feelings in their actions and dialogue. If you are able to also watch a film version, you can compare and contrast that as well. Which version did you find most effective? Which touched your emotions and engaged you the most?

What's Your Story?

Louisa May Alcott based Little Women on people and experiences in her life. If you were to write a story based on your life, what would its title be? Create a book jacket for your story. Include the Title and author, important images and a blurb on the back telling about the story. Write the first chapter!

Walk Where the Characters Walked

Follow the Scavenger Hunt of the sites used to film the movie, historical sites around Boston that will take you back in time.

<http://www.mafilm.org/little-women/>

Adapt it!

The musical is an adaptation of the book Little Women. Choose a favorite book and adapt it into a play or musical. How did you choose what to leave in and what to take out? It is said that in musicals when the feelings become too strong, it is time to sing. What style of music would you use? When would the characters sing in order to tell their story?

Reflect and Review

What are some moments from the play that stood out for you?

Try to describe the concept of the play in a few sentences. What ideas do you think the playwright and director are trying to communicate to you?

Who were your favorite characters? Why were you drawn to them?

Write a description of the physical world of the play. What kind of atmosphere did they create? Do the set pieces/ lighting/costumes have any symbolic meaning?

What is your overall opinion of the play? Would you recommend it to others?

Resources

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/little-women> (charts and visuals/ summary/ themes)

<https://fourseasonstheatre.com/wp-content/uploads/OfficialBroadwayStudyGuide.pdf> (original
broadway musical study guide--lots of info--long!)

https://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/lessons/grade-9-12/Acting_up_a_Melodrama

https://issuu.com/theatreworkseducation/docs/little_women_study_guide

<https://louisamayalcott.org/home> (orchard house site)

<https://www.boston.com/culture/entertainment/2019/12/24/little-women-filming-locations-massachusetts> (about filming sites)

<https://www.mtishows.com/little-women>

<http://www.pcpa.org/pdf/littlewomenstudyguide.pdf>