

Little Men



By

Louisa May Alcott

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

Little Men

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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one or two chapters of *Little Men* and is comprised of five different activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include family and friendship, loyalty, personal growth, accepting responsibilities, learning to accept life's difficulties (the loss of a loved one), coming of age, and diversity.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *personification*.
7. Identify *anagrams*
8. Listing compound words
9. Identifying parts of speech
10. Identify/create *similes*
11. Identification of root words

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.
6. Complete a Story Pyramid

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist/antagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Create a friendly letter.

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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Synopsis

With two young sons of her own, and twelve rescued orphan boys filling the unusual school at Plumfield, Jo March - now Mrs Jo Bhaer - couldn't be happier. But the boys have a habit of getting into scrapes, and their mischievous antics call for the warm and affectionate support of the whole March family to help avoid disaster ...
[Summary courtesy of the Publisher]

A synopsis can be found on this website: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Men

Author Biography

Louisa May Alcott

Louisa May Alcott (November 29, 1832 – March 6, 1888) was an American novelist and poet. She is best known as the author of the best seller, *Little Women* and its sequel, *Little Men*. She grew up among many of the well-known intellectuals of the day including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Alcott's family suffered financial difficulties, and while she worked to help support the family from an early age, she also sought an outlet in writing. She began to receive critical success for her writing in the 1860s. Early in her career, she sometimes used the pen name **A. M. Barnard**, under which she wrote novels for young adults. Published in 1868, *Little Women* is set in the Alcott family home, Hillside, in Concord Massachusetts. The novel is loosely based on Alcott's childhood experiences with her three sisters. The novel was very well received and is still a popular today, having been made into movies several times. Alcott was an abolitionist and a feminist and remained unmarried throughout her life. She died in Boston on March 6, 1888.



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Name: _____

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Chapter 1



Before you read the chapter:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. One of the main characters of *Little Men* is Nat, an orphaned twelve-year-old boy who joins about a dozen other young people at Plumfield, a school run by the Bhaer family. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. What do you think makes for an interesting **protagonist**? (One that is difficult to forget.)



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

jovial	indolent	beguile	effervescent	patronize
recumbent	rogue	decorous	reverie	contrivances

1. A once _____ house was now filled with laughter and hijinks.
2. There was a tub and a basin and all sorts of _____ for cleanliness.
3. Tommy Bangs remained _____ upon the sofa while everyone waited upon him.
4. Nat sank into a blissful _____ over a full plate of food.
5. It didn't take long for the felon to show himself to be the _____ that he really was.
6. The bubbly young girl soon revealed a very _____ personality to us all.
7. “Please do not _____ me,” Ralph said. “I wasn't born yesterday.”
8. It wasn't long before the comedian had everyone in a very _____ mood.
9. The young boy attempted to _____ Charlotte with his charm.
10. That lazy boy is the most _____ creature I have ever encountered.

Questions



1. What is the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter One?

2. What was your impression of the activities taking place at Plumfield when Nat arrived? Do you think you would have felt at home there? Why or why not?

3. What was Daisy's impression of living at Plumfield? Why do you think she felt this way?

4. Demi was interested in a book on Iceland.

True or False

5. What was your impression of Mrs. Bhaer? Please support your answer with evidence from the story.

6. What specifically does it mean when the author says that the boys learned that *liberty must not be abused*?

7. Match each character from these chapters with the most accurate description.

a	Nat Blake		1	Mr. Bhaer's nephew.
b	Aunt Jo		2	Little sis.
c	Tommy Bangs		3	Mother Bhaer.
d	Demi Brooke		4	George.
e	Daisy Brooke		5	His eyes exchanged telegrams.
f	Teddy Bhaer		6	John.
g	Stuffy Cole		7	Uncle Laurie.
h	Big Franz		8	Considered Nat his protege.
i	Mr. Bhaer		9	Fiddler.
j	Mr. Laurence		10	Aunt Jo's rogue.

8. Why was Nat so excited to learn that they had a band at Plumfield?

9. Why do you think Nat began to weep after playing the fiddle for everyone around the piano?

10. What physical ailment did Nat bring with him?

11. What did Mrs. Bhaer allow the boys to do for fifteen minutes every Saturday night? Why might this have been a good idea? What did she mean by the boys would *pay the forfeit*?

Language Activities



A. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



a) read the clue in the right-hand column.

b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in the first chapter of *Little Men*.

Word	Anagram	Clue
fears		More secure.
strip		Journeys.
shoes		Used by firefighters.
where		A person who cuts wood.
regard		A teacher's role.
sport		Harbors.
stairs		A stringed instrument.

Now find two additional words from the first chapter which have interesting anagrams to see if you can stump a classmate.

Word	Anagram	Clue

Good to Know ~ An Omnibus or Horsebus.

Nat arrives at Plumfield in an omnibus. Although the omnibus of Nat's time resembled our modern buses in some respects, it was quite a bit different. For one thing it was horse-drawn, as *Little Men* was first published in 1871, long before motorized vehicles were invented. In a typical arrangement, two wooden benches along the sides of the passenger cabin held several passengers facing each other. The driver sat on a separate, front-facing bench, in an elevated position outside the passengers' enclosed cabin.



B. A Quatrain Poem About an Orphan.

The **quatrain** is a popular form of rhymed verse. It is a poem of four lines, is usually light and can be humorous. The following quatrain is the first stanza of a longer poem written by the poet, Monica G. Bain. It is called, **Lost Orphan**.

*Was it something I did?
Was it something I said?
Did you not want a kid?
Is that why you fled?*



Source: <https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/lost-orphan>

Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A – B – A – B**. Other rhyming schemes include: AABB, AAAA, AABA, ABBA, ABBA, and AAAB.

Your task is to write your own quatrain poem. You may choose a rhyming scheme that fits with your own personal creation. The theme should have something to do with the themes established in the first three chapters of our novel.

The Quatrain Poem

Title:

Mr. Laurie (Some Background Info)

Mr. Laurie, short for Theodore Laurence, plays an important role in this novel. When Mrs. Bhaer was growing up, Laurie was her family's wealthy next-door neighbor. Until Jo and her sisters entered his life he was moody, bad-tempered, and often bored. His grandfather, old Mr. Laurence, wanted him to go into the family business and be a merchant, importing expensive goods from India. Laurie, however, wants to be a great composer, or maybe just run away and have adventures while traveling.

When Laurie and Jo meet, they immediately become good friends. Laurie's feelings eventually turn romantic, but Jo insists that she could never fall in love with him because they're too similar – both of them have touchy tempers. Luckily, he's able to transfer his affections to her sister Amy, whose genteel manners make a much better match for his wealth and social position. [Adapted from the *schmoop* website.]

C. Personification is giving human qualities to something that is not human. The following example is taken from Chapter 1: ... *his (Mr. Bhaer's) eyes had exchanged telegrams with his wife's.*

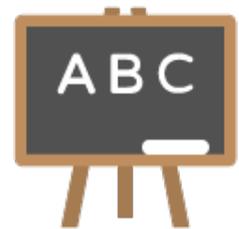


Describe how Mr. Bhaer's eyes are personified in this example.

Create your own example of personification.

As you continue to read through the novel be on the lookout for other examples of this literary device. If you should find one, come back to this question and enter it below.

D. Many authors enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Here's one such example: from Chapter One: *Mrs. Bhaer laid out clean clothes...*

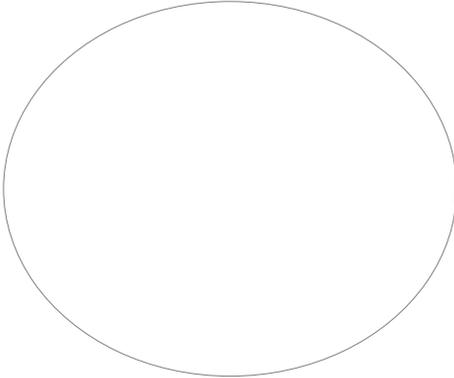


Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

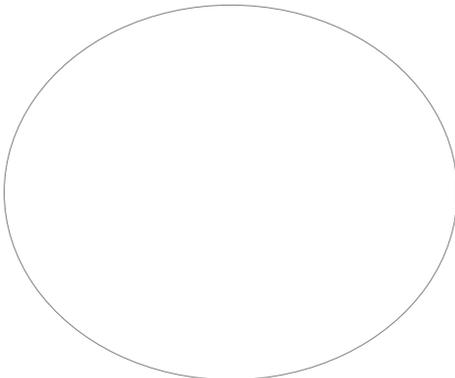
A pillow fight.	
Bath water.	
Your choice.	

E. 5 Ws and an H.

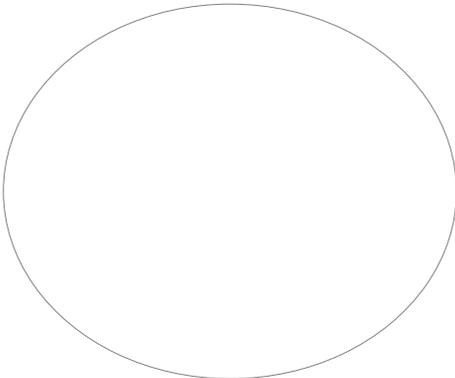
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



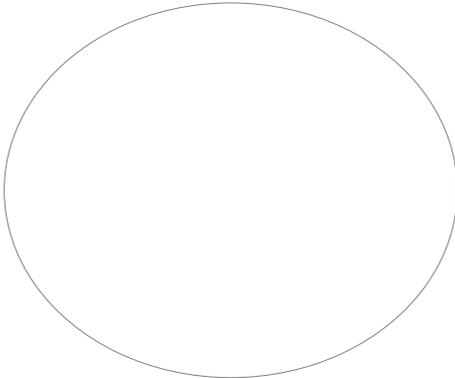
WHO?



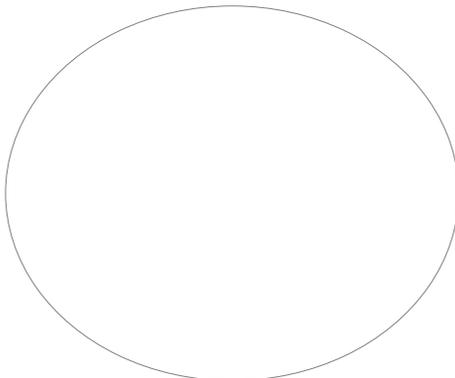
WHAT?



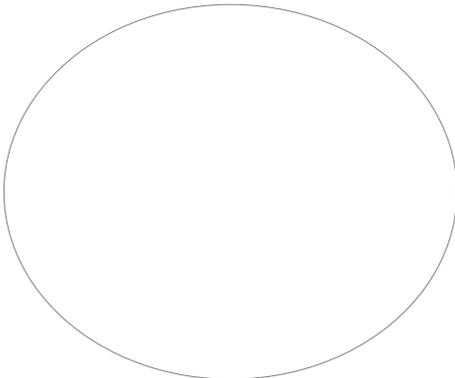
WHEN?



WHERE?



WHY?



HOW?

Extension Activity



Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A story-board can tell the story of only one scene - or the entire novel. Complete the story-board below illustrating the events described in the first chapter of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.



1	2
3	4
5	6