

Little Women



By

Louisa May Alcott

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

Little Women

By *Louisa May Alcott*



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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 Women* and is comprised of five of the following 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 the importance of family and friends, life in the America of the 1860s, courage and sacrifice.

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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 *anagrams*
7. Listing compound words
8. Identifying parts of speech
9. Identify *personification*.
10. 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 the climax of the novel.

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist
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 about your 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

Meg – the sweet-tempered one. Jo – the smart one. Beth – the shy one. Amy – the sassy one. Together they are the March sisters. Their father is away at war and times are difficult, but the bond between the sisters is strong. Through sisterly squabbles, happy times and sad, their four lives follow different paths, and they discover that growing up is sometimes very hard to do . . . [Courtesy of The Publisher]

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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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

Assignment	Grade/Level	Comments

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Name:

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1. Playing Pilgrims.



Before you read the chapters:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. *Little Women* is different than most novels as it features four protagonists, sisters **Meg, Jo, Beth** and **Amy March**. Think back on some novels you have read or movies you have seen. What do you think makes for an especially intriguing protagonist?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

reprove	melodramatic	celestial	slough
despondency	hobgoblin	renounce	asunder

1. Everyone was astonished that the mayor would _____ all her former ambitions.
2. The giant burst his chains _____ and escaped the dungeon.
3. The poor old woman felt a great feeling of _____ come over her.
4. “Save me!” Jo pleaded with a _____ sigh.
5. The teacher was forced to _____ her best student in front of the class.
6. The _____ wonders are beyond comprehension.
7. Before John knew it he was caught in a miry _____ far from civilization.
8. The children were afraid they might be visited by a _____ when the lights went out.

Questions



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

2. Investigate: Although we are not told the year in which the story takes place we do know that Mr. March has joined the army to fight in the American Civil War. What were the years in which the war was fought?

--

3. Not many novels have four protagonists as does **Little Women**. To help keep the four sisters (Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy) straight match each with the following descriptions.

	Character	Description
a)		A tomboy
b)		The pet of the family
c)		The eldest
d)		Not gifted with dramatic power
e)		Fifteen years old
f)		“Little Tranquility”
g)		The youngest
h)		Very pretty, plump and fair with large eyes

4. Who is your favorite sister so far in the story? Why did you choose this character?

5. What idea did Beth come up with regarding how to spend their money for Christmas?

6. What clue is there in the first chapter which might indicate that the March family is not as poor as they let on?

7. Investigate: The famous book by John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is mentioned frequently in this novel. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet research additional information about this novel and record three important facts below.

1.	
2.	
3.	

8. Considering that the novel takes place about 150 years ago, how different was life for the March family than families living today? How was it pretty much the same?

Different	
Same	

9. What was Mr. March's role in the army? Why did he choose this occupation?

Language Activities



A. Cliffhanger

Chapter One contains an important literary device called a **cliffhanger**. A cliffhanger usually occurs at the end of a chapter when the author leaves the reader in suspense, but cliffhangers do not always occur there. Near the end of Chapter One Mrs. March tells her daughters, *Look under your pillows. Christmas morning, and you will find your guide book.* How is this an example of a cliffhanger? Why do you think cliffhangers are a popular literary device with so many novelists?



B. A simile is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. An example from Chapter One is, *Meg had a voice like a flute...* In this example, what is Meg's voice being compared to? Is this meant to be a compliment? Why or why not?

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

a) the northern lights

b) a train's whistle

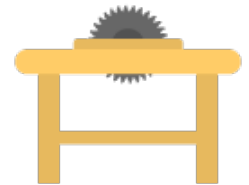
C. Personification is giving human qualities to something that is not human. The following is an example from Chapter One: ... *and Jo wandered through the airs at her own sweet will ...*

Describe how this is an example of personification.

Create your own example of personification.

D. 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 Women*.

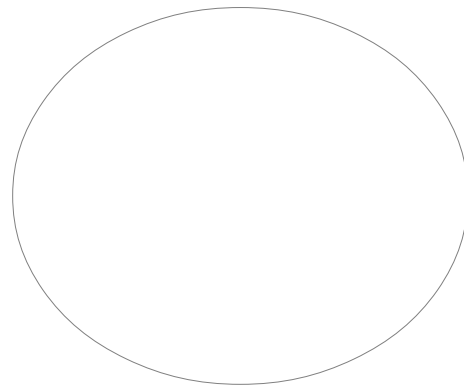
Word	Anagram	Clue
bread		Removed clothing.
blame		Wander.
treat		Potato.
bosom		The sound of cannons.
march		Attractiveness; glamour.
cellar		Remember.
seams		Elevated areas of land with flat tops.

E. 5 Ws and an H.

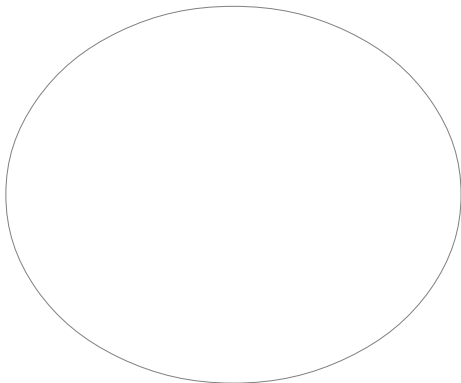
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



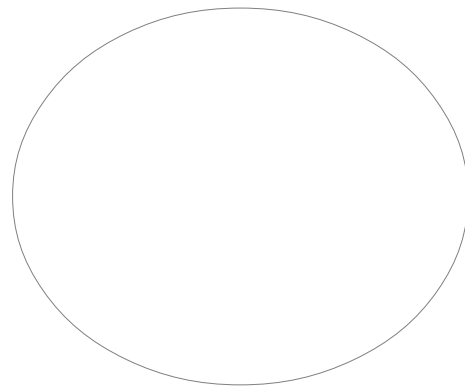
WHO?



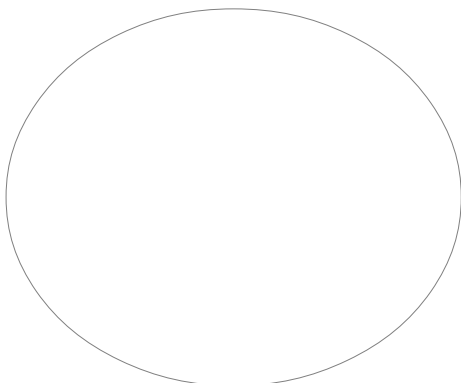
WHAT?



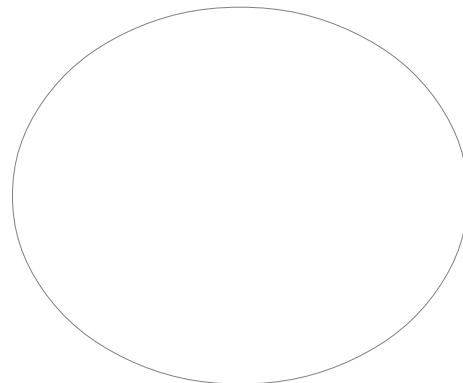
WHEN?



WHERE?



WHY?



HOW?

F. Quintet

Unlike **quintuplet** (a set of five children born to the same mother at one birth), a **quintet** is a five-line verse that tells a story. The quintet has a syllable pattern and has the wonderful ability of bringing a visual image to life for the reader.

Here is the structure of the quintet:

A Creative Title

Line 1 - tells **when** ~ and has 3 syllables

Line 2 - tells **where** ~ and has 5 syllables

Line 3 - tells **what** ~ and has 7 syllables

Line 4 - describes **activity** ~ and has 9 syllables

Line 5 - contains a relevant **thought** ~ and has 3 syllables



An Example!

Here is an example of a Quintet take from the poem, *Jack and Jill*.

Jack and Jill

*Dinner time,
Up a hill they went,
To fetch a pail of water,
Then Jack and Jill tumbled down the hill,
Poor old Jack.*

Now try your hand at writing a quintet which contains some of the important details from this section of the novel.

Extension Activity



A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words



Use the three boxes to describe and illustrate the beginning, middle and end of the first chapter.

Beginning Picture:	Beginning:
Middle Picture:	Middle:
Concluding Picture:	Concluding: