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How to Use This Study Guide

1. Define the words from the Vocabulary section using a dictionary. This will improve your understanding and comprehension of the text when you begin reading.
2. Now, read thoroughly and well the chapter from *Little Women*, marking the text in key places according to the method taught in “How to Mark a Book” (Appendix).
3. Return to the Study Guide and answer the Comprehension Questions and Quotations, stopping to discuss, referring back to the text when necessary.
4. Complete the Enrichment activities as time and interest allow.
5. Repeat steps 1-4 for each lesson.

Introduction to the Author

Louisa May Alcott was born on November 29, 1832 in what is now Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Alcott's family moved from her birthplace to Boston soon after she was born. Aside from a short period of time Alcott spent in Washington, D.C., as a nurse, she spent the remainder of her life in New England. Alcott published more than twenty children's books in her lifetime, the most popular of which are *Little Women* and its sequels, *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*.

Little Women, published in 1868, was originally only Part I of the book that belongs with this study guide. The second part, entitled *Good Wives* in the U.K. and *Little Women Volume II* in the U.S., was published in 1869.

Alcott used her own life as a model for the characters in *Little Women*. She grew up in New England with her parents and three sisters: Anna Bronson, the eldest sister, Elizabeth Dewall, the second youngest, and Abigail May, the youngest. Their father, Amos Bronson Alcott, was a writer, philosopher, reformer, and teacher. He taught at Temple School in Boston, and spoke out against slavery during the Civil War.

Louisa May Alcott modeled Jo after herself. She described herself as boyish and often felt jealous of her youngest sister, Abigail, but was very close to Elizabeth. Elizabeth, affectionately known as Lizzie, died in 1858, and that same year her older sister, Anna, married a man named John Pratt. Louisa felt that this year of her life was a turning point, and somewhat dissolved the close relationship the sisters once had.

While spending time in Europe, Alcott met a man named Ladislav "Laddie" Wisniewski, whom she grew very close to and later modeled Laurie after.

Louisa May Alcott died on March 6, 1888, two days after her father. She is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, New Hampshire.

Note: For this study guide, we will be using the Sterling edition of *Little Women* (ISBN 978-1-4027-1458-0).

Vocabulary

1. If you mean **libel** I'd say so, and not talk (p. 5)
a false statement about someone that causes a bad opinion
2. you'll grow up an **affected** little goose if you don't take care (p. 6)
faking personality traits in order to impress others
3. I think it was so splendid in father to go as a **chaplain** (p. 10)
a priest or pastor who performs services for those in the military
4. This cave was made with a **clothes-horse** for a roof (p. 19)
a frame for drying clothes
5. A stout little **retainer** came in with chains, and led them away (p. 21)
a loyal servant of a noble person
6. in a spasm of **rapture** he tears off his chains (p. 22)
overwhelming happiness/love to an extreme extent
7. cried Meg, at the foot of the **garret** stairs (p. 25)
the top floor or attic, usually unfinished
8. here she loved to retire with half a dozen **russets** and a nice book (p. 25)
sweet apples with rough, reddish-brownish skin
9. Oh dear! what a **blunderbuss** I am! (p. 33)
someone who is clumsy, lacking subtlety or precision
10. as Jo bound up her foot with **arnica** (p. 35)
a dried, yellow flower head used medicinally for bruises and sprains

Quotations

1. *"We can't do much, but we can make our little sacrifices, and ought to do it gladly. But I am afraid I don't;"* (p. 4)
Speaker: Meg March To: Jo, Amy, and Beth
Situation: The girls are all sad that there will be no presents that Christmas because they are sacrificing for the war.
2. *"I'm the man of the family now papa is away, and I shall provide the slippers, for he told me to take special care of mother while he was gone."* (p. 7)
Speaker: Jo March To: Meg, Amy, and Beth
About what? Jo wants to spend her dollar getting new slippers for her mother.
Who is "he"? Mr. March

3. "... remind them that while we wait we may all work, so that these hard days need not be wasted." (p. 11)

Speaker: Mr. March, in a letter To: Mrs. March and the four girls

Situation: This is in Mr. March's letter to his family, when he is encouraging them during
difficult times to continue working hard and growing their character.

Comprehension Questions

1. What are the ages of the four March girls? What kind of work is each person in their family assigned?
Meg is 16, Jo is 15, Beth is 13, and Amy is 12. The March family is poor, and their mother
works while their father is off at war. Each of the four girls also has some sort of assigned
work. Meg teaches young children, Jo watches over an elderly lady, Beth does housework,
and Amy is in school.
2. Why do Amy and Jo fight? Compare their personalities.
Amy reproaches Jo for using slang words. Jo immediately begins acting even more boyish
to aggravate Amy. They have such opposite personalities that their opinion of how a person
should act causes conflict between them, and their actions get on each others' nerves. Jo wants
to be wild and boyish, while Amy is very concerned with what is proper.
3. What do the girls decide to do with their Christmas money? Why do they do this?
The girls decide to spend their Christmas money getting nice things for their mother. Meg says
she will get their mother a nice pair of gloves, Jo says she will buy their mother army shoes,
Beth says she will buy handkerchiefs, and Amy says she will get her a little bottle of cologne.
They decide to do this because they realize that their mother's slippers are worn-out, and they
want to take care of her the way she takes care of them.
4. Where is Mr. March, and what does his letter say? What does it remind the girls to do?
Mr. March is serving in the Civil War as a chaplain. The letter says that Mr. March loves and
misses his girls, and that he is praying for them every day. It also reminds the girls to continue
to work diligently while he is away, so that when he returns, he will be even prouder and
fonder of them than he is now.
5. What book is referenced at the end of Chapter 1? What are the burdens of each of the girls?
The Pilgrim's Progress. Meg's burden is that she is too fond of her looks (p. 11) and hates to
work. Jo's burden is that she is too rough and wild and often wishes she were down South
instead of doing her duty at home. Beth's burden is that she dislikes housework and is afraid of
people. Amy's burden is that she is selfish.

6. What does Jo do that upsets Beth? How does Meg handle the situation? How does this reflect what we know of them so far?

Jo says that it is funny that Beth put "Mother" on the handkerchiefs instead of their mother's initials, which causes Beth to feel "troubled." Meg immediately tells Beth that it was a very clever thing to do, since Mrs. March's initials are the same as Meg's, and frowns at Jo. Jo has a quick temper, which causes her to say things before she thinks about how they will affect others. Meg is acting according to her motherly manner, caring for and lecturing her siblings as necessary.

7. What did Amy run out to do early in the morning? Why is she satisfied once she has done it?

Amy ran out to exchange the cheap bottle of cologne that she had bought for their mother for the larger, more expensive one, because she wanted to be more selfless. She is happy once she has done it because hers *"is the handsomest now"* (p. 16).

8. Who is the Laurence boy? Choose one quote from the end of Chapter 2 that describes him.

The Laurence boy is Mr. Laurence's grandson who lives with him. Jo says, *"He's a capital fellow, and I wish we could get acquainted. He looks as if he'd like to know us; but he's bashful, and Meg is so prim she won't let me speak to him when we pass"* (p. 24).

9. Compare and contrast the state of Jo and Meg's clothing. How does this reflect their personalities?

Jo's clothing is in a state of poor disrepair. Her dress has a large scorch-mark in the back and her gloves are stained with lemonade. Meg's wardrobe is more refined; she talks of getting a new ribbon for her hair and wearing her new slippers, as well as borrowing a pin from their mother. Jo is less responsible and more clumsy than Meg, albeit more adventurous, and her clothes reflect that. Meg's clothes are well cared-for and look proper because she is "prim" and is more concerned with the way others see her.

10. Describe Laurie. How does he act towards Jo?

Laurie's *"black eyes shone with fun"* (p. 30). He seems to be a mischievous yet very gentlemanly and kind young man, and is very nice to Jo. When he asks her to dance, he offers a sheltered place so that she won't be embarrassed, and when she spills the coffee she wanted to take to Meg, he offers to bring some for both her and Meg. When he discovers Meg's sprained ankle and that Jo has asked for a carriage, he offers them a ride in his carriage. He is *"very polite for a boy, and altogether jolly"* (p. 31).

Enrichment

1. On page 5, Beth says, "You said the other day you thought we were a deal happier than the King children, for they were fighting and fretting all the time, in spite of their money." Do you think that people are happier when they are not worried about their money? What positive and negative effects do you think wealth can have on children? How can the negative effects be prevented?

Answers will vary.

2. Write descriptions of each of the March girls from their mother's perspective. Be sure to describe their personalities as we have learned from these first few chapters.

Mrs. March sees Meg as being very maternal but still young and naive in many ways. She sees Jo as being very adventurous, while Beth is soft-spoken and mild and considers nothing to be a burden—even though she does have burdens. Mrs. March knows Amy is still very young and must be reminded not to grow up too fast.

3. *All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts.*

As You Like It, Oxford University Press publisher, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, 2009 edition.

The above passage is taken from Jaques' monologue in *As You Like It*. How does this quote compare to Mrs. March's quote on page 12: "We never are too old for this, my dear, because it is a play we are playing all the time in one way or another." Why does she say this? What do you think this means? What kind of play are you playing in?

She says this as a reminder to Amy that the journey they were play-acting, the Pilgrim's Progress, is a story that represents a journey we all take through difficulties in order to reach something worthwhile. (Other answers will vary.)

4. What is a play, and what does it require? Choose ONE of the following options:
 - 1) On the next page or on a separate sheet of paper, write a play of your own that includes at least 5 characters. Be sure to include stage directions and a brief set design in your description.
 - 2) Draw a picture of the set of the Marches' play, including two characters on stage, and provide a description of the scene they are acting out.

