

# *Little Women*

**Louisa May Alcott**

retold by Jenny Dooley & Virginia Evans



**Express Publishing**

# Contents

<b>Introduction:</b>	.....	4
<b>Chapter 1:</b>	<i>A Merry Christmas</i> .....	8
<b>Chapter 2:</b>	<i>The Laurence Boy</i> .....	14
<b>Chapter 3:</b>	<i>A New Friendship</i> .....	20
<b>Chapter 4:</b>	<i>Amy Gets into Trouble</i> .....	26
<b>Chapter 5:</b>	<i>Meg Becomes a Lady</i> .....	32
<b>Chapter 6:</b>	<i>Secrets</i> .....	37
<b>Chapter 7:</b>	<i>Beth's Kindness</i> .....	44
<b>Chapter 8:</b>	<i>Mrs. March Returns</i> .....	48
<b>Chapter 9:</b>	<i>Love Letters</i> .....	53
<b>Chapter 10:</b>	<i>Meg's Decision</i> .....	58
<b>Activities:</b>	.....	64
<b>Projects:</b>	.....	84
<b>Word List:</b>	.....	88

# Introductory Lesson

## Before Reading

- ① *Work in pairs. Look at the cover of the book and give a detailed description of the five people on it. Answer the following questions: What do they look like? Where are they? What are they doing? How are they feeling?*
- ② *Look at the title of the novel. What do you think a “little woman” is? Why do you think the author chose this title?*
- ③ *In “Little Women”, each of the March sisters tries to work out a character flaw and become a better person. Meg’s major flaw is vanity, Jo’s is a hot temper, Beth’s is shyness and Amy’s is selfishness. In what way can these flaws be a problem for someone?*
- ④ *Read the description of the novel on the back cover of the book and guess the outcome of the story.*

Louisa May Alcott



Louisa May Alcott was born on 29 November 1832, in Germantown, Pennsylvania, USA. Her family was poor. She had one older sister, Anna, and two younger sisters, Elizabeth and May. In 1834 or 1835, the Alcott family moved to Boston, where Louisa’s father started a school. Unfortunately, the school did not do well, and the Alcott family had to move several times during Louisa’s childhood. Louisa did not attend school, but she had lessons from her father and from friends of the family.

Because her family was poor, Louisa started working from an early age. She worked as a teacher, a seamstress, a governess and a writer. Her first book, "Flower Fables", was a collection of short stories published in 1854.

In 1860, Louisa began writing for the "Atlantic Monthly" magazine. From 1862 to 1863, she worked as a nurse in the Union Hospital at Georgetown, in Washington, D.C. and wrote several letters home to her family. These letters were collected and published under the title "Hospital Sketches", and were very popular with readers.

However, Louisa only became truly successful as a writer in 1868, when the first part of "Little Women" or "Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy" was published and the world first read about the March sisters. The second part of the story, also known as "Good Wives", soon followed in 1869, and the tale of the March family continued with the publication of "Little Men" in 1871 and "Jo's Boys" in 1886.

Although Louisa suffered from poor health, she continued to write for the rest of her life and produced several more successful novels. She fought against slavery and also worked hard to obtain equal rights for women. Louisa was determined for women to have the right to vote, and she was the first woman to register to vote in Concord, Massachusetts.

Louisa May Alcott died in Boston on 6 March 1888. She was 55 years old.

⑤ Read about Louisa May Alcott and answer the questions.

- 1 When was Louisa May Alcott born?
- 2 How many sisters did Louisa have?
- 3 Who taught Louisa when she was young?
- 4 Why did Louisa start working when she was still very young?
- 5 What was Louisa's first book called?
- 6 What was Louisa's job when she wrote "Hospital Sketches"?
- 7 When was the first part of "Little Women" published?
- 8 How old was Louisa when she died?



Jo

Meg

Beth

Amy

Aunt March

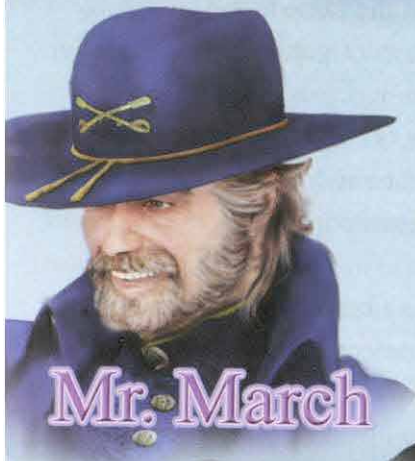
Hannah



Mrs. March



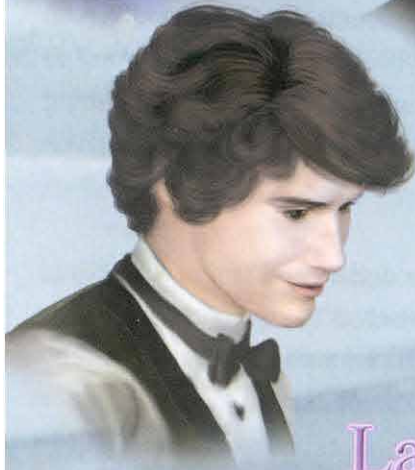
John Brooke



Mr. March



Mr. Laurence



Laurie



## *A Merry Christmas*

The four March sisters, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, were knitting by the fire. Snow was falling outside, and it was nearly Christmas, but the girls were not excited. This year they had no money for Christmas presents.

Jo could not help complaining.

“Christmas won’t be Christmas without presents.”

Amy, the youngest sister, was in the same mood.

“It’s not fair! Some girls have lots of pretty things, and other girls have nothing at all.”

Beth looked on the bright side of things.

“But we’ve got Father and Mother, and each other.”

For a moment, the other girls smiled, but they soon looked sad again. Jo sounded pessimistic.

“We haven’t got Father. We won’t have him for a long time.”

The sisters sat quietly for a moment, thinking of their father, who was far away fighting in the war.

After a while, Meg spoke.

“Mother suggested not having presents this Christmas because it will be a hard winter for everyone. She thinks it is wrong to spend money on pleasurable things when the men are suffering in the war. We can’t do much to help them, but we should think of them, and not of ourselves.”

Jo agreed.

“You’re right, but we do have a dollar each. Perhaps we could each buy something small for ourselves.”

The clock struck six, and Beth put a pair of old slippers by the fire. It was time for Mother to come home.

Jo picked up the slippers.

"These are very old. Mother needs a new pair."

On hearing this, Beth jumped up.

"I'm going to buy her some new slippers with my dollar!"

Amy cried out:

"No, I want to buy them!"

Beth came up with a better idea.

"I know! Let's each buy something for Mother and not buy anything for ourselves."

Jo agreed.

"You're so sweet, Beth. What a wonderful idea!"

The sisters were very happy with their plan, and decided to go shopping the next afternoon.

Mother arrived home in time for supper, with some good news for the girls. A letter had arrived from their father. After they had eaten, they gathered in front of the fire to read it. It was a cheerful, hopeful letter, with little news of the dangers and troubles of the war. Instead, Mr. March wrote of his love for his wife and his daughters.

"*I am so proud of my little women,*" he wrote. When the girls read this, tears came to their eyes.

Amy felt she didn't deserve all this love.

"I am a selfish girl but I will try to be better."

Meg sounded determined.

"We all will. I worry too much about my looks and I hate working, but I will try to change."

Jo made a promise, too.

"I'll try to be a little woman and stop being rough and wild."

Beth said nothing, but dutifully went back to her knitting. Soon the atmosphere was lightened as the sisters sang together with their mother, until it was time for bed.

Christmas arrived a few days later, and when the sisters woke



# Activities

## *A Merry Christmas*

### **Comprehension**

Read or listen to Chapter 1 and write T (TRUE) or F (FALSE).

- 1 The March sisters look forward to Christmas. ....
- 2 Beth does not complain. ....
- 3 Mother thinks the girls should have lots of presents this year. ....
- 4 The girls finally decide to buy a present each for their mother. ....
- 5 The family receives a depressing letter with news of the war. ....
- 6 The girls promise to be nice to their father. ....
- 7 Each girl gets a colored book as a Christmas gift. ....
- 8 The girls offer their breakfast to a poor family. ....
- 9 The March sisters watch a play on Christmas night. ....
- 10 Jo has met the Laurence boy. ....

### **What do you think?**

**A** Discuss the following questions.

- 1 All the characters in Chapter 1 prove to be very compassionate and caring. What are their selfless deeds? Do you believe that kindness is always rewarded?
- 2 Mr March is away, fighting in the war. How do you think this affects his family?
- 3 What commitment do the March sisters make? What does this show about their character?
- 4 Is it common for people today to think and act like the March family? Why (not)?

**B** Find the following excerpts from Chapter 1 and discuss their meanings.

- 1 p. 8: "Christmas won't be Christmas without presents."
- 2 p. 12: "Good angels have come to us!"
- 3 p. 13: "I wish I could send these to Father. I'm afraid he isn't having such a merry Christmas."

### Language Practice

**I** Match the words in box A with their opposites in box B.

A	B
1 proud	a tiny
2 pessimistic	b miserable
3 cheerful	c ashamed
4 huge	d thoughtful
5 selfish	e tasteless
6 delicious	f optimistic

**II** Fill in the gaps with the words in the box. Some of them need to be put in the correct form.

pleasurable    strike    servant  
rehearse    suffer    reward    whisper

- 1 The four sisters ..... a play which they perform on Christmas night.
- 2 Mr Laurence sends the girls flowers to ..... them for their kindness.
- 3 When the clock ..... six, Beth puts Mother's slippers by the fire.
- 4 This Christmas a lot of men ..... in the war.
- 5 Mother thinks it is wrong to spend money on ..... things this year.
- 6 After the performance, Hannah, the ....., invites everyone downstairs for a surprise.
- 7 When Beth looks at the flowers on the table, she ..... a wish for Father.