Little Women

Louisa May Alcott

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Summary

Little Women is the story of the March family. The father is away in the war and the sisters are at home with their mother. They're unhappy because they can't buy Christmas presents. Mr. Laurence sends them a big meal. Meg and Jo go to a party and they meet Mr. Laurence's son, Laurie. They become good friends. The girls have different problems, but everybody helps. Father returns and the family celebrate Christmas again. Everybody's happy.

Chapter 1: The family gets a letter from Father.

Chapter 2: On Christmas Day, the family takes their food to the Hummels. Mr. Laurence sends the girls a big meal.

Chapter 3: Jo and Meg go to a party and she talks with Laurie.

Chapter 4: Jo invites Laurie home and everybody has a good time.

Chapter 5: Amy had a problem at school.

Chapter 6: Amy has an accident and Jo and Laurie help her.

Chapter 7: Jo writes good stories for the local newspaper.

Chapter 8: Father is sick and Jo sells her hair to help.

Chapter 9: Beth becomes very sick. Mother arrives home.

Chapter 10: Father arrives home. Beth is better; everybody's happy.

About the author

Louisa May Alcott was born in Pennsylvania in 1832. She began writing stories at a young age. At age 36, she published *Little Women*, an autobiographical novel. During the Civil War Alcott worked as a nurse. She died in 1888.

The original text

Little Women was published in 1868 and it was the first to give Alcott some reputation as a writer. In it, the author showed her own struggle to gain independence and give her family financial security.

Background and themes

Gender roles: A wife can run the house without the husband at home.

Generosity: The girls wanted to help by giving to people who had less than them.

Friendship: Friends can help in good and hard times.

Poverty: Life is difficult for the poor, who cannot afford many things that other people take for granted.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 **Discuss:** Talk about the book cover. Guide students with these questions.
Is it fact or fiction? How many people can you see? Who are they? Who are the "little women"?

Chapter 1
After reading

2 **Discuss:** Talk about the Marches. Have students draw a family tree. Students include information as they read on.

Chapters 2–3
After reading

3 **Discuss:** Talk about the chapter titles. Have students think of possible alternative title for Chapters 2–3. They can rank the titles, from most to least appropriate.

Chapters 4–5
After reading

4 **Discuss:** Talk about houses. Have students compare the Laurences' and the Marches' houses.

Chapters 6–7
After reading

5 **Role play:** Students write the dialogue between Mr. Brookes and Jo.

Chapters 8–9
After reading

6 **Guess:** Have students predict what is going to happen.

Chapter 10
After reading

7 **Check:** Discuss the title again. Students go back to their predictions on the cover.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word list and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.

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