



**STUDY GUIDE**

*Little Women*

*Adapted from the novel by Louisa May Alcott*

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## About Wild Swan Theater

### **MISSION STATEMENT:**

*Wild Swan Theater is dedicated to producing professional children's theater of the highest artistic quality and to making that theater accessible to low income, minority and disabled children through low ticket prices and innovative outreach programs.*

### **History and Activities:**

Wild Swan Theater was founded in 1980. Since its inception, the company of professional adult actors, dancers, musicians, visual artists, and American Sign Language interpreters has performed for hundreds of thousands of children. As well as many public performances in its home base of Ann Arbor, the company tours regularly to theaters, museums and public libraries as well as offering residencies and workshops at schools and hospitals serving disabled children statewide. This year the company will give 140 performances for an audience of over 50,000 children and their families.

Wild Swan's performance style, which incorporates storytelling and live action with puppets, masks, music and dance, has received critical acclaim as well as an enthusiastic following. The Detroit News has praised the work as "professional children's theater at its very best," and the Flint Museum of Art has described it as "superb theater that enhances life and its joys." Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village has called Wild Swan "one of the finest theaters for families in the nation."

Wild Swan has pioneered a number of audience accessibility measures for disabled individuals that are models in the state and have earned the praise of educators and health specialists across the country. All productions are performed in American Sign Language as well as spoken English with the signing completely integrated into the productions. Thus deaf children and adults have not only complete access to the productions but hearing children are exposed to this beautiful and poetic language. A program for blind individuals includes pre-performance backstage "touch tours". Participants have the opportunity to feel specially constructed props and masks, explore the set, and meet actors and hear the voices their characters will use. Audio-description, a simultaneous description of staging, lights, and costumes, transmitted electronically to participating audience members during pauses in the dialogue, permits audience members who are blind or visually impaired to have access to all the visual elements of the production. As a leader of disabled access in the state, Wild Swan has been a recipient of the Governor's Service Award in 1998 in the Arts in Service category and a grant recipient of Very Special Arts/ Michigan for seven years.

## **About American Sign Language in Wild Swan Theater Productions**

Making Theater Accessible to Everyone  
American Sign Language in the Theater

Wild Swan Theater wants to create theater productions that all audience members can enjoy. There are many things a theater company can do to make attending a play a good experience for people who have disabilities. For example, Towsley Auditorium, where you are coming to see the play, has two special seating sections for people who use wheel chairs. Not only is there lots of room for wheel chairs or other kinds of mobility devices, but there is room for friends and family members to sit together. Wild Swan also offers backstage "touch tours" and "audio-description" for people who are blind.

Wild Swan Theater includes American Sign Language in all its performances that are part of its season of productions at Washtenaw Community College. American Sign Language (ASL) is the language that children and adults who are deaf use to communicate. Wild Swan uses ASL so that people who are deaf will be able to understand and enjoy live theater.

When you see a Wild Swan production, you will notice several things about the signing. You will notice that the people who do the signing, the interpreters, are part of the production and wear costumes just like the rest of the actors. You will also notice that the interpreters are very good actors as well as experts at ASL. Finally, you will notice that the signing is an important part of what you see on the stage.

Sometimes when other theater companies include sign language, the interpreters are placed off to the side of the stage, and they are not part of the production. When people who are deaf come to the play, they have to look one place to see the signers and another place to see the play itself. That usually means that they miss some important parts of the play or of the sign language. Wild Swan decided that it wanted to make sure the people who are deaf never miss anything.

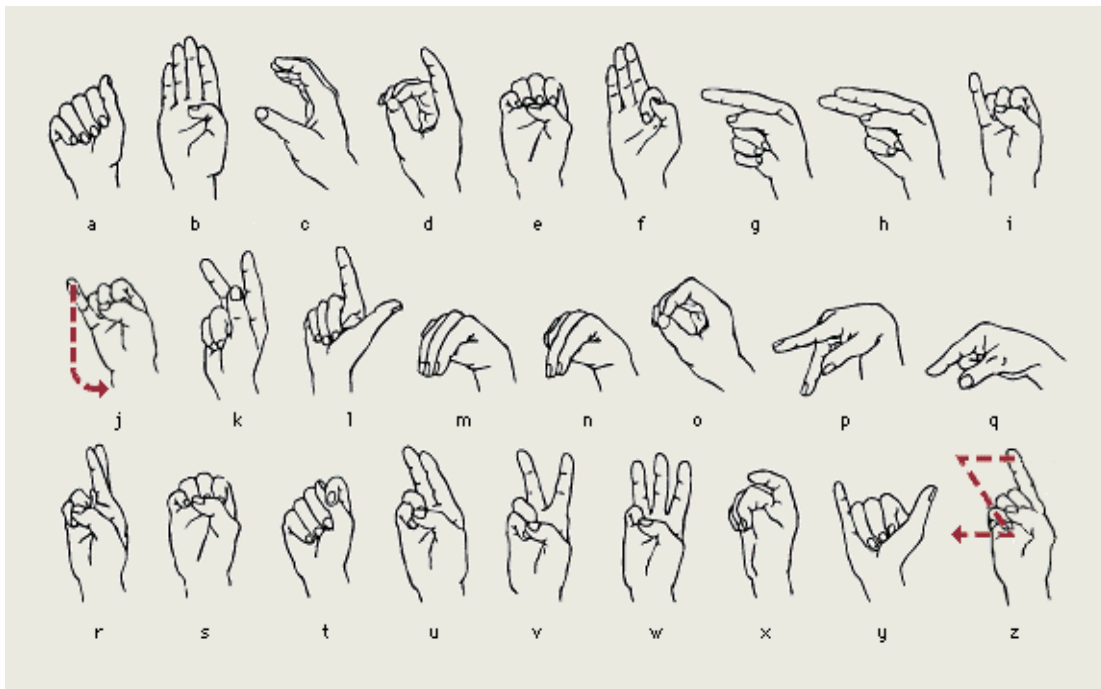
That is why when you come to a Wild Swan production, you will see the signing completely woven into the performance. That way people who are deaf can see what the speaking actors are doing and what the signing actors are doing at the same time. You might even notice that the speaking actors and the signing actors work together. Sometimes a speaking character gets an idea from a signing actor or the signing actors help the speaking actor to make a decision. When you watch a Wild Swan production see if you can pick out some examples of times when the speaking and signing actors work together.

Many hearing people know some sign language. When you attend a Wild Swan production, perhaps you will learn some new signs. That is another reason that Wild Swan uses sign language in its plays. We hope that hearing people will learn a little more about sign language and find out what a beautiful and interesting language it is.

## American Sign Language Alphabet

When you come to see *Little Women* you will notice that American Sign Language Interpreters are part of the play. They are signing the dialogue of the show for audience members who may have difficulty hearing. American Sign Language is a language used by the deaf and hearing impaired community. Using sign language in Wild Swan Theater shows enables more people to enjoy a theatrical production.

Below is the basic sign language alphabet. Can you make the letters of the alphabet using the chart below?



### Classroom Activities:

- Try spelling your name using sign language or try spelling words and phrases.
- Use the ASL alphabet to spell character names and words that are used in the play such as *Little Women*, Jo, Marmee, and Laurie.

## **Novel Synopsis: *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott**

Set in 19th century New England, *Little Women* tells the story of the March family: Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy, and their cheery mother who they lovingly call Marmee. The story begins with the vain Meg, hot tempered Jo, shy Beth, and spoiled Amy mourning the prospect of a dreary Christmas due to the absence of their father, who was off serving as Union chaplain in the Civil War. The family has very little money, and what they do have, they share with their even poorer neighbors, the Hummels.

As the year goes on the girls have many adventures. The girls become friends with their neighbors, Mr. Laurence and his grandson, Laurie. Mr. Laurence grows to know all the sisters well and especially admires Beth. Jo embarks on a writing career and publishes a story in the local newspaper. Amy misbehaves at school and is struck by her teacher as a punishment. Marmee decides to withdraw her from school and have Jo oversee her studies. When Meg and Jo attend the theater, Amy feels left out and angrily burns Jo's latest manuscript. Jo becomes furious with Amy and doesn't forgive her until Amy almost drowns when the girls go ice-skating. In the spring, the girls establish a family newspaper called the Pickwick Club. Laurie becomes a member of the club and presents a new mailbox to the girls to prove his loyalty.

Misfortune occurs when the family receives a telegram saying that Mr. March is sick in a hospital in Washington, D.C. Marmee goes to take care of him and Jo sells her hair to help pay for the trip. While Marmee is away, Beth takes food to the Hummels and soon falls ill from scarlet fever. Near the verge of death, her sisters send for Marmee to return home and have Amy stay at Aunt March's house so she does not catch the disease. Beth recovers, but the disease leaves her permanently weak. Mr. Brooke, Laurie's tutor, falls in love with Meg and asks for her hand in marriage.

The second part of the story is set three years later and the girls are now all grown up. Mr. March is home from the war, and Laurie is almost done with college. Meg marries and moves into a new house with Mr. Brooke. They later have twins. Amy goes to Paris to study art and Jo moves to New York to pursue a career as a writer. Jo meets Professor Bhaer, a poor German instructor who discourages Jo from writing her sensationally styled stories. When Jo returns home, Laurie asks her to marry him but she turns him down and Beth passes away. Time passes again; Amy and Laurie reunite in France, fall in love, and get married. Professor Bhaer and Jo also get married. Jo inherits her old Aunt March's house, Plumfield, which she decides to turn into a boarding school for boys. The story ends with the family happily gathered together.

\*Note the play has been adapted from the original novel written by Louisa May Alcott.

## Background Information on Louisa May Alcott

from <http://www.louisamayalcott.org/louisamaytext.html>

*My book came out; and people began to think that topsy-turvy Louisa would amount to something after all...* -Louisa May Alcott, 1855

Louisa May Alcott was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania on November 29, 1832. She and her three sisters, Anna, Elizabeth and May were educated by their father, philosopher/ teacher, Bronson Alcott and raised on the practical Christianity of their mother, Abigail May.

Louisa spent her childhood in Boston and in Concord, Massachusetts, where her days were enlightened by visits to Ralph Waldo Emerson's library, excursions into nature with Henry David Thoreau and theatricals in the barn at Hillside (now Hawthorne's "Wayside").

Like her character, Jo March in *Little Women*, young Louisa was a tomboy: "No boy could be my friend till I had beaten him in a race," she claimed, "and no girl if she refused to climb trees, leap fences...."

For Louisa, writing was an early passion. She had a rich imagination and often her stories became melodramas that she and her sisters would act out for friends. Louisa preferred to play the "lurid" parts in these plays, "the villains, ghosts, bandits, and disdainful queens."

At age 15, troubled by the poverty that plagued her family, she vowed: "I will do something by and by. Don't care what, teach, sew, act, write, anything to help the family; and I'll be rich and famous and happy before I die, see if I won't!"

Confronting a society that offered little opportunity to women seeking employment, Louisa determined "...I will make a battering-ram of my head and make my way through this rough and tumble world." Whether as a teacher, seamstress, governess, or household servant, for many years Louisa did any work she could find.

Louisa's career as an author began with poetry and short stories that appeared in popular magazines. In 1854, when she was 22, her first book *Flower Fables* was published. A milestone along her literary path was *Hospital Sketches* (1863) based on the letters she had written home from her post in Washington, DC as a nurse during the Civil War.

When Louisa was 35 years old her publisher, Thomas Niles, asked her to write "a book for girls." *Little Women* was written at Orchard House from May to July 1868. The novel is based on Louisa and her sisters' coming of age and is set in Civil War New England. Jo March was the first American juvenile heroine to act from her own individuality; a living, breathing person rather than the idealized stereotype then prevalent in children's fiction.

In all, Louisa published over 30 books and collections of stories. She died on March 6, 1888, only two days after her father, and is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord.

## About the Civil War

It's hard to believe that Americans went to war against one another, but in 1860 the country broke apart and a war took place. Why did this happen?

At the time Americans argued bitterly about slavery. The main debate took place over whether or not slavery should be allowed in new states as they were established throughout the country. Northerners and Southerners disagreed sharply about whether slavery should remain legal or be abolished. The Northern states were mostly industrial. Many people worked in large factories or shops. The South was mainly agricultural. Many people worked on farms and grew cotton, rice, sugarcane, tobacco, and other crops. Slaves were used to help work on these farms and harvest the crops.

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected President. Since he believed that the expansion of slavery should end, many Americans did not want to recognize him as their president. In December of 1860, seven states seceded from the United States and formed Confederate States of America. Its people and soldiers were known as the Confederates. Soon thereafter, four other states joined the Confederates. The North became known as the Union, which was led by President Lincoln, and threatened to use force to keep the southern states from seceding. In response, the Confederate states attacked Fort Sumter in South Carolina and the war began.

From 1861 to 1865, the North and South fought ferociously. Three million soldiers served in the war. Over 620,000 died, making it the deadliest war in American history. The War resulted in a Union victory, the Reconstruction Era, the abolishment of slavery, a nationally strengthened government, and a weakened South. While all these changes united the states allowing them to grow into the country it is today, the lives lost left an enormous impact on every family.

## Union and Confederate States

*Union States:*

California	Iowa	Massachusetts	New Hampshire		
Pennsylvania	Connecticut	Kansas	Michigan	New York	
New Jersey	Rhode Island	Delaware	Kentucky	Minnesota	
Vermont	Illinois	Maine	Missouri	Ohio	West Virginia
Indiana	Maryland	Nevada	Oregon	Wisconsin	

*Confederate States:*

Virginia	North Carolina	South Carolina	Tennessee
Arkansas	Texas	Louisiana	Mississippi
Alabama	Georgia	Florida	

Have the students color in the Union States and the Confederate states on the map below, perhaps doing the Union states in blue and the Confederate states in red.



## Effect of the War on Family Life

Numerous families were divided by the Civil War. Fathers and their young sons were drafted as soldiers into the armies and had to leave their families behind. Many relatives fought on opposite sides and found themselves at odds over slavery. Women and children were left to take care of the households and fight off any soldiers raiding the houses for food and supplies.

### Typical prices of food found at a family market in 1861:

Eggs: **16-18 cents** per dozen

Butter: **16-18 cents** per pound

Milk: **86 cents** per gallon

Cheese: **12-14 cents** per pound

Potatoes: **18-23 cents** per bushel

Sweet Potatoes: **2.00** per bushel

Lard: **12 cents** per pound

Dried Apples: **9 cents** per pound

Dried Peaches: **20 cents** per pound

Codfish: **5-6 cents** per pound

Whitefish: **3.20 cents** for half a barrel

Lake Michigan Trout: **8 cents** per pound

Brown Sugar: **7-9 cents** per pound

White Sugar: **10-14 cents** per pound

Coffee: **12 ½ - 18 cents** per pound

Tea: **50-75 cents** per pound

Molasses: **40 cents** per gallon

Honey: **25 cents** per pound

Cranberries: **12 cents** per quart

Lambs: **2.00-2.35 cents** per 100 pounds

Beef: **2.50-3.00 cents** per 100 pounds

Hams: **12-14 cents** per pound

## **Women's Roles in Society during the Civil War Era**

Women had not yet won their fight for equal rights in the 1860s, and in fact had very few rights. The women in the North and East were making progress, slowly wresting free what was rightfully theirs. The women of the South, including the female slaves and the mistresses they served, lived with the least freedom of all.

In southern society during the Civil War era, women were expected to be simplistic and submissive and were usually valued only as mothers and wives. Even the education of girls and young women was decided on the basis of what would be best for the men who dictated their lives. Proper ladies only engaged in pursuits considered to be feminine and appropriate and always avoided any interest or behavior that could render them unmarriageable.

Society expected women to remain in the private sphere of family and hearth, but many women stepped down off their pedestals when the war started and discovered their competency at performing their husbands tasks; there seemed to be no limits to what chore they would turn to next to ensure the upkeep of the lands and the survival of their families.

### **Employment**

At this time in history, women had very few employment options open to them; they could be seamstresses, cooks, laundresses, or hat-makers. With the war came a shortage of manpower and suddenly it was acceptable for women to step in and do men's work. As more men went to war, women took over male professions, including teaching school and farming.

A popular song of the era urged, "Just take your gun and go, for Ruth can drive the oxen, John, and I can use the hoe," and indeed they did. The invention of horse-drawn farm equipment made it easier for women and children in the North to work family farms with little or no help from men. In the South, most slaves still worked the fields without benefit of horse-drawn equipment. When the slaves left, their owner's wife and children worked the fields and did the chores with hand tools.

### **Charity**

In addition to daily household chores, providing income for their families, and sewing and knitting for the troops, women also held fundraisers, collecting money to provide their troops with basic necessities. These funds and a few extra rows in the family gardens produced over one thousand barrels of food a week.

Louisa May Alcott wrote in her diary in October, 1861, "sewing and knitting for 'our boys' all the time. It seems as if a few energetic women could carry on the war better than the men do it so far."

After the Civil War, many Southern women did not step back into their former restrictive ways of life. For some it was no longer an option, for others it was a choice. The Civil War was a milestone in women's fight for liberty, and for the nation.

*ADAPTED FROM "The Role of Women During the American Civil War" by Maren Sage*  
<<http://www.helium.com/items/1529595-southern-women-of-the-civil-war>>

## **Schooling in America during the Civil War**

During this time in American history, wealthier children attended private academies, which were small, with only about three or four pupils in each grade. One teacher taught several grades in just one room, and girls and boys were taught separately and attended different academies. Some of the subjects the girls learned were reading, spelling, history, arithmetic, geography and penmanship or handwriting. Sometimes they learned manners and dancing, French, drawing, and how to walk and act like a young lady.

Poorer families sent their children to free public schools, where boys and girls attended the same schools. There was a class for each grade level with about 20 to 30 students in each class. Most of the subjects were the same, but the teachers were harder on the children in public schools. Much of the schoolwork in the public schools was reading, memorizing, and reciting. If the students did something wrong, the teachers would hit them with paddles or rulers, or box their ears. Not all poor kids got to go to the free public schools. Many of them had to work to help their families and did not go to school at all. They worked in factories, farms and coalmines.

In those days, very few women went to college. Even the wealthy girls didn't all get to go to college. Young ladies were expected to marry a respectable gentleman and start families of their own.

*ADAPTED FROM: "American Elementary Schools"*  
<<http://library.thinkquest.org/J002606/early1900s.html>>

### **Activity**

Ask your grandparents about women working when they were children. What careers did women have? Did they go to school? Did they attend college? What did people think about the roles of women?

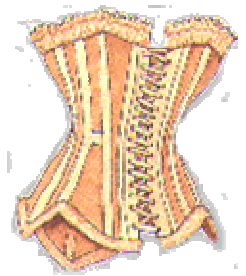
## Women's Clothing of the 1800s

**Pantalettes:** The undermost garment a lady would wear. Unlike the plain knee length drawers, the pantalette was longer in its leg length reaching passed the knee. It was decorated with tucks and flounces. They were made from silk or linen.



**Chemise:** A woman's loose one piece undergarment that reached below the knees. It had a drawstring on the neckline and a button on the drawers. The chemise was calf-length and often had embroidered hems.

**Corset:** A stiffened undergarment worn for support or to give shape to the waist and hips. She would put the corset on over the chemise. The corset itself had many designs. It was designed to give shape to the hips and waist, and to lift the bust area with support. It may have been a simple design with a little embroidery and lace. It tied in the back.



**Petticoat:** A skirt worn under a dress. The number of petticoats worn was often determined by the temperature and the season. If it was summer a woman might only wear one. But in the bitter cold temperatures of winter many women wore five or six petticoats under their dresses.

**Hoop Skirt:** After having put on the chemise, corset, and petticoat the 19th century lady would put on the hoop skirt. Some were made with thin steel wire and other materials. Over the hoop she would wear her finest petticoat with pretty lace and embroidery on the hem. Finally, after layering herself with the undergarments she would then put on the dress. And last but not least, a lady always wore her gloves and her bonnet. The diagram below shows the increasing relative skirt length with the increasing of age. This was thought to be proper for young girls as they approached womanhood. Most children were allowed to wear clothing that came just below the knee. But as they progressed in age so did the length of their clothes.



*“19<sup>th</sup> Century Fashion”*

<http://www.angelfire.com/ar3/townevictorian/victorianfashion.html>

## About New England

New England is a region of the United States. It is located at the northeastern corner of the country, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, Canada, and New York state. Today, New England consists of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.

New England was one of the first pilgrim settlements in North America, starting with pilgrims from England as early as 1620. During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the New England colonies were among the first to discuss independence from the British Crown and took part in the American Revolution. Later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the New Englanders played a large role in the movement to abolish slavery in the United States. New England was the home to many of the soldiers who helped save the Union.

New England has distinguished itself in many ways from the other regions of the United States. Its citizens produced the first pieces of American literature and it was home to the beginnings of free public education. New England was the most educated region of the country. In politics, New England often supported different movements than the rest of the country. It was the first region to undergo the Industrial Revolution. With many job openings and a shortage of workers, numerous people moved from the country into the cities of New England from 1830 to 1860, making it the most urbanized part of the country. In fact, by 1860, New England was home to 32 of the 100 largest cities in the United States. The invention of stagecoaches and railroad services during the same time period, travel into the cities became much easier. In addition, the Industrial Revolution led to immigration from other countries into New England.

## Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson

*Louisa May Alcott was a neighbor to and a good friend of both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau as they all lived in Concord, Massachusetts. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were leading transcendentalists and worked closely with Alcott's father, Bronson Alcott.*

### The Snow-Storm

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,  
Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields,  
Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air  
Hides hill and woods, the river, and the heaven,  
And veils the farmhouse at the garden's end.  
The sled and traveller stopped, the courier's feet  
Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit  
Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed  
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.  
Come see the north wind's masonry.  
Out of an unseen quarry evermore  
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer  
Curves his white bastions with projected roof  
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.  
Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work  
So fanciful, so savage, nought cares he  
For number or proportion. Mockingly,  
On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths;  
A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;  
Fills up the farmer's lane from wall to wall,  
Maugre the farmer's sighs; and at the gate  
A tapering turret overtops the work.  
And when his hours are numbered, and the world  
Is all his own, retiring, as he were not,  
Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art  
To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone,  
Built in an age, the mad wind's night-work,  
The frolic architecture of the snow.

1835 [1841]

## **Concord Hymn**

*Sung at the Completion of the Concord Monument,  
4 July 1837*

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,  
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,  
Here once the embattled farmers stood,  
And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;  
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;  
And Time the ruined bridge has swept  
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,  
We set to-day a votive stone;  
That memory may their deed redeem,  
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit, that made those heroes dare  
To die, or leave their children free,  
Bid Time and Nature gently spare  
The shaft we raise to them and thee.

## "Thoreau's Flute"

*This poem was written by Louisa May Alcott, who may well have been in love with Thoreau. It appeared in the **Atlantic** in the summer of 1863.*

We sighing said, "Our Pan is dead;  
His pipe hangs mute beside the river;  
Around it wistful sunbeams quiver,  
    But Music's airy voice is fled.  
Spring came to us in guise forlorn;  
    The bluebird chants a requiem;  
The willow-blossom waits for him;--  
    The Genius of the wood is gone.

Then from the flute, untouched by hands,  
There came a low, harmonious breath:  
For such as he there is no death;--  
His life the eternal life commands;  
Above man's aims his nature rose.  
    The wisdom of a just content  
    Made one small spot a continent,  
    And turned to poetry life's prose.

Haunting the hills, the stream, the wild,  
Swallow and aster, lake and pine,  
    To him grew human or divine,--  
Fit mates for this large-hearted child.  
Such homage Nature ne'er forgets,  
    And yearly on the coverlid  
    'Neath which her darling lieth hid  
    Will write his name in violets.

To him no vain regrets belong  
Whose soul, that finer instrument,  
Gave to the world no poor lament,  
But wood-notes ever sweet and strong.  
    O lonely friend! He still will be  
A potent presence, though unseen,--  
    Steadfast, sagacious, and serene;  
    Seek not for him--he is with thee.

## Song Appearing in *Little Women*

In the novel, *Little Women*, Beth plays “Pat-a-Pan” while the family sings to celebrate the Christmas season. The piano brought many families together during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was at the center of many families’ homes and brought neighbors and friends together to celebrate holidays.

Pat-a-Pan is a joyous Christmas song that was written in 1700 but is still sung today!

### PAT-A-PAN

Words and Tune by Bernard de la Monnoye (1700)  
Translation by Percy Dearmer, altered by M. Ryan Taylor  
Arranged by M. Ryan Taylor

Quickly

Wil - lie, take your lit - tle drum, With your whist - le,  
Thus the men of old - en days Loved the King of  
God and man are now be - come More at one than

Ro - bin, come. When we hear the fife and drum, Tu-re-lu-re-  
Kings to praise; When we hear the fife and drum, Tu-re-lu-re-  
fife and drum; Lis - ten to this fife and drum, Tu-re-lu-re-

lu, pat-a-pat-a pan; When we hear the fife and  
lu, pat-a-pat-a pan; When we hear the fife and

The illustration shows a man wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a long coat, playing a fife. The background is dark with white stars, suggesting a night sky or a festive atmosphere.

Sources Used: <http://www.songsforteaching.com/christmas/patapan.htm>

## Literature Project List

from [www.teachervision.com/lesson-plans/lesson-1727.html](http://www.teachervision.com/lesson-plans/lesson-1727.html)

- Create a museum.
- Create script and act out a scene.
- Write a rap/poem/song.
- Have a talk show with characters from the play.
- Make a story quilt.
- Compare and contrast the play with other books/plays.
- Make a mural.
- Make a map of significant story locations.
- Create a diorama.
- Write a newspaper article.
- Predict where the characters will be in the future.
- Find out more about the author on the Internet.
- Make an advertisement (poster, commercial) for the play.
- Write a letter from one character to another.
- Design a new cover for the playbook.
- Write a sequel to the play

# Master Vocabulary List

## Lesson One

Knitting: to form fabric from loops of yarn  
Chaplain: an army minister, pastor, or priest  
Handkerchiefs: square of cloth used for tissues, or Kleenex  
Marmee: the Mother's nickname  
Cologne: perfume  
Anxious: worried, excited  
Embroidered: sewn with decorative stitches  
Pitiful: sad, pathetic  
Intentions: what someone means to do  
Domestic: having to do with things at home  
Preserves: jams and jellies

## Lesson Two

Fussed: taken extra care with, sometimes too much care  
Gala: fancy event  
Maroon: dark red, burgundy  
Chrysanthemum: a type of flower; often called a mum  
"Out of sorts": not quite right, out of control  
Governess: a person hired to teach and take care of children  
Confide: to share  
Stately: proud, intimidating  
Conservatory: a room/ building made of mostly glass used to grow flowers in

## Lesson Three

Stern: firm, somewhat angry  
Fib: a lie  
Putting on airs": acting like a snob  
Fiancé: a person engaged to be married  
Society: the social life of wealthy, important, and fashionable people  
Train: a long part of a dress that trails on the ground behind a woman  
Champagne: sparkling wine  
Spectacle: to behave foolishly in front of people  
Rubbish: worthless, trash  
Parlor: a formal room like a fancy living room  
Asparagus: skinny green vegetable with a pointy top  
Mortified: very embarrassed  
Gales: loud outburst of laughter  
"Going abroad": traveling to a foreign country  
Haughty: stuck up  
Sociable: enjoying peoples' company

**Lesson Four**

Croquet: a game played using mallets to knock wooden balls through metal arches

Manuscript: a written out story or article

Mischief: trouble

“ ‘fess up”): confess

Telegram: a message sent by telegraph between distant places

Rash: foolish, without thinking

Selflessness: not thinking of your own needs

Stifled: covered up

Vain: being too proud about how you look

Scarlet fever: a contagious disease, often deadly, that included a red rash on the skin

Escorting: going along with

Invalids: sick or injured people who cannot move around easily

## Teacher's Guide

This lesson plan coincides with the "*Little Women* Notebook" found on pgs 23 - 28. Please print this document and distribute it to all of your students.

### Lesson One

1) Ask students to imagine how they would feel if they were used to getting presents on holidays or other special days, and then were told that they would not get anything this year. Would they be disappointed? What if they were told they would have one dollar to spend any way they wanted. Would they use it for themselves or for a gift for someone else? What if the other part of the special day was to include an extra special meal? How would they feel about giving their part of the food away to a stranger? Would they want to do it? Would it be hard? Tell students that that is exactly what happens to the characters in *Little Women*.

2) Read and write the vocabulary for the day on the board. Once students have seen the vocabulary and completed activity 1 with the illustrations, ask them to guess when the story is set and where (1860's, Civil War, Massachusetts). Show students Massachusetts on a map.

3) Have students complete Activity 2 in their Notebooks. They are to pretend they are one of the characters and write a letter to their father to tell him about their Christmas day. They will need to include at least three details from the storyline. If a boy is uncomfortable with this, then he can pretend to be Laurie writing to the girls' Father telling him about what he has seen them do. They will need to include three details as well.

### Lesson Two

1) Complete Activity 3 Vocabulary. Show pictures of vocabulary words if possible and encourage students to draw simple sketches in their Notebooks to help remind them of definitions.

2) Focus on the different qualities of the four March sisters and Marmee, as they will begin to create character sketches. (You may want to implement this as a class project: Let them know that as a class they will be working on creating life-size paper cutouts to represent the major characters as they go through the novel.)

**“Josephine March** - The protagonist of the novel, and the second-oldest March sister. Jo, who wants to be a writer, is based on Louisa May Alcott herself, which makes the story semi-autobiographical. Jo has a temper and a quick tongue, although she works hard to control both. She is a tomboy, and reacts with impatience to the many limitations placed on women and girls. She hates romance in her real life, and wants nothing more than to hold her family together.

**Meg March** - The oldest March sister. Responsible and kind, Meg mothers her younger sisters. She has a small weakness for luxury and leisure, but the greater part of her is gentle, loving, and morally vigorous.

**Beth March** - The third March daughter. Beth is very quiet and very virtuous, and she does nothing but try to please others. She adores music and plays the piano very well.

**Amy March** - The youngest March girl. Amy is an artist who adores visual beauty and has a weakness for pretty possessions. She is given to pouting, fits of temper, and vanity; but she does attempt to improve herself.

**Marmee** - The March girls' mother. Marmee is the moral role model for her girls. She counsels them through all of their problems and works hard but happily while her husband is at war.

**Laurie Laurence** - The rich boy who lives next door to the Marches. Laurie, whose real name is Theodore Laurence, becomes like a son and brother to the Marches. He is charming, clever, and has a good heart.<sup>1</sup>

3) Talk momentarily about how women dressed back in the 1860's. The dresses were very long and very wide. Women were expected to wear gloves outside of their homes and especially during formal events like a dance. Show pictures of the dress and hairstyles to help students picture the events in today's reading.

(These will also help them as you design the life-size characters.)

4) Begin Activity 4 Character Guides together. There is a page for each major character. Today, just focus on Marmee and Jo. Students should begin to write in their Notebooks adjectives to describe each character. They should leave room to draw actual sketches of the people. Model this activity on the board for Marmee and have them copy items into their Notebooks and then go onto Jo's section on their own.

### Lesson Three

1) Ask the students if they have ever been so angry that they refuse to forgive a brother or sister or friend. Ask them how they would feel if something bad happened to that person. Tell them that in today's reading the sisters will discover the importance of not letting their tempers get the best of them and the importance of forgiveness.

2) Complete vocabulary list for Lesson Three.

3) Choose an activity from the "Literature Projects List" and let the students begin to complete it in small groups, all groups can complete the same activity or each group can have a different project.

### Lesson Four

1) Complete Activity 6 Vocabulary. This time the students will try to match the terms to their definitions. Give them about five minutes working with a partner to see if they can figure them all out. At the end of the time, go over the terms and definitions as a class to make sure everyone gets them correct.

2) What would be something they could give up to help their family if it was needed? (In reference to Jo cutting all of her hair off in order to make money for her family – if you have already seen the show, bring this up, if not – create other extreme acts that someone may participate in)

3) Split students back up into groups to complete the "Literature Project" of their choice.

4) Have students complete the letter reading and letter writing activities.

5) Assess how your students are doing – Gather up the students Notebooks to make sure they are on track with Vocabulary and the Character Guides.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/littlewomen/characters.html>

# *Little Women* Notebook



This Notebook belongs to:

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## LESSON TWO

### Activity 3 Vocabulary

*Fill in the correct definition. Draw a small picture to help you remember the definitions.*

Fussed: \_\_\_\_\_

Gala: \_\_\_\_\_

Maroon: \_\_\_\_\_

Chrysanthemum: \_\_\_\_\_

“Out of sorts”: \_\_\_\_\_

Governess: \_\_\_\_\_

Confide: \_\_\_\_\_

Stately: \_\_\_\_\_

Conservatory: \_\_\_\_\_

### Activity 4

### Character Guides

*Use these pages to list adjectives that describe each character. Draw sketches of what you think the characters look like. Don't worry about how well you can draw. Just do your best!*

# Marmee

# Jo

Meg

Beth

Amy

Laurie

## LESSON THREE

### Activity 5 Vocabulary

Fill in the correct definition. Draw a small picture to help you remember the definitions.

Stern: \_\_\_\_\_

Fib: \_\_\_\_\_

“Putting on airs”: \_\_\_\_\_

Fiancé: \_\_\_\_\_

Society: \_\_\_\_\_

Train: \_\_\_\_\_

Champagne: \_\_\_\_\_

Spectacle: \_\_\_\_\_

Rubbish: \_\_\_\_\_

Parlor: \_\_\_\_\_

Asparagus: \_\_\_\_\_

Mortified: \_\_\_\_\_

Gales: \_\_\_\_\_

“Going abroad”: \_\_\_\_\_

Haughty: \_\_\_\_\_

Sociable: \_\_\_\_\_

## LESSON FOUR

### Activity 6 Vocabulary

Match the word to its definition.

Croquet	sick or injured people who cannot move around easily
Manuscript	not thinking of your own needs
Mischief	being too proud about how you look
“ ‘fess up”	foolish, without thinking
Telegram	a written out story or article
Rash	a contagious disease, often deadly, that included a red rash on the skin
Selflessness	a message sent by telegraph between distant places
Stifled	a game played using mallets to knock wooden balls through metal arches
Vain	trouble
Scarlet Fever	confess
Invalid	going along with
Escorting	covered up



## Letter Reading Activity

- Have the students get into partners and read the letter on the next page out loud.
- Ask the students how the letter made them feel?
- What does Thomas mean by “bedfellows” and “company”?
- What are “characters”? And why do they gather around the campfires?
- Which state is Thomas’ company in?
- Why does Thomas say the soldiers are no longer independent citizens?
- What is the picture Thomas sent his sister of?
- Where is St. Louis? Can you find it on the map?
- What did he tell his sister the best Christmas “box” or present she can send him is?
- Have the students imagine they will be at war over Christmas like Thomas. Why would getting letters from family members be the best Christmas gift ever? What would the students ask their family members for in this situation for Christmas?
- What would it be like to not be home for Christmas, but sleeping in a tent and knowing you have to fight in a war?
- Have the students get into new pairs and read the letter out loud again.
- If they come across a word they don’t know have them try to translate the word’s meaning. If they can’t figure out what certain words mean have them look up the words in the dictionary.
- Have the students prepare a modern translation of the letter. What would Thomas have written differently if he had written the letter in 2009? How would the students have written the letter?

## Letter Writing Activity

- When was the last time you wrote a hand written letter?
- What about a text message or email?
- Did your email or text message contain important information or news?
- If you had important news to tell someone what form of communication would you use?
- What form of communication would you not want to use?
- How important do you think letter writing was during the time period of little women? In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were no telephones and transportation was slow.
- Pretend you were alive during the Civil War. Write a letter to your father, brother, or friend who has gone off to fight. What would you want to tell them about? What do you think they would want to hear about? Would it be easier or harder to tell them about your life in a letter rather than an email or text message?

Camp Benton, Mos. Dec.24/61

Dear Sister,

In my present life I have plenty of leisure, as we do not drill any yet until we get our guns. So more from a feeling of ennui than anything else have I been prompted to devote a half hour to the delineation of some part of the scenes in Camplife.

Our company is quartered for the present in a room about 60 feet by 30, all round this room are the bunks for the men, three tiers in hight [sic], formed of uprights, crosspieces joining them together and boards laid on the crosspieces, on these the bedtick is laid, two men sleeping together. William and I are to be bedfellows after tomorrow.

As I write, a peddler is gathering a crowd around him at one end of the room, by his glowing description of his wares "so sheep shentlemen" and as large a crowd is gathered around his clever imitator who is holding forth in the same style at the other end. We have all kinds of Characters in our battery, some of whom I hope to describe to you someday, 3 men have been members of the Legislature, 3 were in the Crimea, 1 served under Lieutenant-now Commodore-Dupont, 1 was with Fremont in his first Expedition, west of the Rocky Mountains, and 6 or 7 were in the Mexican War. So you see we have thrilling stories told around our Campfire, and more interesting than those related by Novelists Characters.

And here let me remark that I have discovered things to be just as I had imagined them to be. The immense Prairies of Illinois did not appear in the least strange to me, for they looked exactly as I knew they must look. It is so with our military life, I adapt myself to it much more readily than the most of our men do, who have not yet realized that they are no longer independent Citizens, but Soldiers bound by certain rules and Regulations, and subject to all the privations, fatigues and dangers consequential to a Soldiers life in time of War. A great many of our men – and the Americans especially – cannot leave off those habits of Independence, which are so meritorious in the civilian, but so pernicious in the Soldier. Hence there are daily in our company instances of insubordination and misconduct which, if the laws were executed would be severely punished.

The picture I sent you is a pretty correct representation of St. Louis. You can see the City with its brick buildings, its coal Chimneys and its Courthouse, the finest building of its kind in America. The levee with its piles of goods and four horse teams. The River with its Steamers and their clouds of smoke, and on the other side, Belleville with its Depots and Railroad trains. It has only the faults – the River is not wide enough and the City not black enough. Remember that the best Christmas Box you can send us will be a long letter. So, A Merry Christmas to you, and to all our friends.

Thomas.

*Sources Used:* <http://www.mnhs.org/library/Christie/letters/transcripts/td611224.html>