

0. Little Women - The Book and the Movie - Story
Preface

1. Little Women - The Book and the Movie

2. Little Women - When Beth Dies



Louisa May Alcott (aged 25, in this photo) was a nurse (in Washington, D.C.) during America's Civil War. She was also an abolitionist, from a family of abolitionists.

A Northerner, Alcott was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania—north of Philadelphia—on the 29th of November, 1832. She grew-up in Boston, then in Concord, Massachusetts (where, for a time, the Alcott family lived in a home called "The Hillside"). Later, Nathaniel Hawthorne purchased the house, and today it is known as "The Wayside."

Soon after the war was over, Alcott wrote her popular book, *Little Women*. She based her lead character—Jo March—on herself. Jo's sisters (Meg, Beth and Amy) were loosely based on Alcott's own sisters (Anna, Elizabeth and May).

Before Louisa's mother received an inheritance, the Alcotts were a poor family—a situation which inspired Louisa to change her life's circumstances. When she was 15 years old, Louisa wrote:

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!

Women had few opportunities to become independently successful, in Louisa's America, but she was determined that gender restrictions would not impede her:

... I will make a battering-ram of my head and make my way through this rough and tumble world.

Although she never married, Louisa was very close to a man she met in Europe. His name was Ladislav ("Laddie") Wisniewski and he was, in part, the model for Theodore Laurence ("Laurie") in *Little Women*.

Her character, Jo March—a strong-willed girl—was one of the first young female heroines, in American Literature, to follow her own path.

Louisa May Alcott wrote *Little Women* at her home—called "Orchard House"—between May and July of 1868. She was thirty-five years old at the time. She published the first volume of her soon-to-become-famous book on September 30, 1868.

Twenty years later, Louisa died—of a stroke—while she was in Boston. At her death—on March 6, 1888—she was 55 years old. She is buried at the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord.

In 2003, the BBC sponsored "The Big Read." People throughout the United Kingdom could nominate their favorite novel. After about 750,000 votes were cast—in the year-long process—*Little Women* was the 18th most-popular book.

This audio clip contains the first chapter of *Little Women* (read/dramatized by Carole Bos, creator of AwesomeStories).

ISSUES AND QUESTIONS TO PONDER: While listening to the story, ask yourself whether the events in the March home—which took place during America's Civil War—can be compared to family scenes in today's world. What is similar? What is different?

When a father is away, at war, what impact does his absence have on his children and his wife? Although the four March sisters are worried that their father might never come home, because he'd be killed in the fighting, no one expresses that fear outloud. Why not?

Are there issues, in your family, which everyone is thinking about but no one discusses outloud? What makes that approach helpful (or not helpful)?

Louisa May Alcott was as popular in her day as J.K. Rowling is today. Alcott was able to publish *Little Women* under her own name, while Joanne Rowling's publishers told her she needed a name change—thus the invention of J.K. Rowling (although the author had no middle name)—before they would publish the first *Harry Potter* book. What does that fact tell us about "modern attitudes" toward female writers compared to nineteenth-century attitudes?

The first lines of *Little Women* give us a sense of anger seething underneath the surface of the March family home. The sisters didn't like being poor. If you were writing the story today—focusing on the March family's economic situation—how would you write (or rewrite) the

story's beginning?

Credits:

Image from the 1869 book *Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott, entitled "Jo in a Vortex." Public Domain.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Little-Women-The-Book-and-the-Movie>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Little-Women-The-Book-and-the-Movie>

Media Stream



Nineteenth-Century Cover of "Little Women"

Image online, courtesy Project Gutenberg.

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