



CEC READING LIBRARY • GRADE 6 • R2 CORE

Little Women

12 Chapters

Day 1-12

Q4 W29-W32

Read the story. Then think about each question.



Chapter 1: Four Different Dreams

VOCABULARY Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy

The four March sisters lived in a modest house in New England with their mother while their father was away at war. Though they shared the same home and the same parents they were four genuinely and fascinatingly different people. Meg longed for the kind of settled domestic happiness that their poverty had so far prevented her from having. Jo burned with ambition and frustration and a fierce desire to write stories that the world would actually read. Beth asked for nothing except to stay at home, play her piano, and be surrounded by the people she loved most. Amy planned her great artistic career with a confidence that her sisters found alternately impressive and slightly absurd. Alcott presents these four different dreams not as competing but as equally valid expressions of who each girl truly was. ★ **Each sister found her own path.**

THINK *Where did the sisters live?*

Chapter 2: Quiet, Difficult Choices

VOCABULARY choices, Laurie, Meg, Amy

The choices the March sisters make are not dramatic in the sense of involving obvious moral dilemmas. They are instead the quieter and more difficult kind of choices about what kind of person you want to be. Meg chooses love and domesticity over the wealth and status that her beauty could have obtained for her. Jo chooses her own path over the comfortable and conventional life that marrying Laurie would have provided. Amy chooses to take her artistic ambitions seriously at a time when female artists were not taken seriously at all. Beth chooses contentment with small things at a time when ambition was being valorized all around her every day. Each choice was made under social pressure to choose differently, which is precisely what makes each choice revealing. ★ **Each sister proved her worth through her own choices.**

THINK *What does Meg choose over wealth?*

Read the story. Then think about each question.



Chapter 3: Character, Not Convention

VOCABULARY character, convention, Meg, Jo

When *Little Women* was published in 1868 it entered a world with very firm ideas about acceptable female behavior. A woman's worth was measured primarily by her marriage prospects and her ability to create a proper domestic environment. Alcott's novel pushes back against this measurement system not through explicit argument but through sympathetic portraiture. She creates four women who are each worth knowing and each admirable without any of them fully conforming to convention. Meg conforms most closely and is treated with as much warmth as Jo who conforms least — both choices are presented as valid. The novel's implicit argument is that character — honesty, courage, kindness, persistence — is the real measure of a person.

Convention tells us which paths are acceptable; character tells us which paths are truly ours to walk without apology. ★ **Each sister chose her own path — proving that a woman's worth lies in her character, not convention.**

THINK *How was a woman's worth often measured?*

Chapter 4: The Unusual One

VOCABULARY Jo, publisher, stories, rejected

Jo March knew from a very young age that she was not going to fit into the life that her era had planned for women. She was too loud, too ambitious, too comfortable with conflict, and too interested in the world outside her home. She burned with the desire to write stories that mattered — not domestic sketches but real stories with real ideas in them. When she sent her first real story to a publisher and it was rejected she felt the disappointment like a physical blow. But she sat back down at her desk and rewrote it because the alternative — giving up and becoming conventional — was unthinkable. Jo's relationship with her own ambition was one of the most honest portraits of female intellectual life in nineteenth-century fiction. She wanted something that her world told her she could not have and she pursued it with complete and unapologetic dedication. ★ **Jo refused society's expectations.**

THINK *What did Jo burn with?*

Read the story. Then think about each question.



Chapter 5: The Price of Being Herself

VOCABULARY Jo, society, world, define

The particular courage that Jo March demonstrated was not the dramatic kind that announces itself loudly. It was the quieter and more sustained courage of continuing to be herself in a world that found her inconvenient. Every social gathering she attended reminded her that her ambitions were considered slightly ridiculous by respectable people. Every rejection letter she received confirmed what polite society was already suggesting — that she was reaching too far. Jo absorbed these messages and continued reaching because she had no other honest option available to her. She could perform the conventional life and disappear inside it or she could refuse the performance and pay the social price. She chose to pay the price because the alternative was a kind of self-erasure she was constitutionally incapable of accepting. ★ Jo refused to let society define who she was.

THINK What kind of courage did Jo have?

Chapter 6: Her Hair for the Family

VOCABULARY Jo, writing, expectations, purpose

Jo's relationship with writing was the most important relationship of her life for a very long time. It preceded her friendships and her romances and her sense of obligation to her family and its needs. When the family needed money she sold her hair — the one feature she was genuinely vain about — without hesitation. When she finally sold a story she felt a pride and satisfaction that nothing else in her experience could match. Writing for Jo was not a hobby or an ambition in the conventional sense — it was the activity in which she was most herself. She was more fully alive at her desk with a pen in her hand than she was in any parlor or at any social gathering. Society told her that this was an inappropriate priority for a young woman of her time and station and expectation. ★ Jo refused to be defined by society's expectations — writing was her true identity and purpose.

THINK What did Jo sell for the family?

Read the story. Then think about each question.



Chapter 7: The Professor

VOCABULARY Jo, Bhaer, love, conventional

Jo's relationship with Professor Bhaer surprised readers who expected her to end up with the charming and wealthy Laurie. Bhaer was not a conventional romantic hero in any way — he was poor, middle-aged, foreign, and somewhat unfashionable. But he offered Jo something that Laurie, for all his charm and his obvious devotion, could not offer at all. He offered her an intellectual companion who took her writing and her thinking seriously as a genuine partner would. Their conversations were the kind that changed how each of them thought about things that mattered to both of them. Jo did not fall in love with Bhaer despite his lack of conventional attractions but because of his unconventional ones. She needed a love that made her grow, and growth was exactly and specifically what Bhaer's company produced in her. ★ **True love means growing together.**

THINK Who did readers expect Jo to marry?

Chapter 8: A Humble Home

VOCABULARY Meg, John, love, together

Meg's marriage to John Brooke was a genuine love match made without thought for social or financial advantage. In the years that followed the wedding, the reality of limited resources and domestic difficulty became very clear. They could not afford the things that Meg's wealthier friends had and this sometimes created real tension between them. There were arguments about money and about the children and about the division of labor inside their modest home. But Meg and John had made a commitment that was stronger than the frustrations of ordinary married life together. Each difficulty they navigated together added something to the foundation of their relationship rather than eroding it. They were not the same people at forty that they had been at twenty — they were more patient, more understanding, more themselves. ★ **True love means growing better together through hardship.**

THINK What kind of match was Meg's marriage?

Read the story. Then think about each question.



Chapter 9: Love Takes Work

VOCABULARY Meg, Amy, Laurie, difficulties

Louisa May Alcott was deeply skeptical of the romantic notion that love conquers all difficulties without requiring work. The marriages she depicts are loving but they are also demanding, complicated, and frequently imperfect in small and large ways. Meg has to learn to manage a household without the resources she had imagined and John has to learn patience with her frustration. Jo has to learn to accept Bhaer's gentle criticisms of her sensational fiction because she knows his judgment is sounder than her vanity. Amy has to learn to respect Laurie's genuine emotional depth beneath his charm and Laurie has to learn to take Amy seriously. None of these adjustments are easy or painless and none of them happen without setbacks and reversals along the way. What Alcott shows is that the work of adjustment is not a failure of love but its most essential and productive expression. ★ **True love is not about perfection but about growing wiser and kinder together through every difficulty.**

THINK What was Alcott skeptical of?

Chapter 10: Rich in Other Ways

VOCABULARY March, money, character, wealth

The March family's financial situation was a constant and genuine difficulty throughout the novel. They could not afford the clothes or the social activities that their wealthier acquaintances took for granted. This created social pressures and personal frustrations that Alcott depicts with considerable honesty and sympathy. But the novel consistently proposes that the March girls' character is their most valuable and most enviable possession. Their neighbors who had money did not necessarily have kindness, or honesty, or the courage to pursue their real ambitions. The wealthy characters in the novel are not villains but they are often shown to be less admirable than the poorer March sisters. What the Marches have is something that cannot be purchased and that their circumstances have actually helped to develop in them. ★ **Character matters more than wealth.**

THINK What was a constant difficulty?

Read the story. Then think about each question.



Chapter 11: What Cannot Be Bought

VOCABULARY family, integrity, wealth, Beth

Looking back at *Little Women* as a whole, the March family's story is primarily a story about values rather than achievements. The girls grow up, pursue their various paths, fall in love, and face significant losses along the way. But the novel's emotional center is always the family itself — the particular quality of love and honesty that the Marches share. When Beth dies, the sisters do not pretend to cope better than they actually do — they grieve authentically and completely. When Jo finally succeeds as a writer, the success is meaningful not primarily as a career achievement but as a family victory. When Meg creates her modest home it is valuable not for its material comfort but for the character of the life lived inside it. Alcott proposes that a life organized around family and integrity — however modest its external circumstances — is a life well lived. ★ **Family and integrity matter more than wealth or status.**

THINK What did the sisters do when Beth died?

Chapter 12: The Quiet Gathering

VOCABULARY family, integrity, purpose, wealth

Alcott ends her novel not with a triumphant conclusion but with a quiet and reflective gathering of the family. The March girls are now women with their own lives and their own difficulties and their own hard-won understanding. They have not all achieved wealth or public recognition or the kind of success that society values most visibly. But they have all achieved something that Alcott proposes is more rare and more valuable than any of these things. They have become fully themselves — people of real character who have chosen their lives rather than drifted into them. They have maintained their integrity under social pressure, their affection under grief, and their purpose under discouragement. These qualities are the novel's true subject and the family is the environment in which they are most clearly demonstrated. ★ **Little Women shows that family, integrity, and purpose matter far more than wealth or social status.**

THINK How does Alcott end the novel?