



GUTHRIE
THEATER

Play Guide

2025-2026 SEASON



Louisa May Alcott's **Little Women**

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Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*

adapted by **LAUREN M. GUNDERSON**

from the novel by **LOUISA MAY ALCOTT**

directed by **JACKSON GAY**

April 18 – June 21, 2026

Wurtele Thrust Stage

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**GUTHRIE
THEATER**

818 South 2nd Street, Minneapolis, MN 55415
ADMINISTRATION 612.225.6000
BOX OFFICE 612.377.2224 or 1.877.447.8243 (toll-free)
guthrietheater.org • Joseph Haj, Artistic Director

The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

Guthrie Theater Play Guide

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DRAMATURG AND CONTENT EDITOR

Wendy Weckwerth

CONTRIBUTORS Lezlie C. Cross, Jacey Little,
Rachel Ropella, Wendy Weckwerth

GRAPHIC DESIGNER Sierra Ross

COPYEDITOR Christine Stevens

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“A good writer needs a good writer.”

– Professor Bhaer to Jo in *Louisa May Alcott’s Little Women*

PHOTO: JOE BIGELOW AND ISABELLA STAR L’ABLANC (DAN NORMAN)

About This Guide

This play guide is designed to fuel your curiosity and deepen your understanding of a show’s history, meaning and cultural relevance so you can make the most of your theatergoing experience. You might be reading this because you fell in love with a show you saw at the Guthrie. Maybe you want to read up on a play before you see it onstage. Or perhaps you’re a fellow theater company doing research for an upcoming production. We’re glad you found your way here, and we encourage you to dig in and mine the depths of this extraordinary story.

NOTE: Sections of this play guide may evolve throughout the run of the show, so check back often for more information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Thanks for your interest in the Guthrie Theater’s production of *Louisa May Alcott’s Little Women*. Please direct literary inquiries, requests to reprint content or questions about this guide to Literary Manager and Resident Dramaturg Carla Steen at carlas@guthrietheater.org. If you’re an educator with questions about this guide, please contact our Education Team at education@guthrietheater.org.



PHOTO: MAY HEINECKE, AUDREY PARKER, GEORGE KELLER, ISABELLA STAR LABLANC AND STEPHANIE ANNE BERTUMEN (DAN NORMAN)

Synopsis

Louisa May Alcott — aka Lu — invites us into the world of her novel, *Little Women*, which bears more than a passing resemblance to Alcott's own experiences as a young woman. Unfolding largely through direct quotations from the 1868 novel, the four March sisters (who are based on Alcott and her siblings) navigate genteel poverty in Massachusetts during the Civil War, in which their father is away serving as a chaplain.

Each sister follows a distinct trajectory. Meg, the eldest, yearns for a traditional marriage, home and family. Jo, fiercely resistant to society's circumscribed expectations for women, strives to remain independent and become a successful writer. Gentle and musical Beth exudes selfless kindness even through grave illness. And Amy, an artist and the youngest March sister, pursues refinement and social advancement.

Meanwhile, Lu guides the story as the March girls' insightful and loving mother, Marmee, shepherds her daughters toward maturity. Along the way, they meet a wealthy young neighbor, Theodore Laurence (Laurie), who befriends the sisters and forms a particularly strong bond with Jo. Shared sacrifices, joys, triumphs and hardships teach the March sisters lasting lessons about love, ambition and real contentment before Lu closes the book on this part of their story. [G](#)

CHARACTERS

Louisa/Jo March, an ambitious young writer; independent, outspoken and adventurous

Meg March, eldest of the four March sisters; responsible, nurturing and appreciative of fine things

Beth March, second-youngest March sister; quiet, gentle and musical

Amy March, youngest March sister; impatient, artistic and vivacious

Marmee, their mother; wise, resilient, nurturing and compassionate

Aunt March, the March sisters' great-aunt; fussy, rich and judgmental

Laurie, their wealthy young neighbor and friend; adventurous, mischievous and impulsive

John, Laurie's tutor; intelligent, earnest and hardworking

Mr. March, their father

Mr. Laurence, Laurie's prickly grandfather

Friedrich Bhaer, a professor and German immigrant; cultured, sunny and kind

SETTINGS

- Concord, Massachusetts, 1860s
- The March family's cozy home and its surroundings
- New York City



Responses to *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women*

Chris Jones

"*Little Women* at Northlight Theatre Is a New Adaptation With the Author in the Spotlight," *Chicago Tribune*, December 6, 2024


Lauren M. Gunderson, one of America's most produced living playwrights, has a career-long fascination with framing devices and with pumping up the importance of the writer's craft. Thus her very lively new adaptation of *Little Women* ... is bookended by Gunderson's tribute to Alcott herself. ... I've long admired the life in Gunderson's writing, the way she fuses period interest with a contemporary sensibility ... and Gunderson's love for her characters that invariably bursts from all her scripts.

PHOTO: GEORGE KELLER, MAY HEINECKE, ISABELLA STAR LaBLANC, AUDREY PARKER AND STEPHANIE ANNE BERTUMEN (DAN NORMAN)



Sharon Eberson

"*Little Women's* Enduring Legacy on Display at City Theatre," *onStage Pittsburgh*, November 23, 2025

There are love stories told in *Little Women*, of course, and loss enough to rain down tears, but the overarching story is one of perseverance and sisterhood, a niche that the playwright Gunderson continues to explore and hone. ... The enduring charm of the March sisters will be evident well before the spotlight fades. 

"The enduring charm of the March sisters will be evident well before the spotlight fades."

- Sharon Eberson


ONSTAGE
PITTSBURGH

NOVELIST

Louisa May Alcott

Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888) was a trailblazing American novelist, poet and reformer best known for her novel, *Little Women* (1868–1869). Alcott grew up in a household steeped in Transcendentalist philosophy and social reform. She was educated by her father, Amos Bronson Alcott, and mentored by family friends and neighbors, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

Alcott's early life was marked by persistent poverty. Before achieving financial independence after the blockbuster success of *Little Women*, she worked as a teacher, seamstress, lady's companion and even domestic helper to support her family. She also served as a nurse during the Civil War, an experience that informed her first major literary success, *Hospital Sketches* (1863).

She achieved lasting fame for her semi-autobiographical tales of the March sisters, but Alcott also published popular "blood and thunder" thrillers full of forbidden love and revenge under the pseudonym A.M. Barnard. A lifelong advocate for women's suffrage and abolition, Alcott remained a prolific writer until her death, using her pen to support herself and her family and to champion social progress. 



“Jo’s ambition was to do something very splendid. What it was, she had no idea as yet, but left it for time to tell her, and meanwhile, found her greatest affliction in the fact that she couldn’t read, run, and ride as much as she liked. A quick temper, sharp tongue, and restless spirit were always getting her into scrapes, and her life was a series of ups and downs, which were both comic and pathetic.”

– *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott

IMAGE: LOS ANGELES TIMES



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LAUREN M. GUNDERSON


PLAYWRIGHT Lauren M. Gunderson

Lauren M. Gunderson is one of the most-produced playwrights in America since 2015, topping the list four times, including 2025–2026. She is a two-time winner of the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award for *I and You* and *The Book of Will*; the winner of the William Inge Distinguished Achievement in Theater Award, Lanford Wilson Award, Otis Guernsey New Voices Award and Jeff Award for New Plays; and a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, Arthur L. Weissberger Award and John Gassner Award for Playwriting.

Her musical adaptation of *The Time Traveller's Wife* premiered on London's West End, and her anthology of five plays, *Revolutionary Women*, was published by Bloomsbury in 2023. She studied Southern literature and drama at Emory University and dramatic writing at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, where she was a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship.

Her play *The Catastrophist* premiered digitally in January 2021 and is now in the Performing Arts COVID-19 Response Collection in the Library of Congress. She co-authored the *Miss Bennet* trilogy with Margot Melcon. *The Half-Life of Marie Curie*

premiered Off-Broadway and on Audible. Her work is published at Playscripts (*I and You, Exit, Pursued by a Bear, The Taming, Toil and Trouble*), Dramatists Play Service (*The Revolutionists, The Book of Will, Silent Sky, Bauer, Natural Shocks, The Wickhams, Miss Bennet*) and Samuel French (*Emilie*). She is the book writer for musicals with Dave Stewart and Joss Stone (*The Time Traveller's Wife*), Ari Afsar (*Jeannette, I and You*), Jorah Kwamé (*Lady M*), Kira Stone (*Built for This, Pride and Prejudice*) and Kait Kerrigan and Bree Lowdermilk (*Justice, Earthrise*).

She is a former board member of Playwrights Foundation, a member of the Aspen Institute Science and Society cohort, and the host of the podcast *How to Playwright*. Learn more at laurengunderson.com. 

“It’s just a little sensation story, romance and tragedy, and I know it’s all rubbish but it’s apparently good rubbish.”

– Jo in *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women*


Little Women: Literary Legacy

“Let the world know you are alive,” Abba May Alcott told her daughters. And wow did Louisa, the second of Abba’s four daughters, follow through on that advice.

First published in 1868, *Little Women; or, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy* was an immediate critical and commercial success. Alcott followed it with a second volume — *Good Wives*, sometimes called *Little Women Married* — in 1869. Together, the two books form what since 1880 is usually published under the combined title *Little Women*. The novel has been translated into more than 50 languages, has sold an estimated 10 million copies and has never been out of print.

The novel is largely autobiographical, reflecting Alcott’s experience growing up with three sisters in a lively household. Its characters are inspired by Alcott’s family, friends and neighbors, and its primary setting (the March house and its surroundings) echoes Orchard House, the Concord home purchased by the Alcotts in 1857.

Celebrated authors and thinkers who count Louisa May Alcott among their influences include Gertrude Stein, Simone de Beauvoir, Cynthia Ozick, Ursula K. Le Guin, Gloria Steinem, Margaret Atwood, Barbara Kingsolver — and playwright Lauren M. Gunderson. “In this adaptation,” says Gunderson, “I wanted to focus on Alcott the writer alongside Jo the writer — and on the novel’s love stories, its triumphs of the heart, bending and breaking and blossoming.”

The novel has been the source material for numerous stage adaptations, including musicals, opera and ballet; film adaptations, from the silent era to Greta Gerwig’s popular 2019 version; multiple television adaptations, two in Japanese anime; and radio plays. It’s also been a jumping-off point for fan fiction and even literary triumphs, such as Geraldine Brooks’ Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *March* (2005), which imagines the Civil War experience of Mr. March. 

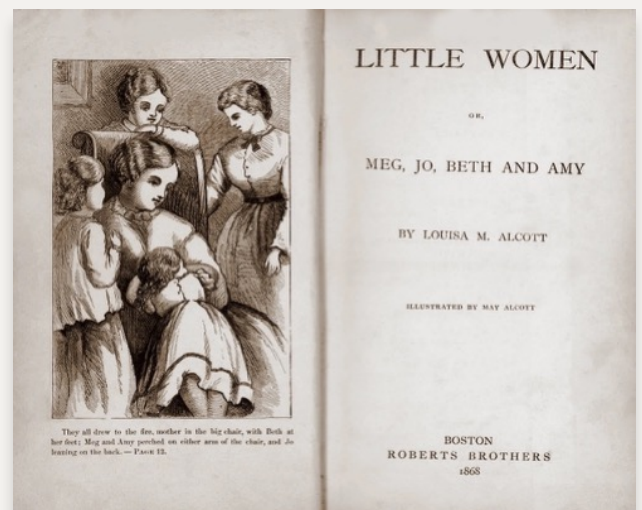


“It is simple and true, for we really lived most of it, and if it succeeds, that will be the reason of it.”

– Louisa May Alcott on *Little Women*

ALCOTT’S NOVELS ABOUT THE MARCHES INCLUDE:

- *Little Women; or, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy* (1868)
- *Good Wives* (1869)
- *Little Men: Life at Plumfield With Jo’s Boys* (1871)
- *Jo’s Boys and How They Turned Out: A Sequel to “Little Men”* (1886)



IMAGES: GRETA GERWIG’S *LITTLE WOMEN*, 2019 (*THE NEW YORK TIMES*); LOUISA MAY ALCOTT’S ORCHARD HOUSE



IMAGE: RAPTIS RARE BOOKS

Responses to *Little Women*

When *Little Women* was first published, it became an instant bestseller, and not only among girls. As a friend of the author later recalled, *Little Women* was “the rage in ‘69,” with everyone from children to grandparents reading it. “Grave merchants and lawyers meeting on their way downtown in the morning said to each other, ‘Have you read *Little Women*’; and laughed as they said it. The clerks in my office read it, so also did the civil engineer, and the boy in the elevator.” Its widespread appeal is reflected in the fact that mainstream publications reviewed it, such as *Harper’s* and *The Nation*, as well as *The Spectator* and *The British Quarterly* in England. Initial reviews called it “a very readable juvenile book” and “a lively story for the young,” but by the publication of part two in April 1869, *Little Women* was viewed more as a story for the whole family. *Harper’s* even considered it “a rather mature book for the little women, but a capital one for their elders.” ...

Over the course of the twentieth century, as American literature became the subject of study by academics, *Little Women* held an uneasy place on the margins of our national literature. Critics largely ignored it, no doubt feeling, as G.K. Chesterton did in 1907, that, as a man, “I am the intruder ... and I withdraw.” When critics, who were overwhelmingly male, bothered to notice the novel at all, they felt free to dismiss it, as Edward Wagenknecht did in his influential 1952 survey, *Cavalcade of the American Novel*. *Little Women* “needs — and is susceptible of — little analysis,” he wrote. ...

Little Women is much more than a perennially beloved girls’ book. That alone would make it still worth reading, adapting into films, and talking about. But it’s also time we recognized how much its portrayal of girls growing into women is anything but simplistic and sentimental.

Anne Boyd Rioux

“Taking *Little Women* Seriously,” *Humanities*, 39(3), Summer 2018



An irrepressible tomboy in her youth, Louisa had “never liked girls or [known] many” other than her three siblings: her older sister, Anna, and her younger sisters, Lizzie and May. She saw only a faint possibility that the “queer plays and experiences” that the four of them had shared would interest a popular audience.

– John Matteson


The greatest American literary sensation of the post-Civil War decade had its origins in a conversation between Thomas Niles, an editor at the publishing house of Roberts Brothers, and Bronson Alcott, the father of a thirty-five-year-old writer whom his wife had named for a favorite sister, Louisa May. When the elder Alcott and Thomas Niles sat down to talk business in May 1868, Louisa May Alcott had a respectable, if still modest, reputation as a highly prolific and versatile author. Her work had appeared several times in the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly*. Her *Hospital Sketches*, a slightly fictionalized memoir of her work as a Union Army nurse, had been hailed as a work of “uncommon merit,” and her one published novel, *Moods*, had been reviewed, if somewhat coolly, by the young Henry James.

But as Louisa herself knew, she had not risen to her full artistic potential. Now her father, in an effort to drum up some work for her, suggested to Niles that Louisa could write him a book of fairy stories. Niles was not taken with the idea; what he really wanted was a book to fill a yawning gap in the juvenile market — a smart, lively novel for girls. He had approached Louisa herself with the same idea the previous autumn. She had told him she would try, and promptly started the project — and just as promptly set it aside. It was not simply that she disliked the idea, though that was true enough. Her experience also told her that writing for juveniles “doesn’t pay as well as rubbish.” Still worse, Alcott considered herself wholly unqualified for the task. An irrepressible tomboy in her youth, Louisa had “never liked girls or [known] many” other than her three siblings: her older sister, Anna, and her younger sisters, Lizzie and May. She saw only a faint possibility that the “queer plays and experiences” that the four of them had shared would interest a popular audience.

All of her concerns, however, were finally outweighed, as they often were, by Louisa’s desire to help her father. Bronson Alcott, whose capacity for fascinating conversation was so great that people paid to hear him talk, had repeatedly failed to convert his verbal inspirations into writing. Nevertheless, he was now revising a philosophical manuscript called “Tablets,” which was possibly the best work he had ever done. Niles, however, would take Bronson’s book only on one condition. He must have Louisa’s book for girls. That settled it.

John Matteson

“Little Woman,” *Humanities*, 30(6), November/December 2009

The more I learned about the Alcotts, though, the more I saw Louisa and Abigail as a pair, each one the person in the world to whom the other felt closest. It was clear that this mother and daughter shared a profound intimacy that had light and dark facets, in which a fierce commitment to female independence coexisted with a mutual dependency. Abigail, I realized, was a vibrant writer, brilliant teacher and passionate reformer who spent decades working to abolish slavery, ameliorate urban poverty and allow women to be educated, vote and engage in public life. She nurtured and fostered Louisa's career as a writer and entrepreneur, encouraging her daughter, rejection after rejection, to persist. Louisa in turn dedicated all her early work, starting with her first novel at age sixteen, to her mother, who possessed a "nobility of character and talents." ... Behind the legendary figure of Louisa May Alcott stands the larger-than-life model of her mother. 

Eve LaPlante

Marmee & Louisa: The Untold Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Mother,
Simon & Schuster, 2013

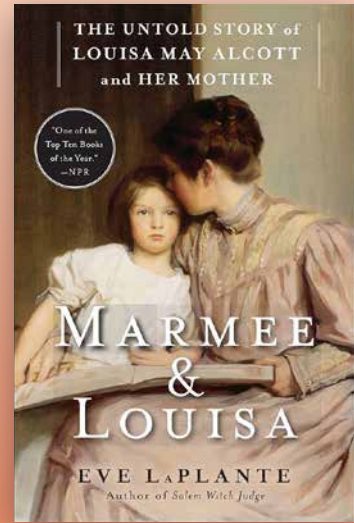
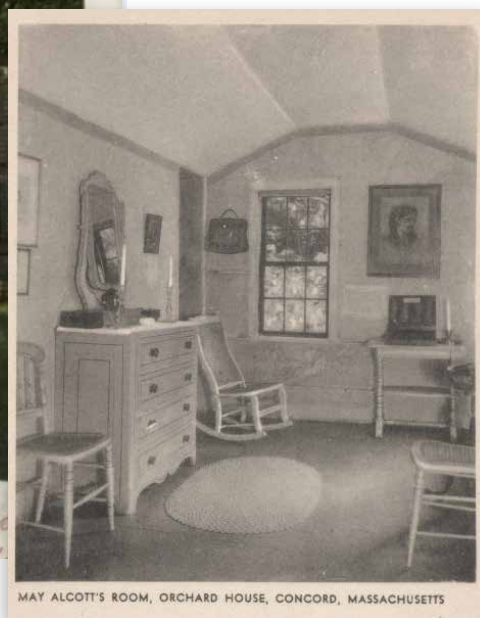


PHOTO: GEORGE KELLER AND ISABELLA STAR LaBLANC (DAN NORMAN)



Orchard House in
Concord, Massachusetts



MAY ALCOTT'S ROOM, ORCHARD HOUSE, CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS



Louisa as Jo

Louisa May Alcott famously, and openly, based the March family on her own. In one passage about Jo, who's an emerging writer in *Little Women*, she even skewers her own creative process:

Every few weeks she would shut herself up in her room, put on her scribbling suit, and "fall into a vortex," as she expressed it, writing away at her novel with all her heart and soul, for till that was finished she could find no peace. Her "scribbling suit" consisted of a black woolen pinafore on which she could wipe her pen at will, and a cap of the same material, adorned with a cheerful red bow, into which she bundled her hair when the decks were cleared for action. This cap was a beacon to the inquiring eyes of her family. ... If this expressive article of dress was drawn low upon the forehead, it was a sign that hard work was going on, in exciting moments it was pushed rakishly askew, and when despair seized the author it was plucked wholly off and cast upon the floor. ...

She did not think herself a genius by any means, but when the writing fit came on, she gave herself up to it with entire abandon, and led a blissful life, unconscious of want, care or bad weather, while she sat safe and happy in an imaginary world, full of friends almost as real and dear to her as any in the flesh. Sleep forsook her eyes, meals stood untasted, day and night were all too short to enjoy the happiness which blessed her only at such times, and made these hours worth living, even if they bore no other fruit. The divine afflatus usually lasted a week or two, and then she emerged from her "vortex," hungry, sleepy, cross or despondent.

"Jo's unquiet wanderings always ended with her clutching a book."

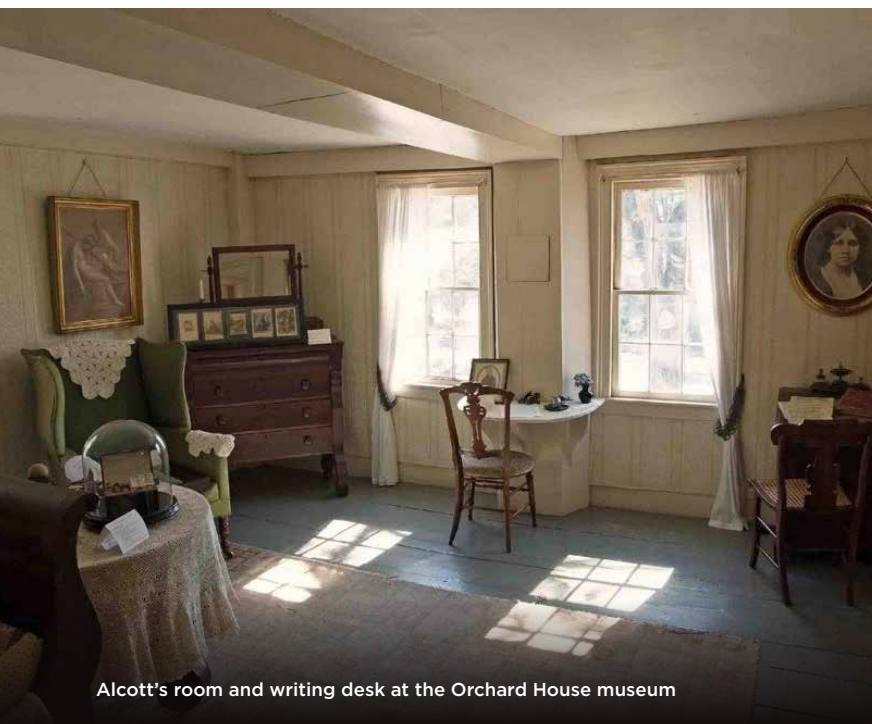
– Marmee in *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women*



“You have been running, Jo; how could you? When will you stop such romping ways?” said Meg, reprovingly, as she settled her cuffs and smoothed her hair, with which the wind had taken liberties.

“Never till I’m stiff and old, and have to use a crutch. Don’t try to make me grow up before my time, Meg; it’s hard enough to have you change all of a sudden; let me be a little girl as long as I can.”

- *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott




Alcott's room and writing desk at the Orchard House museum

National Public Radio

Morning Edition, December 28, 2009

From the time she was young, Alcott vowed that she would see to it that her family would not be poor. Just after she turned 11 years old, she wrote: “I wish I was rich, I was good and we were all a happy family this day.”

The high-mindedness of the fictitious March family contrasts starkly with Alcott's real-life motivations — she was driven, in large part, by the desire to not be poor. “Money is the means and the ends of my mercenary existence.” ... She wrote what she called “moral pap for the young” because it pays well. 

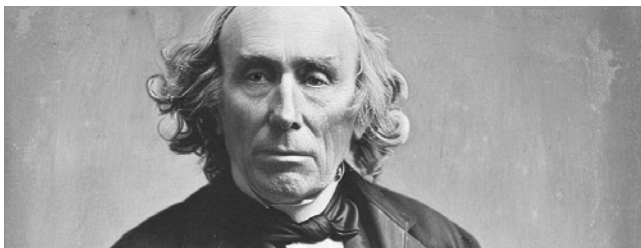
PHOTOS: ISABELLA STAR LÉBLANC (DAN NORMAN); LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S ORCHARD HOUSE



The Battle of Atlanta, a 49-by-374-foot cyclorama, depicts a pivotal Civil War battle fought in July 1864. The immersive experience debuted in Minneapolis in 1886 and is now displayed at the Atlanta History Center.

Timeline

Alcott Family Events



1799

November 29: Amos Bronson Alcott — the inspiration for Mr. March — is born to a poor flax-farming family in Connecticut.

1800

October 8: Abigail (“Abba”) May — the inspiration for Marmee — is born into a family bankrupted by a real estate investment con; Abba’s mother was from a prominent New England family with connections to Abigail Adams and John Hancock.

Historical Events

1619

Jamestown settlement establishes enslavement of African people in North America.

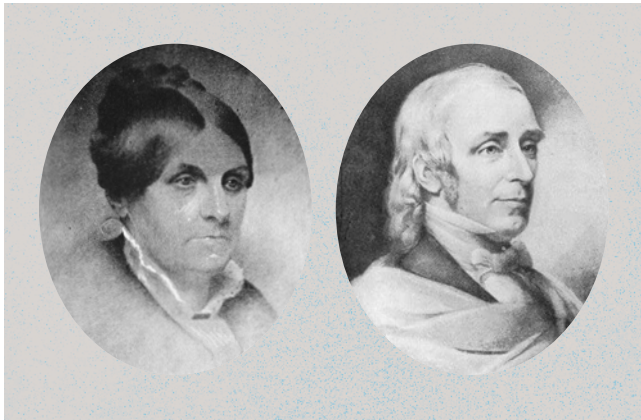
1776

The Declaration of Independence is signed.



IMAGES: *THE NEW YORKER*; EMERSON CENTRAL; HISTORYNET

Alcott Family Events (continued)



1830

May 23: Abba May and Bronson Alcott marry in Boston.

1831

March 16: Anna Bronson Alcott — the inspiration for Meg March — is born.

1832

November 29: Louisa May Alcott — the inspiration for Jo March — is born.



Historical Events (continued)

1803

Ralph Waldo Emerson is born — friend, supporter and neighbor of Bronson Alcott and a fellow Transcendentalist.

1804

Nathaniel Hawthorne is born — novelist, writer of short stories and another Concord neighbor of the Alcotts.

1808

Laws banning the African slave trade go into effect in the British colonies and the U.S.

1817

Henry David Thoreau is born — naturalist, essayist, philosopher, poet and neighbor of the Alcotts in Concord.

1820

The Missouri Compromise passes, admitting Maine as a free state and Missouri as a slave state.

1830

The Indian Removal Act authorizes the forced relocation of Native American tribes residing east of the Mississippi River to land west of the river. For the next two decades, an estimated 13,000 to 16,000 Indigenous people died of exposure, disease and starvation on the Trail of Tears.



IMAGES: WOMENHISTORYBLOG.COM; LOS ANGELES TIMES; GILCREASE MUSEUM

Alcott Family Events (continued)

1834

The Alcott family moves to Boston, where Bronson establishes the Temple School to put his theories about education into practice.

1835

June 24: Elizabeth “Lizzie” Sewall Alcott — the inspiration for Beth March — is born.

1838

After Bronson Alcott admits an African American girl to classes, other families pull their students and Temple School closes.

1839

Abba Alcott gives birth to a son who survives only a few minutes.

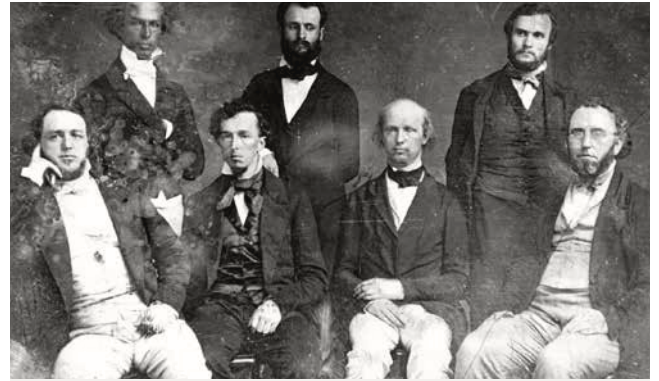


1840

The Alcotts move to Hosmer Cottage in Concord, Massachusetts.

July 26: Abigail May Alcott, known as May — the inspiration for Amy March — is born.

Historical Events (continued)

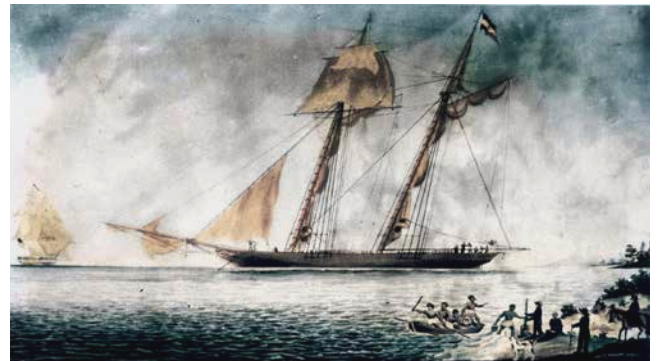


1836

Emerson publishes *Nature*, the foundational text of the literary, philosophical and social movement Transcendentalism (the book was significantly influenced by passages in Bronson Alcott’s journal).

1837

The Panic of 1837 begins — an extended and severe financial crisis in the U.S. caused by land speculation and the collapse of bank credit, among other factors, that lasted into the 1840s.



1840

A successful revolt occurs on the slave ship *Amistad*, leading to a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that was a crucial victory for the abolitionist cause.

Alcott Family Events (continued)

1843

The Alcotts move to Harvard to found Fruitlands, a Transcendental commune of seven families.

Louisa starts a journal and begins writing poems.

1844

The Alcotts move to Still River, Massachusetts, and then back to Concord.

1845

The Alcotts buy Hillside, a property in Concord, with Abba's inheritance and money borrowed from Emerson; Bronson Alcott loans an ax to Thoreau, who uses it to build his hut on nearby Walden Pond.

1846-1847

Accessing Emerson's library, Louisa reads voraciously, including Dickens, Goethe, Carlyle, Dante and Shakespeare.

1847

Louisa opens a small school in the Hillside barn.

1848

The Alcotts run out of food and move to Boston, where Bronson hopes to find work.

1849

The Alcotts move in, for a time, with Abba's brother.

The Alcotts later move to Groton Street in Boston; they contract smallpox, but recover.

Historical Events (continued)

1843

Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" are published.



1845

America annexes Texas.

1845-1852

The Great Famine kills more than one million people in Ireland; in the ensuing decade, more than 1.5 million Irish people emigrate to the U.S.

1846-1848

The Mexican-American War is fought.

1847

The California gold rush begins.

1848

The Seneca Falls Convention launches an organized women's rights movement.

The Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels is published.



IMAGES: THOUGHTCO; WIKIPEDIA

Alcott Family Events (continued)



1851

Louisa, while working as a governess, attends a rally protesting the Fugitive Slave Act.

1852

Louisa's poem "Sunlight" and her story "The Rival Painters" are published.

1853

Bronson Alcott teaches an extracurricular course at Harvard Divinity school.

1854

The Alcott family (except Louisa, who visits from Boston) moves to Walpole, New Hampshire.

Louisa publishes her first book, *Flower Fables*, based on tales she'd told to Emerson's daughter, and regularly attends professional theater performances.

1856

Lizzie and May Alcott contract scarlet fever.

1857

The Alcotts move back to Concord; with Emerson's help, they purchase and renovate Orchard House.



Historical Events (continued)

1850

The Compromise of 1850 is passed — a series of five bills passed by the U.S. Congress that temporarily cool tensions over the expansion of slavery after the Mexican-American War.

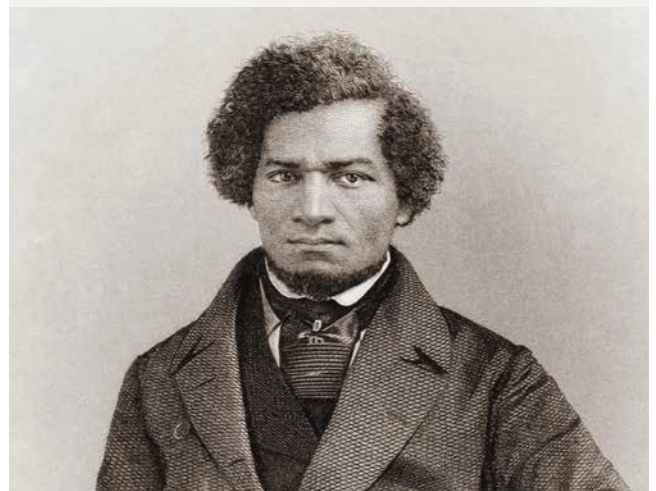
1850-1870

Large numbers of Chinese immigrants arrive to the West Coast, providing labor for the railroads and gold mines.

1852

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is published.

Frederick Douglass condemns the hypocrisy of celebrating the nation's independence in his speech "What to a Slave Is the Fourth of July?"



1857

Dred Scott v. Sandford fuels tensions that lead to the Civil War by asserting enslaved people weren't citizens and couldn't sue in federal court. It is later overturned by the 13th and 14th Amendments.

Alcott Family Events (continued)

1858

Anna Alcott and John Bridge Pratt get engaged.

March 14: Lizzie Alcott dies.



1860

Bronson Alcott is named Concord's superintendent of schools.



1862

Louisa goes to Washington, D.C., to work as a nurse at the Union Hotel Hospital.

Thoreau dies; Louisa's memorial poem, "Thoreau's Flute," is published in the September 1863 issue of *The Atlantic*.

1863

Louisa contracts typhoid pneumonia; Bronson brings her home to Concord.

Hospital Sketches, Louisa's literary breakthrough, is published.

Historical Events (continued)

1858

Abraham Lincoln is elected president.

Minnesota becomes a state.



1860

The Pony Express is established — the fastest means of east-west communication before the transcontinental telegraph in 1861.

1861

April 12: The American Civil War launches with the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter in South Carolina.

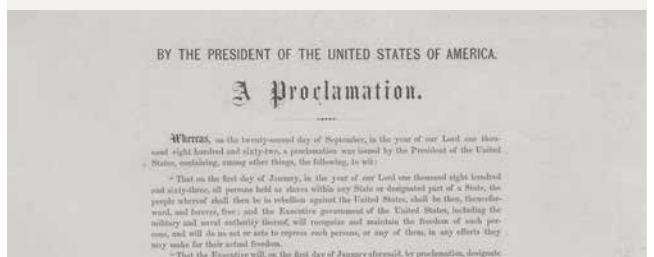
July 21: The First Battle of Bull Run (First Manassas).

1862

The U.S.-Dakota War, sparked by broken treaties, delayed annuity payments and starvation, takes place over six weeks in south-central Minnesota.

1863

Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation.



IMAGES: WOMENHISTORYBLOG.COM; ABE BOOKS; MAINE MEMORY NETWORK; NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STANDARDS AND TECHNOLOGY

Alcott Family Events (continued)

1864

Louisa's first novel, *Moods* — a realistic portrayal of love, marriage and divorce — is published.

1865-1866

Louisa travels to Europe, visiting Switzerland, France and England.

1866

Louisa's sensational story "Behind a Mask; or, a Woman's Power" — one of her "blood and thunder" tales — is published under the pen name A.M. Barnard.

1866

Louisa becomes the editor of *Merry's Museum*, an illustrated children's magazine.

1868

Louisa writes *Little Women*.



1869

Louisa writes *Good Wives*, the sequel to *Little Women*.

Historical Events (continued)

1865

The first transatlantic telegraph cable is completed.

April 9: Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrenders to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia, ending the Civil War.

April 14: Lincoln is shot by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre.

December 6: The 13th Amendment passes, formally abolishing slavery in the U.S.



1869

The Suez Canal opens, transforming global trade.

In the U.S., the first transcontinental railroad is completed.

Mendeleev creates the periodic table of elements.

The 14th Amendment grants citizenship to everyone born in the U.S. (or naturalized), regardless of race.

IMAGES: DIGITAL COMMONWEALTH; HISTORYNET

Alcott Family Events (continued)



1877

November 25: Abba Alcott dies.

1879

With Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, Bronson Alcott launches the Concord School of Philosophy.

December 29: May Alcott Nieriker dies; Louisa adopts May's newborn daughter, Louisa May, known as Lulu.

1888

March 4: Bronson Alcott dies.

March 6: Louisa May Alcott dies at age 55, possibly from complications of mercury poisoning.

Historical Events (continued)

1870-1900

Rapid industrialization, railroad expansion, growth of steel and oil production, technological innovations, large-scale immigration, lack of government regulation and other factors combine to create an era Mark Twain called the Gilded Age — prosperous and shiny on the surface, but tarnished by corruption, poverty and intense financial and social disparities.

1870

The 15th Amendment passes, granting Black men the right to vote.

1872

Susan B. Anthony is fined \$100 for voting in the U.S. presidential election.

1877

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is published.

1878

Chinese immigrants are ruled ineligible for naturalized citizenship.

In Minneapolis, the Washburn A Mill explodes, killing 18 and destroying much of the Mill District.

1879

Thomas Edison tests his first light bulb.

1882

Ralph Waldo Emerson dies.

The Chinese Exclusion Act bans immigration of laborers from China (though students and businessmen are allowed).

1883


The Stone Arch Bridge is built by James J. Hill, bringing passenger trains into downtown Minneapolis. 

IMAGE: HISTORIC NEW ENGLAND

In Alcott's Own Words

FROM HOSPITAL SKETCHES

In 1862, answering a national call for nurses after the bloody beginning of the Civil War, Louisa May Alcott went to Washington to work as a nurse at the Union Hotel Hospital, a converted hotel and tavern. She even brought Dickens novels to read to her patients. During her six weeks of nursing, she contracted typhoid pneumonia. The medication used to treat her resulted in mercury poisoning, causing chronic pain and other lasting symptoms. Published in 1863, *Hospital Sketches*, a lightly fictionalized account of her nursing experiences, was popular and well-received: “fluent and sparkling, with touches of quiet humor and lively wit,” wrote one critic.

My three days' experiences had begun with a death, and, owing to the defalcation of another nurse, a somewhat abrupt plunge into the superintendence of a ward containing forty beds, where I spent my shining hours washing faces, serving rations, giving medicine and sitting in a very hard chair, with pneumonia on one side, diphtheria on the other, five typhoids on the opposite and a dozen dilapidated patriots, hopping, lying and lounging about, all staring more or less at the new “nuss,” who suffered untold agonies, but concealed them under as matronly an aspect as a spinster could assume, and blundered through her trying labors with a Spartan firmness, which I hope they appreciated, but am afraid they didn't.



Louisa May Alcott, 1862, photogravure from a photo taken just before leaving for Washington as a nurse

IMAGE: LOUISA MAY ALCOTT: HER LIFE, LETTERS AND JOURNALS BY EDNAH DOW CHENEY

FROM ALCOTT'S JOURNALS

May 1868: Father saw Mr. Niles about a fairy book. Mr. N. wants a *girls' story*, and I begin *Little Women*. Marmee, Anna and May all approve my plan. So I plod away, though I don't enjoy this sort of thing. Never liked girls, or knew many, except my sisters, but our queer plays and experiences may prove interesting, though I doubt it.

July 15: Have finished *Little Women*, and sent it off — 402 pages. May is designing some pictures for it. Hope it will go, for I shall probably get nothing for *Morning Glories*.

Very tired, head full of pain from overwork, and a heart heavy about Marmee, who is growing feeble.


August: Roberts Bros. made an offer for the story, but at the same time advised me to keep the copyright, so I shall.

[An honest publisher and a lucky author, for the copyright made her fortune, and the “dull book” was the first golden egg of the ugly duckling. 1885. — L.M.A.]

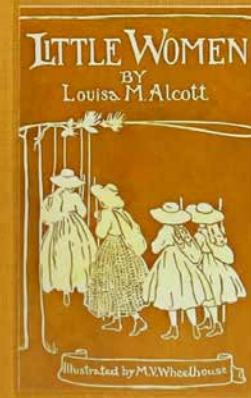
August 26: Proof of whole book came. It reads better than I expected. Not a bit sensational, but simple and true, for we really lived most of it, and if it succeeds that will be the reason of it. Mr. N. likes it better now, and says some girls who have read the manuscripts say it is “splendid!” As it is for them, they are the best critics, so I should be satisfied.

October 30: Saw Mr. Niles of Roberts Brothers, and he gave me good news of the book. An order from London for an edition came in. First edition gone and more called for. Expects to sell three or four thousand before the new year.

Mr. N. wants a second volume for spring. Pleasant notices and letters arrive, and much interest in my little women, who seem to find friends by their truth to life, as I hoped.

November 1: Began the second part of *Little Women*. I can do a chapter a day, and in a month I mean to be done. A little success is so inspiring that I now find my “Marches” sober, nice people, and as I can launch into the future, my fancy has more play. Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman's life. I *won't* marry Jo to Laurie to please anyone. 

Discussion Questions and Activities



Before the Play

GROWING UP DURING WAR

“But we haven’t got Father, not until this war is over.”

– Jo

Little Women is set in Concord, Massachusetts, during the 1860s — a time of big change in the U.S. as well as in the lives of our characters. While Louisa May Alcott is not specific about dates, many speculate that the story begins at Christmas 1861 and extends through the end of the decade. Throughout the pre-war and war years, Concord served as a station on the Underground Railroad, helping escaped enslaved people to freedom in Canada. While this is not reflected in *Little Women*, the Alcott home was a stop on the Underground Railroad. Reflecting those values, during the Civil War, Concord (a town of 2,000) sent 450 men to fight for the Union.

In this activity, students will become familiar with the real-life events that serve as the backdrop for *Little Women* and consider how growing up during this conflict might have impacted the characters.

Activity

Step One: Using the timeline below, students research one or more of the major events in the U.S. that took place during the years the March sisters were growing up. This can be an individual or group activity and can take place in class or as an at-home assignment.

Step Two: Students report out their findings. Discuss how living through these real-life events might have impacted the fictional March family.

Timeline

1860

April

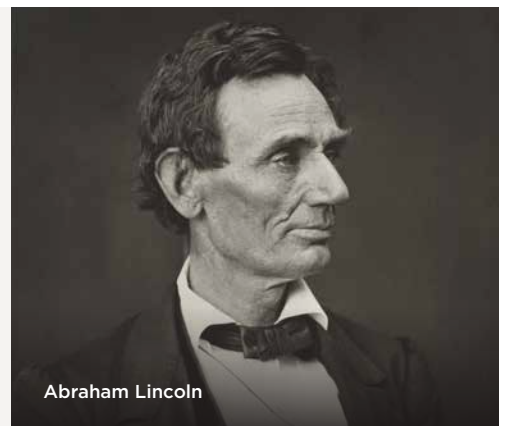
The attempted arrest in Concord of abolitionist Franklin Sanborn is thwarted by his neighbors. Louisa May Alcott writes, “Sanborn was nearly kidnapped. Great ferment in town.”

November 6

Abraham Lincoln is elected president.

December 20

South Carolina is the first state to secede from the Union.



Abraham Lincoln

IMAGES: ABE BOOKS; FINE ART AMERICA

Timeline (continued)

1861

January – February

Six additional southern states secede.

February 4

The Confederate States of America is organized in Montgomery, Alabama.

February 22

Jefferson Davis becomes President of the Confederate States of America.

April 12-13

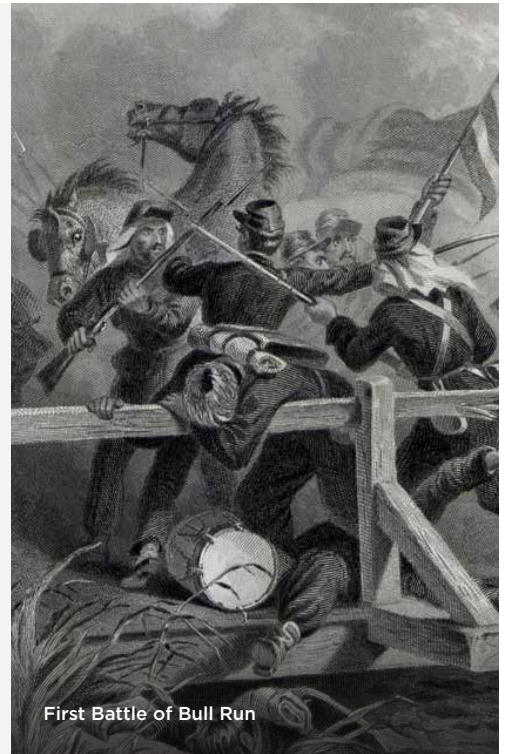
Confederate forces fire on Fort Sumter, beginning the Civil War.

April 15

Lincoln puts out a call for volunteers. 82 volunteers from the Concord Artillery left for Washington, D.C., on April 19.

July 21

The First Battle of Bull Run begins.



First Battle of Bull Run

1862

April 5

Union General George B. McClellan's forces siege Yorktown, Virginia.

August 29-30

Confederate victory at the Second Battle of Bull Run.

August – September

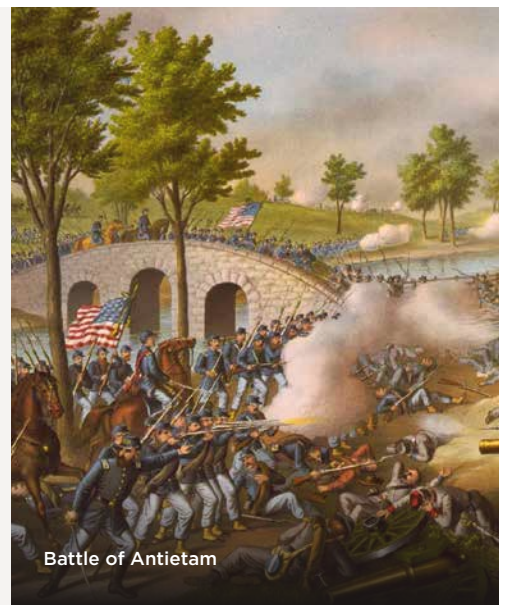
The U.S.-Dakota War takes place in Minnesota.

September 17

The bloodiest day of the war occurs at the Battle of Antietam with 23,000 casualties.

December 13

Confederate victory at the Battle of Fredericksburg.



Battle of Antietam

1863

January 1

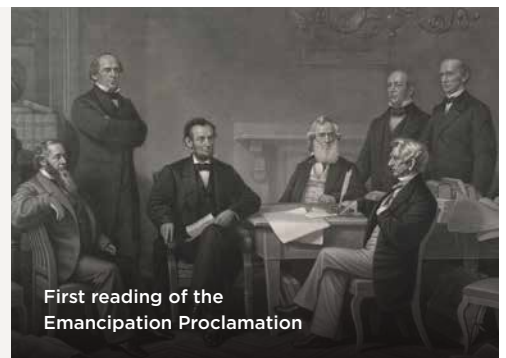
Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation.

July 1-3

Union victory at the Battle of Gettysburg.

November 19

Lincoln delivers the Gettysburg Address.



First reading of the Emancipation Proclamation

IMAGES: WIKIPEDIA; BRITANNICA; NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Timeline (continued)

1864

May 5

Union General William T. Sherman marches toward Atlanta, Georgia.

July 11-12

Jubal Early and 12,000 Confederate troops threaten Washington.

September 2

General Sherman captures Atlanta, Georgia.

October

Nevada becomes a state.

November 8

Abraham Lincoln is reelected president.

November 25

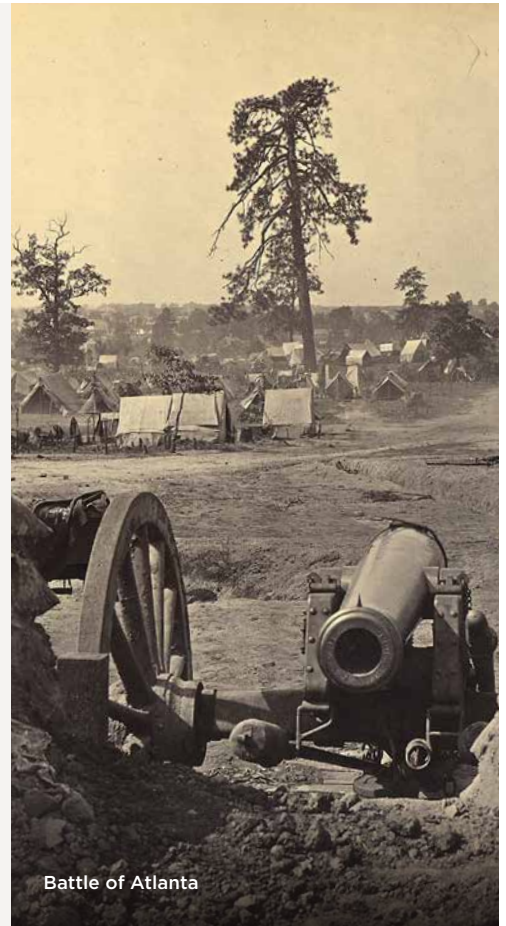
Brothers Junius, Edwin and John Wilkes Booth, three famous actors, perform *Julius Caesar* as a fundraiser.

December 16

Confederates' main western army is shattered at the Battle of Nashville.

December 22

General Sherman captures Savannah, Georgia.



Battle of Atlanta

1865

January 31

Passage of the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery.

April 2

Union troops take Petersburg, Virginia. The nearby confederate capital, Richmond, is evacuated and set on fire.

April 9

Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrenders to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia.

April 14-15

Actor John Wilkes Booth assassinates Abraham Lincoln, and Vice President Andrew Johnson becomes president.

June 19

The first Juneteenth, commemorating the end of slavery.



Passage of the 13th Amendment

IMAGES: BRITANNICA; THE PEW CENTER FOR ARTS & HERITAGE

Timeline (continued)

1866

April

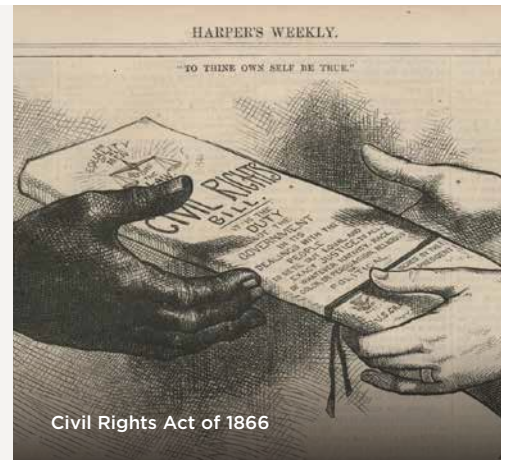
Passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866.

June 13

Congress passes 14th Amendment, which grants citizenship to African Americans and guarantees equal protection of the laws to all U.S. citizens.

July 24

Tennessee becomes the first U.S. state to be readmitted to the Union.



1867

March

The First Reconstruction Act is passed by the U.S. Congress.

April

The Ku Klux Klan reorganizes into a paramilitary organization.

October

The Territory of Alaska is purchased from the Russian Empire.



1868

February 24

Attempted impeachment of President Andrew Johnson for "high crimes and misdemeanors." He was acquitted by the Senate by one vote.

June 22-25

The remaining Confederate states are readmitted to the Union.

July 9

Congress ratifies the 14th Amendment.

September 30

The first volume of *Little Women* is published.



1869

March 4

Ulysses S. Grant is inaugurated as president.

April

The second volume of *Little Women* is published.

May 10

The Transcontinental Railroad is completed, joining the East and West Coasts via rail.



IMAGES: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS; HISTORY.COM; WIKIMEDIA; BRITANNICA

UNCOVERING LOUISA'S REAL WORLD

“It’s *my* story, sit down.”

– Louisa

The small town where Louisa May Alcott grew up — Concord, Massachusetts — is the setting for *Little Women*. Concord has a deep history that dates to the Revolutionary War. The town has been home to many famous literary figures, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne. In this activity, students will research the history of the Alcott family and Concord’s involvement in the Civil War.

Activity

Step One: In pairs or small groups, students quickly browse the online resources listed below.

Step Two: Each group should choose two resources that excite them for a deep dive. In their deeper investigation of the materials, students should note:

- The title and author
- At least four unique facts they learn about the Alcotts and the history of Concord during the Civil War

Step Three (Optional): As an at-home assignment, students watch *Concord’s Secret History* and record at least four unique facts to bring back and share with the class the following day.

Step Four: The class reconvenes to share out the students’ findings and discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions

- What surprised you when researching the history of Concord and the Alcott family? Was there a story or fact that stuck out to you while reading?
- How did the Civil War impact the community of a small town like Concord?
- In real life, Louisa May Alcott was older than her protagonist Jo March when the American Civil War began. Why do you think she decided to write about young people growing up during the Civil War?
- In what ways has the community of Concord kept their history and the legacy of its famous authors alive? Why do you think it is important to preserve Orchard House and honor Alcott’s work?

Research Links

“A Duty So Severe’ Concord and the Civil War.” Discover Concord.
discoverconcordma.com/articles/307-a-duty-so-severe-concord-and-the-civil-war



“Winds of War: Concord’s Early Role in the Civil War.” The Concord Bridge.
concordbridge.org/index.php/2023/04/14/winds-of-war-concords-early-role-in-the-civil-war



At-Home Option

Concord’s Secret History. PBS. 56 minutes.
pbs.org/video/concords-secret-history-k16t9l





PHOTO: ISABELLA STAR LaBLANC (DAN NORMAN)

BE THE PLAYWRIGHT

“Celebrated American Authoress ... What’s next?”

– Laurie

Four U.S. theaters co-commissioned playwright Lauren M. Gunderson to write this fresh take on *Little Women* which “is still really true to the book.” For her adaptation, Gunderson decided to make author Louisa May Alcott a character in the play, adding a level of historical context as well as a metatheatrical framing for the story. In adapting the novel, Gunderson chose the device of narration to include some of the descriptions in the novel as well as the characters’ inner feelings.

In this activity, students will make their own choices about how to adapt a passage from the novel into their own piece of theater.

Activity

Step One: Read the included selection from *Little Women* as a class.

Step Two: Brainstorm ways to bring the selection from the novel to theatrical life. Divide the class into groups, and have them put their ideas into action using one of the two options below.

Option One: Each group adapts the section into a script complete with speech headings, dialogue and stage directions. If time allows, act out the adaptations for the class and compare the different approaches taken in each adaptation.

Option Two: Each group distills the action down into a series of tableaux, or frozen living pictures. Be sure that students have at least three tableaux for the beginning, middle and end of the scene. Encourage each member of the group to be something (if not someone) in the scene.

Step Three: As a class, discuss the different approaches to telling the story theatrically that students observed in the performances.

As they gathered about the table, Mrs. March said, with a particularly happy face, "I've got a treat for you after supper."

A quick, bright smile went round like a streak of sunshine. Beth clapped her hands, regardless of the hot biscuit she held, and Jo tossed up her napkin, crying, "A letter! a letter! Three cheers for father!"

"Yes, a nice long letter. He is well, and thinks he shall get through the cold season better than we feared. He sends all sorts of loving wishes for Christmas, and an especial message to you girls," said Mrs. March, patting her pocket as if she had got a treasure there.

"Hurry up, and get done. Don't stop to quirk your little finger, and prink over your plate. Amy," cried Jo, choking in her tea, and dropping her bread, butter side down, on the carpet, in her haste to get at the treat.

Beth ate no more, but crept away, to sit in her shadowy corner and brood over the delight to come, till the others were ready.

"I think it was so splendid in father to go as a chaplain when he was too old to be drafted, and not strong enough for a soldier," said Meg, warmly.

"Don't I wish I could go as a drummer, a *vivan* — what's its name? or a nurse, so I could be near him and help him," exclaimed Jo, with a groan.

"It must be very disagreeable to sleep in a tent, and eat all sorts of bad-tasting things, and drink out of a tin mug," sighed Amy.

"When will he come home, Marmee?" asked Beth, with a little quiver in her voice.

"Not for many months, dear, unless he is sick. He will stay and do his work faithfully as long as he can, and we won't ask for him back a minute sooner than he can be spared. Now come and hear the letter."

They all drew to the fire, mother in the big chair with Beth at her feet, Meg and Amy perched on either arm of the chair, and Jo leaning on the back, where no one would see any sign of emotion if the letter should happen to be touching. Very few letters were written in those hard times that were not touching, especially those which fathers sent home. In this one little was said of the hardships endured, the dangers faced, or the homesickness conquered; it was a cheerful, hopeful letter, full of lively descriptions of camp life, marches, and military news; and only at the end did the writer's heart overflow with fatherly love and longing for the little girls at home.

"Give them all my dear love and a kiss. Tell them I think of them by day, pray for them by night, and find my best comfort in their affection at all times. A year seems very long to wait before I see them, but remind them that while we wait we may all work, so that these hard days need not be wasted. I know they will remember all I said to them, that they will be loving children to you, will do their duty faithfully, fight their bosom enemies bravely, and conquer themselves so beautifully, that when I come back to them I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women."

Everybody sniffed when they came to that part; Jo wasn't ashamed of the great tear that dropped off the end of her nose, and Amy never minded the rumpling of her curls as she hid her face on her mother's shoulder and sobbed out, "I am a selfish pig! but I'll truly try to be better, so he mayn't be disappointed in me by and by."

"We all will!" cried Meg. "I think too much of my looks, and hate to work, but won't any more, if I can help it."

"I'll try and be what he loves to call me 'a little woman,' and not be rough and wild; but do my duty here instead of wanting to be somewhere else," said Jo, thinking that keeping her temper at home was a much harder task than facing a rebel or two down South.

Beth said nothing, but wiped away her tears with the blue army sock, and began to knit with all her might, losing no time in doing the duty that lay nearest her, while she resolved in her quiet little soul to be all that father hoped to find her when the year brought round the happy coming home.



PHOTO: MAY HEINECKE, AUDREY PARKER, GEORGE KELLER, ISABELLA STAR LaBLANC AND STEPHANIE ANNE BERTUMEN (DAN NORMAN)



PHOTO: THE CAST OF LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S LITTLE WOMEN (DAN NORMAN)

After the Play

THE ARTIST WITHIN

**“Aunt March keeps me busy with painting and drawing lessons,
sketching great works of art.”**

– Amy

Each of the sisters in *Little Women* are artists in their individual ways. In this in-class or at-home activity, students will become artists themselves as they create a visual response to their experience at the theater.

Activity

Step One: Ask students to consider their experience of seeing *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women*. They should think about the emotions they felt watching the show, the characters and their stories, the costumes and stage design, or anything else striking.

Step Two: Students create their visual response. It can be a drawing, painting, collage, sculpture or other creative response.

Step Three: In groups or in front of the whole class, students share their visual response with the class, describing their piece and how it demonstrates their response to the production.

THE NATURAL WORLD OF LITTLE WOMEN

“The spring sunshine streamed in like a benediction.”

– Jo

Louisa May Alcott's family grew up surrounded by a community of writers and scholars involved in the philosophy of Transcendentalism, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Louisa's father, Bronson Alcott. Transcendentalism was a 19th-century New England movement that valued self-reliance, the innate goodness of people and the importance of connecting with nature. In this activity, students will read and discuss three quotes from Transcendentalist authors and then participate in a small group discussion about the relationship between nature and the production design of *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women*.

Activity

Step One: Project or write the following quotes on a board where your entire class can see them. Have three students volunteer to read the quotes out loud.

1. "To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. ... In the presence of nature a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows."

- **Ralph Waldo Emerson**, *Nature* (1836)

2. "Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit and resign yourself to the influence of the earth."

- **Henry David Thoreau**, journal entry, August 23, 1853

3. "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion."

- **Henry David Thoreau**, *Walden*, 1854

Step Two: Have students get into groups of four and conduct a small group discussion about the quotes using the following prompts.

Discussion Questions

- What do you think the author is expressing in each quote?
- Do you have a personal experience that relates to the idea expressed by each quote?
- Do you think that children or young people experience nature differently than adults? How?
- In what ways can being in nature impact your mood?
- How do you experience each season differently throughout the year?

Step Three: Join back together as a class and reflect on the Guthrie production with the following prompts.

Discussion Questions

- How was the natural world featured in the set design of *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women*? How did the lighting and sound design play a role in portraying the passing of time and different seasons?
- In a play that focuses on a family living at home together, why do you think the scenic designer chose to focus on having the action happen in an outdoor setting? What does that reveal about the impact of the natural world on the characters?
- Do you think this production of *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women* upholds the ideas and values of Transcendentalism represented in the quotes? Why or why not?

COMING-OF-AGE ONSTAGE

“I am different! A year over here and I’m a new woman!”

– Amy

In *Little Women*, we see the March sisters (and Laurie) grow up from children into young adults. In this activity, students will reflect on the changes in the characters and how the actors and costume designs help us see 10 years of growth in two-and-a-half hours.

Activity

Step One: Choose one of the characters to focus on:

- Meg played by Stephanie Anne Bertumen
- Jo played by Isabella Star LaBlanc
- Beth played by May Heinecke
- Amy played by Audrey Parker
- Laurie played by Daniel Petzold

Step Two: Prompt students to think back on the performance and make some notes. What did the actor’s movements and vocal choices reveal about their age at the beginning of the play? How did their movements and voices evolve by the end of the play? How did the changes of costumes and hairstyles show that the characters were growing up?

Step Three: Students compile their notes into a short review of the performance, comparing the younger character and the older character. Be sure to consider movement, vocal choices, costumes and hair design.

WHICH LITTLE WOMEN CHARACTER ARE YOU?

“They weren’t the adorable things anyone writes books about, they were just normal, wild, strange, hilarious, brave, wonderful women.”

– Louisa

Since the novel was first published in 1868, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott has never been out of print. The novel was an instant hit that has captured the hearts and imagination of readers throughout the world. While young adult fiction has now become a robust genre, *Little Women* helped to revolutionize the concept of a coming-of-age story. In this activity, students will work together to create character profiles for the young adults featured in *Little Women* and connect the characters with students’ lives today.

Activity

Step One: On a whiteboard or chalkboard, create five columns and label each with the following characters from *Little Women*: Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy and Laurie.



IMAGE: ILLUSTRATIONS BY COSTUME DESIGNER JESSICA FORD

Step Two: In groups or as a class, ask the following prompts about each character:

- What descriptors (writer, cousin, friend, class clown) describe the character?
- What adjectives would you use to describe their personality?
- What are their likes and dislikes?
- What are the challenges this character faces within the play?
- What are the character's goals or dreams?

Step Three: After all five character profiles have been generated by the class, give students time to choose one of the following prompts and independently write a reflection.

Option One: Which of the characters from *Little Women* do you relate to the most? Reflect on the traits you have in common with the character and/or a moment from the character's journey in the play.

Option Two: Who is someone in your life (friend, family member, teacher) that reminds you of a character from *Little Women*? Reflect on the traits your person shares with this character or a moment from the Guthrie production that reminded you of them.

Step Four (Optional): Pair students into groups of two and have students share their reflections and findings with each other. Did any students relate to the same character? Find out which character the class relates to the most!

AUTHOR OF YOUR OWN STORY

“Miss Alcott,’ the publisher Mr. Niles says. ‘We want you. To write. A book.’”

– Louisa

Little Women is considered a semi-autobiographical novel as Louisa May Alcott drew inspiration from her real-life childhood and relationships with her three sisters. In this activity, students will brainstorm ideas for their own semi-autobiographical story inspired by their lives.


Activity

Step One: Independently, students think of a particular event, experience or period in their life to focus on for their story.

Step Two: Students begin to outline their story using the following prompts:

- Where does your story take place?
- Who would be featured in your story?
- When is your story set? Is it a specific day at a specific time, or is it over a span of time?
- What is a lesson or idea you have learned that you want to highlight within your story?
- What happens in your story? What is the beginning, middle and end of the event(s)?

Step Three: Using their outline, students craft a one-page autobiographical excerpt featuring their story. Encourage students to clearly establish their setting, incorporate dialogue and use descriptive, sensory language as Louisa May Alcott does in *Little Women*.

Step Four: After writing their excerpt, students select a title for their autobiography. The title should capture the reader's attention and convey the essence of their story. Students should write a brief explanation (3–5 sentences) describing the significance of their chosen title. 

For Further Reading and Understanding

OTHER PLAYS BY LAUREN M. GUNDERSON

- *Ada and the Engine*
- *Anthropology*
- *Artemisia*
- *Bauer*
- *Billie Jean*
- *The Catastrophist*
- *Earthrise*
- *Exit, Pursued by a Bear*
- *The Half-Life of Marie Curie*
- *Jeannette*
- *Justice*
- *Lady Disdain*
- *Leap*
- *Natural Shocks: A One-Woman Play in a Tornado*
- *Silent Sky*
- *Toil and Trouble*
- *The Amazing Adventures of Dr. Wonderful and Her Dog!*
- *The Book of Will*
- *The Time Traveller's Wife*
- *Trojan Women*
- *Emilie: La Marquise du Châtelet Defends Her Life Tonight*
- *Georgiana and Kitty*
- *The Heath*
- *I and You*
- *Miss Bennet*
- *Peter Pan and Wendy*
- *The Revolutionists*
- *The Taming*
- *The Wickhams*

PODCAST

How to Playwright by Lauren M. Gunderson, available on various streaming platforms.

laurengunderson.com/how-to-playwright-podcast

MORE ABOUT LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

"Alcott: Not the Little Woman You Thought She Was." NPR, December 28, 2009.

American Bloomsbury by Susan Cheever. Simon & Schuster, 2006.

"Before Writing *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott Penned 'Blood and Thunder'" by Amaranta Sbardella. *National Geographic*, December 2, 2021.

Eden's Outcasts by John Matteson. W.W. Norton & Co., 2007.

The Journals of Louisa May Alcott edited by Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy and Madeleine B. Stern. University of Georgia Press, 1997.

"Little Woman" by John Matteson. *Humanities*, 30(6), November/December 2009.

"Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind *Little Women*." PBS, 2009.

Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women by Harriet Reisen. Picador, 2010.

Louisa May Alcott: A Personal Biography by Susan Cheever. Simon & Schuster, 2010.

Marmee & Louisa: The Untold Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Mother by Eve LaPlante. Simon & Schuster, 2012.

Orchard House: Home of Little Women directed by Jan Turnquist. Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House, 2018.

"Taking *Little Women* Seriously" by Anne Boyd Rioux. *Humanities* 39(3), Summer 2018.

WEBSITE

Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House

louisamayalcott.org