

LEARNING STAGE

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Study Guide by Kara McCarthy, dramaturg

UVU Theatre Presents

Little Women

The Broadway Musical

Based on the novel by Louisa May Alcott

Book by

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Music by

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UVU THEATRE

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

Louisa May Alcott was born on November 29th, 1832, in Pennsylvania. Like Jo March, she was one of four sisters, a spirited tomboy, and a natural storyteller who wrote plays for her and her sisters to perform for friends.

Her first book *Flower Fables* was published in 1854. During the Civil War, she served as a nurse in a Union hospital, an experience that inspired her 1863 book, *Hospital Sketches*. In addition to her well-known works, Louisa also wrote short stories—ranging from grisly tales of blood, guts and horror to eerie gothic thrillers.

In 1868, Louisa's publisher encouraged her to write a "girls' story," which led to the creation of *Little Women*. The novel was deeply influenced by her own life, with the March sisters inspired by Louisa and her three siblings. Even the March family home in the book was modeled after Orchard House, Alcott's own home in Concord, Massachusetts.



Louisa May Alcott



Little Women Film collage from Orchard House Website

An Astonishing Legacy

When Louisa May Alcott wrote *Little Women*, she would begin a lasting legacy that would cement her in history as being an "astonishing" woman.

From the four major films in 1933, 1949, 1994, and 2019 to numerous TV adaptations, stage plays, operas, ballets, and this musical, *Little Women* has been reimagined across generations in countless ways.

EMOTION AND CREATIVITY

In *Little Women*, Jo's stories come from her memories of home, the love she shares with her sisters, the pain of loss and rejection, and her strong ambition to succeed in her work.

In the same way, emotions like love, loss, and determination shape all of us, not just artists. They influence the way we tell stories, share experiences, and express ourselves in everyday life—whether through writing, music, conversations, or even the way we remember the past.

These emotions connect us to each other, helping us relate to stories on stage and find meaning in our own lives. What ways do you like to express your emotions?



Photo of Abstract Painting On Canvas by Steve Johnson



Blue Umbrella on Black Stairs by Ravi Kant

COPING THROUGH EXPRESSION

In *Little Women*, each of the sisters deals with stress, loss, and difficult emotions in their own way. For Jo, writing stories in the attic is her way of coping, while Amy turns to drawing, Beth finds peace in music, and Meg seeks comfort in family.

Just like the March sisters, we all have different ways of handling life's ups and downs. Some of us write, some draw, others play music, or just spend time with loved ones. We might also find relief in things like reading, watching videos, or practicing mindfulness.

Life is always changing, and sometimes it can feel like a lot to manage. What about you? What are some things that help you cope when stress, loss, or tough times come your way?

Shadow Muses

In Greek mythology, the Muses were the nine daughters of Zeus, each guiding a unique aspect of the arts and sciences. They served as sources of inspiration, influencing creativity in areas such as music, poetry, history, tragedy, comedy, writing, dance, and astronomy.

In this production of *Little Women*, Director Laurie Harrop-Purser has woven the concept of the Muses into the ensemble through Jo's Shadow Muses.

Each of Jo's Shadow Muses represents one of her sisters, guiding her along her journey throughout the play. They offer insight into Jo's mind, revealing her thoughts, emotions, and creative process. How does the addition of the muses impact your experience of the play?

Julia Taylor
Polly, Aunt March's
Assistant



Interview With Julia Taylor

As the dramaturg, I wanted to learn about the actors' experiences with ASL in this production. I spoke with Julia Taylor, who plays Aunt March's assistant, about her journey learning ASL and working with Anne Post Fife, who brings Aunt March to life on stage. Here's what Julia shared:

"Working on this project has been an incredible experience. Not only have I had the chance to perform in this fun show, but I've also learned so much about ASL.

I'll admit, I was nervous at first. I didn't know any ASL and worried that my lack of experience might become a hindrance, but Anne and the other interpreters were incredibly patient with me, answering my questions and putting me at ease right away.

Working with Anne on stage has also pushed me to grow as an actor. The way she commands the space and radiates energy is remarkable — it's taught me that acting is about so much more than words. In fact, some of the best acting doesn't involve words at all."

Writing Against the Odds

Louisa May Alcott's path to authorship was far from easy. Throughout her career, she wrote under various pseudonyms, navigating the choice between anonymity and recognition.

As an unmarried woman, she faced intense criticism, with some deeming her unqualified to write romance.

Today, women and minority authors still encounter obstacles, including internalized sexism and racism. According to Data USA, women made up 58.5% of the writing workforce in 2022, yet they continue to face challenges in gaining equal recognition and opportunities.

A Book on Beach Towel on White Sand
by K.B. Pics



Dramaturg's Note

At its heart, *Little Women* is a story about embracing individuality and challenging the roles society imposes on us. Jo March dares to push beyond expectations, proving that it's okay to be different and to create your own path.

Though Jo and Professor Bhaer disagree on almost everything, their story reminds us that love and acceptance can exist even in the face of contrast. In a modern world that's often divided, we too can seek understanding and connection rather than conflict when it comes to our communities and among our neighbors.

Like Beth and Mr. Laurence's friendship, we can be reminded of the possibilities that can come from choosing kindness. True compassion transcends differences, creating friendships and love where we least expect them in our own lives.

- Kara J. McCarthy

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