

ENRICHMENT GUIDE

little women



 **FIRST
STAGE**
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH THEATER

PROUD CORNERSTONE MEMBER

UNITED PERFORMING ARTS FUND

DEAR FIRST STAGE FRIENDS,

Jo March isn't your typical Victorian lady. She's ruthless and headstrong, and destined to be a great American novelist. As Jo and her sisters grow up in the middle of the Civil War, they strive to be brave, intelligent, and imaginative young women, while reconciling their own ambitions with society's expectations. Alcott's celebrated coming-of-age novel comes to stage in this modern and relevant adaptation.

This is a **Young Company Performance Project** – an actor-driven presentation using elemental production values. By stripping down to a nearly bare stage, the connection of actor to audience is enhanced, and the words of the play come alive in exciting ways, allowing our award-winning students to showcase their graduate level skills with full length material, from Shakespeare to American classics to pieces commissioned specially for them.

Enjoy the show,



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SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Our story begins at Christmastime in the March household in 1861. We're introduced to the four March sisters: Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy. The four girls are getting ready for the day while their housekeeper, Hannah, serves them breakfast. Amy uses a number of words incorrectly, and Jo writes them down in a little notebook. Meg is off to her job as governess for the Mingott family (or the Manhattan Mingotts). Jo is heading to Great Aunt March's house. Amy is off to school. None of them are particularly thrilled about the day's events, except for Beth, who stays home because of her anxiety. Meg and Jo must do their jobs to help earn money for the family, as their father is away, fighting in The Civil War. Jo is looking forward to visiting Europe with Aunt March in a few months, and hopes that the trip will make her painful visits with Aunt March worth it. Marmee (the girl's mother) returns home from helping the Hummel family, and discusses Christmas with the girls. She proposes that the family doesn't spend money on Christmas this year. The girls all have varied reactions to this idea. The girls head out for the day with hot potatoes in their pockets to keep their hands warm.

At school Amy is caught passing limes with her friends (sharing limes is the ultimate gesture of friendship), and her teacher slaps her hand. She runs from school, and runs into the March family's new neighbor, Laurie, who has moved in with his grandfather Mr. Laurence after the death of his parents. Laurie consoles Amy until his tutor Mr. Brooks comes looking for him. Mr.

Brooks insists on bringing the little girl home (although Amy insists she is a fully grown woman), and meets Meg and Jo. At home, the girls tend to Amy's hand, while Marmee agrees that Amy can be homeschooled for a while. Meg announces that the Mingotts have invited her and Jo to their dance. Meg is thrilled to go to the dance. Jo is not. And Amy is disappointed that she is too young to attend. At the dance Meg dances with Mr. Brooks, while Jo and Laurie hide from socializing and find that the two of them are more alike than they thought.

A few days later, the girls are rehearsing Jo's play, but they can't get it quite right. Jo invites Laurie to join them, but some of the girls are doubtful if he should be invited into their girl's club. Mr. Laurence does not think it's appropriate for Laurie to spend time with the March girls in this manner. Beth gathers all of her courage and pays a visit to Mr. Laurence to ask him to allow Laurie to participate in their play. Beth reminds Mr. Laurence of his daughter, Laurie's mother, and Beth admires his piano. On Christmas, the girls surprise Marmee by spending their money on gifts for her, and Mr. Laurence surprises Beth with a new piano. The March family celebrate Christmas with Laurie, Mr. Laurence and Mr. Brooks. Mr. Brooks and Meg dance together. Amy and Laurie dance, and Amy tries to get Laurie to kiss her under the mistletoe, but they are interrupted by a knock on the door. It's a telegram saying that Mr. March has been wounded. Mr. Brooks agrees to escort Marmee to the hospital. The trip will be expensive,

SYNOPSIS

and Jo will have to sacrifice her trip to Europe. Marmee and the girls worry about how they will pay the rent. Jo sells her hair so that the March family will not have to worry about money.

With Marmee gone, Meg is the lady of the house, and takes on extra duties running the household. Jo and Laurie cook up a plan for Jo to get stories published in the newspaper, and Beth cares for the ill Hummel family. The Hummel's baby dies as Beth cares for them, and she is quite shaken up. Beth gets scarlet fever from the Hummel family and becomes very ill. Amy is set away to stay with Aunt March because she's never had scarlet fever. Marmee and Mr. March return home, The girls are all delighted to see their father, Meg is delighted to see Mr. Brooks, and Jo and Laurie share a kiss under the mistletoe.

ACT II

We find the girls grown up. It's now 1863. Mr. March is home, but Marmee spends a lot of time caring for him. It's taken a toll on her. Meg is married to Mr. Brooks and they have two babies. Jo dresses in masculine clothing now. Beth has recovered from her illness, but she's still frail and sickly. Amy wears her hair up. Laurie is heading off to college. Jo is jealous of the opportunities that Laurie is entitled to as a man. Amy and Jo go to visit Aunt March, and Jo gets upset with Aunt March, yelling about ignoring the world's problems, and how that won't fix anything. In light of this outburst, Aunt March decides to take Amy to Europe instead of Jo. Jo decides to send herself to Europe, and begins working on writing a

novel. Meg visits. She is finding her role as wife and mother challenging, but it is what she wants. Jo tries to sell her novel to the man who printed her story in the newspaper, but he tells her he has no use for fluffy women stories unless they help him sell advertisements. Beth tries to console Jo and asks her to tell her a real story.

Spring of 1864, Laurie returns home. He looks like a man now. Jo confesses to Laurie that she doesn't feel like she has a place in the world. Laurie confesses that he loves Jo, and proposes. Jo cannot accept. She loves Laurie, but not in that way. And she does not wish to be a wife. Beth pays a visit to Laurie, who is mourning what he wanted; a future with Jo. Beth opens his eyes to what he has; a future with Amy, who has always loved him.

Upset, Amy tries to burn Jo's notebook in which she records Amy's misused words, but she accidentally burns Jo's novel instead. Jo and Amy argue. Jo tells Beth that she's tired of fighting. Beth faints. She is ill again. This time she won't get better. Beth fears leaving home. And she fears what will become of her family without her. Jo tells Beth she'll grow up, and do her duty for their parents. Beth tells Jo that is giving up, not growing up, and makes Jo promise to write the real stories, and to accept herself for who she is. Beth asks Jo to make amends with Amy, and to bring Amy and Laurie together. Beth dies from her illness, but Jo keeps her promises. She makes amends with Amy, she brings Amy and Laurie together, and she writes about her sister Beth, a real story.

WHICH MARCH SISTER ARE YOU?

QUIZ ACTIVITY

Find out which March sister you are! Read each question below and circle your answers.

1. Would you rather:

- a. Act
- b. Write
- c. Play music
- d. Paint

2. What is your favorite color?

- a. Pink
- b. Green
- c. Purple
- d. Baby Blue

3. Where do you want to live when you're older?

- a. Cottage
- b. Apartment
- c. Cabin
- d. Mansion

4. Which element are you most drawn to?

- a. Air
- b. Fire
- c. Earth
- d. Water

5. What is your preferred mode of transportation?

- a. Car
- b. Train
- c. Walk
- d. Airplane

5. What is your favorite place?

- a. A Party
- b. The Library
- c. Home
- d. The Mall

6. Who are you closest to?

- a. My group of friends
- b. My bff
- c. My family
- d. Everybody

6. Others describe you as:

- a. Responsible
- b. Ambitious
- c. Kind
- d. Social

Count your responses and write them here: **a:** _____ **b:** _____ **c:** _____ **d:** _____

If you got mostly a's you're most like Meg!

Meg is responsible, outgoing, and gentle.

If you got mostly c's you're most like Beth!

Beth is kind, caring, and empathetic.

If you got mostly b's you're most like Jo!

Jo is ambitious, daring, and creative.

If you got mostly d's you're most like Amy!

Amy is social, competitive, and boisterous.

A LETTER TO MR. MARCH

LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITY

In *Little Women*, the girls write letters to Mr. March while he's away fighting in the war, and to him, Marmee and Mr. Brooks while Mr. March is in the hospital. Choose a character from *Little Women* and write a letter to Mr. March, Marmee or Mr. Brooks from their perspective. Use the graphic organizer below to organize your ideas, then write your letter using the lines on the next page.

CHARACTER (Which character's perspective are you writing from?):	I'M WRITING A LETTER TO (Marmee, Mr. March or Mr. Brooks):
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THESE TWO CHARACTERS:	
THIS CHARACTER WANTS:	THIS CHARACTER LIKES:
THIS CHARACTER DOES NOT LIKE:	THIS CHARACTER HOPES:

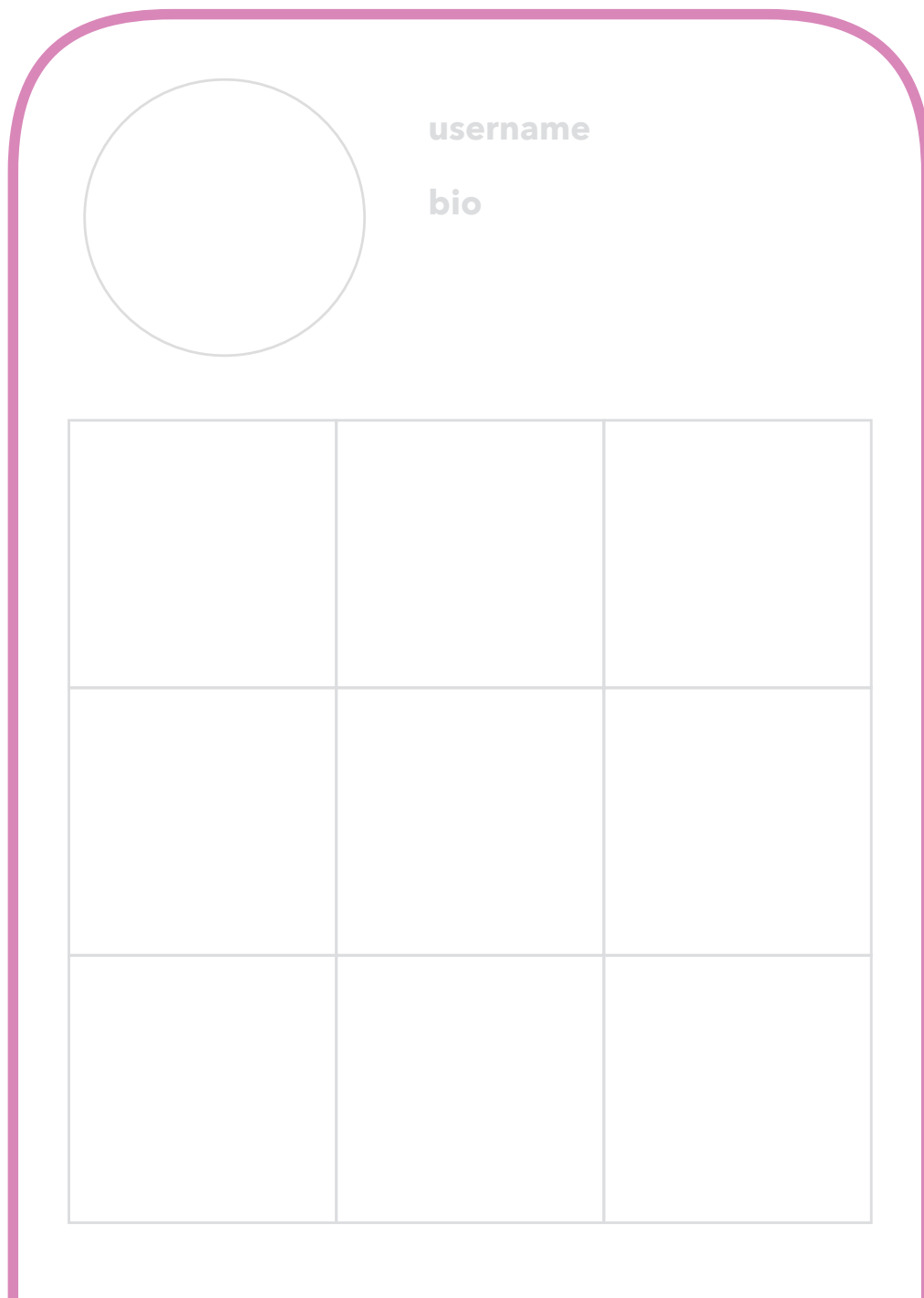
THE MARCH SISTERS ON INSTAGRAM

ART ACTIVITY

MATERIALS:

- Instagram template
- Pencil and any additional art supplies you wish to use

What would the March girl's social media profiles look like? What would they choose for their profile picture? What kind of posts would they make? What would their Instagram aesthetic be? Use the template below to design an Instagram profile for Meg, Jo, Amy, or Beth.



The template is a rounded rectangle with a pink border. It contains a circular profile picture placeholder on the left. To its right are labels for 'username' and 'bio'. Below these is a 3x3 grid of squares representing a grid of posts.

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS



1. *Little Women* takes place during and after the American Civil War. How would the story change if it were set in a different time period? If you were to set the story in a different time period, which would you choose, and why? What changes to the story would you have to make?
2. Which character from *Little Women* do you identify with most? Why? What characteristics do you share with that character?
3. How are gender roles and gender stereotypes explored in *Little Women*? What roles or stereotypes are challenged? What roles or stereotypes are reinforced?

WHO SAID IT?



1. You can be lonely in a crowd, if it's not the right crowd.
2. I, uh, found a damsel in distress upon your snowbank.
3. You have no idea how terrible it is – to spend years pretending to be someone you're not.
4. So be who you are, Josephine, and live with the consequences.
5. Nothing lasts forever.
6. You must think me the villain from Mr. Dickens' book, Beth March, to ruin Christmas.
7. No Laurie, I went blind for the holidays.
8. It feels as if there's been an earthquake.
9. We're all too young for this.
10. That's not growing up, that's giving up!

RECOMMENDED READING

