



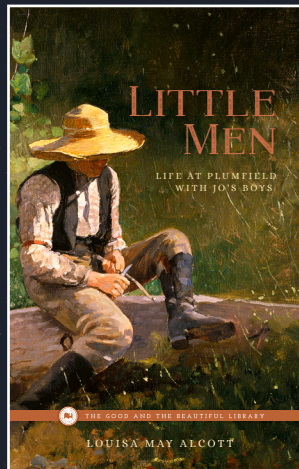
HIGH SCHOOL HONORS

# BOOK STUDY

## LITTLE MEN

• LIFE AT PLUMFIELD WITH JO'S BOYS •

*by* Louisa May Alcott

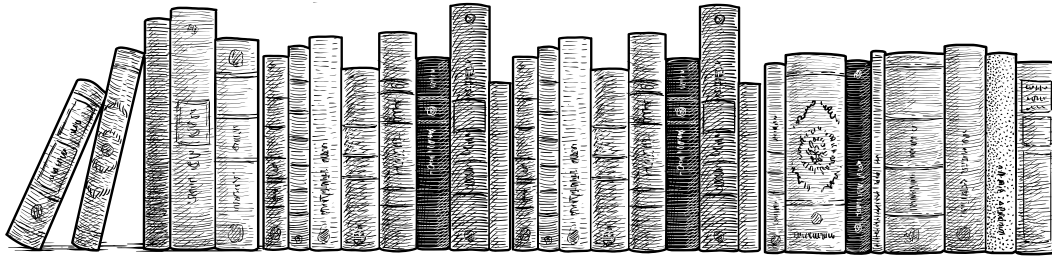


◦ THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL ◦

## VOCABULARY WORDS

*“Your understanding of what you read and hear is, to a very large degree, determined by your vocabulary, so improve your vocabulary daily.”*

—Zig Ziglar



**Abdicate** [AB-dih-cate]: to relinquish or give up a responsibility or duty

*The queen decided to abdicate her throne.*

**Alacrity** [uh-LACK-rih-tee]: brisk and cheerful readiness

*She accepted the invitation with alacrity.*

**Assuage** [us-SWAGE]: to relieve or soothe an unpleasant feeling

*He composed a beautiful song to help assuage his grief.*

**Beguile** [be-GUILE]: to charm or captivate someone, sometimes in a deceiving way

*The performer used flattery to beguile the crowd.*

**Carouse** [cuh-ROUZE]: to party with alcoholic drink and usually a great amount of noise

*The drunken group caroused all night.*

**Condole** [cuhn-DOLE]: to express sympathy and grieve with someone

*When my friend's father passed away, I brought flowers in an effort to condole her.*

**Congenial** [cuhn-JEE-nee-yole]: agreeable; pleasant; personable; friendly; amiable

*Everyone was drawn to his congenial personality.*

**Droll** [drole]: humorous or entertaining in a dry way

*He kept me laughing with his droll humor.*

**Effervescence** [eff-fer-VEHS-sents]: enthusiasm and vivacity; bubbles or fizz in a liquid

*His effervescence was contagious, creating a stir in all of us.*

**Expatriate** [ex-PAY-she-ate]: speak or write at length or in detail

*I plan to expatriate on this important topic during my presentation.*

**Ferule** [FEH-rule]: a rod, cane, or flat piece of wood for punishing children

*He felt a sharp crack across his hand from his teacher's ferule.*

**Filial** [FILL-ee-ul]: a child's duty to his or her parents

*He determined to tend the stables out of filial duty to his father.*

**Ignominious** [ig-nuh-MIN-ee-us]: deserving or causing public disgrace or shame; humiliating

*They suffered an ignominious defeat.*

**Impetuous** [im-PET-choo-us]: moving or acting quickly, without thought or care; hasty; impulsive

*The whole town bore the consequence of his impetuous decision.*

**Indolent** [IN-doe-lent]: wanting to avoid activity or exertion; lazy

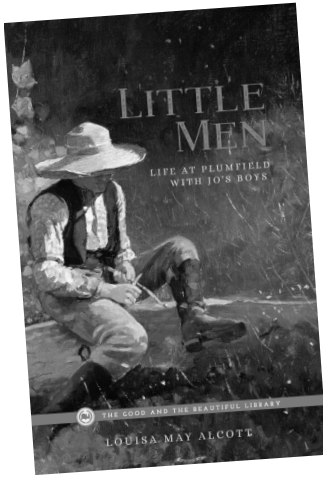
*I just don't understand his newly indolent behavior.*

# SECTION 1

## Chapters I–IX

### Introduction

Welcome to the *Little Men* Honors Book Study! You will use this book study as a guide while you read *Little Men*, a story full of wisdom, joy, sorrow, and laughable antics.



The goal of The Good and the Beautiful Book Studies is to strengthen both your mind and your heart. This book study is broken into three sections. Complete each section as you read the corresponding chapters in the book. Using the book study as a guide will give you a greater appreciation for the rich language, meaningful messages, and well-developed characters in the story.

Mark off the Section 1 activities below as you complete each one. When all four are completed, you are ready to begin Section 2.

- ☐ Complete the Vocabulary activity in this section.
- ☐ Read the Correlated Literature portion of this section.
- ☐ Read the article “Discerning the Value of Literature” in this section.
- ☐ Read Chapters 1 through 9 of *Little Men*.

### Vocabulary

Circle the correct word below. Use the vocabulary key on pages 3–4 when needed.

1. The queen decided to ABDICATE | REBUFF her throne because of turmoil in the kingdom.
2. He felt a sharp crack across his hand from his teacher’s FERULE | SOUSE.
3. The movie about endangered animals used much PLACID | PATHOS to gain sympathy.
4. She accepted the invitation with ALACRITY | TACITURN.
5. He determined to tend the stables on his own out of NOSEGAY | FILIAL duty to his father.
6. I love to sit and write in my journal in this SANGUINARY | PLACID meadow.
7. He composed a beautiful song on his piano to help ASSUAGE | BEGUILE his grief.
8. The team suffered an IGNOMINIOUS | EXPATiate loss.
9. I expect you to use REBUFF | PROPRIETY at dinner.
10. The performer used flattery to CONDOLE | BEGUILE the crowd.
11. His hasty decision was rather IMPETUOUS | ASSUAGE.
12. Rather than thank him, the fancy lady chose to LANGUISH | REBUFF his flattering compliments.
13. It’s much more beneficial and wise to study than to CAROUSE | PROPRIETY your college years away.
14. As he worked hard, he got tired of the INDOLENT | PALAVER employees who didn’t pull their weight.
15. The pasta was beautiful, but unfortunately, it was also rather IMPETUOUS | INSIPID.
16. My greatest goal is to RECOMPENSE | REBUFF you for the loss I caused.

## Correlated Literature

Part of understanding literature is understanding the background of the book and the author. You will learn more about the author of *Little Men*, Louisa May Alcott, in Section 3. In this section, you will learn some background information about *Little Men* and its beloved characters.

Before *Little Men* was published in 1871, the more widely known story *Little Women* by the same author was published in 1868. It was also followed in 1886 by Alcott's novel *Jo's Boys, and How They Turned Out*. All three books have many of the same characters. *Little Men* can be read without having read *Little Women* first, but it is helpful to understand who some of the characters are.



1969 illustration of *Little Women* by May Alcott

*Little Women* follows the lives of four sisters—Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March. The novel is based loosely on the lives of Louisa May Alcott and her three sisters, classifying the book as a **semi-autobiography**.

In particular, Josephine “Jo” March is a principal character in both books. In *Little Women*, Jo has a fiery temper and strong will. She works to control her temper with the help of her mother, sisters, and friends. Jo loves literature, both reading and writing.

During part of the story, Jo cares for her Great-Aunt March, a rich, elderly widow living in a mansion called Plumfield.

For a long while, Jo rejects the idea of romance and marriage because she doesn't want to break up the wonderful home life and relationships she has with her sisters. Toward the end of the book, however, a German professor, Friedrich “Fritz” Bhaer, proposes to Jo, and she accepts. When her Great-Aunt March dies, she leaves Plumfield to Jo. She and Professor Bhaer turn the house into a school for boys. They have two sons of their own, Robin “Rob” Bhaer and Theodore “Teddy” Bhaer.

You may enjoy watching the 2018 PBS production of *Little Women* (available on Amazon Prime at the time of this publication).

Here are some other important characters to know before starting *Little Men*:

**Theodore “Laurie/Teddy” Laurence** is Jo's brother-in-law (Amy's husband) and good friend. Jo is the only one allowed to call him “Teddy.” Most of his friends and family call him “Laurie.” He is a fun-loving, wealthy young man and is very generous when it comes to the needs of the school and its students. He makes frequent visits to the school, usually taking his daughter Bess with him.

**Bess “Goldilocks/Princess” Laurence** is Laurie and Amy's daughter, who is well loved by all the boys and girls at Plumfield. She is affectionately called “Goldilocks” and “Princess.”

**Asia** is the irritable but tender-hearted cook at Plumfield.

**Silas** is the jovial farmhand at Plumfield.

**Meg Brooke** is Jo's oldest sister, married to John Brooke; she is Daisy, Demi, and Josie's mother.

**Nat** is a twelve-year-old orphan who lived as a street musician until his father's death. He is brought to live at Plumfield.

**Dan** is a neglected fourteen-year-old orphan, who is brought to Plumfield by Nat.

**Nan** is the only unrelated girl brought into the school.

**John “Demi” Brooke and Margaret “Daisy” Brooke** are John and Meg Brooke's ten-year-old twins who are schooled at Plumfield.

**Tommy, Emil, Franz, Ned, Jack, George “Stuffy”, Dick, Billy, and Adolphus “Dolly”** are all boys who live at Plumfield and are schooled by the Bhaers.

## Discerning the Value of Literature

by Jenny Phillips



In my intense pursuit of seeking out the best literature, I have read thousands of books. Of all these books, *Little Men* is on my list of top-ten favorite books of all time. Why? The language is so skillfully and beautifully written that it was a deeply enjoyable and satisfying read for me. In addition, the many profound messages in the book also sank deep into my heart and made me a better person. With this being said, it was not a book that kept me up late into the night feverishly reading on the edge of my seat. In fact, it took me a while to read the entire book. Often in our world today, people judge how “good” a book is by how hard it is to put down. Certainly, books of the greatest value should be engaging, but they do not have to be instantly and constantly thrilling to be engaging, and the entertainment value of a book is only one measure of a book’s overall value. One of the main purposes of this book study is to help you learn, through reading and analyzing *Little Men*, how to recognize and appreciate books of great value.

### The Moral Value of Books

The Bible gives a valuable standard by which we can judge the moral value of books:

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Philippians 4:8 KJV)

*Little Men* is packed with messages that are pure and lovely. Here are some of them:

- appreciation for music
- compassion
- creativity and imagination
- family unity
- friendship
- gratitude

- high regard for motherhood, fatherhood, and family
- honesty
- kindness
- love of education
- love of nature
- loyalty
- manners and politeness
- mercy and forgiveness
- optimism and cheerfulness
- patience
- persistence and perseverance
- repentance
- respect for authority/parents
- responsibility
- tenderness and gentleness
- thoughtfulness

When judging the moral value of a book, consider that a book can have both bad and good themes and messages. This can be confusing when judging the overall morality of a book. Most books that contain immoral messages *also* contain a small or large amount of moral messages. If you add an immoral message to moral messages, the book still contains immoral material. If you have a bowl of horse manure and put juicy, ripe strawberries and fresh cream on top, it is still horse manure underneath, and it is still gross and not good to eat.

Another important matter to consider when judging the moral value of books is that just because a book has, perhaps, all good *themes and messages*, does not mean it is a moral book. For example, one recent best-selling book has the profound message that “love conquers all.” The main character stays moral and tries to combat evil. However, the reader is offered a lot of horse manure to eat along the way—profanity, sexually provocative scenes (not made to look acceptable, but still provocative), and many pages of disturbing graphic violence that can desensitize the reader to that level of violence.

*Little Men* has the same overall, deeply profound message of “love conquers all.” However, to get to that message, the reader is not dragged through profanity, immorality, or graphic violence.

Yes, an immoral book can have positive messages and even impact us in good ways, but immoral books will also

## Literary Analysis



Analyzing literature can be an eye-opening experience, especially as you compare widely popular books of low literary value with “good and beautiful” books. As you learned in the last section, too often books are chosen by entertainment value alone, but with good analytical skills, you will be able to draw conclusions for yourself on whether a book is worth reading.

There are several categories to consider when analyzing a book:

- *entertainment value*
- *moral value*
- *educational value*
- *literary value*

It is very common for *entertainment value* to be placed high on the list of importance. However, being entertained is not the greatest purpose for literature. It’s also important to recognize that a book can be entertaining in many different ways. There is the instantly gratifying, constantly thrilling type of entertainment, more like a video game; then there is entertainment that makes you work for it, diving deep into beautiful descriptions, complex characters, and profound insights, more like taking a long walk in the woods while looking for a rare type of flower. When you are not used to the latter type of entertainment, it may take some time and persistence to come to fully appreciate and enjoy it. If you persist, your mind and heart will become more cultivated to a deeper, more fulfilling type of entertainment.

In Section 1, you read about *moral value* of literature. The importance of the moral value in books cannot be exaggerated. List some of the moral messages you have already discovered in *Little Men*:

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*Educational value* is how much the reader learns from the book. Historical fiction, for example, is frequently used to educate the reader on a certain time, geographical area, person, and/or event through a story. Not all historical fiction is equally educational, though. Accuracy and detail play a big part in the educational value of a book.

Finally, the *literary value* is determined by how well-written a book is. This can be analyzed by paying attention to the sentence structures, literary devices, descriptive writing, and the author’s ability to create believable characters and engage the reader in the story.

Louisa May Alcott’s works have tremendous literary value. Her understanding of grammar and sentence structure, her use of literary devices and descriptive writing, and her ability to engage the reader in a captivating story with lovable characters all combine to create masterpieces.

Let’s analyze the descriptive writing in several paragraphs of *Little Men*:

### page 14:

*A few slight accidents occurred, but nobody minded, and gave and took sounding thwacks with perfect good humor, while pillows flew like big snowflakes.*

- **sounding thwacks:** sensory language (sound)
- **pillows flew like big snowflakes:** simile

### page 30:

*Nat looked with delight from the babbling brown water below to the green arch above, where bees were making a musical murmur as they feasted on the long yellow blossoms that filled the air with sweetness.*

- **brown, green, yellow:** sensory language (sight)
- **babbling:** sensory language (sound)
- **babbling brown:** alliteration
- **murmur:** sensory language (sound)
- **musical murmur:** alliteration
- **filled the air with sweetness:** sensory language (smell)
- **feasted on:** precise/strong verb (compare to “fed upon”)

## Themes and Messages

Chapter 14 of *Little Men* is titled “Damon and Pythias,” a reference to a Greek legend. In the legend, Damon and Pythias were loyal friends. Pythias was accused of treason against the tyrannical King Dionysius and sentenced to death. Pythias asked for permission to return to his home one final time to say goodbye to his family and make sure all his affairs were in order. The king, of course, thought that Pythias would not return and refused the request.

Damon heard of his friend’s plight, and he asked to be held as a hostage so Pythias could return home. The king told Damon that if Pythias did not return in time for the execution, Damon would be executed in his stead. Damon agreed to the conditions, and Pythias was released.

King Dionysius thought that Pythias would not return and that Damon was a fool. Indeed, the day came for Pythias’ return, and the king called the executioner to kill Damon, but Pythias appeared just in time! He apologized to his friend for taking so long and explained that, on his return to relieve his friend from captivity, pirates had captured his ship and thrown him overboard. He had swum ashore and hurried to the palace as fast as he could.

The king was so amazed and touched by the loyal friendship of Damon and Pythias that he pardoned both men and set them free.

Like the story of Damon and Pythias, Chapter 14 of *Little Men* touches deeply on two important topics: loyal friendship and honesty.

Read the following excerpt:

Nat felt the difference in the way they spoke of Demi and himself, and would have given all he had or ever hoped to have to be so trusted; for he had learned how easy it is to lose the confidence of others, how very, very hard to win it back, and truth became to him a precious thing since he had suffered from neglecting it.

Professor Bhaer set a wonderful example of how to deal with a dishonest child. Read again the following passages that demonstrate how Professor Bhaer spoke to the children when it appeared there was a thief and a liar among them:

“Take your seats,” he said; and, when all were in their places, he added slowly, as his eye went from face to face with a grieved look, that was harder to bear than a storm of words,

“Now, boys, I shall ask each one of you a single question, and I want an honest answer. I am not going to try to frighten, bribe, or surprise the truth out of you, for every one of you have got a conscience, and know what it is for. Now is the time to undo the wrong done to Tommy, and set yourselves right before us all. I can forgive the yielding to sudden temptation much easier than I can deceit. Don’t add a lie to the theft, but confess frankly, and we will all try to help you make us forget and forgive.”



And a little later:

“I am very sorry, Nat, but evidences are against you, and your old fault makes us more ready to doubt you than we should be if we could trust you as we do some of the boys, who never fib. But mind, my child, I do not charge you with this theft; I shall not punish you for it

till I am perfectly sure, nor ask anything more about it. I shall leave it for you to settle with your own conscience. If you are guilty, come to me at any hour of the day or night and confess it, and I will forgive and help you to amend. If you are innocent, the truth will appear sooner or later, and the instant it does, I will be the first to beg your pardon for doubting you, and will so gladly do my best to clear your character before us all.”

Continue to watch for themes and moral messages as you read *Little Men*.



*Group Discussion: If completing this unit as a group, discuss the following questions:*

1. Why do you think Louisa May Alcott titled Chapter 14 “Damon and Pythias”?
2. Who are the two characters that she relates to Damon and Pythias?
3. How important is trust to you? What would you give to have others trust you? How can you earn and keep trust?
4. What have you learned from Nat, Dan, and Professor Bhaer?

## Example Response Paper

A response paper discusses your reaction to a text. A response paper is not a summary of the text; it is your own personal analysis and impressions of what you read. Response papers are written from the first person point of view, which means you may have phrases such as “I believe” or “I feel.”

Writing a response is a wonderful exercise for subjective thinking, organization, and writing. One of the best ways to learn to write well is to read model writing. Read and analyze the following short response paper, making a checklist in your notebook of items needed for a successful response paper.

Starts with an attention-grabbing opening, such as a question, quote, short personal experience, or—as in this case—an interesting statement.

The title and author of the book are listed in the opening paragraph.

A body paragraph should have a topic sentence, but it does not always come as the first sentence in the paragraph.

It can be effective to use specific examples from the text, paraphrased or quoted.

### *Little Men Chapter 15*

#### *Response Paper*

*by Jenny Phillips*

Most people will not find themselves searching for a giant lost ruby in the middle of an exotic, mysterious jungle while being pursued by foes riding on elephants. Life rarely contains the kind of thrilling excitement you would find in an action-packed movie. Does that mean regular life is boring for most people? Chapter 15 of *Little Men* by Louisa May Alcott shows, through masterful writing, that regular life, indeed, does not have to be boring. Rather, excitement and deep enjoyment can be found in small things, available to everyone.

If you were trying to help a reader see how beautiful small, ordinary things in life can be, would you think of using the point of view of a tree? This is exactly what Alcott does in Chapter 15, brilliantly showing the beauty of ordinary things that happen in and under the willow tree. Alcott describes how the quiet, pleasant tree enjoys the children and all they do. From a busy, adult perspective, perhaps little girls’ bits of soap for washing doll clothes and little boys’ plans for butterfly nets are not of much significance. But the old tree finds it delightful: “A passing breath of air shook the old willow, as if it laughed softly at the childish chatter which went on in the nest, and it had hardly composed itself when another pair of birds alighted for a confidential

Transitions to the thesis statement.

Thesis statement

Topic Sentence

Each body paragraph sticks to the main idea of the topic sentence.

## Author Study

### LOUISA MAY ALCOTT BIOGRAPHY

BY PENNY E. COE

Many years before you were born, there lived in the pretty town of Concord, Massachusetts, a very happy family. There was a father, a mother, and four little girls. The sisters were named Anna, Louisa, Elizabeth, and May Alcott. The second child, Louisa, was the one who grew up to write the stories you are about to read, and many others besides. She called herself Jo March in a beautiful book that she wrote about herself and her sisters. This book is *Little Women*, which you must read someday, if you have not already. As Miss Alcott came to write more and more for children, she came to call herself their Aunt Jo.

If you had been a child in Concord when the Alcotts were little girls, you would have loved to have Louisa for a playmate. She was a jolly little girl to know. She loved to climb trees, jump fences, and run races like a wild young deer. She wrote of herself, "No boy could be my friend till I had beaten him in a race, and no girl if she refused to climb trees, leap fences, and be a tomboy." Walks of ten, fifteen, and even twenty miles were common. There was swimming and boating on the Concord River in summer and skating in winter. Often the children skated through the deep-green pine woods over the crust of the snow.

Louisa was an active child with a mind so wide awake that adventures were always coming her way.

They began when she was only two years old. Her family was on their way by boat from Philadelphia to Boston. Suddenly Louisa was missed. Where could the baby toddler be? The anxious father and mother searched everywhere. At last she was found in the engine room, contentedly examining all about her. She liked the strange place she had found—it was "SO nice and dirty."

When she was six, Louisa was lost for the whole day. At this time the family was living in Boston. Miss Alcott tells the story herself most charmingly.

"Running away was one of the delights of my early days. On one of these occasions I passed a rainy day with some Irish children, who hospitably shared their cold potatoes, salt fish, and crusts with me as we reveled in the ash-heaps which then adorned the wastelands where the Albany Depot now stands. A trip to the Common cheered the afternoon, but as dusk set in and my friends deserted me, I felt that home was a nice place after all, and tried to find it. I dimly remember watching a lamp-lighter as I sat to rest on some doorsteps in Bedford Street, where a big dog welcomed me so kindly that I fell asleep with my head pillowed on his curly back, and was found there by the town-crier, whom my distracted parents had sent in search of me. His bell and proclamation of the loss of 'a little girl, six years old, in a pink frock, white hat, and new green shoes,' woke me up, and a small voice answered out of the darkness, 'Why dat's me.'"



Mr. Alcott, Louisa's father, was a philosopher and teacher. He held at that time advanced views on education. He had taught his little girls from their earliest years. One day, two distinguished friends were calling upon Mr. and Mrs. Alcott in Concord. They were the famous authors Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller.

Miss Alcott tells the story gleefully, and we cannot do better than to quote her words. In the course of the conversation, Miss Fuller said:

"Well, Mr. Alcott, you have been able to carry out your methods in your own family, and I should like to see your model children."

"She did in a few moments—for as the guests stood on the doorsteps a wild uproar approached, and round the corner of the house came a wheelbarrow holding baby May arrayed as a queen; I was the horse, bitted and bridled, and driven by my elder sister Anna, while Lizzie played dog and barked as loudly as her gentle voice permitted.

"All were shouting and wild with fun, which, however, came to a sudden end as we espied the stately group before us, for my foot tripped, and down we all went in a heap, while mother put a climax to the fun by saying with a dramatic wave of the hand:

"Here are the model children, Miss Fuller!"

Doubtless Louisa had suggested this game with the wheelbarrow, for she was the leader in all the plays. Her



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