

Little Women

January 23-February 1

Fridays & Saturdays at 7:30 pm

Sundays at 3:00 pm

2nd Street Stage

**Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts
Center**

120 South 2nd Street

Based on the novel by Louisa May Alcott

Produced nationally and internationally, *Little Women* has been praised by critics for its ambition in adapting such a well-known story for the stage. This timeless, captivating story is brought to life in this glorious musical filled with personal discovery, heartache, hope and everlasting love. The original production starred the unparalleled Sutton Foster, who received Tony, Outer Critics Circle and Drama Desk nominations for her performance.

Based on Louisa May Alcott's life, *Little Women* follows the adventures of sisters Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy March. Jo is trying to sell her stories for publication, but the publishers are not interested – her friend, Professor Bhaer, tells her that she has to do better and write more from herself. Begrudgingly taking this advice, Jo weaves the story of herself and her sisters and their experience growing up in Civil War America.



About the Thalian Association

Thalian Association Community Theatre is a non-profit, membership organization that's dedicated to enhancing the rich artistic environment of the Cape Fear region. Tracing its roots back to 1788, the Thalian Association Community Theatre was founded to provide arts education and bring the excitement of the performing arts to Wilmington, North Carolina. Today the Thalian Association Community Theatre produces five major productions annually on the Main Stage at historic Thalian Hall, offers a Youth Theatre program and professionally manages the Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts Center for the City of Wilmington. In 2007, the North Carolina legislature named the Thalian Association Community Theatre the Official Community Theater of North Carolina.



The Story Behind *Little Women*

About the novel: The 1868 novel *Little Women* revolves around four sisters growing up in America during the tumultuous period of the Civil War. The novel's title *Little Women* refers to the fact that the characters are between childhood and early adulthood when the events of the novel take place. The novel was written by Louisa May Alcott and combined the literary styles of children's fiction, romanticism, realism, and historical fiction to write a coming-of-age masterpiece that revolves around four sisters. The work is semi-autobiographical, meaning that some of the characters are based on Louisa's sisters, friends, and extended family, and some of the plotlines are based on things that happened during her real life and in her mother's life. However, Louisa also uses the concept of literary license in *Little Women*, crafting fictional, idealized versions of real people and true events. The musical stage adaptation follows the same story as the novel, but it is presented in a more brief format that condenses the two-volume novel and adds musical numbers to make the story more suited for a stage performance.



The four March sisters: Jo, Meg, Beth, and Amy.



Louisa May Alcott in 1870

About the author: Louisa May Alcott lived in the mid-1800s, from 1832-1888. Louisa was an outspoken abolitionist, suffragist, and feminist, and her literary fame and advocacy made her an influential and famous figure during her lifetime. As a child, she lived in Concord, Massachusetts, and her family often struggled financially during that time. Like the character Jo in her novel, she worked and sold stories to help support her parents and siblings. Louisa published her first work in 1851 when she was around eighteen years old. During the early 1860s, when Louisa was in her late 20s, America became increasingly divided because of the Civil War. During the war, Louisa worked as a hospital nurse in Washington, D.C., taking care of injured soldiers. After the war, Louisa fought to establish herself in the literary world, writing

stories and articles for the magazine *Atlantic Monthly*. A few years later, Louisa finally began to see some success when she started writing books that were based on her own life, like 1863's *Hospital Sketches*, a compilation of letters she wrote about her experience as a nurse during the war.



Portrait of Louisa May Alcott

In the mid-1860s, Louisa became the editor of a children's magazine, and her publisher asked her to write a novel specifically aimed at girls and young women. At first, Louisa did not want to write the story because she thought the plot would be boring; she enjoyed writing sensationalist fiction and detective novels at the time. However, after some encouragement by her publisher, she decided to base the characters off the young girls she knew best - her and her sisters.

At a time when more than 90% of women in America were married, Louisa, having never married herself, had a goal to get women to look at their life in a different light. Consequently, themes of feminine independence, equality, love, and marriage are very prevalent in the

book. Louisa deliberately wrote the characters to portray men and women on equal terms, with husbands and wives jointly making decisions about household management, work, and raising children. Many of the women in the story also have jobs outside the home.

When the first volume of *Little Women* was published in 1868, the book became an immediate blockbuster success. The first printing sold out in months, and the publisher had a hard time keeping up with the demand.



Louisa May Alcott



Louisa May Alcott reading a book

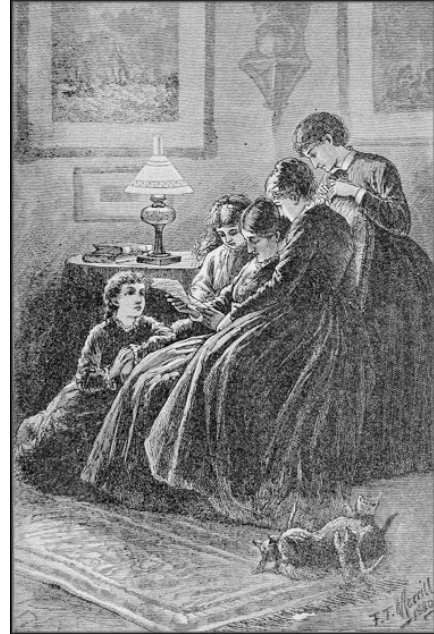
Many readers sent letters to Louisa to ask her how the story of the March sisters ends, and her fans inspired Louisa to write the second volume of the story in 1869. All together, Louisa published over seventy novels, short stories, collections, and poems during her lifetime. Today, over one hundred and fifty years after the first volume of *Little Women* was published, Louisa's words continue to ring in the ears of her devoted audience.

Little Women Character Descriptions

Read the following character descriptions to learn more about the four March sisters and their close circle of friends and family.

The March Family: The March family are the main characters of the story. They live in a neighborhood in Massachusetts in the 1860s during the Civil War. The family includes a mother named Margaret, father named Robert, four sisters named Jo, Amy, Beth, and Meg, and their Aunt March. The four sisters are very close but all have extremely different personalities. The family has social and family connections and used to be well-off, but they have fallen on hard times due to the father Robert helping a friend pay off a debt and subsequently losing all of their savings.

Jo: Jo March is the story's protagonist, meaning her life is the focal point of the book. The character of Jo is based on Louisa herself. Jo is fifteen years old when the story begins, and, even then, she is very headstrong and rebellious. Jo is depicted as unable to be influenced by outside forces, even her Aunt March, who is trying to push Jo to be more ladylike in order to fit into higher society's social circles. Instead, Jo dreams of being a writer, and spends many hours in her attic studio writing novels, stories, and plays.



An illustration of the March family by Frank Merrill

Meg: Meg is Jo's older sister. The character of Meg is based on Louisa's actual older sister, Amy Alcott. At the start of the story, Meg is sixteen, one year older than Jo. In the novel, Meg is portrayed as beautiful and responsible. As the oldest, she often takes charge of the household when her parents are away. During the first part of the story, Meg makes her entrance into the circles of high society with the help of her wealthy Aunt March, and she is expected to find a husband and start a family of her own soon.



Jo, Meg, and their mother

Beth: Beth is Jo's younger sister, and she is shy, sweet, and introverted. Beth is thirteen years old when the story begins. Beth's character and personality are based on Louisa's sister Elizabeth Alcott. Beth is a musician who enjoys playing the piano. She often goes out of her way to help people in need, and ends up contracting scarlet fever after visiting a family with sick children.

Amy: Amy is the youngest March sister, aged just twelve when the story begins. Amy's status as the youngest child means she is a little spoiled and selfish at times. The character of Amy is based on May Alcott, Louisa's youngest sister. Amy loves art and eventually moves to Europe to become a moderately successful artist.



Mr. March and his daughters

Margaret: Margaret, the mother of the March sisters, is called Marmee by her family and children. Marmee is the matriarch of the family, and the March family life centers around her after their father Robert is called away to serve as a chaplain in the Civil War. Marmee is based on Louisa's mother, Abigail Alcott.

Robert: Robert is the father of the March sisters and the patriarch of the family. Robert is based on Louisa's father, Bronson Alcott. During most of the novel, Robert is away from the family, serving as a Chaplain in the Civil War.

Aunt March: Aunt March is the girls' aunt on their father's side. Aunt March is widowed and wealthy, and she is portrayed as snobbish and cantankerous. Though she goes out of her way to help the March sisters, she is very outspoken and often causes family rifts as a result.

Laurie: Laurie is a neighbor who lives near the March sisters. He befriends all of the sisters, but forms an especially close relationship with Jo. Laurie is often seen riding his horse. Laurie's parents tragically died when he was a child, and he was raised by his wealthy grandfather. Laurie is the love interest of several of the sisters during the events in the novel.

Professor Baher: Professor Baher is a respected, middle-aged professor from Berlin, Germany. Jo meets him while they are both residing at a boarding house in New York City. Though Baher is a philosopher and intellectual, he is poor, and older than Jo. However, that doesn't stop him from falling in love with her. Professor Baher's character is based on several of Louisa's mentors and other men she admired, including Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, two famous intellectuals and authors of the 1800s who were both friends with her father Bronson.



Laurie on his horse

***Little Women* Character Questions**

Answer these questions to test your knowledge about the characters in *Little Women*.



Meg at a ball

1. Who is Jo? Why is she the protagonist of the story? What does it mean to be the novel's protagonist?

2. Who is Meg? Why does she have an important role in the March household?

3. Who is Amy? What are some of her character's personality traits?



Beth playing piano

4. Who is Beth? What does she enjoy doing? Why does she get sick?

5. Who is Robert? Why is his character absent for most of the novel?



Jo and Professor Baher

6. Who is Aunt March? Why does her character cause trouble for the family?

7. Who is Professor Baher? Which real-life people is his character based on?



Laurie and Jo

8. Who is Laurie? Out of all the March sisters, who is his best friend?

Write Your Own Semi-Autobiographical Short Story

Little Women is semi-autobiographical, meaning the story is mostly true and based on Louisa May Alcott's real experiences growing up in America during the period surrounding the American Civil War. Louisa used the concept of literary license to craft her novel by building fictional characters and plotlines based on real people and events. This technique helps her novel seem more believable to readers.

Use the following space to write your own short story based loosely on an event from your real life. Try to practice the concept of literary license to condense your real-life story into its most important parts.

[illegible]

***Little Women* Coloring Sheet**

Use your imagination to color an illustration of the March family by Frank T. Merrill from the novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. Over two hundred illustrations by Merrill appeared in the illustrated version of the novel.

