

STUDY GUIDE LESSON INFORMATION

The six curricular lesson plans listed in the matrix below and found on the following pages focus on themes found within the novel and musical *Little Women*. Use them with your class prior to seeing the show to enhance your students' understanding of the historical context of this great American story. Be sure to utilize the Online Connections to enhance your experience and interact with other students and schools!

| Lesson Title | Grades | Core Subjects | Relevant Blog Topics |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| The Characters of <i>Little Women</i> (pages 16-17) | Middle School 5 - 8 | CA, SS | 11/10-Family 11/24-Gender 12/1-Individuality |
| Communication, Writing, and <i>Little Women</i> (pages 18-19, 28) | Middle School 6 - 8 | CA | 11/3- Theatre Then and Now |
| Understanding Themes in <i>Little Women</i> (pages 20-21, 29) | Middle School 6 - 8 | CA, SS, and Theatre | 12/8- Civil War Era 12/15- Musical and Novel |
| Gender and Louisa May Alcott's <i>Little Women</i> (pages 22-23) | Grade 8 and High School | CA, SS | 11/10- Family 11/17- 19th c. Rights 11/24- Gender 12/1- Individ./ Conformity |
| "Astonishing": Individuality vs. Conformity in <i>Little Women</i> (pages 24-25, 30) | Middle and High School | CA, SS, and Theatre | 12/1-Individuality and Conformity in the 19th c. |
| Transcendentalism and <i>Little Women</i> (pages 26-27) | Grade 8 and High School | CA, SS | N/A for Blog (see list of online resources) |

LITTLE WOMEN BLOG

<http://stagesacademy.wordpress.com/>

Join us for the *Little Women* BLOG—a place for students studying the novel in conjunction with the upcoming STAGES ST. LOUIS production to connect. We will post information, images, links, and articles on this site weekly. Check back often to see what's new and don't forget to comment so that other students can read what you write!

Little Women Blog Topics

Week 1 (11/3): Theatre Then and Now
 Week 2 (11/10): Family in *Little Women*
 Week 3 (11/17): 19th Century Rights
 Week 4 (11/24): Gender and *Little Women*
 Week 5 (12/1): "Astonishing": Individuality & Conformity in the 19th c.
 Week 6 (12/8): The Civil War Era
 Week 7 (12/15): The Musical and the Novel

Each week four entries will be made. Refer to the Lesson Matrix to see how each of the above topics relates to the lessons in the Study Guide. The following entries will be posted each week:

Monday: ***Blog Entry/ Discussion Thread***
 Wednesday: ***Teacher Resource***
 Thursday: ***Production & Theatre***
 Friday: ***Actor journal from Casey Erin Clark***

THE CHARACTERS OF *LITTLE WOMEN*

Objective

Students will analyze and discuss the characters in the novel *Little Women*.

Outcomes

In this workshop, students will...

- understand literary elements of a novel including the terms *character, plot, setting, and motivation*.
- compare and contrast characters in the book.
- write about which character they most identify with.

Targeted Grade Level: This lesson will work best for grades 5-8. It can be adapted to work with even younger students, but more time should be allowed if that is the case.

Targeted Learning: Missouri Grade Level Expectations

Middle School (grade 6-8)

| Skill/ Task | Comm. Arts | Social Studies |
|---|------------|----------------|
| Make Connections/ Analyze Text | R1I | RIG-6D |
| Analyze setting, character, plot, and context | RC2 | RIG-6H |
| Writing: Reflection and Analysis | W2F | |

Materials Needed: copies of *Little Women*, or passages from book, pens

Time Needed: 45 min- 1 hour

Questions To Be Addressed

- How are the characters portrayed in Little Women?*
- What are the expectations of each character?*
- What are the flaws of each character?*
- Which character do you most identify with?*
- Are these characters depicted in a realistic manner?*

Words to Know

character set plot depiction portrayal
 complex characters stereotype archetype

Learning Activities

1. Who are the main characters in *Little Women*?

Create a chart (either on paper or on the blackboard) with characters' names on one side and adjectives/short descriptions on the other side.

| | | | |
|------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Jo | Amy | John Brooke | Father |
| Beth | Laurie | Marmee | the professor |
| Meg | Mr. Lawrence | the Hummels | |

2. After some basic character information has been drawn, discuss the character flaws of the four main characters, the March sisters. Your answer might look something like this:

Meg- vanity, wanting to be part of the crowd
 Jo- stubbornness, independence
 Meg- shyness, not going outside of her comfort zone
 Amy- jealousy, envy

THE CHARACTERS OF *LITTLE WOMEN* (CONTINUED)

Learning Activities Continued

3. Discussion Questions:

- Are these characters depicted in a real way?*
- Do you know people like these characters?*
- Do these characters seem complex or simple?*
- Do these characters represent stereotypes?*
- Do the characters change throughout the novel? How?*

Checking For Understanding

Ask students to write a paragraph explaining which character they most identify with. Ask them to give examples about why they think they are similar to that character. Have they ever found themselves in a similar situation as a character from *Little Women*?

Online Connections

Online Connections

Students can continue their analysis of the characters in *Little Women* by navigating to the STAGES *Little Women* Blog. Each week there are posts on a different theme, including resources for teachers (websites for more information) and discussion threads for students to post comments and interact with others studying the novel. Online gender resources include links to biographies of feminists and questions about expectations of women in the 19th century (weeks of 11/24 and 12/1 are relevant). The Family Blog theme (week of 11/10) is the best for upper elementary and middle school grades.

Week of:

11/10-Family

11/24-Gender

12/1-Individuality



Photo from the original Broadway production of *Little Women, The Musical* on Tour.

COMMUNICATION, WRITING, AND *LITTLE WOMEN*

Objective

Students will examine historical contexts of writing. They will compare occasions for reading and writing in the 19th century with communication today. They will analyze the subjects, audiences and purposes of writing found in *Little Women* and in their own lives. The objective is that students will better understand the many uses of writing and will incorporate writing into their everyday lives in new ways.

Outcomes

In this workshop, students will...

- analyze how the theme of “writing” is used in *Little Women*.
- understand why written communication is so important to the characters of *Little Women*.
- compare and contrast methods of communication between the 19th century and today, with attention paid to advantages and disadvantages of both.
- analyze how communication fits into our lives today.
- see that method of communication depends on subject, audience, and purpose.

Grade Level: 6-8

Targeted Learning: Missouri Grade Level Expectations *Middle School (grade 8)*

| Skill/ Task | Comm. Arts | Social Studies |
|---------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| analysis of text and context | R1H, R2C | RIG-6H |
| compare/ contrast communication | R1I | |
| subject, aud., and purpose | R3C | |
| writing activities | W2F, W1A | |

High School Communication Arts: LS2, R1I, W2A, W3A

Materials Needed: pens, paper, Writing Chart (worksheet provided on page 28)

Time Needed: 45 min-1 hour

Questions To Be Addressed

- What is the importance of writing to the characters in Little Women?*
- What do they gain personally by writing?*
- Why is writing so important to Jo?*
- What advantages and disadvantages does writing have over other forms of communication?*
- What are the differences between how we communicate today and how the characters communicated in Little Women? Which way is better, and why?*
- Is there a difference between communication and information?*

Words to Know

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| self-expression | post (original meaning, as in mail) |
| communication | verbal and non-verbal communication |
| technology | |

Learning Activities

1. How do the characters use writing in *Little Women*?
2. Who writes and for what purpose? Whom are they writing to? Who is reading this writing and why? Through discussion students should be able to tease out several different ways writing is used in the story:

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| as entertainment | the “mailbox” at Laurie’s house |
| as self-expression | to communicate with people far away |
| as a career | to make money |

COMMUNICATION, WRITING, AND *LITTLE WOMEN* (CONTINUED)

Learning Activities Continued

3. How do these types of writing differ based on the subject, audience, and purpose? (discussion)

4. Why is writing so important to the characters in *Little Women*?

This can be done as a discussion, or as a written exercise. If using this as a writing exercise, begin by asking the first question to the group, so everyone has a common starting place and gets better ideas.

5. *What are some of the differences between communication then and now?*

Then, use the WRITING CHART (provided) and ask students to fill out each column by brainstorming how they use writing in their everyday lives.

Prompt students by asking them to think about all kinds of writing—writing at home, in school, at work. They should think of lists, journals, text messages, emails, assignments, essays, letters, notes passed in class, etc. They do much more writing than they realize.

After brainstorming has taken place, have students volunteer answers aloud.

6. *How does communication fit into our lives today?*

After gaining a better understanding of how writing has been used in the 19th century and today, students are ready to share their experiences and knowledge. *Check for understanding* by asking them to write a quick journal entry about how communication fits into their lives today. Ask them to compare and contrast how they use written communication. Do they write more or less than people did in the 19th century? Is why we write different now than it was then?

Activity Extension and Online Connection

Students should be directed to the STAGES *Little Women* Blog to review posts from the week of 11/3. Online discussion threads ask students to think of the purpose that theatre served in the 19th century and post comments based on their responses to questions comparing theatre then and now.



Future Directions



Subject, Audience, and Purpose: Give students examples of different combinations of subjects and audiences, or subjects and purposes. Ask them how they would communicate? Why do we not have to always think about how we communicate? (Example: How would you communicate with your friend that your allowance needed to be raised? Would you say it the same way to your parent(s)? Would the result be the same? Why or why not?)

Code Switching: If your students speak a different cultural dialect of English or are ESL students, this might be a good lesson to introduce the idea of code switching. There is a time to speak formally and informally (or Standard English versus Ebonics/cultural dialect). How do we know when to switch between styles of speaking and writing?

Writing and Personal Expression—Analysis of Great Works: The importance of writing and how writing fits into our everyday lives is a great thing to teach students. This works best as a series of moderated discussions and short writing activities centered around the reading of texts (or excerpts). Ask students to examine why writing is so important to other people. How does writing and the power of language change the following author's lives?

-Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Malcolm X is a bright kid turned hustler, who ends up going to jail. In his biography, he writes about how he copied the dictionary—every single definition—day after day. In this process, he learned the power of words, built his vocabulary and gained confidence as a speaker.

-Maya Angelou, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*

In this autobiographical story, a young girl who was repeatedly abused and molested has stopped speaking. Then she meets a neighbor whose love of books and conversation make her want to speak again, while also bringing her out of her shell.

-Anne Frank, *Diary of Anne Frank*

Hiding in her attic during the Holocaust, young Anne Frank writes daily in her diary just as she used to, dreaming of a world that would be different, more just, and kind. The first entry has the best quote, "Paper has more patience than people."

The writing in all three of these works is powerful and can be used for many discussion threads, writing assignments, or reading analyses. All show the author empowered by language, and all were written from a necessity and urgency. There's a lot of value in comparing each of these works to *Little Women*; there are some striking similarities.

UNDERSTANDING THEMES IN *LITTLE WOMEN*

Objective

Students will gain an understanding of the term “theme” so that they can think critically about literature. Students will identify themes present in the novel *Little Women*. They will analyze the text, compare and contrast historical information, and respond with reflections from their own lives. Themes to be discussed include gender, war, poverty, family, and morality.

Outcomes

In this workshop, students will...

- understand the term *theme* as it relates to critical reading.
- learn how to identify themes in literature.
- recognize the importance of interpretation in regards to theme.
- understand the academic difference between a *book* and *literature*.
- discuss several themes present in *Little Women*.
- better understand the similarities and differences between 19th c. America and today.

Grade Level: 6-8

Targeted Learning: Missouri Grade Level Expectations Middle School (grades 6-8)

| Skill/ Task | Comm. Arts | Social Studies | Theatre |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------------------|---------|
| Political, Social, Hist. Context | LS1A, R2C | MUS-3aH, MUS-3aI, PP2C | HC1B |
| Analysis of Themes | R1H | RIG-6H | IC1A |
| Compare/ Contrast Themes | R1I | | |

High School Communication Arts: R1I, R2C, W2B, W3A, LS1A

Materials Needed: blackboard or whiteboard for making chart, paper, pencils, paper, worksheet (provided on page 29)

Time Needed: 45 min-1 hour

Questions To Be Addressed

- What is a theme?*
- What does it mean when we say something is “universal”?*
- Why are themes important in literature?*
- What’s the difference between a book and “literature”? Is there a difference?*
- What are some of the main themes in Little Women?*
- What are some of the differences between the 19th century and today?*

Words to Know

| | | |
|-----------|------------------|-------------------|
| theme | universal | literature |
| gender | conformity | Transcendentalism |
| character | plot | class |
| culture | social construct | |

Learning Activities

1. Students will understand the term *theme* and how it applies to literature.

A *theme* is a broad idea in a story or written work. Themes are universal in nature—that is, they are topics that a majority of the audience will understand personally. Themes are dependent upon interpretation, and they are implicit within the text—that is, themes are found in the text, not overtly stated.

2. Using a known example, such as a current movie or another book the students have read, ask what themes might be present within the work.

For example: In a superhero film, “good vs. evil” is a common theme.

UNDERSTANDING THEMES IN *LITTLE WOMEN* (CONTINUED)

Learning Activities Continued

Other common themes in literature might be:

| | | | |
|---------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| individuality | escape | work | morality |
| family | success | fear | nature |
| freedom | death | innocence | war |
| love | jealousy | revenge | religion |

3. If students are familiar with *Little Women*, ask what themes they think are present. Write these on the chalkboard. If they are not familiar with the book, quickly outline the plot, then ask them to hypothesize what themes might be present in *Little Women* based on what they've learned in history. Help students work through possible themes until there is a good list of 6-8 themes present in the novel. (Write themes in one column.)

Themes Present in Little Women

| | | | |
|------------|----------|--------------|------------------------------|
| work | family | gender roles | equality (equal rights) |
| war | poverty | morality | individualism vs. conformity |
| philosophy | learning | writing | domesticity and the home |

4. Use the themes of *Little Women* to compare and contrast 19th c. America with today.

In a big group, take one theme and use it as an example to model comparing and contrasting aspects of the 19th century and today. For example, what were attitudes towards work in the 19th century? What are our attitudes towards work today? Ask them to be specific and come up with as many details as they can. (Make sure students understand the definitions of each theme.)

Alone or in small groups, ask students to fill out the Theme Chart (provided on page 29). Encourage them to use everything they know about the time period to come up with answers. (Other novels, movies, and history class should help them think.)

5. After 10 minutes, come back as a big group to check for understanding. Write down some of the students' answers on the board, creating a Class Chart. Compare and contrast our attitudes and experiences in the 19th century and those of today. What are the implications of our findings? Students should begin to see that themes are universal—not always specifically, but in general.

Online Connections

Online Connections

Based on the discussion of themes present in *Little Women*, students are ready to delve more deeply into the text and historical context of the book. Each week, the STAGES *Little Women* Blog provides teacher resources (online) and Discussion Threads for follow-up.

Included in these weeks are links to Civil War histories, biographies, and strange facts, as well as information on how to adapt a book into a play. There are activities and prompts for students to utilize theme to adapt parts of the text and update the plot. Topics and dates are listed below.

Week of: 12/8- Civil War Era
12/15- Musical and Novel

Future Directions

Themes in Literature: Now that students better understand what is meant by the term “theme”, it is easier for them to discuss literature in a new and more critical fashion. This lesson can be carried over and used with other novels or written works.

Writing a Critical Essay: Students can use the Theme Lesson as a brainstorming session. In the process of discussion, topics in *Little Women* should have been opened up and discovered by the students. This is a good departure point to discuss how we write about themes and begin the process of writing a critical analysis of a piece of literature.

Creative Writing: Ask students to pick a theme that was discussed and write a short dialogue or monologue illustrating that theme in their own lives. For example, a student might write a short dialogue about a conversation where someone placed gender expectations on them. This approach asks them to appropriate the learned concepts and use it in their own writing.

GENDER AND LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN*

Objective

Students will analyze the gender roles and expectations of women present in the novel *Little Women*. They will compare and contrast 19th century attitudes about women with what they observe in the 21st century.

Outcomes

In this workshop, students will...

- understand the term *gender*, its definitions, usages, and applications.
- compare and contrast the expectations, roles, and limitations placed on females in the 19th century and the 21st century.
- analyze how and why women's rights have changed over time.
- understand that the word "feminine" is a construction, and its definition often changes to suit different contexts, societal needs, and beliefs.

Grade Level: Grade 8 and High School

Targeted Learning: Missouri Grade Level Expectations *Grade 8 and High School*

| Skill/ Task | Comm. Arts | Social Studies |
|-----------------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Women's Rights and Gender | LS1A | PP2C, MUS-3aH |
| Compare and Contrast Time Periods | R1I, R3C | |
| Analysis of Text and Context | R1H, R2C | RIG-6H, MUS-3aI |

Materials Needed: paper, pencil, copy of novel for further discussion

Time Needed: 45 min- 1 hour

Questions To Be Addressed

- What is gender?*
- What were the roles of women in the 19th century?*
- What restrictions were placed on women in the 19th century?*
- Why were restrictions placed on women in the 19th century?*
- What restrictions are placed on women today?*
- Does having the same rights as men guarantee equality? Why or why not?*

Words to Know

| | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|---------------|---------|
| gender | double standard | stereotype | society |
| social construct | biological factor | social factor | culture |

Learning Activities

1. Students will understand the term *gender*.

- Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behavior, activities and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women.
- Each society has different expectations for how women and men should behave.
- Gender is different from sex. Sex is a biological factor (the genetic markers and physical anatomy present at birth), while gender is a social construct (something invented by society, and thereby subject to change).

2. Students will discuss gender expectations present in *Little Women*.

- How were women (and girls) expected to act?*
- How have expectations of women changed over time? Why?*

GENDER AND LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN* (CONTINUED)

Learning Activities Continued

3. Looking at specific passages, students will discuss gender in *Little Women*.

What do these passages have to say about women's work in the home?

"If I was a boy, we'd run away together, and have a capitol time; but as I'm a miserable girl, I must be proper and stay at home."

(Jo says to Laurie, Ch. 21)

"It was play then; but there came a time when I was truly grateful that I not only possessed the will but the power to cook whole some food for my little girls, and help myself when I could no longer afford to hire help."

(Marmee says to Meg before she gets married, about the importance of housework, Ch. 24)

4. Students will compare and contrast gender roles and expectations.

Are expectations the same for men and women? Think about types of work, behavior, and rules that might be present in our society. Are there double standards or stereotypes? Is this fair? If not, what can be done about it?

Checking For Understanding

In a final discussion, students will be asked whether they'd rather live in the 19th century or today, based upon gender expectations. Where does gender affect our lives today? Does it limit us or help us?

Students should read one of the Blog entries listed below in "Online Connections". Once a week there is a discussion thread. Students should use what they have learned about gender as a basis for their comments on one of the topics.

Online Connections

Online Connections

There are several weekly themes on the blog that will provide resources for teachers to reinforce this lesson on gender and connect it to other themes in *Little Women*. For each week, there will be teacher resources (websites and info.), as well as a short post and Discussion Thread for students to post comments and discuss themes with other students online.

Week of:

11/10- Family

11/17- 19th Century: Rights in America

11/24- Gender

12/1- Individuality vs. Conformity in *Little Women*

Connections With Other Lessons

Use the lesson "Astonishing": Individuality vs. Conformity in *Little Women*" as a follow-up to this lesson. It will utilize students' understanding of gender to analyze social expectations in *Little Women*.

Future Directions

Writing Prompt: Re-write a scene from *Little Women*. Choose a place where gender expectations are present and re-write the scene as if it were to happen today. How would it change? What would be different?

Writing Prompt: Pretend you are a character from *Little Women*. Write a journal entry from that character's point of view. Write about the gender roles you encounter and how it makes you feel.

Drama: Students should work in groups to choose a part of the book where gender expectations seem unfair or old-fashioned. They should update this scene from the book as if the action was occurring today. Using drama, they should create a short scene to perform to illustrate how gender expectations have changed.

Other Ideas:

- Students should be encouraged to observe attitudes towards gender present in our society. Where are men and women treated equally? Where are restrictions based on gender found in our society? By discussing gender on a regular basis, students will become more self-aware of where they fit into society, and the places in which they might encourage change or challenge assumptions.
- To pursue this topic further, the following subjects might be researched:

19th century

Margaret Fuller

The Seneca Falls Convention

Sojourner Truth

14th Amendment

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Susan B. Anthony

“ASTONISHING”: INDIVIDUALITY VS. CONFORMITY IN *LITTLE WOMEN*

Objective

Working with song lyrics from the musical *Little Women*, students will analyze some of the pressures women faced in the 19th century. They will also analyze ways in which individuality and conformity have shaped American culture.

Outcomes

In this workshop, students will...

- Analyze song lyrics and understand how lyrics are used to convey meaning, character information and plot within a musical.
- Using the song lyrics, students will list examples of what was expected of a woman in 19th century America.
- Understand the terms *individuality* and *conformity*.
- Analyze the ways in which individuality and conformity have shaped our culture, both in the 19th and 21st centuries.

Grade Level: Middle School and High School

Targeted Learning: Missouri Grade Level Expectations *Middle School and High School (all levels)*

| Skill/ Task | Comm. Arts | Social Studies | Theatre |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------|
| Read and analyze lyrics | R2C, R1F, R1G, R1H | | IC1A, HC1B |
| Women’s Roles/ Hist. Context | | MUS-3aH, MUS-3aI | |
| Compare/ Contrast Time Periods | R1I | | |
| Writing: Reflection and Analysis | W1A, W2F | | |

Materials Needed: “Astonishing” song lyrics (provided on page 30), pencils, paper

Time Needed: 45 min-1 hour

Questions To Be Addressed

- What does it mean to be ‘astonishing’?*
- Why does the character of Jo want to be astonishing?*
- Why does she decline Laurie’s offer of marriage?*
- How does Jo feel about marriage?*
- What does Jo want for herself, according to the song?*
- What does it mean to conform?*
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of conformity?*
- What are some of the consequences of being an individual?*

Words to Know

astonishing
culture

conformity
society

individuality

Learning Activities

1. Students will discuss the word “astonishing” by using its definition, synonyms, and giving examples of things that are astonishing.
2. (Discussion or Written Brainstorming Activity)
Based on the song lyrics and what Jo sings about wanting and not wanting, what were some of the expectations placed on women during the 19th century?

This activity can be done as individual brainstorming, a small group activity, or as a whole class while someone writes answers down on the blackboard.

3. Jo wanted a different life than what was expected of a young woman at the time.
Discuss the terms individuality and conformity. What did Jo gain by refusing to conform? What did she give up? (discussion)

“ASTONISHING” LESSON (CONTINUED)

Learning Activities Continued

4. How have concepts of individuality and conformity shaped our culture today?

Individually or in small groups, students should come up with 3-5 examples.

Discussion Topic: What wouldn't exist if everyone did things the same way?

As a class, try to come up with a big list of things we wouldn't have/know.

- Think of inventions, heroes, leaders, big ideas
- Do leaders think the same as everyone else?
- If you had to do everything like everyone else, what would you miss most?

Checking For Understanding

Have each student write a response to one of the following questions:

How are you astonishing? What would you like to do in the future to be astonishing?

Is it better to conform or be an individual? Why?

Have you ever had to make an unpopular decision? What was it?

In order to be an individual, what do you have to give up? Is it worth it?

What would life be like if everyone thought the same? Give examples.

Online
Connections

Online Connections

In the week of 12/1/08, the online resources and discussion topics will center around this lesson. Included are resources on etiquette and expectations of women, as well as a Media Literacy lesson plan about conformity. The discussion thread of the blog is a great substitute for the above “Checking for Understanding” activity. Students can leave comments online and respond to others.

Future Directions

Based on writing prompt at end of lesson, have students research one person who didn't conform. Who is the person? What choice did they make? Was it a good or bad choice? What were the consequences?

For instance, someone might research a person who was hurt for saying what they believe in (civil rights, gay rights, abolition, political persecution, etc.).

Did others benefit from this person? How?

Other examples: Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey

Look through newspapers and articles online. Are there stories of people doing things their own way? What were the effects? Find clips of the song “Astonishing” online. Does it sound like you thought? How would you update the song today? Write your own song using the theme of individuality. Who would sing it? Why?

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND *LITTLE WOMEN*

Objective

In this lesson, students will understand what Transcendentalism is and how it relates to philosophy and culture. Students will analyze if Transcendentalism affected Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women* and in what ways it is present within the text.

Outcomes

In this workshop, students will...

- learn about the Transcendental philosophy movement of the 19th c.
- be able to identify key writers and thinkers of Transcendentalism.
- be able to identify main aspects of Transcendental philosophy.
- analyze the effect of Transcendentalism in Alcott's writing and life.

Targeted Grade Level: 8th Grade and High School

This lesson will work best with above-grade-level middle school students or with high school students because of the high level of critical thinking and new material that is involved. If attempting this lesson with students younger than 8th grade, break the material down into 2 sessions: one to discuss philosophy in general and one to discuss Transcendentalism.

Targeted Learning: Missouri Grade Level Expectations

Middle School (grade 8)

| Skill/ Task | Comm. Arts | Social Studies |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| Transcendentalism- gen. info. | LS1A, R3C | RIG-6H |
| Analyze text and context | R1F, R1G, R1H, R2C | SSI-7C |
| Writing: Philosophy and Personal Experience | R1I, W2F | |

High School Communication Arts: R2C, R3C, LS2A, W2B, W3A

Materials Needed: quotes/ passages of Transcendental authors, text of *Little Women*

Time Needed: 45 min-1 hour (2 hours or 2 sessions if working with middle school)

Questions To Be Addressed

- What is philosophy?*
- How does philosophy influence our actions and our culture?*
- What is Transcendentalism?*
- How did Transcendentalism begin?*
- What was Louisa May Alcott's experience with Transcendentalism?*
- What elements of Transcendentalism can be found in Little Women?*
- What other major writers and their works are associated with Transcendentalism?*

Words to Know

- philosophy
- Transcendentalism
- feminism
- abolition
- Civil Disobedience

TRANSCENDENTALISM AND *LITTLE WOMEN* (CONTINUED)

Learning Activities

1. What is Transcendentalism?

Transcendentalism is:

- A group of ideas in religion, philosophy, and culture that was expressed through literature and practice in the mid-late American 19th century.
- It began as a protest of intellectualism at Harvard against the doctrines of their church.
- Transcendentalism believes that spirituality is found by the intuition of the individual, not by the doctrines of a church. It is also believed that spirituality is found best when the individual is in nature.
- Transcendentalism values independent thinking, personal knowledge, learning, and the power of the individual.
- Transcendentalists also worked for equal rights, and were strong supporters of feminism and abolition.

2. Who were the Transcendentalists? (discussion)

Ralph Waldo Emerson (writer) Henry David Thoreau (writer) Bronson Alcott (Louisa's father) Margaret Fuller (feminist)

- Discuss the above thinkers and what they are known for. Some students may be familiar with *Walden* or "Civil Disobedience". Others might know Fuller.
- Emerson led the movement, gathering prominent thinkers together, and establishing a journal for their writings called *The Dial* (which Fuller edited for a time). Concord, MA was the hub of Transcendental thought, as well as the home to Emerson, Thoreau, the Alcotts, and other great writers and thinkers of the day.

3. Reading Transcendentalism

Students will gain a better understanding of Transcendental thought and see what elements are present in passages written by prominent thinkers of the time.

"We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds ..."
(from the essay "American Scholar" by Emerson)

What does this passage mean?

How might it relate to Transcendentalism?

What does this say about how we should learn?

How might this have been different from other learning at the time?

"However mean your life is, meet it and live it: do not shun it and call it hard names. Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Things do not change, we change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts. God will see that you do want society." (Henry David Thoreau)

What does this passage mean?

What is important to Thoreau, based on what he says here?

What does it mean when he says, 'Things do not change, we change'?

How does this passage relate to what you learned about Transcendentalism?

4. Based on what you have learned about Transcendentalism, are there elements of this philosophy in *Little Women*? Why or why not?

Where? Ask students to find passages or parts of the novel that relate to Transcendentalist thought. (This can also happen in small groups.) After students discuss this question and look for evidence, as a whole class decide if there is a case for Transcendentalism being present in *Little Women*.

Think about:

elements of nature present

ideas of individuality

ideas about learning

how spirituality is present

Checking For Understanding

Writing Exercise for Students

Using the following quote, "Things do not change, we change," answer one of the questions below.

-Based on your experience, is this a true statement?

-Does this make a good philosophy? Why or why not?

-Compare and contrast the 19th century and today. Have things changed, or have we changed?

-Do you think Thoreau leaving society and living at Walden helped him to come to this conclusion?

Why or why not?

-Is Transcendentalism a good philosophy? Why or why not?

COMMUNICATION, WRITING, AND *LITTLE WOMEN*

| WRITING | SUBJECT | AUDIENCE | PURPOSE |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| What do you write every-day? | What information is included? | Who reads this writing? | Why do you do it? |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

“ASTONISHING”
(SONG LYRICS FROM *LITTLE WOMEN*)
PERFORMED BY JO

Who is he?

Who is he with his marry me?
With his ring and his marry me,
the nerve, the gall.

This is not,
Not what was meant to be.
How could he ruin it all
With those two words?

I thought I knew him
Thought that he knew me
When did it change?
What did I miss?

A kiss,
When I thought all along,
That we were meant to find frontiers,
How could I be so wrong?

And I need,
How I need my sisters here
If I can't share my dreams
What were they for?

I thought our promise
That we would never change and never part.
I thought together,
We'd amaze the world.
How can I live my dreams or even start when everything has
come apart.

I thought home was all I'd ever want
My attic all I'd ever need.
Now nothing feels the way it was before
And I don't know how to proceed.
I only know I'm meant for something more
I've got to know if I can be
Astonishing

There's a life
That I am meant to lead
A life like nothing I have known
I can feel it
And it's far from here
I've got to find it on my own

Even now I feel it's heat upon my skin.
A life of passion that pulls me from within,
A life that I am making to begin.
There must be somewhere I can be
Astonishing
Astonishing

I'll find my way
I'll find it far away
I'll find it in unexpected and unknown
I'll find my life in my own way
Today

Here I go
And there's no turning back
My great adventure has begun
I may be small
But I've got giant plans
To shine as greatly as the sun

I will blaze until I find my time and place
I will be fearless,
Surrendering modesty and grace
I will not disappear without a trace
I'll shout and start a riot
Be anything but quiet
Christopher Columbus
I'll be Astonishing
Astonishing
Astonishing

At Last

THEATRE JOBS

**Besides the actors you see on stage, there are many different types of jobs in Musical Theatre.
Take a look at all of the different types of jobs that made this production possible.
Perhaps you may find yourself working in the theatre one day!**

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Producer | Makes all final production decisions involving budget, schedule, personnel, advertising, etc. |
| Director | Works directly with the actors and stages the play; determines the style of production and executes the rehearsal process; charged with approval of all major aesthetic decisions; collaborates with all designers. |
| Choreographer | Stages the movements of actors and dancers; composes dances to advance a storyline, interpret emotion, and enliven a production; serves as advisor for period and style dance, movement, and gesture; considered a collaborator with the director. |
| Vocal Coach | Helps actors overcome any speech problems; coaches dialects and accents; creates a vocal warm up for the company to use at rehearsals and for performance. |
| Dramaturg | Researches all productions for information useful in the rehearsal process. For example, they might research a specific time period and help the actors understand how one might move, dress, and speak. |
| Playwright | Writes script; in some cases they might be involved in the day to day process of rehearsal and script revision. |
| Composer | Writes musical score for a production; collaborates with the playwright or librettist. |
| Music Director | Coordinator of all musical elements of a production; involved in the development and rehearsal of the orchestra. |
| Production Manager | Coordinates all production activities throughout a production season; coordinates activities of all production stage managers; involved in all scheduling and staffing. |
| Stage Manager | Works among all departments of a production; responsible for scheduling, information exchange, and the smooth operation of all rehearsals; calls* dress rehearsals and performances. |
| Technical Director | Responsible for coordination of all technical areas; determines how scenic and lighting elements of a production are executed; efficiency expert on the technical elements of running a production; supervises the operation of the scenic shop and all technical equipment. |
| Scenic Designer | Designs the physical visual elements of both stage and set pieces; collaborates with director and other designers. |
| Costume Designer | Designs the clothing worn by actors; collaborates with director and other designers. |
| Lighting Designer | Designs the lighting; collaborates with director and other designers. |
| Sound Designer | Designs all sound including live and taped effects and recorded music; collaborates with director and other designers. |
| Master Carpenter: | In charge of the building of all scenic elements. |
| Master Electrician | Responsible for the execution of lighting of a production. The Master Electrician hangs and focuses lights and makes sure equipment is ready for production. |
| Prop Master | In charge of the purchasing, borrowing, and building of all props. |
| Carpenter | Crew member involved in the construction of scenic elements. |
| Grip | Crew member charged with the moving of scenery on the stage floor. |
| Flyperson | Crew member involved in the operation of the fly system*. |
| Running Electrician | Crew member involved in the running of the lighting throughout the technical and dress rehearsal period and all performances. |
| Board Operator | Runs the lighting control board. |
| Deck Electrician | Operates, moves, connects, and disconnects all lighting equipment on the stage floor. |
| Follow Spot Operator | Operates the follow spot light (or front lamp). |
| Sound Technician | Prepares and records all sound effects and musical cues. |
| Sound Operator | Operates the sound equipment in rehearsal and performance. |
| Property Crew Member | Assists the property master in obtaining and construction of all properties; involved in the running of props for rehearsals and performances. |
| Costume Supervisor | Oversees the building of all costumes; runs the costume shop*; orders all costume materials; maintains costumes throughout the production period. |
| Costume Technician | Crew member involved in the construction and altering of all costumes; involved in the preparation, repairs, and cleaning of costumes during the performance period. |
| House Manager | In charge of the house*; responsible for the comfort and safety of the audience; coordinates performance timing with the stage manager. |
| Box Office Manager | Person in charge of all reservations and ticket sales. |

*Call: The Stage Manager will call the show which means he/she will give lighting and sound cues to members of the technical teams.

*Fly System: system of ropes, counterweights, pulleys, designed to allow a technical crew to quickly move set pieces, lights, and microphones on and off stage by 'flying' them in from a large opening above the stage known as a *flyspace*.

*Costume shop: Where costumes are built, restored, and executed for a production

*House: The house is where the audience sits.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Little Women Lesson Plans and Study Guides

http://litplans.com/titles/Little_Women_Louisa_May_Alcott.html

Links to over a dozen sites with lesson plans for middle school and high school English teachers.

Web English Teacher

<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/alcott.html>

Lesson plans, including vocabulary, biographical info., drama tie-ins, and the text of the novel online.

Playhouse Square Center's Broadway Buzz

Website for original Broadway Musical starring Maureen McGovern

<http://www.playhousesquare.org/bbuzz/little-women/c-page.html>

Lots of great info., including notes on adapting the book for the stage, character summaries, fun facts, and biographical info. on Louisa May Alcott.

Book Rags

http://www.bookrags.com/Little_Women

Great online resource for full text of novel (broken down by chapters), criticism, essays, themes, selected passages, historical context, and lesson ideas/discussion threads. An excellent resource that is easily navigated.

University of Pennsylvania Online Books Page

A Celebration of Women Writers, 19th century

http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/_generate/1801-1900.html

Fantastic resource with links to text of Alcott's work, including lesser known essays. Included are links to "Hospital Sketches" and "Flower Fables" (written for Ralph Waldo Emerson's daughter). Also find links (under "F") to Margaret Fuller's "Woman in the Nineteenth Century" and links to Thoreau and Emerson texts online. Excellent for searching through an author's body of work.

American Writers and Their Works (1851-1900)

Sam Houston State University

http://www.shsu.edu/~eng_wpf/amlitchron_19th2.html

A timeline and links for other authors contemporary to Alcott. Excellent lit. context.

Digital History: 19th c. American History

<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/chron19.cfm>

A chronology of historical events in the U.S. Presented by the University of Houston. Year by year major events in America. Great for context, as well as housing other pages of American history.

Broadway Production of Little Women: Study Guide

<http://www.littlewomenonbroadway.com/study.html>

Huge study guide to accompany the original musical, including historical information on the 19th c., production notes and theatre terms, as well as thematic information.

E-Notes

<http://www.enotes.com/little-women>

Online literature resource for teachers and students. Includes summaries, contextual information, lesson ideas, and other information about Alcott and the novel.



STAGES ST. LOUIS
Little Women, The Musical Study Guide
Created by:

Allison Trombley
Rob Grumich
Andrea Palazzolo
Catalina Bajuyo

THANK YOU STAGES ST. LOUIS STAFF!



Photos from the original Broadway production of *Little Women, a musical* on Tour.