

Publishers' Bindings Online, 1815-1930: The Art of Books
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Sample Lesson Plan: Louisa May Alcott
Grades K-5

Objectives:

Students will learn about Louisa May Alcott's childhood and her books written for children. The lesson will be completed with the aid of the PBO bindings database and includes a creative classroom activity.

Materials:

- 1) A computer with an Internet connection and a large screen or other capability to display the teacher's actions to the entire class.
- 2) One of the stories from Alcott's *Flower Fables*, available at Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/163>.
- 3) Enough blank paper for each student.
- 4) Crayons, markers, or colored pencils (either for each student or to share).
- 5) Corkboard and tacks or other capability to display student artwork (such as spreading it out on a large table or taping it to the wall).

Lesson

Louisa May Alcott is best known for her book *Little Women*, a story about four sisters growing up in New England during the Civil War. However, she wrote a number of other things, including many other stories for children.

Louisa was born in 1832, in a Pennsylvania town that now is part of Philadelphia. Her father's name was Amos Bronson Alcott. Her mother's name was Abigail May Alcott, but everyone called her Abba. Louisa was the second child. Her sister Anna was older; Elizabeth and May were born later.

Louisa moved around a lot as a child. Her father had a lot of different jobs, and her family followed him around. Most of their homes were in New England. In fact, Louisa spent much of her life around Boston, particularly in a little Massachusetts village called Concord.

Louisa's family was poor, so she and her sisters didn't have a lot of toys. Instead, they took what they learned from their father's friends, who were famous writers, and wrote plays that they acted out for their friends. They often used things they found around their house as props and costumes.

[Go to <http://bindings.lib.ua.edu/sitesearch.html>, select the “Search by Keyword” link, and click on “Guided Search” at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in “pbw00138.” Click on thumbnail. Enlarge image by clicking on the largest box under it.]

This is a collection of plays Louisa and her sister Anna wrote when they were children. The plays were found in Louisa’s papers after she died and made into a book. The title is *Comic Tragedies Written by ‘Jo’ and ‘Meg’, and Acted by the ‘Little Women,’* because Louisa named the characters in her famous book after people in her family. The character Jo was Louisa herself, and Meg was her sister Anna.

Starting when she was seven years old, Louisa kept a diary every day and often wrote stories in it. She also wrote short stories and poems for people she loved. Because she wanted to help out her family, Louisa started selling her stories for money. First, she had them published in magazines. Then in 1854, when Louisa was 22 years old, she published her first book.

[In “Guided Search,” type in pbw00894. Click on the thumbnail.] The book was called *Flower Fables*, and it included several stories she had written for a little girl named Ellen. Ellen was the daughter of Bronson Alcott’s friend, a famous writer named Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Louisa kept writing stories for magazines. She even edited a magazine of literature for children called *Merry’s Museum*. A book publisher asked her if she would write a story for girls. What she wrote was *Little Women*. It was published in 1868.

[In “Guided Search,” type in pbw00108. Click on the thumbnail.] As I said before, *Little Women* was about Louisa’s family. Jo and Meg were two of the March sisters. The other two were Beth, who was Louisa’s sister Elizabeth, and Amy, who was Louisa’s youngest sister May.

[In “Guided Search,” type in pbw00187. Click on the thumbnail.] Louisa wrote a sequel to *Little Women* called *Little Men*, published in 1871. It was about a boarding school that Jo ran called Plumfield, which was based on a school her father had founded.

[In “Guided Search,” type in pbw00095. Click on the thumbnail.] The last book in the *Little Women* series was called *Jo’s Boys*, published in 1886. It was about some of the students at Plumfield after they grew up.

[In “Guided Search,” type in pbw00182. Click on the thumbnail.] Louisa wrote several other book-length stories for young readers. One of them was called *Jack and Jill*, and it was published in 1880. It was like the nursery rhyme: Jack and Jill went up a hill and tumbled down it, but in Louisa’s story, it was a sledding accident. The story tells about how they amused themselves while they were stuck inside recovering from their injuries.

[In “Guided Search,” type in pba00741. Click on the thumbnail.] *Eight Cousins*, published in 1875, and its sequel *Rose in Bloom*, from 1876, are both about a girl named Rose. In *Eight Cousins* she is a young girl growing up among seven mischievous boy cousins. The second book tells stories about the cousins as teenagers.

[In “Guided Search,” type in pbw00168. Click on the thumbnail.] In addition to her children’s books, Louisa wrote several collections of short stories for children. She wrote six volumes of short stories in a collection called, *Aunt Jo’s Scrap Bag*, again calling herself Jo like her character in *Little Women*. The series was published from 1871 to 1882. This book, published in 1901, has one story from each volume.

[In “Guided Search,” type in pbw00103. Click on the thumbnail.] Another series of stories she wrote was called *Lulu’s Library*. These three books, published from 1886 to 1889, were written for Louisa’s niece, whose name was also Louisa May, but she was called Lulu to avoid confusion with her aunt. Lulu was the daughter of Louisa’s sister May. May died when Lulu was a baby, and Louisa raised Lulu.

[In “Guided Search,” type in pbw00249. Click on the thumbnail.] The last collection of stories published while Louisa was alive was called *A Garland for Girls*. All of the stories in this book were named after flowers.

Activity

[NOTE: Before class, the instructor should select a story from the on-line full-text edition of *Flower Fables*, available at the URL listed under “Materials.”]

All of the books that Louisa May Alcott wrote for children had pictures in them. In fact, Louisa’s sister May, who was an artist, drew a lot of the pictures for Louisa’s books.

I am going to read you a story from Louisa’s book first book, *Flower Fables*. Then you will draw a picture, as if it were going to go in the book with the story.

The story is called, “[INSERT NAME OF STORY TO BE READ].”

[Read the selected story.]

[Distribute drawing materials.]

Remind students that they will now draw a picture to go with the story. Encourage creativity.

[After students complete their work, display the covers so students can see all of their classmates’ designs.]