

KS3 FICTION BOOKLET

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott

Little Women was written in 1868 and is one of the most beloved children's books of all time. It is the story of the four March sisters: Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy. They live with their mother while their father is fighting in the American Civil War. The family doesn't have much money. They live next door to Mr. Laurence, who is very wealthy, and his grandson, Laurie. In this passage, Beth's passion for music forces her to overcome her natural shyness. The 'Mansion of Bliss' is Mr. Laurence's house.

As you read the extract, make notes on how the writer shows Beth overcoming her fear of Mr. Lawrence.

But Beth, though yearning for the grand piano, could not pluck up courage to go to the 'Mansion of Bliss', as Meg called it. She went once with Jo, but the old gentleman, not being aware of her infirmity, stared at her so hard from under his heavy eyebrows, and said "Hey!" so loud, that he frightened her so much her feet chattered on the floor', she never told her mother, and she ran away, declaring she would never go there any more, not even for the dear piano. No persuasions or enticements could overcome her fear, till, the fact coming to Mr. Laurence's ear in some mysterious way, he set about mending matters. During one of the brief calls he made, he artfully led the conversation to music, and talked away about great singers whom he had seen, fine organs he had heard, and told such charming anecdotes that Beth found it impossible to stay in her distant corner, but crept nearer and nearer, as if fascinated. At the back of his chair she stopped and stood listening, with her great eyes wide open and her cheeks red with excitement of this unusual performance. Taking no more notice of her than if she had been a fly, Mr. Laurence talked on about Laurie's lessons and teachers. And presently, as if the idea had just occurred to him, he said to Mrs. March...

"The boy neglects his music now, and I'm glad of it, for he was getting too fond of it. But the piano suffers for want of use. Wouldn't some of your girls like to run over, and practice on it now and then, just to keep it in tune, you know, ma'am?" Beth took a step forward, and pressed her hands tightly together to keep from clapping them, for this was an irresistible temptation, and the thought of practicing on that splendid instrument quite took her breath away. Before Mrs. March could reply, Mr. Laurence went on with an odd little nod and smile...

"They needn't see or speak to anyone, but run in at any time. For I'm shut up in my study at the other end of the house, Laurie is out a great deal, and the servants are never near the drawing room after nine o'clock."

Here he rose, as if going, and Beth made up her mind to speak, for that last arrangement left nothing to be desired. "Please, tell the young ladies what I say, and

if they don't care to come, why, never mind." Here a little hand slipped into his, and Beth looked up at him with a face full of gratitude, as she said, in her earnest yet timid way...

"Oh sir, they do care, very very much!" "Are you the musical girl?" he asked, without any startling "Hey!" as he looked down at her very kindly.

"I'm Beth. I love it dearly, and I'll come, if you are quite sure nobody will hear me, and be disturbed," she added, fearing to be rude, and trembling at her own boldness as she spoke.

"Not a soul, my dear. The house is empty half the day, so come and drum away as much as you like, and I shall be obliged to you."

"How kind you are, sir!"

Beth blushed like a rose under the friendly look he wore, but she was not frightened now, and gave the hand a grateful squeeze because she had no words to thank him for the precious gift he had given her.

Peter Pan by J M Barrie

The novel Peter Pan began as a play in 1904, and was made into a novel in 1911. It is the story of three English children: Wendy, John and Michael Darling. They meet the amazing Peter Pan, a boy who lives in magical Neverland. In this passage, the reader is introduced to Nana, the Darling children's nurse and nanny.

As you read the extract, make notes about your first impressions of the Darling family.

Mrs. Darling loved to have everything just so, and Mr. Darling had a passion for being exactly like his neighbours; so, of course, they had a nurse. As they were poor, owing to the amount of milk the children drank, this nurse was a prim Newfoundland dog, called Nana, who had belonged to no one in particular until the Darlings engaged her. She had always thought children important, however, and the Darlings had become acquainted with her in Kensington Gardens, where she spent most of her spare time peeping into perambulators, and was much hated by careless nursemaids, whom she followed to their homes and complained of to their mistresses. She proved to be quite a treasure of a nurse. How thorough she was at bath-time, and up at any moment of the night if one of her charges made the slightest cry. Of course her kennel was in the nursery. She had a genius for knowing when a cough is a thing to have no patience with and when it needs stocking around your throat. She believed to her last day in old-fashioned remedies like rhubarb leaf, and made sounds of contempt over all this new-fangled talk about germs, and so on. It was a lesson in propriety to see her escorting the children to school, walking sedately by their side when they were well behaved, and butting them back into line if they strayed. On John's footer [in England soccer was called football, "footer for short] days she never once forgot his sweater, and she usually carried an umbrella in her mouth in case of rain. There is a room in the basement of Miss Fulsom's school where the nurses wait. They sat on forms, while Nana lay on the floor, but that was the only difference. They affected to ignore her as of an inferior social status to themselves, and she despised their light talk. She resented visits to the nursery from Mrs. Darling's friends, but if

they did come she first whipped off Michael's pinafore and put him into the one with blue braiding, and smoothed out Wendy and made a dash at John's hair.

No nursery could possibly have been conducted more correctly, and Mr. Darling knew it, yet he sometimes wondered uneasily whether the neighbours talked.

He had his position in the city to consider.

Nana also troubled him in another way. He had sometimes a feeling that she did not admire him. "I know she admires you tremendously, George," Mrs. Darling would assure him, and then she would sign to the children to be especially nice to father. Lovely dances followed, in which the only other servant, Liza, was sometimes allowed to join. Such a midget she looked in her long skirt and maid's cap, though she had sworn, when engaged, that she would never see ten again. The gaiety of those romps! And gayest of all was Mrs. Darling, who would pirouette so wildly that



all you could see of her was the kiss, and then if you had dashed at her you might have got it. There never was a simpler happier family until the coming of Peter Pan.

The Coral Island by R M Ballantyne

One of the first novels about teenagers and also for teenagers, 'The Coral Island' was published in 1858. It is the story of three boys, Ralph, Jack and Peterkin, who are shipwrecked on an island in the Pacific Ocean. Ralph is the narrator of the story. In this extract, the three boys begin to recover from the shipwreck and consider what resources they have with them on the island.

As you read the extract, make notes on the way the writer shows the characters as isolated.

We now seated ourselves upon a rock and began to examine into our personal property. When we reached the shore, after being wrecked, my companions had taken off part of their clothes and spread them out in the sun to dry, for, although the gale was raging fiercely, there was not a single cloud in the bright sky. They had also stripped off most part of my wet clothes and spread them also on the rocks. Having resumed our garments, we now searched all our pockets with the utmost care, and laid their contents out on a flat stone before us; and, now that our minds were fully alive to our condition, it was with no little anxiety that we turned our several pockets inside out, in order

that nothing might escape us. When all was collected together we found that our worldly goods consisted of the following articles: -

First, a small penknife with a single blade broken off about the middle and very rusty, besides having two or three notches on its edge. (Peterkin said of this, with his usual pleasantry, that it would do for a saw as well as a knife, which was a great advantage.) Second, An old German-silver pencil-case without any lead in it. Third, a piece of whip-cord about six yards long. Fourth, A sail maker's needle of a small size. Fifth, A ship's telescope, which I happened to have in my hand at the time the ship struck, and which I had clung to firmly all the time I was in the water. Indeed it was with difficulty that Jack got it out of my grasp when I was lying insensible on the shore. I cannot understand why I kept such a firm hold of this telescope. They say that a drowning man will clutch at a straw. Perhaps it may have been some such feeling in me, for I did not know that it was in my hand at the time we were wrecked. However, we felt some pleasure in having it with us now, although we did not see that it could be of much use to us, as the glass at the small end was broken to pieces. Our sixth article was a brass ring which Jack always wore on his little finger. I never understood why he wore it, for Jack was not vain of his appearance, and did not seem to care for ornaments of any kind. Peterkin said "it was in memory of the girl he left behind him!" But as he never spoke of this girl to either of us, I am inclined to think that Peterkin was either jesting or mistaken. In addition to these articles we had a little bit of tinder, and the clothes on our backs. These last were as follows: -

Each of us had on a pair of stout canvass trousers, and a pair of sailors' thick shoes. Jack wore a red flannel shirt, a blue jacket, and a red Kilmarnock bonnet or night-cap, besides a pair of worsted socks, and a cotton pocket-handkerchief, with sixteen portraits of Lord Nelson printed on it, and a union Jack in the middle. Peterkin had on a striped flannel shirt, - which he wore outside his trousers, and belted round his

waist, after the manner of a tunic, - and a round black straw hat. He had no jacket, having thrown it off just before we were cast into the sea; but this was not of much consequence, as the climate of the island proved to be extremely mild; so much so, indeed, that Jack and I often preferred to go about without our jackets. Peterkin had also a pair of white cotton socks, and a blue handkerchief with white spots all over it. My own costume consisted of a blue flannel shirt, a blue jacket, a black cap, and a pair of worsted socks, besides the shoes and canvass trousers already mentioned. This was all we had, and besides these things we had nothing else; but, when we thought of the danger from which we had escaped, and how much worse off we might have been had the ship struck on the reef during the night, we felt very thankful that we were possessed of so much, although, I must confess, we sometimes wished that we had had a little more.

Winter's Bone by Daniel Woodrell

Taken from the opening to 'Winter's Bone', Ozark teenager Ree Dolly is faced with an unresponsive mother and a criminal father. Alone, she does what she can do to manage the household and take care of her two younger siblings.

Ree Dolly stood at break of day on her cold front steps and smelled coming flurries and saw meat. Meat hung from trees across the creek. The carcasses hung pale of flesh with a fatty gleam from low limbs of saplings in the side yards. Three halt haggard houses formed a kneeling rank on the far Creekside and each had two or more skinned torsos dangling by rope from sagged limbs, venison left to the weather for two nights and three days so the early blossoming of decay might round the favour, sweeten that meat to the bone.

Snow clouds had replaced the horizon, capped the valley darkly, and chafing wind blew so the hung meat twirled from jiggling branches. Ree, brunette and sixteen, with milk skin and abrupt green eyes, stood bare-armed in a fluttering yellow dress, face to the wind, her cheeks reddening as if smacked again. She stood tall in combat boots, scarce at the waist but plenty through the arms and shoulders, a body made for loping after needs. She smelled the frosty wet in the looming clouds, thought of her shadowed kitchen and lean cupboard, looked to the scant woodpile, and shuddered. The coming weather meant wash hung outside would freeze into planks, so she'd have to stretch clothes line across the kitchen above the woodstove, and the puny stack of wood split for the potbelly would not last long enough to dry much except Mom's underthings and maybe a few T-shirts for the boys. Ree knew there was no gas for the chain saw, so she'd be swinging the axe out back while winter blew into the valley and fell around her.

Jessup, her father, had not set by a fat woodpile not split what there was for the potbelly before he went down the steep yard to his blue Capri and bounced away on the rut road. He had not set food by nor money, but promised he'd be back soon as he could with a paper sack of cash and a trunkload of delights. Jessup was a broken-faced, furtive man given to uttering quick pleading promises that made it easier for him to walk out the door and be gone, or come back inside and be forgiven.

Walnuts were still falling when Ree saw him last. Walnuts were thumping to ground in the night like stalking footsteps of some large thing that never quite came into view, and Jessup had paced on this porch in a worried slouch, dented nose snuffling, lantern jaw smoked by beard, eyes uncertain and alarmed by each walnut thump. The darkness and those thumps out in the darkness seemed to keep him jumpy. He paced until a decision popped into his head, then started down the steps, going fast into the night before his mind could change. He said, "Start lookin' for me soon as you see my face. 'Til then, don't even wonder."

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Mom sat in her chair beside the potbelly and the boys sat at the table eating what Ree fed them. Mom's morning pills turned her into a cat, a breathing thing that sat near heat and occasionally made a sound. Mom's chair was an old padded rocker that seldom rocked, and at odd instants she'd hum ill-matched snips of music, notes unrelated by melody or pitch. But for most of any day she was quiet and still, wearing a small lingering smile prompted by something vaguely nice going on inside her head. She was a Bromont, born to this house and she'd once been pretty. Even as she was now, medicated and lost to the present, with hair she forgot to wash or brush and deep wrinkles growing on her face, you could see she'd once been as comely as any firl that ever danced barefoot across this tangled country of Ozark hills and hollers. Long, dark and lovely she had been, in those days before her mind broke and the parts scattered and she let them go.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

Taken from the opening to 'The Handmaid's Tale', Our protagonist finds herself being imprisoned in an old school after a catastrophic event has changed the USA.

We slept in what had once been the gymnasium. The floor was of varnished wood, with stripes and circles painted on it, for the games that were formerly played there; the hoops for the basketball nets were still in place, though the nets were gone. A balcony ran around the room, for the spectators, and I thought I could smell, faintly like an afterimage, the pungent scent of sweat, shot through with the sweet taint of chewing gum and perfume from the watching girls, felt-skirted as I knew from pictures, later in mini-skirts, then pants, then in one earring, spiky green-streaked hair. Dances would have been held here; the music lingered, a palimpsest* of unheard sound, style upon style, an undercurrent of drums, a forlorn wail, garlands made of tissue-paper flowers, cardboard devils, a revolving ball of mirrors, powdering the dancers with a snow of light.

There was loneliness in the room, and expectation, of something without a shape or name. I remember that yearning, for something that was always about to happen and was never the same as the hands that were on us there and then, in the small of the back, or out back, in the parking lot, or in the television room with the sound turned down and only the pictures flickering over lifting flesh.

We yearned for the future. How did we learn it, that talent for insatiability? It was in the air; and it was still in the air, an afterthought, as we tried to sleep, in the army cots that had been set up in rows, with spaces between so we could not talk. We had flannelette sheets, like children's, and army-issue blankets, old ones that still said U.S. We folded our clothes neatly and laid them on the stools at the ends of the beds. The lights were turned down but not out. Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrolled; they had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts.

No guns though, even they could not be trusted with guns. Guns were for the guards, specially picked from the Angels. The guards weren't allowed inside the building except when called, and we weren't allowed out, except for our walks, twice daily, two by two around the football field which was enclosed now by a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire. The Angels stood outside it with their backs on us. They were objects of fear to us, but of something else as well. If only they would look. If only we could talk to them. Something could be exchanged, we thought, some deal made, some trade-off, we still had our bodies. That was our fantasy.

We learned to whisper almost without sound. In the semi-darkness we could stretch out our arms, when the Aunts weren't looking, and touch each other's hands across space. We learned to lip-read, our heads flat on the beds, turned sideways, watching each other's mouths. In this way we exchanged names, from bed to bed : Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June.



A palimpsest is a piece of paper that has been used more than once which still shows signs of the earlier writing or art work. It is like an echo of what was there before.