

Olli at American University
SYLLABUS for STUDY GROUP #630
Fall 2020

Study Group: Little Known Louisa May Alcott: A Fresh Look at Little Women

Day: Monday mornings, 11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.

Dates: Sept. 21, 28, Oct. 5, 12, 19, 26, Nov. 2, 9

Leader: Dr. Linda Freeman

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Texts: Louisa May Alcott: Hospital Sketches. Alice Fahs, ed. Bedford/St. Martin's, Boston, New York. ISBN: 0-312-26028-8

Louisa May Alcott: A Long Fatal Love Chase. Dell Books, Random House, NY. ISBN: 978-0-440-22301-6

Louisa May Alcott: Little Women. Norton Critical Edition, Phillips and Eiselen, eds. W.W. Norton Co., NY. ISBN: 978-0-393-97614-4

Note: These three recommended books are paperbacks. Hospital Sketches is out of copyright, so there are many versions out there; use any one you can find. The Norton Critical Edition of Little Women is highly recommended, as it comes with bottom-of-the-page footnotes and a large section of background, contexts, and criticism in the back. However, you should feel free to use another version, should you care to.

While not required, it is expected that most of us will have seen the new 2019 film version of "Little Women" (Gerwig, director), so we will have a short discussion of it both in our first session and again in our last session. We also will read an Alcott short story, "My Contraband," about 15 pages long, which can be found at this address online

http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415537070/data/section3/alcott-my_contraband.pdf

and one of Alcott's best poems, "Thoreau's Flute." This poem may be found at

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1863/09/thoreaus-flute/540804/>

Goals: We will read and discuss three early works by Louisa May Alcott and then her masterpiece, Little Women in an attempt to understand and enjoy these remarkable literary achievements. We will consider author biographical material and the larger historical context of

these works, as well as their artistry, how they accomplish their effects, and what their over-all thematic goal(s) may be. Group members will become aware not only of the versatility of Alcott's writing but also how current some of her major concerns still are in our own time. We also will discuss the various film and TV versions of Little Women.

Format: Study group meetings will be a mix of informal lectures with group discussions. Active participation by group members will be essential to the success of each session. An agenda for each session will be sent out ahead of time by email. Starting after the first session, study questions relating to the reading assignment coming up for discussion the next week also will be emailed to group members each Tuesday. Because the amount of reading will be heavy, the reading assignments will run about 90 pages per week. This is by no means impossible for intrepid OLLI participants, but it should be planned for.

Attendance: Anyone dropping the study group should let the OLLI office (202-895-4860) know as soon as possible so that someone else might be able to attend. Anyone who must miss study group meetings for travel, illness, or other reasons should try to stay up with the reading schedule (below) while away. Anyone not completing a session's reading assignment should feel welcome to attend class anyway (and complete the reading when it becomes possible to do so). Please don't stay away because you feel you are not prepared. You can still learn by being there!

Schedule: This part of the syllabus is subject to adjustment.

Sept. 21—Intros, syllabus, class policies; literary genres, elements of the novel; Alcott bio, background for the Sketches; orientation for 2019 "Little Women" film

Sept. 28—Discussion of Sketches, "My Contraband;" Gothic novels; background for Love Chase

Oct. 5—Discussion of "My Contraband," Love Chase, Chapter I ("Fair Rosamond," page 1) through Chapter XII ("Behind the Grating," page 185); interim evaluations

Oct. 12—Discussion of Love Chase, Chapter XIII ("Flee Temptation," page 185) through Chapter XXIV ("The Vision Verified," page 346); background for Little Women

Oct. 19—Discussion of Little Women, Chapter I ("Playing Pilgrims," page 11) through Chapter X ("The P.C. and P.O.," page 91)

Oct. 26—Discussion of Little Women, Chapter XI ("Experiments," page 92) through Chapter XXXII ("Aunt March Settles the Question," page 185)

Nov. 2—Discussion of Little Women, Part Second, Chapter I ("Gossip," page 190) through Chapter XI ("A Friend," page 283)

Nov. 9—Discussion of Little Women, Chapter XII ("Heartache," page 283) through Chapter XXIV ("Harvest Time," page 380); filmography; summing up; possible future courses