

Talking about *Little Women*

by Louisa May Alcott · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/little-women/

Warming up

Easy openers. Anyone at the table can answer these, including the youngest.

1. Which March sister are you: Meg, Jo, Beth, or Amy? Now the dangerous part: which one does the rest of the table say you are?
2. The sisters make their own fun: plays in the attic, a family newspaper, a secret society with passwords. Which of their homemade amusements would actually work in this family?

The real conversation

Pick two or three, not all of them. Parents answer too, honestly.

1. Amy burns the only copy of Jo's book, and Jo says she'll never forgive her. Then the ice breaks on the river. What does that day teach Jo about how anger and love fit in the same heart? Could it have taught her any other way?
2. Everyone (Laurie, Amy, half the readers who ever lived) thinks Jo and Laurie belong together. Jo says no, because she knows herself better than they do. How do you know when everyone else is wrong about what's right for you?
3. Beth is the quietest sister with the smallest life, and she's the one the family can least imagine losing. What does Beth do for the Marches that nobody else does? Who does it in our house?
4. Each sister carries her flaw the whole book (Jo's temper, Meg's envy, Amy's vanity) and works at it without ever fully curing it. Is that disappointing, or is it the most honest thing in the book?
5. The Marches are poor with a rich boy next door, and the envy runs in both directions; Laurie would trade the grand empty house for their noisy one in a heartbeat. What does each house have that the other wants?

The big one

Save it for last.

Jo dreamed of being a famous writer in New York; she ends up running a school in a big noisy house full of boys, and calls herself the happiest she's ever been. Did she give up her dream or trade it for a truer one? How would you tell the difference in your own life?

Do it *together*

Publish the Pickwick Portfolio. The sisters ran a weekly family newspaper: stories, poems, advertisements, stern letters to the editor about cats. Produce one issue: every member contributes one piece under a pen name (the sillier the better; the Marches used Dickens characters). Read the whole thing aloud at the next meeting, with all the ceremony you can stand. If it survives two issues, you have a family institution.