Classic Readers

Little Women

Louisa May Alcott

retold by Jenny Dooley & Virginia Evans

Express Publishing

Chapter 1

A Merry Christmas

The four March sisters, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, were knitting by the fire. Snow was falling outside, and it was nearly Christmas, but the girls were not excited. This year they had no money for Christmas presents.

Jo could not help complaining.

"Christmas won't be Christmas without presents."

Amy, the youngest sister, was in the same mood.

"It's not fair! Some girls have lots of pretty things, and other girls have nothing at all."

Beth looked on the bright side of things.

"But we've got Father and Mother, and each other."

For a moment, the other girls smiled, but they soon looked sad again. Jo sounded pessimistic.

"We haven't got Father. We won't have him for a long time."

The sisters sat quietly for a moment, thinking of their father, who was far away fighting in the war.

After a while, Meg spoke.

"Mother suggested not having presents this Christmas because it will be a hard winter for everyone. She thinks it is wrong to spend money on pleasurable things when the men are suffering in the war. We can't do much to help them, but we should think of them, and not of ourselves."

Jo agreed.

"You're right, but we do have a dollar each. Perhaps we could each buy something small for ourselves."

The clock struck six, and Beth put a pair of old slippers by the fire. It was time for Mother to come home.

Jo picked up the slippers.

"These are very old. Mother needs a new pair."

On hearing this, Beth jumped up.

"I'm going to buy her some new slippers with my dollar!"

Amy cried out:

"No, I want to buy them!"

Beth came up with a better idea.

"I know! Let's each buy something for Mother and not buy anything for ourselves."

Jo agreed.

"You're so sweet, Beth. What a wonderful idea!"

The sisters were very happy with their plan, and decided to go shopping the next afternoon.

Mother arrived home in time for supper, with some good news for the girls. A letter had arrived from their father. After they had eaten, they gathered in front of the fire to read it. It was a cheerful, hopeful letter, with little news of the dangers and troubles of the war. Instead, Mr. March wrote of his love for his wife and his daughters.

"I am so proud of my little women," he wrote. When the girls read this, tears came to their eyes.

Amy felt she didn't deserve all this love.

"I am a selfish girl but I will try to be better."

Meg sounded determined.

"We all will. I worry too much about my looks and I hate working, but I will try to change."

Jo made a promise, too.

"I'll try to be a little woman and stop being rough and wild."

Beth said nothing, but dutifully went back to her knitting. Soon the atmosphere was lightened as the sisters sang together with their mother, until it was time for bed.

Christmas arrived a few days later, and when the sisters woke

Meg Becomes a Lady

Comprehension

Read or listen to Chapter 5 and then match the beginnings and the endings of the sentences below to make true statements.

1 Although Mrs March is afraid that Meg will get used to fashionable life,
2 Meg forgets her embarrassment at her shabby old dress for a while,
3 Belle offers to lend Meg one of her dresses
4 Although everyone admires Meg at the ball,
5 A man's rude remark at the ball
6 When Meg returns home,

a when she receives her mother's and Laurie's gifts.
b Laurie thinks she doesn't look like herself.
c she admits to her mother and sisters that she let people make a fool of her.
d makes Meg regret not wearing her own clothes.
e she lets her stay with the Moffats for a fortnight.
f for a ball where Laurie is invited too.

What do you think?

A ***Discuss the following questions.***

1 Should we follow the latest fashions? Why (not)?
2 What do you think of the Moffat sisters? Refer to the text to justify your answer.
3 Laurie is very straightforward, telling Meg the truth about her appearance. Do you think he should have acted differently?
4 What qualities do you think make someone admirable?

B Find the following excerpts from Chapter 5 and discuss their meanings.

1 p. 34: *"I'll say I didn't know you. You don't look like Meg at all."*
2 p. 35: *"They are making a fool of that girl. They have treated her like a doll to dress up and play with."*
3 p. 36: *"Belle says poor girls don't stand a chance."*

Language Practice

Refer to the text to match the words and make collocations. Then use them to complete the sentences, putting the verbs in the correct form.

- attend — a sigh of relief
- follow — the latest fashions
- throw — a good time
- refuse — dinners
- breathe — sb's offer
- shake — a party
- have — your head

1 When Mrs March realises that Meg hasn't changed, she ..... .
2 During her stay at the Moffats, Meg and the Moffat sisters ..... .
3 Meg begins to copy the manners of the people around her and to ..... .
4 When Laurie asks Meg if she is enjoying the ball, she ..... .
5 One evening, the Moffats decide to ..... .
6 Meg wants Laurie to tell her family that she ..... at the ball.
7 Meg tries to ..... Belle's ..... to lend her one of her dresses.

A Review

A review is a short description of a book, which is written to inform readers about the book and give them an opinion about whether they should read it or not. Read the following example and answer the questions below.

DAVID COPPERFIELD

David Copperfield, by Charles Dickens, is a story describing the life of a boy who grows up in very difficult circumstances and overcomes his problems to achieve success in adult life.

The story begins when David's widowed mother decides to remarry. She marries Mr Murdstone, an evil man who sends David away at the first opportunity and is determined to teach him and his mother discipline. David's mother dies while David is away at school, and David is sent to London to work. Soon, David realises that he must find his only living relative, Miss Betsy Trotwood, and ask for help.

This is a beautifully written book, with many sad and desperate moments, as well as light-hearted ones. Dickens' vivid descriptions give the reader a clear picture of life in Victorian times.

I strongly recommend this book to children and adults alike. Anyone who has a love of the English language will enjoy David Copperfield.

1 Which of the following were included in the review? Tick (✓)

A the type of book
B the title of the book
C the name of the author
D the author's biography
E a brief reference to the main characters
F a few points on the plot
G general comments
H the ending of the story
I recommendation

2 What style is it written in? a) formal?
b) informal?
c) semi-formal?

Little Women

The March sisters and their mother are struggling to make a living while Mr March is away fighting in the Civil War. Can they survive in this troubled time? More importantly, will Mr March return home safely?

COMPONENTS:

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