Year 4 overview

Unit 20

Word meaning

Fiction

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Fiction

Little Women

by Louisa May Alcott

▽ **Printable text** • **Modelling slides**   📖 **Photocopiable text and questions** • **pages 194 to 197**

Based on the author's life growing up in New England during the American Civil War, this hugely popular novel tells the story of Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy March. Alcott's portrayal of the March sisters as ambitious and spirited was momentous at a time when women were seen as subordinate to men. In this extract, Jo decides to befriend the grandson of her wealthy neighbour, Mr Laurence. The contrasting descriptions of their two houses is interesting to consider alongside the **Unit 19** text.

1 Get ready

Discuss the **Key vocabulary** identified in the **Language toolkit** and then complete the vocabulary activities as desired. Please note that the selected vocabulary is a guide. Depending on the needs of your cohort, additional vocabulary discussion may be beneficial before, during and after reading. Next, display the text (pages 194 to 195) so the children can see the title and any illustrations, and encourage the children to discuss the following questions before reading.

1 Look at the text's title. What do you think it might be about? What issues do you think it might cover?
Answers will vary. Although the children should understand that the text is likely to be about female characters, some may assume that this refers to the physical size of the characters, others might guess that 'little' refers to the characters' ages. You could ask them whether they would want to be referred to as 'little'; many will not. Use this opportunity to explain that men and women were not considered equal at this point in history.

2 The four sisters in *Little Women* have very different personalities. What other female characters have you come across in books? What sort of qualities do they have?
Answers will vary. However, most children should be able to contribute some ideas. You could review key characters from texts in this book (e.g. Flossie in **Unit 12**; Lily in **Unit 13**; Violet in **Unit 19**).

3 In the story it is cold and snowy outside, so one character sits near the fire to keep warm. What sort of atmosphere do you think this creates?
If the children do not know what it feels like to sit by a fire, explain that 19th-century families used fires to keep warm before central heating existed. The children might suggest that the fire creates a warm, cosy, or welcoming atmosphere.

Language toolkit

Key vocabulary

behold	betokening	doze
fancy	frolicked	invalid
mischievous	shabby	splendors
stately	suburb	wistfully

Vocabulary discussion questions

- Are you more likely to **doze** by a fire or at a football match? Why?
- What **stately** homes do you know of? What makes them **stately**?
- When you are ill you might look **wistfully** at children who are out playing. How would you be feeling?
- Would you rather live in the middle of a city or in a **suburb**? Why?
- When might you wear **shabby** clothes?

Vocabulary activities

- **Mischievous** follows the 'i before e rule'. Challenge the children to tell you the version of the 'i before e rule' they know and to think of examples that conform to the rule. Can they also think of some exception words? For example, 'seize' and 'protein' are exceptions to most versions of the rule.
- As this extract uses US English, some words are spelt differently (e.g. 'neighbour' becomes 'neighbor'; 'splendours' becomes **splendors**). Can the children think of any other words that are spelt differently in US English (e.g. 'colour'/'color'; 'theatre'/'theater'), or any words that are entirely different (e.g. 'rubbish'/'garbage'; 'torch'/'flashlight')?

2 First steps

Read the text together and then encourage the children to discuss the following questions.

1 What does Meg want her sister Jo to do?
Stay in by the fire instead of going out in the snow.
If the children only refer to what Meg does/does not want Jo to do, you could prompt them to expand their answers.

2 Why did Jo sweep a path outside?
So that Beth could have a walk later in the day.
Ensure that the children understand that Beth is another of Meg and Jo's sisters.

3 Who lives next door to the March family? What is their house like?
The Laurence family/the Laurence boy and his grandpa. Their house is large, well-kept, full of riches.
The children may need help to understand that the Marches' house is the shabbier of the two described.

3 Explore

- Discuss what we learn about the March sisters in this extract. Encourage the children to look for evidence of how Jo looks and acts, and then contrast this with what we learn about Meg (e.g. Jo is bold and always looking for fun; Meg is sensible and likes to be comfortable). You could also discuss what we can infer about Beth. Make predictions about the relationships between the sisters: do they get on well or drive each other mad because they are so different? You might refer to Meg 'advising' Jo, and Jo sweeping a path for Beth's walk.

- Talk about the portrayals of female characters in fairy tales (e.g. 'Cinderella'; 'Sleeping Beauty'). Point out that these heroines can be quite passive and idealised – they are very beautiful and they often need to be rescued by a prince. Compare these characters with that of Jo, who is a very different type of heroine (e.g. her looks aren't mentioned; she is 'mischievous', energetic and adventurous; she plans to go and tell Mr Laurence what his grandson needs). Discuss which portrayals of female characters the children prefer. Which are the most realistic?

- *Little Women* was written just after the American Civil War (1861–1865). Discuss the war with the class (see the **Reading list** for resources). As the war was primarily about slavery, you could use this opportunity to talk about the wrongs of slavery and the impact it still has on people today.

4 Skills focus   See pages 192 to 193

Use the information from the **Skills guide** and the relevant **Skills graphic** to introduce the skill of word meaning.

1 Model the skill using the **Unit 20 Modelling slides** and the **Modelling word meaning** guidance on page 192.

2 The children can then attempt the **Word meaning** questions on page 196.

3 Finally, the **Mix it up!** questions on page 197 offer practice in a range of comprehension skills.

Answers and marking guidance for all questions are included on pages 192 to 193.

5 Where next?

- **Speaking and listening task:** Split the class into pairs and ask each pair to discuss whether it is better to have lots of money or a big family. Each pair could prepare five bullet points to share with the class, or to help them debate the issue in larger groups.

- **Writing task:** Ask the children to write a character profile for a protagonist from a favourite story or from their recent reading. They should include details about the character's appearance and their main traits. Do they have any unusual hobbies, experiences or talents? They could also include a rating out of ten for how realistic they think the character is.

Reading list

Fiction
- ▶ *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery
- ▶ *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning* by Lemony Snicket (Linked text: **Unit 19**)
- ▶ *What Katy Did* by Susan Coolidge

Class reads
- ▶ *Pippi Longstocking* by Astrid Lindgren

Non-fiction
- ▶ *Civil War (Eyewitness)* by DK
- ▶ *Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World* by Kate Pankhurst
- ▶ *The USA* by Terry Deary

Poetry
- ▶ *Before She Was Harriet* by Lesa Cline-Ransome

Films
- ▶ *Little Women* (Columbia Pictures, 1994)
- ▶ *Little Women* (Columbia Pictures, 2019)

Modelling word meaning

▽ See Unit 20 Modelling slides

Use the **Skills guide** (see pages 14 to 15) and the downloadable **Skills graphic** to support your modelling.

1 *"Going out for exercise," answered Jo with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.* **What does the word** *mischievous* **mean in this sentence?**

playful/naughty

Read the question together. Model locating the target word in the text and reading around it for context. Point out that Jo has been out for two walks, so she doesn't really need exercise. She is also carrying a broom and shovel, which she wouldn't need for a walk. This suggests she is up to something, as does the phrase 'twinkle in her eyes', which shows that Jo is excited or feeling playful, because her eyes are shining. You could also remind the children of your discussion of the target word in the **Key vocabulary**. Finally, model writing an appropriate synonym as your answer.

2 **Read the first two sentences of the paragraph beginning** *Meg went back to toast her feet and read Ivanhoe … .* **Find and copy** one **word that means 'weak because of illness'.**

invalid

Draw attention to the unusual locator and highlight the relevant sentences in the text. Encourage the children to help you eliminate the words and phrases that cannot be correct. Think aloud: *Beth is going to take the dolls for a walk around the garden to give them fresh air. I think she is playing at being a nurse.* Encourage the children to help you find the best word in these two sentences, referring to your discussion of 'invalid' as part of the **Key vocabulary** if necessary.

3 *Meg went back to toast her feet and read Ivanhoe …* **What does the word** *toast* **mean here? Tick** one.

burn ☐   cool ☐   brown ☐   warm ☑

Locate the target word in the text and underline it. After the key word, the sentence quickly moves on to talk about what Jo was doing, so model concentrating on the part about Meg. Model how to eliminate the options until you are left with one answer. Think aloud: *As Meg is sitting by a cosy fire, she won't be cooling her feet, and burning or browning her feet in the fire would be painful – she'd be cooking them! You sit by a fire to keep warm, and 'warm' makes sense in the sentence, so that must be the answer.*

4 *Both stood in a suburb of the city, which was still country-like, with groves and lawns, large gardens, and quiet streets.* **Which group of words tells you that Jo's neighbourhood had lots of trees and grass? Tick** one.

suburb of the city ☐   groves and lawns ☑   large gardens ☐   quiet streets ☐

Read the locator quotation and the question aloud. Point out that, as all the answer options are included in the text, you will need to think very carefully about the meaning of each one. Discuss which matches the question most closely, recapping your discussion of 'suburb' from the **Key vocabulary** if desired. If the children suggest 'large gardens', explain that 'groves and lawns' is an even better match for the key words in the question, as the words are synonyms for 'trees and grass'. Finally, model ticking the answer.

Word meaning questions mark scheme ❓

📖 See page 196

Answer		Guidance
1	advise	Some children may need help to locate the start and end of the sisters' conversation. If so, point out the speech marks and draw attention to the reporting clauses that mark both of Meg's speeches. **Award 1 mark for the correct answer.**
2	played ☑	If necessary, remind the children to try substituting each of the answer options into the target sentence to see if they make sense. Your discussion of the **Key vocabulary** should help them understand that 'frolicked' involves moving about rather than sitting still. **Award 1 mark for the correct answer ticked.**

Answer		Guidance
3	fancy	Some children may choose words connected with imaginative play (e.g. 'enchanted'; 'splendors'; delights'; 'behold'). If so, remind them to look for a closer synonym for 'imagination', and to look for places where 'imagination' could be substituted into the sentence. **Award 1 mark for the correct answer underlined.**
4	impatient/enthusiastic/keen	Some children may use longer phrases or a whole sentence instead of single words to explain the meaning (e.g. 'Jo really wants to get to know the Laurence boy.'). This is acceptable. **Award 1 mark for a plausible synonym or explanation.**
5	longingly ☑	This question contains some strong distractors. If the children tick an incorrect option, recap your discussions of 'wistfully' from the **Key vocabulary**. **Award 1 mark for the correct answer ticked.**

Mix it up! questions mark scheme ❓🧭🔍💭🔤🔀☰✏️

📖 See page 197

Answer		Guidance
1	big coach house *OR* well-kept grounds *OR* conservatory *OR* lovely things *OR* rich curtains	Remind the children that, as this is a 'find and copy' question, they must use the exact words from the text in their answers. **Award 1 mark for each correct answer, up to a maximum of 2 marks. Skill: Retrieval.**
2	She has never been into the house. ☑	If the children tick the second option, remind them to read around the locator quotation to check their answer. Point out that the word 'betokening', as well as the following paragraph, make it clear that Jo has not been into the house. If they tick the last option, explain that although Jo does think the house is grand, this does not relate to the meaning of 'glimpses'. **Award 1 mark for the correct answer ticked. Skill: Word choice.**
3	The Laurence house is bigger/grander/richer/more luxurious than Jo's house, because it has a lot of land/lovely things inside, while Jo's house is shabby/old.	Evidence can be given in the form of direct quotes, paraphrasing or summaries. Some children may not realise that the words 'old', 'brown' and 'bare' refer to Jo's house. You could explain that Jo's house is next door to the Laurence house, which they know from previous questions is the 'stately stone mansion'. **Award 1 mark for a plausible comparison that mentions both houses. Award 2 marks for a plausible comparison supported by evidence from the text. Skill: Comparison.**
4	*Impression*: Jo is friendly/nosy. *Evidence*: She plans a way to introduce herself to the lonely Laurence boy/she wants to see inside his house.	The children are likely to think of a range of adjectives to describe Jo (e.g. 'energetic', 'cheeky', 'bold'). If they select adjectives lifted from or very close to those in the text (e.g. 'mischievous'; 'adventurous') and do not provide evidence, encourage them to justify their answers verbally to check their understanding. **Award 1 mark for a plausible impression. Award 2 marks for a plausible impression with appropriate evidence from the text. Skill: Inference.**
5	Jo is going to tell the boy's grandfather to let the boy play with her, because she says he needs 'somebody young and lively' to play with.	If necessary, remind the children that they need to provide evidence from the text. This could be in the form of a quotation or a summary in their own words. **Award 1 mark for a plausible prediction. Award 2 marks for a plausible prediction with evidence from the text. Skill: Prediction.**

Little Women, by Louisa May Alcott

Little Women is about four sisters, called Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy March. The story is set in the United States in the 1860s, shortly after the American Civil War. In this extract, Jo imagines what life must be like for her lonely neighbour, whom she calls 'the Laurence boy'.

"What in the world are you going to do now, Jo?" asked Meg one snowy afternoon, as her sister came tramping through the hall, in rubber boots, old sack, and hood, with a broom in one hand and a shovel in the other.

"Going out for exercise," answered Jo with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

"I should think two long walks this morning would have been enough! It's cold and dull out, and I advise you to stay warm and dry by the fire, as I do," said Meg with a shiver.

"Never take advice! Can't keep still all day, and not being a pussycat, I don't like to doze by the fire. I like adventures, and I'm going to find some."

Meg went back to toast her feet and read *Ivanhoe*, and Jo began to dig paths with great energy. The snow was light, and with her broom she soon swept a path all round the garden, for Beth to walk in when the sun came out and the invalid dolls needed air. Now, the garden separated the Marches' house from that of Mr. Laurence. Both stood in a suburb of the city, which was still country-like, with groves and lawns, large gardens, and quiet streets. A low hedge parted the two estates. On one side was an old, brown house, looking rather bare and shabby, robbed of the vines that in summer covered its walls and the flowers, which then surrounded it. On the other side was a stately stone mansion, plainly betokening every sort of comfort and luxury, from the big coach house and well-kept grounds to the conservatory and the glimpses of lovely things one caught between the rich curtains.

Yet it seemed a lonely, lifeless sort of house, for no children frolicked on the lawn, no motherly face ever smiled at the windows, and few people went in and out, except the old gentleman and his grandson.

To Jo's lively fancy, this fine house seemed a kind of enchanted palace, full of splendors and delights which no one enjoyed. She had long wanted to behold these hidden glories, and to know the Laurence boy, who looked as if he would like to be known, if he only knew how to begin. Since the party, she had been more eager than ever, and had planned many ways of making friends with him, but he had not been seen lately, and Jo began to think he had gone away, when she one day spied a brown face at an upper window, looking wistfully down into their garden, where Beth and Amy were snow-balling one another.

"That boy is suffering for society and fun," she said to herself. "His grandpa does not know what's good for him, and keeps him shut up all alone. He needs a party of jolly boys to play with, or somebody young and lively. I've a great mind to go over and tell the old gentleman so!"

From *Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott.
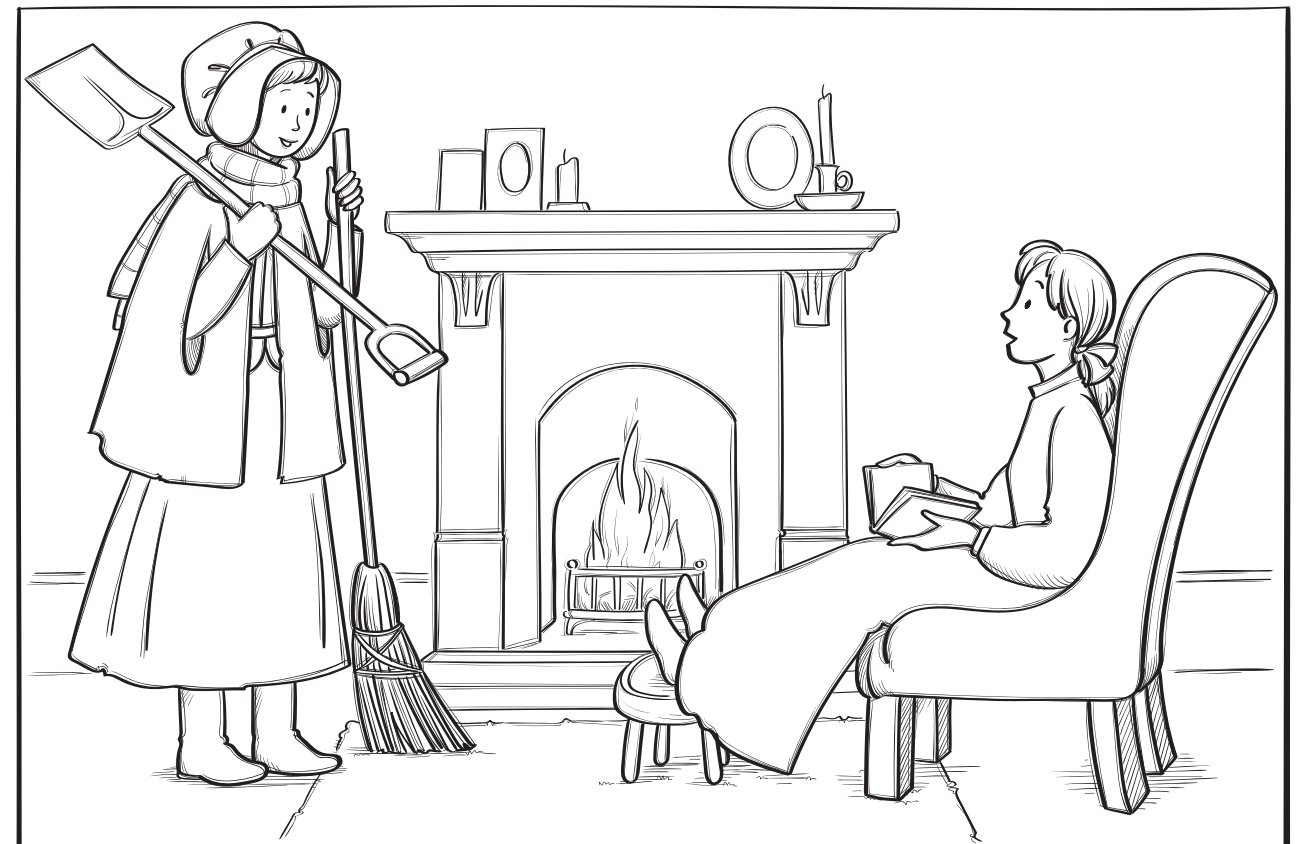
? Word meaning

Name: _____

1 Look at the conversation between Meg and Jo at the beginning of the text.
Find and copy **one** word that shows that Meg is making a suggestion to Jo.

_____

1 mark

2 *Yet it seemed a lonely, lifeless sort of house, for no children frolicked on the lawn, no motherly face ever smiled at the windows, and few people went in and out, except the old gentleman and his grandson.*
What does the word *frolicked* mean in this sentence? Tick **one**.

went ☐   played ☐   liked ☐   sat ☐

1 mark

3 Look at the sentences below. Underline **one** word that means the same as 'imagination'.

> To Jo's lively fancy, this fine house seemed a kind of enchanted palace,
>
> full of splendors and delights which no one enjoyed. She had long wanted
>
> to behold these hidden glories, and to know the Laurence boy, who looked
>
> as if he would like to be known, if he only knew how to begin.

1 mark

4 Look at the paragraph beginning *To Jo's lively fancy, ...* What does the word *eager* mean here?

_____

1 mark

5 *... Jo began to think he had gone away, when she one day spied a brown face at an upper window, looking wistfully down into their garden, where Beth and Amy were snow-balling one another.*
Which word could replace *wistfully* here? Tick **one**.

happily ☐

playfully ☐

longingly ☐

enviously ☐

1 mark

Mix it up!

Name: _____

1 *On the other side was a stately stone mansion, plainly betokening every sort of comfort and luxury, from the big coach house and well-kept grounds to the conservatory and the glimpses of lovely things one caught between the rich curtains.*
Find and copy **two** examples of comforts and luxuries found at Mr Laurence's mansion.

1 _____

2 _____

2 marks

2 *...the glimpses of lovely things one caught between the rich curtains.*
What does the word *glimpses* tell you about Jo's experience of the Laurence house?
Tick **one**.

She is a frequent visitor. ☐   She has never been into the house. ☐

She visits occasionally. ☐   She thinks the house is very grand. ☐

1 mark

3 How is Jo's house different from the Laurence house? Explain your answer using the text.

_____

_____

_____

2 marks

4 Look at the whole text. What impression do you get of Jo's personality?
Give **one** impression and **one** piece of evidence from the text.

Impression	Evidence
_____	_____
	_____
	_____

2 marks

5 What do you think Jo will do next? Explain your answer using evidence from the text.

_____

_____

2 marks