

Little Women

Part One, Chapters 16–23

by Louisa May Alcott

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: capricious, contrite, covet, estimable, exult, obstinacy, pathetic, perversity, propitiate, solace

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Vocabulary Preview 2

Answer Key — Preview 3

Caution: share only if self-checking

OPTIONAL POST-READING QUIZ

Vocabulary in Context 4

Answer Key — In Context 5

Caution: do not share with students

About the Pre-Reading Activity (open-dictionary; ungraded or completion grade):

Students preview 10 words from the upcoming reading, each in a sentence that supports understanding. They choose the best meaning from 3 choices.

About the Optional Post-Reading Quiz (use after reading, or skip):

Same words, now in real excerpts from the text, with questions that build reading and analytical skills.

Vocabulary Sections for this Book:

Section 1 · Part One, Chapters 1–8 · The March sisters at Christmas

Section 2 · Part One, Chapters 9–15 · Meg visits her fashionable friends

Section 3 · Part One, Chapters 16–23 · The sisters keep house alone

Section 4 · Part Two, Chapters 24–31 · The sisters, three years later

Section 5 · Part Two, Chapters 32–39 · Jo longs for a change

Section 6 · Part Two, Chapters 40–47 · Quiet days at the March home

Bold = this section. Other sections are available at verbalworkout.com.



verbalworkout.com
(all resources free)

Vocabulary Preview

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Read each prompt. Then choose the best meaning for the bold word.

1. A **capricious** customer changed her order three times in a minute.

- A. ruled by sudden whim
- B. rude and impatient
- C. fussy and hard to please

2. The **contrite** student lowered his eyes and said nothing.

- A. bored and tired
- B. shy and timid
- C. sincerely sorry

3. Many people **covet** their neighbor's new car.

- A. quietly criticize
- B. secretly admire
- C. long to possess

4. She is an **estimable** scholar with many published books.

- A. clever but vain
- B. worthy of respect
- C. ambitious and driven

5. They **exult** whenever their team wins a close game.

- A. rejoice triumphantly
- B. sigh with relief
- C. grow restless

6. Her **obstinacy** kept her from ever admitting she was wrong.

- A. wounded pride
- B. honest confusion
- C. firm stubbornness

7. The **pathetic** whimper of the stray dog filled the alley.

- A. harsh and angry
- B. arousing pity
- C. feeble and worthless

8. Out of sheer **perversity**, he refused the help he clearly needed.

- A. stubborn pride
- B. willful contrariness
- C. sudden laziness

9. He brought a gift to **propitiate** his angry neighbor.

- A. pacify and appease
- B. flatter and praise
- C. bribe with money

10. After the bad news, music was her only **solace**.

- A. comfort in distress
- B. a source of pride
- C. a pleasant distraction

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

bijou — a small decorative jewel or ornament; here, something worn merely for show

affianced — engaged to be married; an older, formal term

in high dudgeon — very angry and offended

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY
1	A
2	C
3	C
4	B
5	A
6	C
7	B
8	B
9	A
10	A

Vocabulary in Context

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____ Score _____ / 10

Read each excerpt carefully. Then choose the best answer to each question.

1 “Go on with your work as usual, for work is a blessed solace. Hope and keep busy, and whatever happens, remember that you never can be fatherless.”

As it is used in the passage, ‘a blessed solace’ most nearly means that work offers the girls...

- A. a duty they owe their mother
- B. comfort in their distress
- C. a way to forget their fears

2 “... Jo, living in the darkened room, with that suffering little sister always before her eyes and that pathetic voice sounding in her ears, learned to see the beauty and the sweetness of Beth’s nature ...”

In context, calling Beth’s voice ‘pathetic’ emphasizes that it...

- A. stirred deep pity and tenderness
- B. was too faint to be understood
- C. had grown feeble and contemptible

3 “I, too, covet that, but not as a necklace. Ah, no!”

It can reasonably be inferred that, in saying she ‘covets’ the cross, Esther...

- A. longs to possess it herself
- B. already owns one like it
- C. scorns it as worldly finery

4 “Seeing that he really was out of temper, Jo, who knew how to manage him, assumed a contrite expression, and going artistically down upon her knees, said meekly ...”

In the passage, Jo’s ‘contrite expression’ characterizes her as...

- A. indifferent to the quarrel
- B. feigning penitence to win Laurie over
- C. openly defiant and unrepentant

5 “... hoping to propitiate him by accepting a second dose of Boswell’s Johnson ...”

Jo hopes to ‘propitiate’ Mr. Laurence with the book chiefly so that she can then...

- A. steer him away from Laurie
- B. raise Laurie’s quarrel gently
- C. leave without being scolded

6 “... if the boy held his tongue because he promised, and not from obstinacy, I’ll forgive him.”

Which statement about Laurie’s silence is best supported by Mr. Laurence’s words?

- A. No reason could excuse the silence.
- B. Stubborn defiance would be forgiven.
- C. A kept promise would earn his pardon.

7 “... how he was altogether a most estimable and upright young man.”

In the passage, Mr. Brooke is characterized as a young man who is...

- A. charming but not to be trusted
- B. clever at advancing himself
- C. worthy of esteem and respect

8 “She felt excited and strange, and not knowing what else to do, followed a capricious impulse, and, withdrawing her hands, said petulantly ...”

The author calls Meg’s impulse ‘capricious’ in order to present her change of heart as...

- A. a long-planned decision
- B. a settled dislike of Brooke
- C. a sudden, passing whim

9 “The best of us have a spice of perversity in us, especially when we are young and in love.”

The remark about ‘a spice of perversity’ primarily functions to explain Meg’s defiance as springing from...

- A. an urge to resist being ordered
- B. a wish to please her parents
- C. her sincere love for John

10 “Going in to exult over a fallen enemy and to praise a strong-minded sister for the banishment of an objectionable lover ...”

Which choice best describes the mood in which Jo enters the parlor, expecting to ‘exult’?

- A. gleeful, gloating triumph
- B. tender concern for Meg
- C. calm, polite curiosity

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY	NOTE
1	B	
2	A	Tests the older sense of 'pathetic' -- arousing pity -- not the modern dismissive meaning students expect.
3	A	
4	B	Jo's penitence is staged, not sincere -- 'assumed' and 'artistically' mark the contrite look as a tactic to manage Laurie.
5	B	Event comprehension. Jo has come to coax Mr. Laurence into making peace with Laurie; the borrowed book is her opening move to soften him.
6	C	
7	C	A teaching moment: Jo soon retorts 'I hate estimable young men!', turning the very word of praise against Brooke.
8	C	
9	A	The narrator pairs 'inclination' (Meg's real liking for John) with 'perversity'; the key is the contrary impulse the word names, not the love.
10	A	Jo's gloating is misplaced -- she is about to find Meg engaged to the 'enemy,' not rid of him.

Teacher Context: Part One, Chapters 16–23

With Marmee gone to nurse their father, the girls manage the household alone and Beth falls dangerously ill after visiting a poor family. The home weathers its darkest days, the parents return, and Part One closes with Aunt March's part in settling Meg's future. Section runs to the end of Part One.