

LITTLE MEN

LIFE AT PLUMFIELD WITH JO'S BOYS

By Louisa May Alcott

HIGH SCHOOL HONORS BOOK STUDY

SAMPLE
Not for use

Created by Jenny Phillips and Maggie Felsch

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ABOUT THE BOOK STUDY

What are Honors Book Studies?

The Good and the Beautiful Honors Book Studies are student-directed consumable booklets that accompany select books from The Good and the Beautiful Library. Each Honors Book Study is designed to help students explore the book's themes and messages, appreciate the literary value of the book, and learn new vocabulary and writing skills that correlate with the book. To complete an Honors Book Study, the student simply reads and follows the instructions in the booklet while reading the corresponding book. The Honors Book Studies are intended to be completed independently, or they can be completed in a group, class, or book club setting.

What are the goals of the Honors Book Studies?

There are three main goals of the Honors Book Studies: to help the student learn to **analyze**, **appreciate**, and **gain inspiration** from good and beautiful literature.

How many Honors Book Studies should be completed?

Students can complete as few or as many of the Honors Book Studies as desired. Honors Book Studies are not designed to take the place of the High School Language Arts courses; they are designed to be used in addition to those courses for those students who work at a faster pace and can use more challenging work. The reading books for the Honors Book Studies are more challenging than the required reading books for the High School Language Arts course. Honors Book Studies can be completed in any order.

What materials are needed?

To complete this book study, you will need the following items:

- This book study booklet
- *Little Men* by Louisa May Alcott
- A computer or laptop with a basic word processing program, such as Word or Google Docs
- A pencil or pen and a journal or notebook

AT-A-GLANCE

Vocabulary

- Challenging vocabulary words in *Little Men* (see pages 2–3)

Correlated Literature Study

- Overview of other works by Louisa May Alcott
- Study of characters in Louisa May Alcott books

Literary Analysis

- Study the themes and messages in *Little Men*
- Analyze the literary value of *Little Men*

Author Study

- Biography of Louisa May Alcott

Writing

- Reading and analyzing response papers
- Writing a response paper
- General writing instruction and practice

VOCABULARY WORDS

"Your understanding of what you read and hear is, to a very large degree, determined by your vocabulary, so improve your vocabulary daily."

-Zig Ziglar



Abdicate [AB - dih - cate]: to relinquish or give up a responsibility or duty

The queen decided to abdicate her throne.

Alacrity [uh - LACK - rih - tee]: brisk and cheerful readiness

She accepted the invitation with alacrity.

Assuage [us - SWAGE]: to relieve or soothe an unpleasant feeling

He composed a beautiful song to help assuage his grief.

Beguile [be - GYLE]: to charm or captivate someone, sometimes in a deceiving way

The performer used flattery to beguile the crowd.

Carouse [cuh - ROUZE]: to party with alcohol or drink and usually a great amount of noise

The drunken group caroused all night.

Condole [cuhn - DOLE]: to express sympathy and grieve with someone

When my friend's father passed away, I brought flowers in an effort to condole her.

Congenial [cuhn - JEE - nee - yole]: agreeable; pleasant; personable; friendly; amiable

Everyone was drawn to his congenial personality.

Droll [drole]: humorous or entertaining in a dry way

He kept me laughing with his droll humor.

Effervescence [eff - fer - VEHS - cents]: enthusiasm and vivacity; bubbles or fizz in a liquid

His effervescence was contagious, creating a stir in all of us.

Expatriate [ex - PAY - see - ate]: to speak or write at length or in detail

I plan to expatriate on this important topic during my presentation.

Ferule [FER - rule]: a rod, cane, or flat piece of wood for punishing children

He felt a sharp crack across his hand from his teacher's ferule.

Filial [FILL - ee - ul]: a child's duty to his or her parents

He determined to tend the stables out of filial duty to his father.

Ignominious [ig - nuh - MIN - ee - us]: deserving or causing public disgrace or shame; humiliating

They suffered an ignominious defeat.

Impetuous [im - PET - choo - us]: moving or acting quickly, without thought or care; hasty; impulsive

The whole town bore the consequence of his impetuous decision.

Indolent [IN - doe - lent]: wanting to avoid activity or exertion; lazy

I just don't understand his newly indolent behavior.

Inspid [in - SIP - id]: lacking in flavor; lacking in vigor or interest

We soon grew bored with his inspid reenactment.

Languish [LANE - gwish or LAN - gwish]: to lose vitality; grow weak or feeble

Being locked in the cell with no books and nothing to do caused him to languish.

Maudlin [MOD - lin]: self-pityingly sentimental; tearfully sentimental

We wept at the maudlin story of the orphan twins.

Menagerie [meh - NADGE - er - ee]: a collection of wild animals kept in captivity for exhibition; a strange or diverse collection

She had quite a menagerie of stuffed animals on her bed.

Nosegay [NOSE - gay]: a small bouquet of flowers; boutonniere

She pinned the lovely nosegay to her dress as a sweet ornament.

Palaver [puh - LAV - er]: prolonged and idle discussion; to talk at length

I quickly grew tired of the palaver between the two men.

Pathos [PAY - thos]: a communication technique that evokes pity, sadness, or a similar emotional response

The movie about endangered animals used pathos to gain sympathy.

Placid [PLASS - id]: not easily upset or excited; calm; tranquil

I love to sit and write in my journal in this beautiful, placid meadow.

Propriety [pro - PRY - ih - tee]: behavior that is accepted as socially or morally correct and proper

She behaved at the ball with great propriety.

Rebuff [ree - BUFF]: (verb) to reject someone or something in an abrupt or ungracious manner; (noun) an abrupt or ungracious refusal or rejection; snub

I tried to not let my feelings be hurt by his rebuff.

Recompense [REH - kum - pents]: (verb) to compensate or make amends for a loss; (noun) compensation

I hope the recompense for your loss was enough.

Remonstrance [reh - MON - strunts]: an earnest protest or objection

We decided to stop the show after their remonstrance.

Reprieve [ruh - PREEVE]: (verb) to cancel or postpone punishment; (noun) cancellation or postponement of punishment

He was sentenced to jail but was granted a last-minute reprieve.

Sanguinary [SANE - gwin - air - ee]: involving or causing extreme bloodshed

The battle was a sanguinary struggle.

Souse [rhymes with HOUSE]: to soak in or drench with liquid

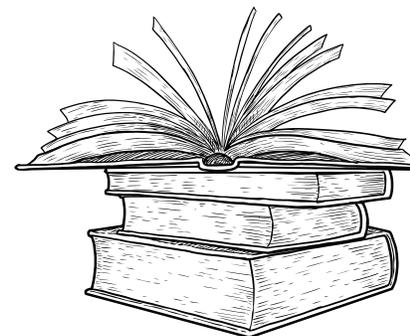
First, souse the vegetables in broth.

Taciturn [TASS - ih - tern]: reserved or uncommunicative in speech; saying little

When I tried to speak with her, she was very taciturn. I didn't know the reason behind her taciturnity.

"You can't build up a vocabulary if you never meet any new words. And to meet them you must read. The more you read the better."

-Rudolf Flesch

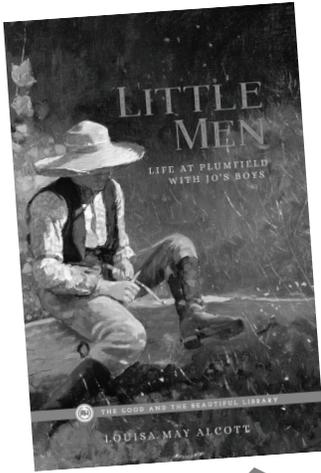


SECTION 1

Chapters I–IX

Introduction

Welcome to the *Little Men* Honors Book Study! You will use this book study as a guide while you read *Little Men*, a story full of wisdom, joy, sorrow, and laughable antics.



The goal of The Good and the Beautiful Book Studies is to strengthen both your mind and your heart. The book study is broken into three sections. Complete each section as you read the corresponding chapters in the book. Using the book study as a guide will give you a greater appreciation for the rich language, meaningful messages, and well-developed characters in the story.

Mark off the Section 1 activities below as you complete each one. When all four are completed, you are ready to begin Section 2.

- Complete the Vocabulary activity in this section.
- Read the Correlated Literature portion of this section.
- Read the article “Discerning the Value of Literature” in this section.
- Read Chapters 1 through 9 of *Little Men*.

Vocabulary

Circle the correct word below. Use the vocabulary key on pages 2–3 when needed.

1. The queen decided to ABDICATE | REBUFF her throne because of turmoil in the kingdom.
2. He felt a sharp crack across his hand from his teacher’s FERULE | SOUSE.
3. The movie about endangered animals used much PLACID | PATHOS to gain sympathy.
4. She accepted the invitation with ALACRITY | TACITURN.
5. He determined to mend the stables on his own out of NOSEGAY | DUTY to his father.
6. I have to sit and write in my journal in this SAMBINARY | PLACID meadow.
7. He composed a beautiful song on his piano to help ASSUAGE | BEGUILE his grief.
8. The team suffered an UNCOMMONIOUS | EXPATiate loss.
9. I expect you to use REBUFF | PROPRIETY at dinner.
10. The performer used flattery to CONDOLE | BEGUILE the crowd.
11. His hasty decision was rather IMPETUOUS | ASSUAGE.
12. Rather than thank him, the fancy lady chose to LANGUISH | REBUFF his flattering compliments.
13. It’s much more beneficial and wise to study than to CAROUSE | PROPRIETY your college years away.
14. As he worked hard, he got tired of the INDOLENT | PALAVER employees who didn’t pull their weight.
15. The pasta was beautiful, but unfortunately, it was also rather IMPETUOUS | INSIPID.
16. My greatest goal is to RECOMPENSE | REBUFF you for the loss I caused.

Correlated Literature

Part of understanding literature is understanding the background of the book and the author. You will learn more about the author of *Little Men*, Louisa May Alcott, in Section 3. In this section, you will learn some background information about *Little Men* and its beloved characters.

Before *Little Men* was published in 1871, the more widely known story *Little Women* by the same author was published in 1868. It was also followed in 1886 by Alcott's novel *Jo's Boys, and How They Turned Out*. All three books have many of the same characters. *Little Men* can be read without having read *Little Women* first, but it is helpful to understand who some of the characters are.



1969 illustration of *Little Women* by May Alcott

Little Women follows the lives of four sisters—Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March. The novel is based loosely on the lives of Louisa May Alcott and her three sisters, classifying the book as a **semi-autobiography**.

In particular, Josephine “Jo” March is a principal character in both books. In *Little Women*, Jo has a fiery temper and strong will. She works to control her temper with the help of her mother, sisters, and friends. Jo loves literature, both reading and writing.

During part of the story, Jo cares for her Great-Aunt March, a rich, elderly widow living in a mansion called Plumfield.

For a long while, Jo rejects the idea of romance and marriage because she doesn't want to break up the wonderful home life and relationships she has with her sisters. Toward the end of the book, however, a German professor, Friedrich “Fritz” Bhaer, proposes to Jo, and she accepts. When her Great-Aunt March dies, she leaves Plumfield to Jo. She and Professor Bhaer turn the house into a school for boys. They have two sons of their own, Robin “Rob” Bhaer and Theodore “Teddy” Bhaer.

You may enjoy watching the 2018 PBS production of *Little Women* (available on Amazon Prime at the time of this publication).

Here are some other important characters to know before starting *Little Men*:

Theodore “Laurie/Teddy” Laurence is Jo's brother-in-law (Amy's husband) and good friend. He is the only one allowed to call him “Teddy.” Most of his friends and family call him “Laurie.” He is a fun-loving, wealthy young man and is very generous when it comes to the needs of the school and its students. He makes frequent visits to the school, usually taking his daughter Bess with him.

Bess “Goldilocks/Princess” Laurence is Laurie and Amy's daughter, who is well loved by all the boys and girls at Plumfield. She is affectionately called “Goldilocks” and “Princess.”

Mia is the scrupulous but tender-hearted cook at Plumfield.

Silas is the jovial farmhand at Plumfield.

Meg Brooke is Jo's oldest sister, married to John Brooke; she is Daisy, Demi, and Josie's mother.

Nat is a twelve-year-old orphan who lived as a street musician until his father's death. He is brought to live at Plumfield.

Dan is a neglected fourteen-year-old orphan, who is brought to Plumfield by Nat.

Nan is the only unrelated girl brought into the school.

John “Demi” Brooke and Margaret “Daisy” Brooke are John and Meg Brooke's ten-year-old twins who are schooled at Plumfield.

Tommy, Emil, Franz, Ned, Jack, George “Stuffy”, Dick, Billy, and Adolphus “Dolly” are all boys who live at Plumfield and are schooled by the Bhaers.

Discerning the Value of Literature

by Jenny Phillips



In my intense pursuit of seeking out the best literature, I have read thousands of books. Of all these books, *Little Men* is on my list of top-ten favorite books of all time. Why? The language is so skillfully and beautifully written that it was a deeply enjoyable and satisfying read for me. In addition, the many profound messages in the book also sank deep into my heart and made me a better person. With this being said, it was not a book that kept me up late into the night feverishly reading on the edge of my seat. In fact, it took me a while to read the entire book. Often in our world today, people judge how good a book is by how hard it is to put down. Certainly, books of the greatest value should be engaging, but they do not have to be instantly and constantly thrilling or engaging, and the entertainment value of a book is only one measure of a book's overall value. One of the main purposes of this book study is to help you learn, through reading and analyzing *Little Men*, how to recognize and appreciate books of great value.

The Moral Value of Books

The Bible gives a valuable standard by which we can judge the moral value of books.

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Colossians 4:8 KJV)

Little Men is packed with messages that are pure and lovely. Here are some of them:

- appreciation for music
- compassion
- creativity and imagination
- family unity
- friendship
- gratitude

- high regard for motherhood, fatherhood, and family
- honesty
- kindness
- love of education
- love of nature
- loyalty
- manners and politeness
- mercy and forgiveness
- optimism and cheerfulness
- patience
- persistence and perseverance
- repentance
- respect for authority/parents
- responsibility
- tenderness and gentleness
- thoughtfulness

When judging the moral value of a book, consider that a book can have both bad and good themes and messages. This can be confusing when judging the overall morality of a book. Most books that contain immoral messages *also* contain a small or large amount of moral messages. If you add an immoral message to moral messages, the book still contains immoral material. If you have a bowl of horse manure and put juicy, ripe strawberries and fresh cream on top, it is still horse manure underneath, and it is still gross and not good to eat.

Another important matter to consider when judging the moral value of books is that just because a book has, perhaps, all good *themes and messages*, does not mean it is a moral book. For example, one recent best-selling book has the profound message that “love conquers all.” The main character stays moral and tries to combat evil. However, the reader is offered a lot of horse manure to eat along the way—profanity, sexually provocative scenes (not made to look acceptable, but still provocative), and many pages of disturbing graphic violence that can desensitize the reader to that level of violence.

Little Men has the same overall, deeply profound message of “love conquers all.” However, to get to that message, the reader is not dragged through profanity, immorality, or graphic violence.

Yes, an immoral book can have positive messages and even impact us in good ways, but immoral books will also

always impact us in negative ways as well. On the other hand, a completely moral book can have the same positive impacts (and I argue even *stronger* impacts), but without *any* negative impacts.

The Literary Value of Books

Here are some ways to judge the literary value of a book:

- Complexity and variety of sentence structures (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex)
- Skilled use of poetic devices
- Use of rich descriptive and sensory language (writing that describes sound, touch, taste, sight, smell, and emotion)
- Elevated, varied, and wide-ranging vocabulary
- Skilled characterization: well-developed characters who are complex, believable, and interesting, rather than shallow, flat, and superficial, that show character grown and give insight into human nature, history, places, and cultures
- Skilled plot development, not based on being quick-paced, thrilling, or instantly entertaining, but rather on being complex, creative, compelling, well-developed, interesting, mind-expanding, insightful, and meaningful

Books with high literary value tend to be more challenging to read and might keep you reading feverishly through the night like fast-paced easy reads might; that is not the aim of the best book.

Imagine walking on a flat and smoothly paved path with jugglers, fire swallowers, and folk dancers entertaining you as you go. That would be easy and fun. Now imagine hiking on a sometimes rugged and challenging dirt path, passing through vast deserts, isolated beaches, and windswept prairies. Ascending into the mountains, the path at times becomes rocky and requires you to clamber over large boulders. You push forward up steep trails that weave rewardingly through spectacular scenery. Your heart beats faster, your muscles burn, and you breathe in the fresh mountain air. The smell of pine, the crisp coolness of higher elevations, and the looming peak above you keep you going. Finally, after much exertion and hard work, you arrive at the peak and are presented with breathtaking, stunning views you have never experienced.

Reading classics may be hard and take extra time and

effort, but the greatest rewards in life usually come through effort and tackling something difficult. Confucius said, "All good things are difficult to achieve."

Reading books of high literary and moral value does more than improve reading proficiency, writing skills, vocabulary, attention span, and academic skills. It helps develop character traits such as persistence; it deepens feelings of empathy and understanding; it increases knowledge of people, places, ideas, and cultures; it reveals high principles and model examples; and it provides a rich and rewarding experience. Christian author C. S. Lewis wrote: "Our leisure, even our play, is a matter of serious concern. There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and could be claimed by Satan."

It can be challenging to choose good literature when you have not read a book and don't know what is in it. Here are some resources for finding out more about the content in books:

The Good and the Beautiful Book List

- includes reviews and information on hundreds of recommended books with high literary and moral value; books are listed by reading level
- a list of books that did not make the list with explanations of why is also available
- www.thegoodandthebeautiful.com

Squeaky Clean Reviews

- book reviews with a Christian focus
- summarizes plot, morality, violence, drug and alcohol content, sexual content, and profanity in books
- www.squeakycleanreviews.com

Assignment

As you read *Little Men*, do so with two colors of highlighters. Highlight phrases, sentences, or passages that stand out to you for their moral value in one color. In the other color, highlight phrases, sentences, or passages that stand out to you for their literary value.

Group Tip: Share and discuss highlighted passages at the beginning of each class.



Themes and Messages

Chapter 14 of *Little Men* is titled “Damon and Pythias,” a reference to a Greek legend. In the legend, Damon and Pythias were loyal friends. Pythias was accused of treason against the tyrannical King Dionysius and sentenced to death. Pythias asked for permission to return to his home one final time to say goodbye to his family and make sure all his affairs were in order. The king, of course, thought that Pythias would not return and refused the request.

Damon heard of his friend’s plight, and he asked to be held as a hostage so Pythias could return home. The king told Damon that if Pythias did not return in time for the execution, Damon would be executed in his stead. Damon agreed to the conditions, and Pythias was released.

King Dionysius thought that Pythias would not return and that Damon was a fool. Instead, the day came for Pythias’ return, and the king ordered the executioner to kill Damon, but Pythias appeared just in time! He apologized to his friend for taking so long and explained that, on his return to relieve his friend from captivity, pirates had captured his ship and thrown him overboard. He had sworn to return and hurried to the palace as fast as he could.

The king was so amazed and touched by the loyal friendship of Damon and Pythias that he pardoned both men and set them free.

Like the story of Damon and Pythias, Chapter 14 of *Little Men* touches deeply on two important topics: loyal friendship and honesty.

Read the following excerpt:

Nat felt the difference in the way they spoke of Demi and himself, and would have given all he had or ever hoped to have to be so trusted; for he had learned how easy it is to lose the confidence of others, how very, very

hard to win it back, and truth became to him a precious thing since he had suffered from neglecting it.

Professor Bhaer set a wonderful example of how to deal with a dishonest child. Read again the following passages that demonstrate how Professor Bhaer spoke to the children when it appeared there was a thief and a liar among them:

“Take your seats,” he said; and, when all were in their places, he added slowly, as his eye went from face to face with a grieved look, that was harder to bear than a storm of words,

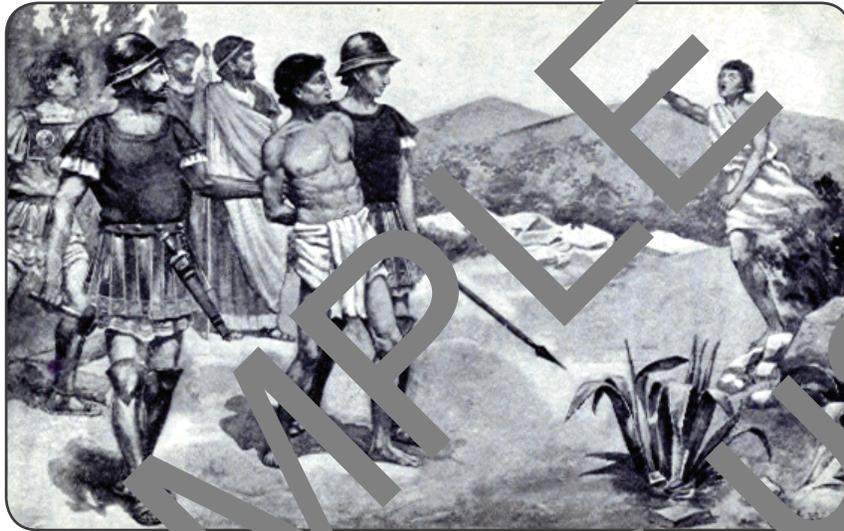
“Now, boys, I shall ask each one of you a single question, and I want an honest answer. I am not going to try to frighten, bribe, or surprise the truth out of you, for every one of you have got a conscience, and know

what it is for. Now is the time to undo the wrong done to Tom—and set yourselves right before us all. I can forgive the yielding to sudden temptation much easier than I can do it. Don’t add a lie to the theft, but confess frankly, and we will all try to help you make us forget and forgive.”

And a little later:

“I am very sorry, Nat, but evidences are against you, and your old fault makes us more ready to doubt you than we should be if we could trust you as we do some of the boys, who never fib. But mind, my child, I do not charge you with this theft; I shall not punish you for it till I am perfectly sure, nor ask anything more about it. I shall leave it for you to settle with your own conscience. If you are guilty, come to me at any hour of the day or night and confess it, and I will forgive and help you to amend. If you are innocent, the truth will appear sooner or later, and the instant it does, I will be the first to beg your pardon for doubting you, and will so gladly do my best to clear your character before us all.”

Continue to watch for themes and moral messages as you read *Little Men*.





Group Discussion: If completing this unit as a group, discuss the following questions:

1. Why do you think Louisa May Alcott titled Chapter 14 “Damon and Pythias”?
2. Who are the two characters that she relates to Damon and Pythias?
3. How important is trust to you? What would you give to have others trust you? How can you earn and keep trust?
4. What have you learned from Nat, Dan, and Professor Bhaer?

Example Response Paper

A response paper discusses your reaction to a text. A response paper is not a summary of the text; it is your own personal analysis and impressions of what you read. Response papers are written from the first person point of view, which means you may have phrases such as “I believe” or “I feel.”

Writing a response is a wonderful exercise for subjective thinking, organization, and writing. One of the best ways to learn to write well is to read model writing. Read and analyze the following short response paper, making a checklist in your notebook of items needed for a successful response paper.

Little Men Chapter 15
Response Paper
by Jenny Phillips

Most people will not find themselves searching for a giant lost ruby in the middle of an exotic, mysterious jungle while being pursued by foes riding on elephants. Life rarely contains the kind of thrilling excitement you would find in an action-packed movie. Does that mean regular life is boring for most people? Chapter 15 of *Little Men* by Louisa May Alcott shows, through masterful writing, that regular life, indeed, does not have to be boring. Rather, excitement and deep enjoyment can be found in small things, available to everyone.

If you were trying to help a reader see how beautiful small, ordinary things in life can be, would you think of using the point of view of a tree? This is exactly what Alcott does in Chapter 15, brilliantly showing the beauty of ordinary things that happen in and under the willow tree. Alcott describes how the quiet, pleasant tree enjoys the children and all they do. From a busy, adult perspective, perhaps little girls' bits of soap for washing doll clothes and little boys' plans for butterfly nets are not of much significance. But the old tree finds it delightful: “A passing breath of air shook the old willow, as if it laughed softly at the childish chatter which went on in the nest, and it had hardly composed itself when another pair of birds alighted for a confidential

Starts with an attention-grabbing opening, such as a question, quote, short personal experience, or, as in this case—an interesting statement.

The title and author of the book are listed in the opening paragraph.

A body paragraph should have a topic sentence, but it does not always come as the first sentence in the paragraph.

It can be effective to use specific examples from the text, paraphrased or quoted.

Transitions to the thesis statement.

Thesis statement

Topic Sentence

Each body paragraph sticks to the main idea of the topic sentence.

Cite the page number of direct quotes

twitter.” (page 217) The tree itself knows how to find joy in the little things: “For an hour the old willow sighed and sung to itself, talked with the brook, and watched the lengthening shadows as the sun went down.” (page 217) Alcott masterfully sets up the tree as something in touch with nature and the simple, beautiful things in life, so as we see the tree find joy in the doings of the little children, it naturally helps the reader see, too.

wraps up examples with an original statement--not a quote from text

Uses transitions

In Chapter 15, Alcott also uses phrases paired with beautiful language that create emotion in the reader. (For example) consider the following phrases from this chapter:

Topic Sentence

Uses transitions

- shout of delight
- so enchanted with his splendid success
- beginning already to feel the sweet satisfaction
- came sauntering home from a long walk in the woods
- looking up at the sky
- was soon wrapped up in watching for the fish

the boy swung himself up into the tree
evidently feeling the charm of the place and hour

We all know how good it would feel and how most people do not take time to saunter through the woods, look up at the sky, and swing themselves up into a tree. In addition, Alcott’s use of alliteration in these phrases gives a sense of harmony and satisfaction: “splendid success,” “sweet satisfaction,” “walk in the wood,” and “wrapt up watching.”

Uses transition

The concluding paragraph wraps up the text without repeating exactly what has been said.

Chapter 15 of *Little Men* is fully packed with messages about finding joy in the ordinary things in life, but the chapter contains more than just messages. The simple act of reading the beautiful language in this chapter is one of the ways that we can ourselves experience pleasure and joy through little things.

Write about the book in present tense.