1. Hello All. My rookie mistake last week was that I did the powerpoint before I wrote the script for the pecha kucha. I tell my students not to do this, and I still fell prey to the practice. This week I’m doing the script first so I won’t run long. This Monday Update should be roughly 8 minutes of your life. So let’s get going.
2. I want to start with an overview of what people had to say in their reading/journal book clubs. I was pleased to see how folks did a good job of identifying how Little Women demonstrates all of the qualities of Young Adult as a genre. To start, this novel uses, to some extent, stock or identifiable characters.
3. Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy give us all something that we might identify with, even now. It’s why Molly Drain could ask, as she did, which March Girl would you be? And that structure of taking time out to give each character a physical description, a personality, likes and dislikes, they related to other characters. This writerly practice persists in the genre. You’ll see it in some of our later texts.
4. A number of you talked about the role of melodrama, how despite challenges (from minor ones like Amy’s childhood school troubles to major ones like the family financial situation) and even tragedy, namely the death of Beth, still brings us to a happy ending with everyone remaining to some extent settled--and, yes, in this instance, settled means married.
5. Another way that the novel fits the genre of Young Adult is the way it is, as a few of you pointed out, pretty episodic (Savannah Resendes identified this). I think one of the ways we might say Alcott elevates the text is by having these episodes hang together nicely, but the chapters are carefully organized so that less skilled readers would be able to manage a narrative that flips between four central characters over a long period of time.
6. I don’t think I have to say a lot about how the novel is a coming of age story. Gabby Boutin might have said it most succinctly when she said the March girls are reacting to the obstacles put in front of them. Molly Drain identified it this way: determining identity and seeking acceptance in the face of poverty. Which I actually really liked.
7. One thing that I wish we could be face to face to talk about is the relationship of the March girls to quote marriage and the role of women unquote. Class was split. Some readers felt that despite the distance of over a century, many of the concerns and obstacles the girls faced still felt very relevant.
8. Others, however, felt that the fact that all of the surviving March girls ended up married at the end felt dated. Maybe. I want to push back a little on this. After all, the Hallmark channel essentially exists on stories of young women finding the love of their lives. I endured roughly six hours of Netflix’s A Christmas Prince, the sequels A Christmas Prince: Royal Wedding and A Christmas Prince: The Royal Baby because my 8 year old niece was obsessed.
9. Your book club/reading journals were strong, but what fun it was to read your conversation about updating Little Women. In my own version of Little Women, The Markowski girls move with their single parent mom from the working class neighborhood of Parma, OH (where, incidentally, I grew up) to the tony suburb of Shaker Heights, OH so that they can get the best public school education the city of Cleveland has to offer
10. and so that they can be closer to the Cleveland Clinic, where Liz, who has battled childhood Leukemia for most of her life, can be treated by great doctors. It’s not easy to be working class in a wealthy suburb. Their mom works two jobs, but it’s still barely enough, and both of the older girls--Maggie and Joey--work as well as go to school.
11. Maggie isn’t so into school but is very into her rich kid boyfriend and the social circle he has made her a part of. She dreams of marrying him one day. Joey, whose real name is Josephine, is determined to get into a great college to become a writer. She writes during breaks at her job at a retirement home.
12. The girl’s father drifts in and out of their lives. He’s a good enough guy, but he is totally incapable of holding down a job. He couldn’t handle Lizzie’s illness. And Mrs. Markowski finally told him she couldn’t raise all five of them. So he took off. I know a few of you felt like the poverty thing would be something you’d change, but, truth be told, this surprised me because so many of you guys work to support yourselves.
13. As you can see, my idea has a lot in common with some of yours. I hit the poverty, working class thing hard because upon a this re-reading of the text, the March girls relationship to work really struck me. Meg and Jo are essentially the sole breadwinners. Which, again, is why I’m pushing back at the characterization of the girls as home-bound.
14. I was also surprised when a number of you talked about the role the father played in their lives. Some of you might know that Bronson Alcott was a sort of failed Transcendentalist and, like Jo March, Louisa May Alcott wrote in order to support her family because the father did not. Sorry Hannah Brodeur and Shaun Ramsay, Justin Carpender and I  just can’t bring ourselves to turn the all-powerful Marmee into a single father.
15. Some other updates that I really loved: Savannah Resendes and Olivia Leonard talked about inserting technology into the story. I can really see how Amy’s school yard story about those limes could become a big cyber-bullying story line--of course not with limes. This is one of those obstacles that young people face today.
16. In my version of LW, I would have Joey be questioning her sexuality--maybe she loves Teddy maybe she loves one of the cheerleaders Maggie hangs out with. One thing YA does well is deal thoughtfully with sexual questioning, and I would want this to be a part of my novel. Shaun Ramsay and Justin Carpender wrote about this. I liked Gabby’s idea of Jo not having a relationship at all and could see my version of Joey ending up going off to college solo too.
17. Gabby and a number of others I think highlighted the most dated aspect of Little Women: how, to quote Gabby, “they all live their lives for other people.” For me, that, and not the role love and marriage plays in their lives, or even the largely domestic sphere of their daily lives marks how the novel feels dated. I thought about how to work the modern day of “playing Pilgrim’s Progress” into my update, but I can’t figure it.
18. A few other updates of note: Lauren Melchionda made space in her update for thinking about the stereotypes of what men should be and also made space for talking about mental disorders in the character of Laurie. I liked how Jailyn Tavares did a nice re-reading of the character of Meg. Feminism espouses to make space for all ways to be a woman, including being a wife and mother.
19. In my version Maggie gets pregnant (like her mother) at 18. She and her boyfriend consider abortion when his family says he will be cut off if he stays with Maggie, but they decide to marry and forgo college because they are in love and really want this kid. I think making space in a modern novel for that choice could be interesting too.
20. Overall, I really valued the energy and thoughtfulness of everyone’s posts. A big huge shout out to Jess Rinker who totally killed it with her first person profiles of each character (a perspective I really loved the idea of and wanted to steal for my update). I hope we can keep this kind of engagement up in the coming weeks.
21. I know we are at twenty slides, but I still have a few things I want to go over. So coming up this week:  We are heading to the total other end of the spectrum and reading Gossip Girl. Also read the essay on Feminism and The Baby Sitter’s Club. And please do that reading, because I not a lot of folks read the scholarship assigned this week. Shout out to Shauna Ridley, Colby Nilson, and Maddie Butkus who did engage with the essay. Well done. I went easy on you this time, but will not in the  future. And post to the reading journal/book club google doc: compare and contrast tropes, genre characteristics, etc of YA as they appear in both Little Women and Gossip Girl#1. How has the genre evolved (or not)? What does this say for the readership of YA literature? How does Little Women teach a reader to read the next harder text? How does (or doesn’t) Gossip Girls. This is an adventure for me. I haven’t read these books.
22. Also, use the google.doc space to Workshop your [Flash Memoir: Reading YA Assignment.](https://www.leetorda.com/engl344-ya-lit-assignment-flash-memoir-ya-edit.html)  Post your 500-word drafts, get and give feedback. I will, again, share mine with you. Finally, respond to this week’s [Teaching Discussion](https://www.leetorda.com/engl-344ya-lit-assignment-teaching-discussions.html)  prompt: 300 words. Identify a popular YA text, and write about how you might use a popular YA novel as a “bridge text” to a more “canonical work. Respond meaningfully to at least one other classmate. I’ll have that posted before Tuesday AM. And I will, again, post a Q&A discussion board for the week even though most people don’t seem to be using it.
23. About responding to each other’s writing this week: be good to each other as workshoppers. Help each other produce the best 500 words that you can by highlighting was is really excellent in each other’s pieces, and where it is less interesting or less vivid or less clear. To help you with this, sometime between now and Wednesday, I will be posting samples of the kinds of evaluation letters I send to students to both help you think about how to respond to your fellow writers and to understand how I will give you feedback as well.
24. So that’s it’s for this week. Collectively, good work and keep at it. Post those questions if you have them, and try to enjoy yourselves as you write your flash memoirs. I know next week is a holiday weekend, so feel free to post as late as Tuesday AM. Keep in mind, however, that will mean you won’t be getting a response from me until most likely Wednesday.