



Word Choice in *Little Women*



Read the following excerpt adapted from Chapter 4 of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. Then answer the questions that follow.

In this excerpt, sisters Meg and Jo are setting out to work after having a pleasant Christmas holiday.

- 1 Hannah **stalked** in, laid two hot turnovers on the table, and stalked out again. These turnovers were an institution, and the girls called them 'muffs,' for they had no others and found the hot pies very comforting to their hands on cold mornings. Hannah never forgot to make them, no matter how busy or grumpy she might be, for the walk was long and bleak. The poor things got no other lunch and were seldom home before two.
- 2 "Cuddle your cats and get over your headache, Bethy. Goodbye, Marmee. We are a set of rascals this morning, but we'll come home regular angels. Now then, Meg!" And Jo **tramped** away, feeling that they were not setting out as they ought to do.
- 3 They always looked back before turning the corner, for their mother was always at the window to nod and smile and wave her hand to them. Somehow it seemed as if they couldn't have got through the day without that, for whatever their mood might be, the last glimpse of that motherly face was sure to affect them like sunshine.
- 4 "If Marmee shook her fist instead of kissing her hand to us, it would serve us right, for more ungrateful wretches than we are were never seen," cried Jo, taking a remorseful satisfaction in the snowy walk and bitter wind.
- 5 "Don't use such dreadful expressions," replied Meg from the depths of the veil in which she had shrouded herself, like a nun sick of the world.
- 6 "I like good, strong words that mean something," replied Jo, catching her hat as it took a leap off her head, preparatory to flying away altogether.
- 7 "Call yourself any names you like, but I am neither a rascal nor a wretch."
- 8 "You're a blighted being, and decidedly cross today because you can't sit in the lap of luxury all the time. Poor dear, just wait till I make my fortune, and you shall revel in carriages and ice cream and high-heeled slippers."
- 9 "How ridiculous you are, Jo!" But Meg laughed at the nonsense and felt better in spite of herself.
- 10 Jo gave her sister an encouraging pat on the shoulder as they parted for the day, each going a different way, each hugging her little warm turnover, and each trying to be cheerful in spite of wintry weather, hard work, and the unsatisfied desires of pleasure-loving youth.





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Answer the following questions about the author's word choice in the adapted excerpt from *Little Women*.

1. **Part A:** In the first paragraph, the author uses the word **stalked** to describe how Hannah, the housekeeper, moves. What does this word suggest about Hannah?

- A. She is in a big rush.
- B. She is in a bad mood.
- C. She is feeling cheerful.
- D. She is very anxious.

Part B: Which of the following phrases from the text supports your answer to Part A?

- A. "These turnovers were an institution"
- B. "comforting to their hands on cold mornings"
- C. "no matter how busy or grumpy she might be"
- D. "The poor things got no other lunch"

2. Select **two** of the following phrases from the text that best show that the girls did not enjoy their winter walks to work.

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|--------------------|---------------------|
| A. "cold mornings" | B. "long and bleak" |
| C. "snowy walk" | D. "wintry weather" |
| E. "bitter wind" | F. "hard work" |

3. Choose the phrase below that best describes the meaning of the word **tramped** as it is used in paragraph 2.

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|-----------------------|--------------------|
| A. plodded heavily | B. strolled lazily |
| C. skipped cheerfully | D. crept carefully |

4. In paragraph 3, Alcott writes, "for whatever their mood might be, the last glimpse of that motherly face was sure to affect them like sunshine." Describe what the simile shows about how Marmee's smile affects Jo and Meg.

5. In paragraph 6, Jo says, "I like good, strong words that mean something," after Meg tells her not to use words like "rascals" and "ungrateful wretches." What do Jo's words show about her attitude?

- A. She does not have a high opinion of her sister.
- B. She is more critical of others than of herself.
- C. She dislikes using words that upset other people.
- D. She believes in being honest, even if it is unpleasant.

6. In paragraph 8, Jo calls Meg a "blighted being" and implies that Meg feels sorry for herself. Write two phrases from the last three paragraphs that show that Jo is merely joking and that she really does love her sister.

1) _____

2) _____

