

## Reading Group Guide

for *Little Woman in Blue* by Jeannine Atkins

1. Have you read *Little Women* or seen one of the movies based on the novel? What surprised you about the depiction of the family in *Little Woman in Blue* compared to Louisa May Alcott's fictionalized version?
2. How are May and Louisa alike? How are they different? How do their similarities and differences affect their relationship?
3. May was raised to admire humility and unselfishness. In what ways did she accept or rebel against those values?
4. Did the depiction of the Civil War as seen from the eyes of one New Englander alter your knowledge of that historical period?
5. Do you think May's life changed when she read Louisa's portrait of her in *Little Women*? How and why?
6. May needed to make art. Louisa needed to write. How did this help or hinder their relationships with others?
7. How did Louisa's achievement of fame affect her and the family? Did you believe, admire, or find annoying her response to success? Do you think women react differently than men do to becoming well known?
8. In what ways is Mary Cassatt like and unlike Louisa Alcott? How is May's friendship with her different than her relationship with her sister? What are the different ways these three women cope with loneliness?

9. What surprised you about the men May was drawn to? Did she make a good choice for the last romance of her life? What aspects of other relationships might have led her to this choice?

10. What made May and Louisa able to hold onto their dreams? Why do you think the sisters responded differently to attaining their cherished goals?

11. Do you know women like May Alcott who yearn for both a happy family and meaningful work? In what ways might her life be easier, or not, if she lived today?

12. What intrigued you about the life of a woman artist in the 1800s? How might a class such as the one Dr. William Rimmer offered in Boston differ from today's college classes? Cecilia Beaux, a talented painter from Philadelphia, wrote in 1915, "I predict an hour when the term 'Women in Art' will be as strange sounding a topic as the title 'Men in Art' would be now." A hundred years later, have we reached that time? In your opinion, why or why not?

13. May wanted to sail to Europe to see art, much of which wasn't available to the public in New England of the period. Why else did she need to travel? Do you think she would have been able to paint as she did if she'd stayed in Concord? Today, is an artist still likely to need to leave her hometown to work?

13. *Little Women in Blue* is fiction based in facts. In what ways may a novel seem more "true" than a biography? Can we ever know the whole truth about a person?