

# Year 9 English Lessons 20<sup>th</sup> April – Fiction

*'Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.'* - Neil Gaiman

## ***What is Fiction?***

Fiction texts are texts that tell an imaginative story, created from the writer's influences, experiences or simply their imagination. The text is a piece of writing influenced by ideas but is not factual.

In the same way that non-fiction texts challenge your ideas, fiction can help you to understand different cultures, worlds or times in history. We often learn how to empathise or understand people through the characters or ideas that we read in fictional texts.

As you work through the texts in this booklet, consider these questions:

- What is the purpose of this text- why was it written? Is it successful in achieving that purpose?
- Do I agree or disagree with the ideas within the piece of writing?
  - How has the language or structure been crafted in a particular way? Have any particular techniques been used to make me react in a certain way? Which line of the text is the most powerful? Why is it included at that part of the text?
- What is the writer trying to get me to visualise or consider about the ideas or characters that they have included in the text?
  - Why did the writer think it essential to write this text? Can I see any elements of the world that I live in within this piece of writing?
  - Can I link the characters, ideas, vocabulary or structure of this text to other things that I have read? Why might they be similar?
- What have I learned from reading this? Has this text changed my views in any way?

If this booklet encourages you to read other fiction, please feel free to share these with your English teacher!

Write all notes and answers on A4 paper or upload to the google classroom if you can.

## Lesson One

### **Little Women by Louisa May Alcott**

*Little Women was written in 1868 and is one of the most beloved children's books of all time. It is the story of the four March sisters: Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy. They live with their mother while their father is fighting in the American Civil War. The family doesn't have much money. They live next door to Mr Laurence, who is very wealthy, and his grandson, Laurie. In this passage, Beth's passion for music forces her to overcome her natural shyness. The 'Mansion of Bliss' is Mr Laurence's house.*

**As you read the extract, make notes on how the writer shows Beth overcoming her fear of Mr Laurence.**

But Beth, though yearning for the grand piano, could not pluck up courage to go to the 'Mansion of Bliss', as Meg called it. She went once with Jo, but the old gentleman, not being aware of her infirmity, stared at her so hard from under his heavy eyebrows, and said "Hey!" so loud, that he frightened her so much her 'feet chattered on the floor', she never told her mother, and she ran away, declaring she would never go there any more, not even for the dear piano. No persuasions or enticements could overcome her fear, till, the fact coming to Mr. Laurence's ear in some mysterious way, he set about mending matters. During one of the brief calls he made, he artfully led the conversation to music, and talked away about great singers whom he had seen, fine organs he had heard, and told such charming anecdotes that Beth found it impossible to stay in her distant corner, but crept nearer and nearer, as if fascinated. At the back of his chair she stopped and stood listening, with her great eyes wide open and her cheeks red with excitement of this unusual performance. Taking no more notice of her than if she had been a fly, Mr. Laurence talked on about Laurie's lessons and teachers. And presently, as if the idea had just occurred to him, he said to Mrs. March...

"The boy neglects his music now, and I'm glad of it, for he was getting too fond of it. But the piano suffers for want of use. Wouldn't some of your girls like to run over, and practice on it now and then, just to keep it in tune, you know, ma'am?"

Beth took a step forward, and pressed her hands tightly together to keep from clapping them, for this was an irresistible temptation, and the thought of practicing on that splendid instrument quite took her breath away. Before Mrs. March could reply, Mr. Laurence went on with an odd little nod and smile...

"They needn't see or speak to anyone, but run in at any time. For I'm shut up in my study at the other end of the house, Laurie is out a great deal, and the servants are never near the drawing room after nine o'clock."

Here he rose, as if going, and Beth made up her mind to speak, for that last arrangement left nothing to be desired. "Please, tell the young ladies what I say, and if they don't care to come, why, never mind." Here a little hand slipped into his, and Beth looked up at him with a face full of gratitude, as she said, in her earnest yet timid way...

"Oh sir, they do care, very very much!" "Are you the musical girl?" he asked, without any startling "Hey!" as he looked down at her very kindly.

"I'm Beth. I love it dearly, and I'll come, if you are quite sure nobody will hear me, and be disturbed," she added, fearing to be rude, and trembling at her own boldness as she spoke.

"Not a soul, my dear. The house is empty half the day, so come and drum away as much as you like, and I shall be obliged to you."

"How kind you are, sir!"

Beth blushed like a rose under the friendly look he wore, but she was not frightened now, and gave the hand a grateful squeeze because she had no words to thank him for the precious gift he had given her.

### **Little Women: Text-focused questions**

1. Alcott writes 'But Beth, though yearning for the grand piano, could not pluck up courage to go to Mr Laurence's house. What does the word 'yearning' mean here? Write a definition.
2. What two things does Mr Laurence do that frighten Beth?
3. What does Mr Laurence offer to the girls to go about 'mending matters'?
4. Where will everybody else be whilst the girls are playing the piano?
5. Alcott writes that Mr Laurence 'stared at her so hard from under his heavy eyebrows, and said "Hey!" so loud, that he frightened her so much'. Why does she repeat the phrase 'so much' throughout this phrase? What does it suggest about Beth's fear?
6. Beth is repeatedly shown to be frail and nervous. Find six pieces of evidence from across the text which suggests this.
7. As Mr Laurence makes his offer, Beth 'found it impossible to stay in her distant corner'. What other movements does Alcott describe which show Beth overcoming her fear of Mr Laurence?

### **Writing Task:**

Music is incredibly powerful and important. It has the power to change our moods, inspire us, or remind us of particular people and places. What is your favourite piece of music? It could be a pop song, a piece of classical music, or anything in between. In 100 words, describe why this piece of music is so important or enjoyable for you. Focus on the melody, the lyrics, the message, how it makes you feel, what it reminds you of. You should listen to the particular piece of music while you are writing your response.