**Louisa May’s Battle: How the Civil War Led to Little Women**

**AUTHOR:** Kathleen Krull  
**PUBLISHER:** Walker Books for Young Readers  
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**GENRE:** Biography/Memoir  
**LEXILE:** 1040

**SUMMARY:** “I long to be a man, “Louisa May Alcott is quoted as saying,"but as I can’t fight, I will content myself with working for those who can.” The famous authoress fulfilled these words when at the age of 30 in 1863 she braved distance, skepticism, illness, and squalid working conditions to work as a nurse during the Civil War. This little-known experience provided the literary groundwork for her future publications, including the classic, *Little Women*.

**BOOKTALK:** A damp old hotel turned hospital, with no fresh air, cockroaches, and rats...would you work there? And would you stay there to help Civil War soldiers who come to you with measles, typhoid fever, pneumonia, and severe war injuries? Read *Louisa May’s Battle* to see how she weathers this personal battle of her own and how adversity and challenges change her life forever.

**AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:**

**Author’s Name:** Kathleen Krull  
**Author’s Website:** [http://www.kathleenkrull.com/index.html](http://www.kathleenkrull.com/index.html)

**Other books written by the author:**  
*Lives Of*... series  
*The Giants of Science* series  
*The Beatles Were Fab (And they Were Funny)*  
*What Was*... series  
*Big Wig*  
*Supermarket*

**CHALLENGING WORDS**

stricken [3] -- afflicted with disease  
runaround [5] -- indecisive treatment, especially in response to a request  
scuttled [13] -- to run with quick, hasty steps  
diptheria [13] -- a febrile, *infectious disease* caused by the bacillus Corynebacterium diphtheriae, and characterized by the formation of a false membrane in the air passages, especially the throat.  
rations [13] -- a fixed allowance or provision of food  
doused [15] -- to splash or throw water on, or another liquid
feeble [23] -- physically weak or feeble, as from age or illness
fretted [25] -- worried
prolific [31] -- producing in large quantities or with great frequency
dithered [32] -- to put off making a decision

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
1. What do you think of the job description to which Louisa responded: “at least thirty, “very plain”, unmarried, strong, with two letters of reference. Would you respond to a job description like that?

2. Could you work under the conditions where Louisa worked?

3. What were Louisa’s feelings as she traveled from Concord, her home, to Washington, DC? Where is the farthest you have traveled from home alone? How did you feel?

4. If you had been Louisa working in the hotel/hospital with the injured soldiers, what would have been the hardest things for you to handle?

5. Louisa wanted so badly to be a writer, but met with much rejection as she tried to be one. Have you ever been told you were not good at something? How did you respond?

6. Do you think Louisa May Alcott would have been a successful writer is she had not had the nursing experience? Why or why not?

ACTIVITIES with COMMON CORE STANDARDS:

Language Arts:
● Students read accounts of the Civil War in their Social Studies text, focusing on the soldiers’ plights regarding injury and convalescence. Compare the description and details in the Social Studies text to the details provided in this biography. Create a T-chart of similarities and differences identified in a comparison of the textbook and this biography. (5.RI.5)

● Students compose letters home from the soldier’s point of view regarding their battlefield experiences and time spent in the soldier hospital. These letters include details of their experiences on the front lines as well as their care in the hospital and the condition therein. Details from their social studies text and the biography of Louisa May Alcott are included in this narrative work (5.W.3)

LIFE SKILLS:
Patience
Caring
Empathy
Concerns for Others
Resiliency
Communication

RELATED INTERNET SITES:
http://www.louisamayalcott.org/
Home website for Louisa...learn about Orchard House, the home of Little Women

http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/louisamayalcott.html
website of Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography; includes details of Alcott’s efforts in the humanitarian and equal rights efforts.

ACTIVITY SHEET CREATED BY:
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