

Jo's Boys as Alcott's 1880s "Social Justice" sequel to *Little Women*

In *Little Women*, the March sisters, particularly the youngest three, participate throughout the novel in performing good works ("practical Christianity") to benefit others, including Freedmen (Amy's involvement in the Chesters' fair), schoolchildren (Beth's labors of love with her needle), and the various working class, special needs, and other child-inhabitants of Plumfield, including the "merry little quadron" admitted by Jo and Professor Bhaer.

In the final novel of the March trilogy, *Jo's Boys* (1886), Alcott returns to the characters and situations of her greatest literary success. In *Jo's Boys*, the students who benefitted from the teachings of the Bhaers as children are coming of age and moving out into the world, and they demonstrate varying commitments to activism, from Demi's muck-raking journalism to Dan's passionate defense of Native American causes in the West, as well as a more widespread support for educational and vocational opportunities for young women. Given these and other examples, and benefitting from 21st century conversations about the nature of social activism, we can study how Alcott's representations of social activism changed over time and speculate about how her perception of social activism evolved and adapted.