

Legends of the Arts

Louisa May Alcott

1832–1888 • Writer

Louisa was the second of her family's four daughters—tall, curious, energetic, and full of enthusiasm. Her father, Bronson Alcott, was a respected philosopher and teacher but had difficulty holding a paying job. His wife, Abigail, was hard-working and practical.

Some of her father's friends were important thinkers and writers of that day. People like Henry Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Nathaniel Hawthorne were frequent guests and friends of the Alcotts.

Louisa and her family moved twenty-nine times in twenty-eight years. Early in life Louisa realized she would have to help support the family. Throughout her lifetime she sewed clothes for family members and others. By the time she was sixteen she wrote her first book, *Flower Fables*, a series of stories that was published several years later and earned her thirty-two dollars, a tremendous amount of money to her.

At sixteen, Louisa also taught school to help the family survive. Her father showed a friend, a magazine editor, some of Louisa's work. This editor promptly let it be known that Louisa should stick to teaching. But Louisa was persistent and insisted she would be a writer and support the family. She later wrote articles for that editor.

During the Civil War, Louisa applied for a nursing position in the Union Army. She was accepted and sent to Washington, D.C., to care for Union soldiers at Georgetown, just outside of Washington. The building was converted from a drafty hotel into a hospital. In her twelve-hour

shifts, she cut off the mud-caked uniforms of soldiers, washed and dressed their wounds, and wrote letters for those who were unable to do so.

After a month, Louisa came down with typhoid fever. The long hours and fever were too much for her. In 1863, her father was summoned. After six weeks as a volunteer at the hospital, she had to be taken home.

Out of this experience came a series of articles called *Hospital Sketches*, which brought her to the attention of the public. Later it became

a book. An editor asked her to write a "book for girls." She wrote a novel about her sisters and their family.

The editor, a bachelor, was not sure it would sell, so he gave the manuscript to his niece to read.

She read it and showed it to a friend, who gave it to another friend to read. They all were enthusiastic

about the book. *Little Women* became a delight to thousands of readers. It is a story about four sisters growing up in New England during the mid-1800s. The book was such a success that the editor invited Louisa to write a sequel. In 1870 she wrote *An Old Fashioned Girl*, and a year later, *Little Men*. Because her books sold so well, Louisa now was able to take care of her family without financial worry. As Louisa grew older, she managed to write about one book a year.

Bronson Alcott died on March 6, 1888. Louisa died two days later. Her books are not her only legacy. She is also remembered for her stands on a woman's right to vote and the temperance movement (opposition to the drinking of alcoholic beverages).





Reading

1. If you have brothers or sisters, write a short story about them as Louisa did with her sisters. Change their names in your story and set it in a different time (the past or future) and place (another state or country). Share the story with your family.
2. Make a list of ten words that describe Louisa May Alcott. Compare and share your lists. How many of the words on each list were similar? What percentage would that be?
3. Write a title for the biography of Louisa May Alcott. Compare your title with those of your classmates.
4. Make a list of ten words from the biography of Louisa May Alcott that you think would be difficult for younger children. Put them in alphabetical order and see if a child you know can read them. Then tell him or her about Louisa or read her biography aloud to them.
3. What two characteristics of Louisa's personality would you like to have as your own as you enter young adulthood? Discuss them with a classmate or family member.
4. Women now have the right to vote in much of the world. Discuss with your classmates when you think there will be a female president of the United States. What are your thoughts on this issue?

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Social Studies

1. Look up Henry Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Nathaniel Hawthorne in a reference book or on the Internet. Make a list of what they did in their lives and share the information with your classmates. Why would Bronson Alcott and Louisa May Alcott enjoy their company?
2. Read about typhoid fever in a reference book. What effect does it have on someone like Louisa? Share what you learned about the disease with your classmates.

Marian Anderson

1897–1993 • Singer

Marian loved to sing. By the time she was six, she was in the junior choir at her church in an African-American community in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Then Marian began singing in other churches and getting paid twenty-five to fifty cents for an appearance.

The Andersons' home was a happy one but financially poor. Marian's father died in an accident at his work when she was in elementary school. Her mother kept the family together by taking in laundry and scrubbing floors.

Marian joined the adult choir at her church when she was thirteen. In school she took business classes to prepare herself for making money to help support her family. With a voice like hers, the principal of her school said, she should be preparing for college. So she transferred to another school. Soon she was a guest singer at other black churches.

To be a professional concert singer, Marian realized she needed special training. She decided to enroll in a Philadelphia music school. When she asked for an application, she was told that she was not eligible because of her color. Marian knew black people were not allowed in some hotels, restaurants, or swimming pools, but being forbidden to enter a music school was beyond her comprehension. So, she found voice teachers who prepared her to sing classical music.

One of her teachers was Giuseppe Boghetti, who was an excellent voice instructor, but expensive. Members of Marian's church raised the money for her lessons. Now she was learning songs by composers such as Brahms, Rachmaninoff, and Schubert, and her new instructor taught her Italian. Because Schubert and Brahms wrote in German,

Marian had to sound out the words and sing them phonetically. Later she learned the language.

In her twenties, Marian placed first in a competition with 300 singers to sing as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic during its summer concert season. Other groups sponsored her in the United States and she won the Rosenwald Fellowship for study abroad. In the 1930s she was giving concerts in London, England; Berlin, Germany; Scandinavia; the Soviet Union; South America; and Austria.



The conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Arturo Toscanini, heard her. He came backstage during intermission and told her, "Yours is a voice such as one hears once in a hundred years."

Even so, as an African American in the United States, she could not sing in Washington, D.C.'s Constitution Hall. The hall was owned by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the U.S. president, resigned from the group in protest. Mrs. Roosevelt invited Marian to give a private performance at the White House. The Department of Interior arranged for Marian to sing at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on April 9, 1939. It was Easter Sunday and 75,000 people came to hear her. Millions also heard her on radio that day.

In later years Marian enjoyed much success and respect. President Eisenhower appointed her as a delegate to the United Nations. In 1965 she gave a farewell concert at Carnegie Hall. Before her death on April 8, 1993, many honors flowed her way: nearly thirty honorary doctoral degrees, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Congressional Medal of Freedom.



Reading

1. Marian turned to her mother and friends in her church for guidance about decisions she had to make about her life and career. Who do you turn to for help in making crucial decisions about your life? Write the person a short letter of thanks for being there when you need him or her.
2. What songs do you sing to yourself from time to time? Write out the words and sing one or two of them to your parents or to a friend.
3. Create new words set to the melody of “Happy Birthday to You.”
4. Make a list of your talents and ask a teacher, another adult, or older friend or relative what you might do to develop those talents.
4. Write a frame poem with the letters of Marian’s name in a vertical position. M might be “marvelous” and so on. Be positive. Use a dictionary if you need help.

Further Reading

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Social Studies

1. Talk to older adults such as your grandparents or other senior citizens about what they may remember about Eleanor Roosevelt who invited Marian to sing at the White House. Tell your classmates what you learned.
2. Read about the Lincoln Memorial in a reference book or on the Internet and show a picture of the memorial to your classmates. Write what you think Lincoln would have said after Marian sang there in front of his statue. Read what you wrote to your classmates.
3. If you were asked what you intended to do with your life, how would you answer? Write briefly what you would say.



Ludwig van Beethoven

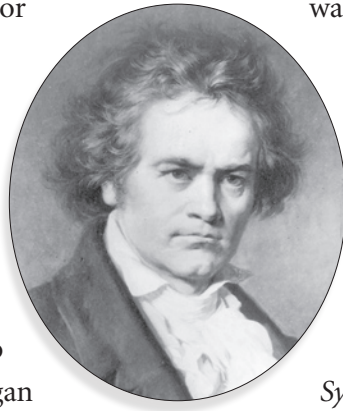
1770–1827 • Composer

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany, on December 16, 1770. Ludwig's father, Johann, was a singer and violinist in the court orchestra of their state's leader, or Elector. Ludwig's mother, Maria-Magdalena, kept close watch over her son.

When Ludwig was four, Johann started teaching him to play the clavier, an early keyboard instrument. Johann wanted his son to be a child prodigy like Mozart was in his childhood. Johann thought Ludwig could make a living for the family with his music.

Johann made Ludwig practice long hours. Late one night, Johann brought home his friend, Tobias, and made nine-year-old Ludwig play for Tobias for a couple of hours. Tobias realized that Johann had taught Ludwig as much as he could, so Tobias became his teacher. Ludwig began to compose music and learned to play the organ at a local monastery. By fourteen, he became Court Organist and led the Court Orchestra.

By 1787, seventeen-year-old Ludwig had saved enough money to go to Vienna to experience the best orchestras, performers, and composers. The Elector of Cologne gave him a letter of introduction to Mozart. Mozart listened to Ludwig play and commented, "Keep your eyes on him. Someday he will give the world something to talk about." But within three weeks, Ludwig's father called him home. His mother was dying of tuberculosis. Upon his return, his mother died and his father was dismissed from his court musicianship post. To compound the problems, Ludwig's seven-month-old sister, Margaret, died. His three younger brothers needed care and the lack of finances became a real problem for the family.



New and old friends came to Ludwig's aid. The Elector gave his father a small pension to be handled only by Ludwig. Ludwig was also given a paid position as a musician at the Court. Ludwig's friend, Count von Waldstein, gave him a new grand piano, which enabled Ludwig to teach music lessons.

In 1798, Ludwig began losing his hearing, but he wanted it kept a secret. On April 2, 1800, he gave a concert of his *First Symphony*. This

was followed by music for the ballet, *Prometheus*, eight more symphonies, piano concertos, sonatas, string quartets, an opera and Mass, and many other compositions.

By 1823, Ludwig was totally deaf, but he could "hear" in his mind. That year, in spite of his hearing loss, he conducted his *Ninth Symphony* in its debut. At the conclusion of the music, the concertgoers clapped and shouted wildly in appreciation. Because Ludwig's back was to his audience, he had no idea whether his work was accepted or not until one of the soloists in the orchestra took him by the arm and turned him toward the admiring audience.

Ludwig "talked" to his friends through notebooks. He had his friends write their questions and comments in his notebook. One evening he escorted a young friend, Bettina, to a ball and throughout the evening made notes. At the end of the evening, he wrote her these words: "My song is finished." During the evening, he had created a song especially for her.

On March 26, 1827, Ludwig slipped into a coma. Two days later, he died of pneumonia. His funeral was attended by 20,000 people.



Reading

1. List the names of three friends or relatives outside your class whom you think would enjoy hearing you read this short biography of Ludwig van Beethoven. Read the biography and discuss with them what you think is most significant about his life.
2. If you had to give up one of your senses (sight, touch, hearing, speech, or smell), which one would it be? Write in fifty words or less the one it would be. Which one do you think Beethoven would have chosen? Why?
3. Listen to a recording of a selection of Beethoven's musical works with a classmate. Discuss with that person what three portions you enjoyed most.

Social Studies

1. Trace the Rhine River on a map with a classmate. List the countries that it flows through and the one that interests you enough to visit.
2. With an adult, take a walk in your neighborhood. "Talk" in a notebook with pen or pencil, as Ludwig did. Describe what you see, such as houses, streets, bird life, colors, sizes of buildings, animals, and the persons who live there. Do not be concerned about spelling, handwriting, or grammar. When you return home, pick out the most interesting parts and rewrite them. Share those parts with a classmate. Discuss what you learned.
3. Beethoven went to Vienna, Austria, to study with Franz Joseph Haydn in 1792. What is the official language of Austria?

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