

Reading

3 Read the texts and answer the questions.

Text 1

Beth was ill – she was sicker than anyone thought. The girls knew nothing about illness, and Mr Laurence, their neighbour, was not allowed to see her. Meg stayed at home so that she wouldn't infect the family she worked for. She did the housework just to have something to do in the day. She felt terrible when she wrote letters to Mrs March, their mother, but said nothing in them about Beth's illness. She didn't think it was right, but she had promised Hannah that she wouldn't say anything – Hannah had told her she didn't want Mrs March to worry about something that Beth would probably get over.

Jo looked after Beth day and night. It wasn't difficult because Beth was very patient, and never complained about her pain. But eventually she almost lost her voice; she tried to sing with such a sore throat that there was no music left; she did not know the familiar faces around her but called them the wrong names; and she wanted her mother. Then Jo became frightened, Meg wanted to write the truth to Mrs March, and even Hannah said she would think about it, but that there was no danger yet.

The days seemed so dark then. And the hearts of the sisters were sad as they worked and waited, while death came closer to their door.

Adapted from: *Louisa May Alcott, Little Women, Chapter 18: Dark Days*

Text 2

Scarlet fever is one of the most common illnesses described in classic eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. That is because, before the discovery of antibiotics, it was one of the major causes of death.

It is easy to catch the disease. It is spread by getting too close to the infected person, touching them or

using things such as the same towels. People who catch the disease get a sore throat and a fever – a high temperature in other words. The name scarlet fever comes from the fact that the patient's tongue goes a bright red colour. A day or two after the fever starts, the patient then gets a rash which usually starts on the neck and face but soon spreads all over the body. Anyone can catch it, but it is most common among children aged between two and eight years old.

In 1900, a cure for the disease was found and many more people were able to survive. It was still dangerous, though, and remained deadly until the invention of penicillin. Nowadays, it doesn't usually cause any serious problems provided that people are able to get medical treatment as soon as possible. Once this has been done, it means taking antibiotics for a few days and having a week off school.

Text 1

- 1 Why didn't Meg tell her mother about Beth's illness?

- 2 Why was it easy for Jo to take care of Beth?

Text 2

- 3 Why did so many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors write about scarlet fever?

- 4 When was scarlet fever no longer a deadly disease?
