



Ida B

By Katherine Hannigan
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Introduction

Ida B savors life and creates her own pleasure—playing in the brook, climbing trees, planning her days and nights, inventing time-saving devices, and walking her floppy eared dog Rufus, who slobbers to high heaven. What she doesn't understand is why her mama develops cancer, or why her daddy reluctantly decides to sell some of their land, or why she has to go to public school instead of being home-schooled. Ida B doesn't like the changes, and before she is finally able to accept what she can't change, she has to learn some of life's most difficult lessons.

Questions for Discussion

1. On two occasions Ida B says to her daddy, "I think the earth takes care of us" (pages 32, 244).

What does Ida B mean by this statement?

2. One of Ida B's beliefs is that "good plans are the best way to maximize fun, avoid disaster, and possibly, save the world" (page 38). What situations in the book illustrate that she acts on this belief? Does her planning achieve the goals she expects? Why or why not?

3. After attending public school kindergarten for one day, Ida B tells her mama that kindergarten has "Too many rules and not enough time for fun" (page 50). And she describes school as "that particular Place of Slow but Sure Body-Cramping, Mind-Numbing, Fun-Killing Torture" (page 58). How does Ida B's attitude toward school make it difficult for her to be herself when she goes back to public school four years later?

4. Ida B is convinced that the trees, the brook, and the stars listen to her and respond to her questions—and even call to her when she doesn't visit them. How does her belief about nature affect her actions? How does it sustain her during difficult times?

5. When Ida B's mama develops cancer, trouble and sadness infect Ida B's house and life. How do those changes affect Ida B? What does she do to adjust to the changes?

6. When Ida B's daddy sells off part of their land and forces her to go back to public school, Ida B quits talking to her parents and shuts herself up. Why does she respond with such uncharacteristic hostility? Is she justified in her actions?

7. Growing frustrated with her attitude, Ida B's daddy yells at her several times, which is out of character for him. Why does he react this way? Is he justified?

8. Accepting the fact that she must obey her father, Ida B makes a vow to herself and (secretly) to him. She thinks, "All right, Daddy . . . I'll do what you say. I'll go back to Ernest B. Lawson Elementary School. But I won't like it. I won't like the people who buy the land, and I won't like my teacher, or the kids in my class, or the ride on the bus. And I won't like you or Mama, either" (page 88). Does Ida B keep her vow? Who is hurt most by this vow? Why?

9. Ida B's teacher, Ms. Washington, wisely doesn't push Ida B to make friends or join the games at recess. How does she finally break through to Ida B's cold heart?

10. Ida B helps Ronnie learn his multiplication tables and they "sort of" become friends, even though she won't talk to him in public if they aren't working on math. Does her relationship with Ronnie help open the door to other friendships?

11. Ida B is relentless in her determination to run the new people off her land. What does she try to do to scare them off? Is she successful? Why or why not?

12. What specific event shows Ida B that she needs to make a change in her attitude and behavior? Are her "how to" plans successful? Why or why not?

13. What do you think Ida B means when she says "Apologizing is like spring-cleaning" (page 222)?

14. After Ida B makes her rounds and apologizes to all those she had hurt by being mean, her attitude changes. Do Ida B's actions change as a result of her softer heart?

15. Ida B finally understands that the "land and the mountain and the trees and the stars . . . weren't mine at all, and never would be. But in some ways they'd always belong to me, and I couldn't imagine not belonging to them" (page 245). How would you explain what Ida B means by that?

About the Author

Katherine Hannigan has taught art and design at the university level. She lives in northeastern Iowa.