

**Literature Circle Guide to *Ida B...and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster,*
and (Possibly) Save the World by Katherine Hannigan**

Book Summary

Who is Ida B Applewood? She is a fourth grader like no other, living a life like no other, with a voice like no other, and her story will resonate long after you have put this book down. How does Ida B cope when outside forces—life, really—attempt to derail her, her family, and her future? She enters her Black Period, and it is not pretty. But then, with the help of a patient teacher, a loyal cat and dog, her beloved apple trees, and parents who believe in the same things she does (even if they sometimes act as though they don't), Ida B triumphs and starts to grow up.

Author Information

Katherine Hannigan was raised in western New York State and earned degrees in education, mathematics, and art. She has worked as the education coordinator for a Head Start program and, most recently, as an assistant professor of art and design. She lives in northeast Iowa.

“Ida B came to be, in large part, because of my move to the Midwest. Hers is the life I would have chosen, if I could have. And I think I try to live up to her example—brave and true, full of fun, and fiercely loving.”

Ida B is Katherine Hannigan's first novel.

Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions

1. Why does Ida B go to “talk” with the old tree when the young trees in her family's apple orchard tell her that hard times are headed her way?
Ida B goes to speak to the old tree because it's older than old, wiser than wise, and always tells the truth, unlike some of the young trees in the orchard (p. 13).
2. Ida B eats the same meal every day for breakfast—hot rolled oats with raisins and milk, no sugar—and for lunch—peanut butter on one slice of bread, milk, and an apple. What are her reasons for never varying her choices?
It is too early for variety in Ida B's morning meal. Most mornings it is still dark outside when Ida B wakes up, and she is so tired, she can barely get the oats to her mouth. At lunchtime, she's wide awake and filled with plans and ideas for the afternoon, and doesn't want to have to think about what to eat (pp. 34-35).
3. Why does Ida B feel so upset that Ms. Myers, her kindergarten teacher at the Ernest B. Lawson Elementary School, wants her to go by the name Ida instead of Ida B?

- Ida B is upset because Ida Applewood is her Mama's name, not hers. She worries that she will forget to answer to the name Ida, and she worries that being called Ida will make her forget what being Ida B is like (pp. 44-45).**
4. Mama's sickness brought about a lot of changes in Ida B's life. What were some of the changes, and how did she feel about them?

Mama was so tired from her treatments that all she could do was lie down in bed (pp. 66-67), the house became very quiet, Ida and Daddy made no noise so that Mama could sleep (p. 69), part of the orchard and some farmland had to be sold (p. 78), and Ida B had to go back to school (p. 81). Ida B felt hurt and angry. Her Mama and Daddy no longer seemed like the Mama and Daddy she had known all her life (p. 72). She hardened her heart against her family and decided to punish them for the changes that occurred (pp. 86-89).
 5. Ms. Washington tries many subtle tactics to bring Ida B out of her shell. What exactly does she do? What are some of Ms. Washington's qualities that appeal to Ida B?

Every day Ms. Washington sits by Ida on the steps during recess and asks her if there is anything she would like to talk about. She does not push Ida to respond (p. 107, 129). She also reads to her class every day with a voice like ten musical instruments. Her voice softens and lightens everything for Ida B (p. 129). She recommends books for Ida B to read (p. 130), and asks her to help Ronnie learn his times tables (p. 132). Ida B loves Ms. Washington's voice; it reminds her of what it feels like to be loved (p. 133).
 6. Ida B devises a game to play with Ronnie to help him learn his math facts. They play the game for money. Ronnie loses money during the math game, but wins it back during running races against Ida B. Ida B found a way to make Ronnie feel proud of his strengths while at the same time improving his areas of weakness. Have you ever helped a friend overcome a weakness? What did you do? How did it work out?

Students' answers will vary. Have your students reflect on situations that might have involved a younger sibling or relative. Also, stress the point that each individual will not have only strengths or only weaknesses. Everyone has a skill that he or she can teach to others.
 7. Ida B felt so good after reading aloud to the class. She described the feeling as a "...warm glow that was in my belly and arms and my legs and my head and wouldn't go away" (p. 152). Have you ever done something that gave you a feeling like that? What was it? How would you describe the way it made you feel?

Students' answers will vary. Encourage kids to discuss all the different areas of their life in which they might have experienced success, both inside

and outside of school. Help kids to realize that small moments like a read-aloud or a race can give large returns in confidence when executed well.

8. Daddy tells Ida B that, “We don’t own the earth. We are the earth’s caretakers.” Ida B answers his comment by saying, “I think the earth takes care of us, too” (pp. 29-32). What does she mean?

Before Ida B makes this statement she tells her Daddy that there are enough apples in their orchard for a pie every day of the week, and when she is hot and sweaty, she uses the brook to cool her off and refresh her. She is explaining how nature enriches her life and helps to nurture her soul.

9. Ida B has all sorts of good feelings after Ms. Washington has her read out loud to her class, but she holds back on sharing those good feelings with her parents. What does she think might happen if she tells them? Does she feel better or worse after sharing some, but not all, of the wonderfulness of reading out loud? **Ida B feels that if she shares her happiness with her parents, they will believe that everything has worked out fine after all. She does not want to give them that impression because she feels that nothing is right with her family or with her valley (pp. 155-156). Ida B can’t keep her happiness from bubbling out of her at dinnertime. However, after she lets a little bit out, her heart tells her to stop because she feels that her parents are still changed and she can’t forgive them for that. When she lets a little happiness out, she feels incredibly lonely (pp. 159-160).**
10. At the end of the story, Ida B says, “And I just sat on the porch looking at all of that land and the mountain and the trees and the stars that 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” (p. 245). What does she mean when she says this? **She has come to realize that one does not possess nature, but lives richly and deeply with it. She wants to nurture the fields, streams, and trees around her, and wants them to nurture her in return.**

11. Ida B says, “...good plans are the best way to maximize fun, avoid disaster, and, possibly, save the world” (p. 38). Ida B makes a lot of plans throughout the book. What are some of the plans she makes? Do they achieve these ends? Why or why not?

Ida B creates *The Soap Mask* to solve her problem of constantly washing her face (pp. 20-21). But instead of keeping her clean, Ida B’s creation lands her at the doctor’s office. After Ida B’s father sells some of their land to pay for her mother’s medical bills, Ida B plans to dislike the people who buy the land, dislike her new teacher and classmates, and dislike her parents (pp. 86-89). Her plan succeeds for a while in that she hurts her parents deeply and offends her classmates. But eventually her heart is opened by kind teachers, classmates, and family. This is not a plan that Ida B ultimately wanted to succeed; she just needed a way to channel her sadness and anger.

12. What do you imagine will happen to Ida B after the last chapter? Will she continue at Ernest B. Lawson Elementary? Will she make friends? What will her relationship with Mama and Daddy be like?

Ida B's experience with school and with her family forces her to grow up and realize that life does not always unfold in the way we would like it to. She realizes that circumstances can change, but family and friends will continue to give love and support. Ida B opens up to her peers by the end of the story, joining them in dodgeball (pp. 234-236); she seems ready to stay at school and enjoy the experience. Ida B also opens her heart again to Mama and Daddy and is relieved that she has let herself love them again, albeit in a more mature way (pp. 237-246).

13. Claire tells Ida B that she is mean. Do you think Ida B does mean things? Is she a mean person? What does she do to make things right with Claire? With the old tree? Have you ever done something mean, then tried to make it right? How did it work out?

Ida B does do mean things to Claire. She refuses to play with her at school when Claire extends herself, she tries to scare away Claire and her brother after their family purchases the Applewood land, and she screams at Claire and tells her that she does not belong on her land (pp. 162-170). Ida B is not a mean person, but she is angry and confused about the changes in her life. To make things right with Claire, Ida B apologizes to her and her brother (pp. 219-221). To make things right with the old tree, she apologizes to it as well (pp. 229-231).

14. What do Evan and Ida Applewood, Ida B's parents, do right in raising Ida B? Do they make mistakes in raising her? Was it a good idea to home school her? Was it a good decision to send her back to school? If you were Evan or Ida, what would you do differently in raising Ida B? What would you do the same?

Evan and Ida are very good parents to Ida B in that they love her very much and give her a lot of freedom to explore both ideas and the outside world. They allow Ida B to punish them for the changes they are forced to make in her life, but understand that eventually she will come back to them. They also understand that Ida B is experiencing pain, sadness, and fear over her mother's illness in her own way.

Note: The following questions are keyed to Bloom's Taxonomy as follows:

Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension: 4-5; Application: 6-7; Analysis: 8-10; Synthesis: 11-12; Evaluation: 13-14.

Activities

1. Ida B loves to be a part of nature, and is most comfortable outside. She is amazed by the world around her and is constantly discovering new things. Take time as a class to go on nature walks in your neighborhood. Look closely at the world around you, take notes, make sketches, and see what you find.

Have a discussion with the class before you go, and find out what they already know about their environment. Talk to them about how many people use observation for their work: scientists, writers, artists, and others. Then tailor your activity to your purpose: Students could write poetry or prose based on their experience, the class could take many walks and record the ways in which the environment changes, or they could use the experience to create larger pieces of art.

2. Ms. Washington helps Ida B in many ways. She is a supportive teacher and friend. Think about which teachers have had an impact on your life. How have they helped you to grow? Collect stories as a class and share them with each other and the teachers that have touched you.

Reread the parts of the story about Ms. Washington and Ida B and discuss how Ms. Washington was helpful. Students should use this activity to practice writing an effective, entertaining narrative.

3. Ida B loves nature and was deeply saddened when part of her family's orchard was cut down. She believes that one should take care of the earth, as her father says. How could your class take care of the earth, individually or through a class project?

This is a great opportunity for students to get involved on a local, national, or global level. Help the students to brainstorm ideas. They might include promoting recycling within your school, protecting endangered animals, or examining how individual families might become more environmentally friendly.