



# **Ida B: . . . and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster, and (Possibly) Save the World**

*Katherine Hannigan*

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Ida B. Applewood believes there is never enough time for fun.

That's why she's so happy to be homeschooled and to spend every free second outside with the trees and the brook.

Then some not-so-great things happen in her world. Ida B has to go back to that Place of Slow but Sure Body-Cramping, Mind-Numbing, Fun-Killing Torture—school. She feels her heart getting smaller and smaller and hardening into a sharp, black stone.

How can things go from righter than right to a million miles beyond wrong? Can Ida B put together a plan to get things back to just-about perfect again?

## Ida B: . . . and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster, and (Possibly) Save the World Details

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# From Reader Review *Ida B: . . . and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster, and (Possibly) Save the World* for online ebook

**Andrea says**

3 Stars (Read Aloud to my 8 year old)

Ida B is quite like Pippi Longstocking - unpredictable, imaginative, whimsical & spunky. That was refreshing. The plot, however, was meandering, and bits of it were odd (talking trees & brooks.) I thought some sections were written beautifully, whereas my daughter's eyes glazed over. The prose was almost too lyrical and wordy for its intended audience (grades 4-6). All in all, a mixed bag.

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**Josiah says**

It's not easy to be an Ida B in our world. From an early point in this book, it's plain to see that Ida B's quirkiness extends beyond that of most other kids, into a range of idiosyncrasy that will always make it difficult for her to accept when her well-laid plans don't go the way she envisions. Most people shrug off unwanted changes and deviations to their plans with relative ease, knowing that our world is too crazy and unpredictable for us to ever realistically expect everything to go our way, but not Ida B. I know the burden of how it feels to always care too much, to dream so big that a letdown is crushing beyond one's ability to cope, because I'm an "Ida B", too. And the positives of being an Ida B are indescribably wonderful, emotions so vivid and sweeping that they can carry a person off in their wake on a thrill ride the likes of which few will ever experience. But in our world, where the ability to scramble when plans change and to adapt to the bitterness of unmet expectations are the ultimate survival mechanisms, being an Ida B can be a wobbly tower that is destined for a hard crash to the ground, often sooner than later. And how does one, being an Ida B, recover from that?

If I were to select a handful of the freshest voices in literature from the 2000-2010 timeframe, Ida B's would certainly make the list. Sort of a cross between Barbara Park's Junie B. Jones and Caitlin from Kathryn Erskine's *Mockingbird*, Ida B's manner of speaking is as memorable as it is indelible, and it's her unique personal style, more than anything else, that will make this book unforgettable to readers. Just take her beginning school experiences in kindergarten, for example: Ida B needed more freedom than the conventional education system allowed, and being made to sit through regular school everyday was a drain on her bright and beautiful spirit that simply could not go unchecked. This is why, from the first pages of *Ida B*, she is home-schooled by her parents, who understood as far back as when she was in kindergarten that their daughter's needs were different from those of other kids, and took the necessary measures to provide her with what she needed. However, it was only a matter of time before Ida B's fragile peace with her immediate world would be broken, and that is the story we find in this book.

I won't spoil the story for anyone by telling exactly how things begin to go wrong for Ida B once she reaches fourth grade, but the demise of her meticulously planned home existence is quick and leaves her with a horde of changes to adjust to, changes that to a girl like Ida B seem absolutely unacceptable. Whatever happened to all of her careful planning for the future, both long-term and short-term? Why is it that now, years after the kindergarten debacle that ended so nicely, Ida B must confront the issue of public school yet again, but this time without another option to fall back on if she can't stand the requirements of conformity? For Ida B, whose enthusiasm for life as she knows it is as pure as it comes and who lives, truly, just how she wants to,

the trials that are now coming her way are enough to cast her down from her tower of happiness, to leave her back on the ground floor after she had planned so long for what she wanted and how she wanted it to happen. She is a true Ida B, and the rigidity of her idealism has now become the greatest obstacle to her happiness. But then, that's the price one pays for being an Ida B...

To survive the changes coming so quickly to the life she once knew, Ida B learns what all human beings must in order to function in an imperfect world for the long haul: our existence on planet earth will never be something that we can arrange perfectly, will never be under our control enough to allow us to dictate terms as if we were in charge. The truth is, not one of us is the boss of even our own life, and only by the grace of Providence can we hope, not expect, for the tide to eventually turn and a few good things to begin coming our way again after a string of bad luck. To expect that the plans we lay out so carefully will be followed at *all* by the narrative of our personal history is to ensure stress and strife, and to think that we can have it made if we just figure out what we want and then present the world with our schematic is a blueprint for disaster. And as Ida B comes to terms with the truth that in a broken world filled with broken people there's no way we can ever hope for our story to proceed in unbroken fashion, her "Ida B" heart doesn't fundamentally change; rather, she simply keeps on going forward because she knows that's the only thing to do, and tries to set right the parts of her life that she knows she *can* fix even while assimilating the inevitability of change to her once-perfect existence, recognizing that nothing stays the same forever, so we must cherish the goodness that our lives *do* offer for as long as it stays with us. It's the only way to hold on, even for but a transient moment in time, to our happiness.

*Ida B* is one of those books that has Newbery written all over it, despite not being rewarded for it by the 2005 committee. The book's emotion is keenly relevant to the reader's life, the rich wisdom of experience coming through in every facet of the narrative as we observe Ida B's reaction to change in her life and realize that we are faced every day with the same sorts of decisions that she has to make. Our real-life stories don't usually have clean endings, easily recognizable moments of transfer from unhappiness to happiness, and this book is completely faithful to that reality, not giving readers a synthetic happy ending that would compromise the poignancy of the story and its honest emotions up to that point. The life that Ida B enters into as the book closes is as realistic as the one she had always lived, and gives us not an end to a story, but another jumping-off place by which more life is about to begin. As in our own lives, the end of a road is never just the conclusion of a story, but the beginning of what happens next. Even if we can't know where the next road might take us.

Would I recommend *Ida B*? I most certainly would. For readers who love to hear a fresh narrative voice, or who read because stories are the best way to receive a full emotional education, *Ida B* is a junior novel that should not be missed. Katherine Hannigan is an excellent writing talent, and I'm looking forward to immersing myself in more of what she has to offer. If it's as good as *Ida B*, then I know it will be worth it.

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### Neil (or bleed) says

4.5

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### Meg says

In this book, I saw so many similarities between the character and myself. This quote describes how I reacted

to things many times growing up.

Quote: "I couldn't do anything except curl up like a ball on the floor of the barn and lie there, crying. The kind of tears that burn your eyes, and the sort of sobs that make your chest ache so that you're sure it's going to bust open. And when the sobs finally ran out, the tears kept coming, so I lay there with my mouth wide open, but I hardly made a sound. Just air going into me, and a heavy wind full of sorrow coming out. But as I cried, my heart was being transformed. It was getting smaller and smaller in my chest and hardening up like a rock. The smaller and harder my heart got, the less I cried, until finally I stopped completely. By the time I was finished, my heart was small enough to fit in the palm of my hand. It was so hard nobody could break it and so sharp it would hurt anybody who touched it." (p.86)

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## **Shoa Khan says**

Reading this book made me feel that maybe, just *maybe* I've been reading too many MG books of late. It did get better after a point and has its heart in the right place, but it made me want to break the monotony in my reading habit.

I couldn't help but compare the protagonist to the one in *Flipped*, and while the character of Juli Baker is one you cannot help falling in love with, the love for nature somehow seemed forced in *Ida B.*

That said, it made for an easy read and also carried an important lesson, that sometimes all it takes to fix things is a heartfelt apology.

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## **Allyse says**

### **THINGS I LEARNED FROM IDA B.**

That..there is more than one way to tell each other things, and there's more than one way to listen too.

That...Even when you think you're in heaven, you need to stay alert and have a plan...but some things are very hard to plan for.

That...When your heart changes, you change, and you have to make new plans.

That...Sometimes our head knows something, but our hearts refuse to feel it.

That..Sometimes our unhappiness is the quiet kind, that doesn't do much and says even less.

That..A warm heart turned cold can't help but turn warm again if the right people are let in.

That..in books lie a whole other world and sometimes that's where it's nice to be.

That..happiness is best satisfied when shared.

That..just because you make a thought go quiet, doesn't mean you've gotten rid of it.

That..sometimes when you haven't talked with a friend for a while, even if it's strange and stiff and you don't quite know what to say, it can still feel better than ever.

That..letting go can sometimes mean you grow.

That..even if you make things right...all may not be perfect.

That..sometimes a silence between friends needs to be crossed to be comfortable and it may seem dangerous and you might want to plan for it..but just taking that step without too much considering will put you on the other side in an instant.

That..feelings are words that can go straight to the heart.

Ida B is not just any fourth grade little girl...but little girls with thoughts and feeling like hers exist . A nod to Katherine Hannigan for writing a book for them. Anyone can enjoy Ida B, but a few will understand and learn from her without the words...they'll learn with their hearts. I've seen her compared to Junie B., who my class, (and I have to admit from time to time) I enjoy. However, she is not like Junie B besides the fact that we get to hear her thoughts. She is an old soul in a little girls body...we, I mean they exist . I don't want to say much about the story but I do want to say take a leap of faith and pick it up. By turns you will laugh, cry, hold your breath as you wait for resolution, and finally sigh...(why you sigh would be telling...)I certainly hope that someone...a little girl...or a big one like me will read this, read Ida B, relate and perhaps pass it on.

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### **Zainab Alrifai says**

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### **Heidi-Marie says**

The B could stand for "Brat." She is a likeable character--because I do hearing her voice throughout the book, no matter how at times it seemed a bit too advanced for a 4th grader--but she's still a brat. Too much of the only child home-schooled with little interaction with society so she has gotten too used to her own way, her own feelings, her own everything. In short, SELFISH. And is she ever!

And yet the story is told in such a way that you can't help be at least a little sympathetic for her entire world being turned upside down. It shows her journey in how she does (or doesn't) accept change. It was actually quite realistic and I liked that 1) there was no absolutely clean-cut ending (because that wouldn't be realistic) and 2) while still learning and growing up, you can tell it's still Ida B. Definitely a good book for the 7-13 year old age range going through hard trials, as well as any age that can enjoy the humor, smile in understanding, and applaud the parents for not totally losing it when she would have caused any other person to scream (though I would say a little more discipline would have helped a whole lot more).

P.S. Loved that she named and talked to the trees. I, too, would have been upset if I had a home/orchard like that and it changed on me.

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### **Sarah says**

Ida B. is an only child in a perfect world. She spends her days making miniature rafts with questions attached like, "What is life like in Canada?" Her best friends are the apple trees, with whom she has long conversations.

Then one day the apple trees are worried, daddy seems worried, and mommy doesn't seem the same. Her parents tell her that her mother is sick and while she's trying to get better, Ida is going to have to stop being homeschooled, and instead go to school in town. Ida is furious, hurt, and betrayed.

It takes the loving, and patient help of a 4th grade teacher, her parents, and ultimately Ida herself to break down the stony exterior she builds up, and find a way to heal.

There is an element of environmentalism and protecting the earth's natural resources in the book, too, which works well with older elementary students.

The voice of Ida B. is amazing and poignant. The book absolutely screams to be read aloud. Ida will make you laugh, shake your head in amazement, and probably shed a tear or two for an amazing little girl who tries to find a way to be herself when her world is turned upside down.

From the first page:

" 'Ida B,' Mama said to me on one of those days that start right and just keep heading toward perfect until you go to sleep, 'when you're done with the dishes, you can go play. Daddy and I are going to be working till dinner.'

'Yes, ma'am,' I said back, but I said it like this, 'Yes, MAY-uhm!' because I couldn't wait to get on with my business. I could already hear the brook calling to me through the back door screen, 'C'mon out and play, Ida B. Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up.' I had three places I wanted to visit, six things I wanted to make, and two conversations I hoped to have before dinnertime."

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### **Kristin says**

I wanted to read something yesterday when I was in bed with the flu, and I wanted a story. My currently-reading list is all nonfiction right now, but *Ida B.*, with its brightly colored cover, called to me from the bookshelf. What a fun, quirky character *Ida B.* is! I read the entire book quite quickly. Although it's a little younger than the other YA books I read (*Ida B.* is a fourth grader), this is a delightful story written in a creative and humorous voice. Just what I needed for an uplifting read!

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### **Rachel says**

I am getting old. All I could think as I was reading about *Ida B.* proceeding from one bratty, precocious, stereotypical only child action to the next was "Get this kid stricter parenting!"

The story is this: *Ida B.*, her parents, and their many animals live on many acres of land with trees and a brook. *Ida B.* loves to take her animals to the brook and talk to the brook and the trees, which she has given names and which talk back to her. She went to school (for like three days btw) and hated it, so her parents chose to homeschool her. Then her mom gets cancer, her dad has a hard time managing time and money, and he has to both stop homeschooling her and sell the land that *Ida B.*'s tree friends are on. He sells the land to a family that ends up cutting them down. *Ida B.* freaks out and is mad at everyone about the trees and about the fact that she has to go to public school.

Now. I know that it is totally normal for 9 and 10 year olds to only be thinking of their own needs. And maybe my ability to read stories like these is tarnished by being closer to the parent's age than the kid's age

now (which still seems like an odd thing to say in one's mid-20's).

But that doesn't make *Ida B.* an enjoyable read.

I was hedging towards finding it OK around the time when she starts to see that her cruel actions were an offshoot of the anger she had from her mom being sick. Then I lost all that goodwill at the part where she apologizes to *trees* for her behavior, but not really *her parents* (I swear I did not make that up) and then she and her dad are talking about how "nature takes care of us" and I'm like, "Wait, wasn't she a super brat to her cancer-stricken mother? Was that not actually the point of this book???"

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## Hanah says

After finishing this book and failing to find words for how much I loved it, I checked out some other people's reviews here and on Amazon for inspiration. I was surprised to discover that a lot of people think of it as a book about environmentalism. I can kind of see that if I squint, but for me the message about loving nature was a much softer undercurrent, not the main point of the book at all.

For me, this is a book about Big Feelings, and about a child going through those feelings for the first time and not knowing how to cope with them. It's about feeling so angry and disappointed and betrayed that you don't even remember how to be a friend anymore, and about going through months of life with that hurt being the only thing animating you. And then it's about how to come back alive from that place, how to apologize and forgive, and how to let joy and love back into your life even when the paradise you once had is lost forever. This is very heavy and very deep subject matter for kids, but it's important even at a young age. The way it's presented in the book is very relatable, and often quite a lot of fun.

As I was reading and saw the plot start to unfold, I was worried that this was going to be an "I used to be homeschooled but now I'm in public school and it turns out to be even better" story. I was pleased to find that that didn't turn out to be the message at all. *Ida B* learns to get along in public school, and even to like it a bit, but it's clear that she's remaining there because of her family situation, not because it's a better option than homeschooling. And I think that's a very important message as well -- that an ideal situation may not be possible, or that the best available solution may be different as time goes on and circumstances change.

I read this for myself, but I'm going to read it aloud to my six-year-old too. He's definitely too young to read it on his own, and he might be too young to fully grasp the insights in the novel, but I think these are messages he could benefit from hearing, and I want to give it a try.

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## Apzmarshl says

This is the kind of book that would have depressed the heck out of me for weeks when I was little.

*Ida B.* is a very characterly character. She is precocious. A trait I have never enjoyed in others. As an only child she has had a lot of indulging. Her imagination is lovely. She loves a good plan, which I can totally get with! She has the run of a large piece of land with trees, and water, and mountains.

*Ida B.*'s mom becomes ill with breast cancer and *Ida B.*'s bubble of perfectness pops. She must go back to



public school, face having some of her land sold, meet new people, and have some of the trees she loves cut down. Ida B.'s heart dries up and dies in the process. She makes the tough road ahead even tougher for herself. Eventually she learns some hard lessons, which makes the book worth reading.

Reading this as an adult, I took the view of the parents more readily than that of Ida B. This may have ruined the essence of the book for me. I was so angry with the child when her mother could die and she refuses to talk to her. She would rather throw a fit over the fact that a tree was cut down than have a relationship with her parents. Parents that are clearly in pain and carrying the weight of the world. As a parent, that's our job....to shelter. But really, I wanted to have the parents scream at her.....Ida B. would you rather have your mother or the small plot of land we had to sell in order to pay for medical treatment?!

So instead of feeling all of the whimsy, and then the pain of the child.....I felt for the parents. And it may have killed the book for me. Infact I might give this book a hair less than 3 stars.

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### **Brooke says**

It was cute, reminded me of my childhood.

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### **Megan Anderson says**

I. Love. This. Book. Why didn't it win an award? It's brilliant, and it has all the right pieces: a loveable main character, gorgeous prose, and a plot so realistically drawn that it's easy to fall into. It struck a chord with me, and I found myself laughing even as tears poured down my face. Such a beautiful, beautiful novel--first novel, especially.

This book is made of win, and everyone (especially teachers!) need to read it. Now.

5/5 on here, 10/10 for myself

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