

# IDA B. WELLS, VOICE OF TRUTH

EDUCATOR, FEMINIST, ANTI-LYNCHING CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER

by Michelle Duster; Illustrated by Laura Freeman

2023 Jane Addams Children's Book Award Honor, Books for Younger Children

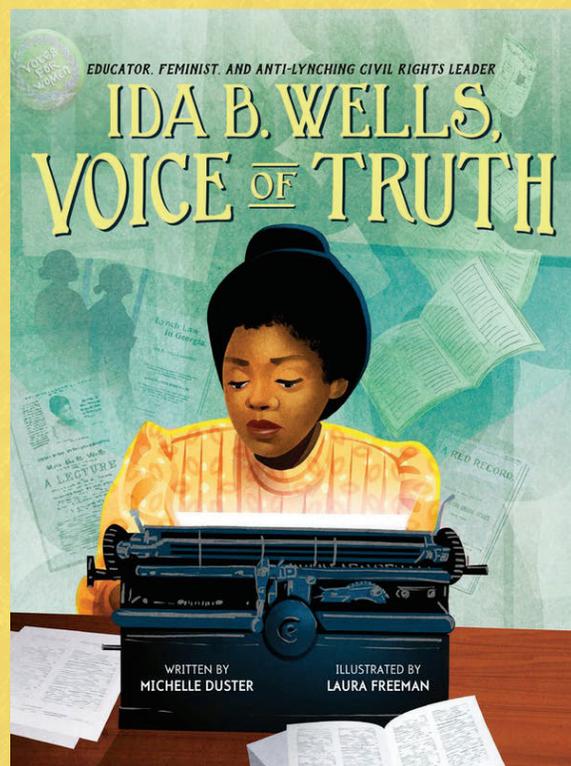
This Learn and Do Reading Guide is intended to help teachers, librarians, and family members facilitate genuine reflection, dialogue, and inspiration for action among young people as they read this commended title together or on their own.

If the adult is reading aloud, the commentary can be shared and the questions posed as seems fit in the process. If young people are reading independently, Building Background and Reflection can be discussed with an adult before and after reading. Dialogue Questions could be assigned for written consideration while reading, with discussion afterward. All or just a few prompts and questions can be utilized. In all cases, conversation about the book is key.

In a group setting, children can be asked to turn to someone nearby to consider a question before several young people share with the whole group. It is so important that young people share their own perspective and learn about others' views as well. Here are some useful sentence starters for students extending each other's thinking:

"When you said . . . I thought/wondered . . .," "Before I read this I thought . . . now I think . . .," "This makes me feel . . . because . . ."

For more information see our [Learn & Do Curriculum Guidelines](#).



The annual [Jane Addams Children's Book Awards](#) recognize children's books of literary and aesthetic excellence that effectively engage children in thinking about peace, social justice, global community, and equity for all people.

*In Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907), Jane Addams wrote, "Peace would no longer be an absence of war, but the unfolding of worldwide processes making for the nurture of human life." She saw the fostering of "sympathetic knowledge" as a building block of peace. In modern terms, the award criteria asks, "How can people work with compassion, empathy, and activism to advance Jane Addams's belief that achieving true peace means more than ending war; it means ensuring justice for all people?" "Sympathetic knowledge," compassion, empathy, and activism are the distinguishing features of peace-building that we seek to emphasize in our reading guides.

# BEFORE READING

## ADULTS

- *Ida B. Wells, Voice of Truth*, is the recounting of Michelle Duster's great-grandmother's heroic life. Ida is presented in her unique personhood and as a leader of historic proportions. Reading in preparation and later with children, take the time to explore how Duster's factual account of Ida's journey is widely and deeply illustrated by Laura Freeman's artistic renderings. This is key to the full story.
- Some understanding of what *lynching* means is essential to reading this story. What do you and the children you are with already know about this term? There's a helpful definition to share with children included below, but do take the time to acquaint yourself with the realities that Ida was facing and opposing even though you will likely not want to share many details with the children.
- Plan for how you will provide a safe place for processing feelings that may arise for children, especially those who have experienced racialized violence within their communities and for those who are sensitive to news of such violence in the media. All children will need attentive support. Encourage empathy and questioning.
- Other key terms and concepts to explore with children before or during reading: *civil rights, feminist, suffragist, and the press*.

## YOUNG READERS:

- Before you begin reading, take a picture walk! Look at each spread in order. What are you noticing about the story simply through the artwork? What feelings are you seeing in the faces in the illustrations?
- Compare the pictures of Ida and bold words on the front jacket flap with those on the back jacket flap. How are they connected and how are they different?
- Perhaps you will want to read the book once and then go back for a deeper look at each spread. Once you feel familiar with Ida's story, read the book again to experience the flow and power of Duster's text.

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## SPREADS 1-2

*Family photo album through Ida as a younger and older woman*

### BUILDING BACKGROUND

#### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT, WHAT CAN BE LEARNED GOING IN?

- This is the true story of Duster's great-grandmother. The photos, button, and papers are based on real artifacts from her great-grandmother Ida B. Wells's life.
- These two spreads list Ida's many accomplishments.

## DIALOGUE

### SPACES FOR CONVERSATION THROUGHOUT THE BOOK

- How do the words describing Ida's accomplishments connect with specific pictures?
- Which things that Ida did are familiar to you? Which are new words or ideas? Share your answers to these questions and ask someone you are reading with to share theirs. See how you can expand each other's knowledge.

## REFLECT

### DEEPER DIVE OR LOOKING AS A WHOLE. HOW DOES THIS CHANGE HOW YOU FEEL AND WHAT YOU THINK?

- Reread the words above Ida's picture as an older woman. What are you feeling about her right now? What are you wondering about her?

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## SPREADS 3-4

*Image of hands in chains through spread with gravestones*

### BUILDING BACKGROUND

#### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT, WHAT CAN BE LEARNED GOING IN?

- Slavery ended in Holly Springs in August 1862 when Ida was one month old, but it wasn't until 1865 and the end of the Civil War, when she was almost three, that freedom was guaranteed.
- Education was important to those who had been enslaved and prohibited from learning to read and write. Ida, her siblings, and her mother went to a school that was likely supported by the federal Freedmen's Bureau. At sixteen, Ida was ready to teach in such a school



Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

## DIALOGUE

### SPACES FOR CONVERSATION THROUGHOUT THE BOOK

- What are your thoughts and feelings looking at the image of the overlapping of hands in chains, the Confederate flag, and Ida's face in the first spread?

## REFLECT

### DEEPER DIVE OR LOOKING AS A WHOLE: HOW DOES THIS CHANGE HOW YOU FEEL AND WHAT YOU THINK?

- How do you think the circumstances and events of Ida's early life might have shaped her character?
- What do the illustrations in these two spreads convey beyond what the words say?

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## SPREADS 5, 6, & 7

*Being put off the train through striding with newspapers in hand*

### BUILDING BACKGROUND

#### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT, WHAT CAN BE LEARNED GOING IN?

- After 1877, Jim Crow laws were created and enforced by Southern white lawmakers to keep Black people separate or segregated from whites. This meant Black people had lesser and unequal opportunities in every part of their daily lives. Tennessee created such a law regarding trains cars in 1881. Separate and unequal schools were yet another example of Jim Crow legislation.



PBS American Experience

## DIALOGUE

### SPACES FOR CONVERSATION THROUGHOUT THE BOOK

- As you read and look at the illustrations, take the time to ask yourself what you imagine Ida is thinking and feeling in each spread. Be as specific as you can.
- Ida fought and spoke up about unjust Jim Crow laws. Did she get justice?

## REFLECT

### DEEPER DIVE OR LOOKING AS A WHOLE: HOW DOES THIS CHANGE HOW YOU FEEL AND WHAT YOU THINK?

- How and why do you think Ida grew as a writer during this part of her life? What motivated her to write?
- Ida got pushback with each step she took. How did she handle this?
- How are you or would you like to be like Ida? As a writer and/or as a person who faces challenges?

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## SPREADS 8, 9, & 10

*Ida covering her face through the dark picture of broken windows and men with guns*

## BUILDING BACKGROUND

### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT, WHAT CAN BE LEARNED GOING IN?

- Have you heard about the terrible practice of lynching? Lynching is a type of violence in which a mob attacks and kills a person, supposedly because the person committed a crime or other offense. The execution is often hanging and happens without a trial or the defense of the person accused.
- Thousands of Black people were lynched in the South after the Civil War and into 1900s. Through this violence, white people sought to intimidate Black people and to keep them in what white people thought was their place.

(Source: Britanica Kids)

## DIALOGUE

### SPACES FOR CONVERSATION THROUGHOUT THE BOOK

- What questions do you have about what happened to Ida's friends, and what she realized about lynching?
- Why do you think Ida urged Blacks to boycott streetcars and white-owned businesses and even to move out of Memphis? How was that connected with her being threatened and her press destroyed?

## REFLECT

### DEEPER DIVE OR LOOKING AS A WHOLE: HOW DOES THIS CHANGE HOW YOU FEEL AND WHAT YOU THINK?

- In what specific ways has Ida “turned the light of truth upon wrongs” so far in this story?
- The Memphis lynching of Ida’s friends changed her life. How did reading this section change you? Try filling out this sentence for yourself: “Before I read this I thought . . . now I think . . .”

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## SPREADS 11, 12, & 13

*Ida in a white hat in New York through holding a VOTES FOR WOMEN sign*

### BUILDING BACKGROUND

#### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT, WHAT CAN BE LEARNED GOING IN?

- Clearly Ida didn’t let anything stop her. In this section we learn about more of her accomplishments and ways in which she was her own person.

### DIALOGUE

#### SPACES FOR CONVERSATION THROUGHOUT THE BOOK

- Who was Ida working for in each of the new projects she took on?
- Did it surprise you that Ida kept her own last name and worked for women’s right to vote? Why or why not?

## REFLECT

### DEEPER DIVE OR LOOKING AS A WHOLE: HOW DOES THIS CHANGE HOW YOU FEEL AND WHAT YOU THINK?

- As you read what Duster wrote about her greatgrandmother, what do you think she is most proud of about her? Why?

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# SPREADS 14, 15, & 16

*The group with umbrellas mourning through Ida B. Wells: A Life*

## **BUILDING BACKGROUND**

### **WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT, WHAT CAN BE LEARNED GOING IN?**

- This section brings us to the end of Ida’s life, celebrates what she stood for, and gives a timeline and lists ways she was honored after she died.

## **DIALOGUE**

### **SPACES FOR CONVERSATION THROUGHOUT THE BOOK**

- Compare the illustrations of groups of people on the first and second spreads of this section. One is of family at Ida’s funeral and the other is of a modern day protest. How are these groups alike, how are they different, how might they be connected?
- As you read through “Ida B. Well: A Life” and the paragraphs about how she has been honored, what surprises you? What would you like to know more about?

## **REFLECT**

### **DEEPER DIVE OR LOOKING AS A WHOLE: HOW DOES THIS CHANGE HOW YOU FEEL AND WHAT YOU THINK?**

- Ida believed that “exposing injustice would lead to change.” Do you believe this? If not, what keeps you from believing it?
- You’ve learned of many things Ida did in her life. What do you think are important ways she “made a difference for us all”?
- Don’t forget to go back and read the book one more time. Reading aloud is the best way to hear the power in the words themselves.

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# CALL TO ACTION

- Who will you tell about this story? What do you want them to know? Why? What will you say to convince them to read it?
- Choose one of the issues that Ida fought for—antiviolence (lynching in her time), ending racism and unequal privileges, women’s rights, housing and assistance to those in need—and write your own pamphlet about that issue today. What is wrong? What needs to change? Tell the truth as you see it.
- Think of a time when you spoke up when you saw something that was unfair. What happened? How did you feel? How can you prepare yourself to speak up next time you see something that is unfair? Share and inspire others.
- Think of a time when you were tempted to or did “make yourself small.” How could you and will you approach the urge to make yourself small differently another time?
- Do you or someone you know have an Ida B. Wells Barbie doll? Create a script from scenes from this book and play them out with your Ida doll or better yet play Ida yourself.
- Choose one of your family members—grandparents, great-grandparent, or someone else—whom you are especially proud of and write a story about their strengths and accomplishments. Illustrate your story and share it widely.

## ADDITIONAL INQUIRY AND RESOURCES

**THESE SITES CAN BE USED TO BUILD FURTHER BACKGROUND AND TO DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING.**

- Politics & Prose interview with Michelle Duster and Laura Freeman P&P Live! Michelle Duster and Laura Freeman—Ida B Wells, Voice of Truth (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiHloW7cemU&feature=youtu.be>)
- OPEN BxRx Tuesday | Interview with M. Duster upon President Biden’s signing of the Emmett Till Antilynching Law (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQU2MvAKO4M>)
- Speaking Ida’s Truth for a New Generation: Chapter 16 Interview with M. Duster (<https://chapter16.org/speaking-idas-truth-for-a-new-generation/>)
- Ida B. Wells: A Lifetime of Activism | The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow - PBS Video (<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/bf09.socst.us.const.antilynch/ida-b-wells-a-lifetime-of-activism/>)

# OTHER RELATED JANE ADDAMS CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD HONORED TITLES

- *Choosing Brave: How Mamie Till-Mobley and Emmett Till Sparked the Civil Rights Movement* by Angela Joy and Janelle Washington
- *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* by Carole Boston Weatherford and Floyd Cooper
- *Heart and Soul: The Story of America & African Americans* by Kadir Nelson



Susan Freiss spent the heart of her career co-creating and teaching in a vibrant 4/5 multiage community within a public school setting and currently teaches middle school reading, writing, and higher order thinking on a part-time basis. She is a previous Jane Addams Children's Book Award selection committee and Peace Association Board member. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin, holds a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction along with Reading Specialist certification, and became a Wisconsin Master Teacher in 2009.