

Background about the Book – So B. It

Although she lives an unconventional lifestyle with her mentally disabled mother and their doting neighbor, Bernadette, Heidi has a lucky streak that has a way of pointing her in the right direction. When a mysterious word in her mother's vocabulary begins to haunt her, Heidi's thirst for the truth leads her on a cross country journey in search of the secrets of her past.

About the Author



Biography

Sarah Weeks has been writing children's books and songs for the past twenty years. She is a graduate of Hampshire College and NYU and recently became an adjunct faculty member in the prestigious Writing Program at the New School University, in New York City.

Her first YA novel, *So B. It*, which appeared on the LA Times bestseller list was chosen as an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, a Booksense 2004 best book of the year and received the 2004 Parent's Choice Gold Award. Her second novel, the highly anticipated *Jumping the Scratch* will be released by HarperCollins in Spring 2006. Ms. Weeks has written four books in a humorous middle grade series, *Boys Will Be Boys*, published in both club and trade editions by Scholastic. Her popular *Regular Guy* series for middle graders has resulted in a development deal with Disney for a feature length live-action film. She has written more than thirty picture books, which include such bestsellers as *Mrs. McNosh Hangs up Her Wash*, *If I Were a Lion*, *Crocodile Smile*, *Follow the Moon* and *What's Under that Hat?* In addition to being an author, Ms. Weeks is an accomplished singer/songwriter. She has written for television, stage and screen and a number of her picture books include songs which she both writes and sings for the accompanying CD's. Her novels, picture books, book-with-CD packages, pop-up books, board books and early readers have been published by HarperCollins, Scholastic, Simon and Schuster, Harcourt and Dial Books. Ms. Weeks' titles have sold well over a million copies, including several foreign editions.

Sarah is a tireless promoter, visiting schools throughout the country, talking to children about writing, reading her books, singing her songs, serving as author-in-residence and speaking to teachers and librarians at national conferences including IRA, ALA and NCTE. She lives in New York City with her two teenage sons

Reviews – So B. It

Booklist Review: /*Starred Review*/ Gr. 4-7. Thirteen-year-old Heidi lives a sheltered but rich life in Reno with her developmentally disabled mother, So B. It, and their agoraphobic neighbor, Bernadette, who takes care of them. The pair arrived on Bernie's doorstep 13 years ago, and because So B. It's vocabulary consists of only 23 words, Bernie has never been able to figure out where she and her mother came from or if they have any other family. Bernie homeschools Heidi, who is intelligent, determined, and energetic. One day while cleaning a closet, Heidi discovers an old camera with film inside. When the photos are developed, they find a young, pregnant So B. It at Hilltop Home for the Disabled, in Liberty, New York. Determined to solve the mystery of her mother, Heidi sets out alone on a cross-country bus trip. There are obvious resemblances to Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons* (1994), but Weeks has a distinctive voice that's all her own. Her fully dimensional characters are remarkable yet believable, and although readers may guess the truth about Heidi's family before she does, the foreshadowing builds to a beautifully satisfying ending. An especially nice device is the chapter titles: each is one of So B. It's 23 words. This is lovely writing--real, touching, and pared cleanly down to the essentials. -- Debbie Carton (*BookList*, 06-01-2004, p1731)

School Library Journal Review: Gr 6-9 –Heidi and her mother have lived in an apartment that adjoins with their neighbor, Bernadette, since the 12-year-old was probably no more than a week old. Bernadette accepted and loved them from the moment they arrived at her door but could never ask questions since Heidi's mentally challenged mother simply "didn't have the words to answer them." Bernadette's agoraphobia further isolates the child. Heidi struggles with knowing nothing about her father or her family history, and never having a real last name. Then she finds an old camera, which prompts her quest to learn the identity of the people in the photographs it holds and to discover her past. While traveling by bus from Nevada to Liberty, NY, the girl relies on her luck, instinct, and the people she meets on the way to learn the truth about her mother and her own background. Readers will pull for and empathize with the likable characters, especially Heidi as she struggles for self-knowledge. The almost melodramatic story has fantasy elements such as Heidi's lucky streak; hitting a slot machine enables her to buy the bus ticket to New York. Heidi's naive voice, however, creates a willing suspension of disbelief as she learns what she set out to and matures along the way.--*Maria B. Salvadore, formerly at District of Columbia Public Library* --*Maria B. Salvadore* (Reviewed July 1, 2004) (*School Library Journal*, vol 50, issue 7, p131)

Publishers Weekly Review: Heidi It has gotten to be 12 years old without knowing any but the sketchiest information about her background: her mentally disabled mother, who insists her name is So Be It, showed up with the week-old Heidi on their neighbor Bernadette's doorstep seemingly out of the clear blue sky, and Bernadette, who is severely agoraphobic but also bookish and generous, has been looking out for Heidi and Mama ever since. Somehow Heidi and Mama never get billed for rent or utilities, and besides, Heidi has an almost magical ability to

play slot machines, which, in their native Reno, can be found even in the local Sudsy Duds laundromat. But as the novel opens, Heidi has begun to chafe—she is no longer willing to live with Bernadette's complacency about the mysterious past ("What happened before [I met you] doesn't matter," Bernadette tells Heidi. "It's just something to be grateful for") and Heidi is determined to find out what Mama means by the strange word "soof." When Heidi uncovers an old camera with a roll of undeveloped film, a host of clues to her identity send her on a solo cross-country bus trip to confront people who not only do not expect her but have taken pains to insulate themselves from her existence. Suspension of belief is beside the point: readers will probably respond to Heidi's voice and determination, get caught up in the mystery and feel wiser for the mild tear-jerker ending. Ages 10-up. (*May*) --*Staff* (Reviewed May 31, 2004) (*Publishers Weekly*, vol 251, issue 22, p75)

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Read Alikes – So B. It

Defining Dulcie by Paul Acamporo

An Egg on Three Sticks by Jackie Fischer

All the Way Home by Patricia Reilly Giff

Stand Tall by Joan Bauer

Blue by Joyce Hostetter

Al Capone Does My Shirts by Gennifer Choldenko

The Porcupine Year by Louise Erdrich

Chasing Normal by Lisa Papademetriou

Discussion Questions: So B. It

1. The title, *So B. It*, could have several meanings. What do you think the title means?
2. Bernadette selflessly and patiently takes care of Heidi and her mother, who both need a caretaker. Why do you think she is willing to spend her time and money on people she does not know? What benefits, if any, does Bernie receive?
3. As a young child, Heidi has tremendous responsibilities; shopping with her mother, running errands for Bernie, and baby-sitting for a neighbor to earn money. How do these experiences influence Heidi as she grows up?
4. When Heidi develops the mysterious roll of film and brings the pictures home to view, Bernie asks her, “What’s the worst it could be?” Heidi responds: “nothing. The worst would be if there was nothing” (p50). Why would nothing have been the worst thing for Heidi to find?
5. Heidi is afraid she will end up like her mother, full of missing pieces, if she does not go to Liberty to discover her past (p85). Do you think that taking this journey is worth the pain it causes Bernie?
6. Heidi is afraid to take the trip to Liberty alone, and several times en route she is ready to turn around and return home to Bernie. What is the driving force that keeps her on the road to Liberty? Does she have any regrets? If so, what are they?
7. When Heidi lies to Alice, she realizes her lies are unnecessary but she doesn’t feel remorseful until she gets caught (p117). What do you think this indicates about Heidi’s character and her search for identity?
8. Heidi realizes she doesn’t miss her dad because she has never known him, therefore life without him seems normal. She tells Georgia, “You can’t miss what you don’t remember having” (p125). Do you think this is true? Why or why not? What are some experiences you have longed for even though you have never had them.
9. Ruby tells Heidi that it probably doesn’t mean anything that Elliot says “soof” regularly, but Heidi says, “I think everything means something, even when you don’t know what it is” (p181-182). Based on Heidi’s life experiences, how would you support her belief?
10. Roy and Ruby cannot understand why Mr. Hill is not telling the truth about Heidi’s mother. But even though Heidi does not know why, she knows that “sometimes people lie because the truth is too hard to admit” (p201). What truth is Mr. Hill afraid to admit? How do the choices he made affect Heidi’s life?

11. One of the lessons Heidi learns is that life is not fair. Discuss the people and events in Heidi's life, and list the ones that are unfair. How do these life experiences help Heidi become a stronger person?
12. Until Heidi's trip to Liberty, she lives a sheltered life with only one friend and very little communication with anyone other than Bernie. Even though Bernie teaches her a multitude of lessons, do you think Heidi's social development suffers? How do you think Heidi will adjust to attending school for the first time in junior high? What hurdles will she have to overcome?
13. In chapter one, Heidi says, "I'd be lying if I said that given a choice I wouldn't rather know than not know." What does Heidi learn about knowing and not knowing on her journey to find her identity?
14. After Heidi's journey to learn about her personal history ends, her lucky streak seems to disappear. What is the significance of Heidi losing her luck?

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GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions can be applied to any book. You can tweak the questions for your specific book. They can be cut into strips and passed around in a basket to help facilitate discussion.

My favorite part of the book was...

A better title for this book would be...because...

(Name of character) reminds me of myself because...

My least favorite character was...because...

If I were (name of character, -----) I would (wouldn't) have...

(Name of character) reminds me of someone I know because...

I changed my mind about...because...

I would (wouldn't) like to read another book by this author because...

This book made me think...When I finished this book, I still wondered...

This book reminded me of...

I'd like to tell the author...

What happened in this book was very realistic (unrealistic) because...

This book was better (worse) than the movie version because...

When I started reading his book, I thought...

I didn't like...because...

This book made me realize...

If I could talk to (name of character), I would say...

One thing I have noticed about the author's style is...

If I could be any character in the book I would be...because...

I was surprised when...

I think the main thing the writer was trying to say was...

The most important thing about this book is...

I predicted that...

I think the writer must be ...because...

I would change the ending...