

The ONE AND ONLY Ivan

By Katherine Applegate

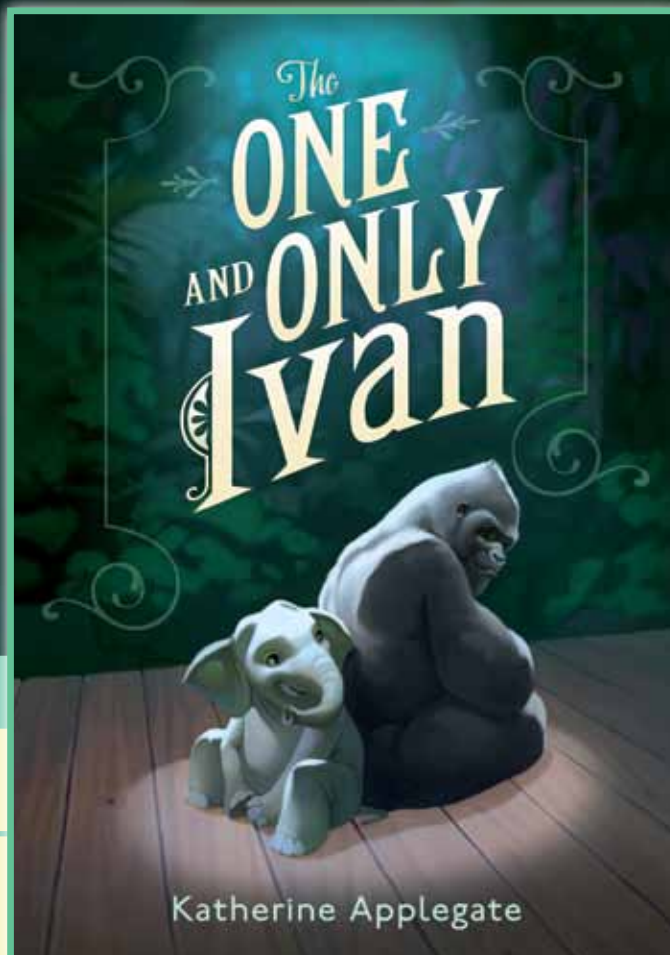
DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

Ivan, an adult male silverback gorilla, has been living in captivity for 27 years, most of that time on display at the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade, along with Stella, a wise older elephant, and Bob, a sassy stray dog. Julia, the janitor's daughter, helps Ivan with his artistic efforts. But when Mack, the owner of the mall, introduces a baby elephant named Ruby, Ivan sees his captivity for what it is. Realizing that Ruby needs more freedom, Ivan assumes his rightful place as a leader and secures a better future for himself and his friends.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Ivan mean when he says, "In my size humans see a test of themselves" (p. 4), and "I am too much gorilla and not enough human" (p. 7)? Why does the sign for the Big Top Mall show Ivan as angry and fierce? Why doesn't Ivan express any anger in the beginning of the story?
2. What are the characteristics of Stella and Bob that make Ivan call them his best friends? Why is each of them important to Ivan? What do Ivan and Stella have in common? How are they alike, and how are they different? What does Stella mean when she says, "Old age is a powerful disguise" (p. 31)?
3. Discuss the special bond between Julia and Ivan. Why is she different from all the other children who come to see his shows? Why do people pay for Ivan's drawings if they don't recognize what he has drawn? Why is Ivan's art important to Mack? Why is it important to Julia?
4. What is the importance of the television in Ivan's cage? What does he learn from watching the television? Why does he like Westerns, and what does he learn from the nature shows? What do you learn from television? What would you say is the most important thing television has taught you?





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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (continued)

5. Why is Bob so independent? What makes him trust Ivan enough to sleep on Ivan's stomach? What events in Bob's life have shaped his personality? How does Bob's experience with humans compare to Ivan's?
6. Compare the personalities of Mack and George. How are they alike, and how are they different? What is the meaning of "family" to each of them? What are the contradictions in Mack's character?
7. What does Stella mean when she says, "A good zoo is how humans make amends" (p. 64)? What is the importance of the story that Stella tells about Jambo (pp. 63-66)? What does it tell us about gorillas? Compare that story to Ruby's story about the humans who rescued her in the jungle (pp. 101-104). What does this story tell us about some humans?
8. What is Ivan's initial reaction to the arrival of Ruby? Compare Ruby's arrival with that of a new baby in a human household. How does her arrival affect all the other animals at the mall? When and why do Ivan's feelings about Ruby change?
9. Why does Ivan promise Stella that he will take care of Ruby when he knows how hard it will be to keep that promise? How does Ivan know that Stella is gone before anyone else does?
10. Discuss the importance of memory in this story. How does Ivan's perception change when he begins to remember more of his own history? What are his most vivid memories? What was Ivan's name in the forest? Why is it important for him to remember his name and his life as a baby gorilla?
11. What is the turning point in the story? When does Ivan start to believe that he will be able to help Ruby, and perhaps himself as well? What events come together to change Ivan's acceptance of the situation and to help him grow into his own strength and wisdom? How do you know he is changing?
12. How does Julia convince her father that Ivan's picture has a very important meaning? Why does George agree to help Julia display Ivan's art on the billboard, even though he knows it might cost him his job? Discuss the meaning of the word "principle."
13. Why is Ivan reluctant to join the other gorillas when he arrives at the zoo? How does he learn to be a true gorilla? What does he need to do to be accepted by the others? How do you feel when you are in a situation with other children you don't know?
14. Discuss the theme of belonging in this story, from the point of view of each of the characters. What is the meaning of belonging for each of them? What does the idea of belonging mean to you?





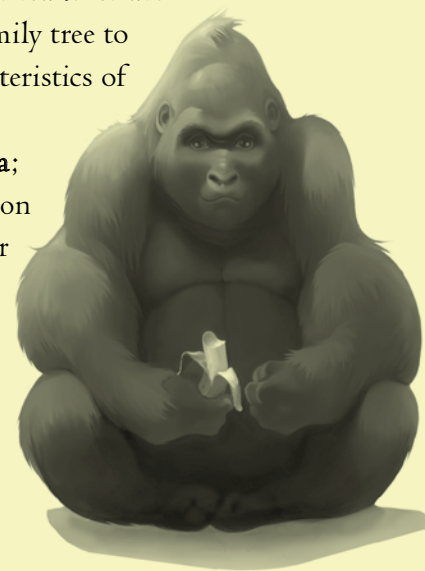
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EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- 1. Fact meets fiction.** Help students to learn about the history of the real Ivan, the inspiration for this book, and find out how he adapted to his new home at Zoo Atlanta. Have your students plan a campaign to rescue an animal in a similar situation. How would they raise awareness of the animal's plight? Whom would they enlist to help them?
- 2. Gorillas in the Wild.** Have students research the mountain gorilla in its natural habitat and investigate what they can do to help the gorilla population worldwide. Go to www.gorillas.org to find ways to help your students learn about efforts to protect gorillas from the kind of hunter who killed Ivan's parents.
- 3. People Who Care.** Break students into small groups and have each group research people who have helped the world learn more about our relatives in nature—people like Charles Darwin, Jane Goodall, Biruté Galdikas, and Dian Fossey. What did each of these contribute to our knowledge? How did they get interested in the natural world and the animals they helped us to learn about?
- 4. Birds of a Different Feather.** Give students the task of finding stories about unlikely friendships among different species of animals. What are the strangest pairings your students can find? There are several fine picture books, many photos on the Internet, and even videos on Youtube that showcase these unusual animal friendships. How many can you and your students discover?
- 5. Our Family Tree.** Have students use PBS/Nova's interactive family tree to make a chart of the characteristics of hominid primates (go to www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova; click on "Evolution," then on "Interactive," then on "Our Family Tree"). Find as many resources as possible for information about the gorilla and its habits and habitats, and compare them to the character of Ivan.



Courtesy of Katherine Applegate

KATHERINE APPLGATE is the author of numerous books for young readers, including the bestselling Animorphs series, the Roscoe Riley Rules series, and the award-winning free verse novel *Home of the Brave*. She lives with her husband, who writes as the author Michael Grant, and their children in California. You can visit her online at www.katherineapplegate.com.

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Questions and activities prepared by Connie Rockman, youth literature consultant and adjunct professor of children's and young adult literature.