

The One and Only Ivan

Recommended for Grades 3-6

Book Summary: The One and Only Ivan

Ivan lives in a mall with other animals, draws pictures, and watches as people come to look at him day after day. He accepts his life in the mall, but wishes for something else. Stella, an old elephant who lives in a cage near his, tells him stories about her life before the mall and reminds Ivan that the cage is a cage, and not a domain.

As the mall begins to lose business, the owner, Mack, buys a baby elephant, Ruby, who brings back some of their human audience. Stella knows that Ruby will take her place in the show and asks Ivan to promise to take care of Ruby.

One night, Ruby asks Ivan to tell her a story and he remembers his life before the mall where he lived with Mack and how his parents wouldn't have approved of his life. When Stella dies, Ivan begins to plan how he can save Ruby.

[Spoiler]

Ivan uses his paint to make a sign featuring him, Ruby and the word "home" which the mall janitor hangs on a billboard. The sign begins attracting more people who begin to complain that the animals in the mall aren't being treated well. Large boxes come for the animals and Ivan realizes that the boxes will take him and Ruby to a better place.

Ivan is brought to a zoo and introduced to a herd of younger gorillas that come to accept him as their leader. He learns that Ruby is now with an elephant herd at the same place and knows that he has kept his promise to Stella.

Author Biography: Katherine Applegate

Katherine Alice Applegate was born October 9, 1956 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She loved animals as a child and knew that she either wanted to work with them or become an author. She graduated from The University of Texas at Austin with a liberal arts degree. She first began her writing career with creating personality quizzes for a magazine. Later, she would go on to write books in the *Animorphs* and *Roscoe Riley Rules* series. In 2013, she won the Newbery Award for *The One and Only Ivan*.

She currently lives with her husband, writer Michael Grant, and two children in Southern California.



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Discussion Questions: The One and Only Ivan

1. Ivan is called many things by onlookers, but he says that he is “only Ivan” and that humans waste words. Do you think he is right about people wasting words? Why or why not?
2. Even though carnivals typically move from place to place, the mall in which Ivan lives does not. Is it better for animals to be in a moving or a permanent carnival? Why? Why do you think the mall carnival attracts so many people?
3. Ivan enjoys western movies where he can tell the good guys from the bad ones. Why does he say that real life is nothing like western movies? Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Ivan considers himself an artist like Julia. How do you think Julia helps Ivan in the mall? How do Stella and Bob help him?
5. According to Stella, “a good zoo is how humans make amends”. What do you think she means by this? Do you agree? Why or why not?
6. Ruby tells Ivan and Bob the story about humans rescued her from a water hole, but they don’t believe her. Why do you think neither of them can trust people? What do you think it would take for them to learn to trust?
7. Unlike people, gorillas don’t name their babies right away. Why are gorilla names so important?
8. Ivan describes his early life to Ruby. How might his description of a young gorilla’s life be similar to your life?
9. Why would Ivan’s parents not have approved of his life with Mack and Helen?
10. Why does Ivan sometimes forget what he is supposed to be?
11. Ivan calls his cage a domain. After Ruby hits Mack, Ivan calls his cage a cage. Why do you think he no longer sees it as his home? What has changed his mind?
12. How does Ivan keep his promise to Stella about protecting Ruby? What else could he have done to save her?
13. Why does it take Ivan so long to adapt to being a real gorilla? What kinds of things does he need to learn? What do you think happens to him after the story?



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