

The One and Only Ivan Study Guide

The One and Only Ivan by K. A. Applegate

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Plot Summary

"The One and Only Ivan" is a novel by Katherine Applegate. In this novel, Ivan is a silverback gorilla who lives in a stationary circus. Ivan is good friends with the other animals in the circus, especially Stella the elephant and Bob, a stray dog. When Stella dies, Ivan makes a promise to save her young friend, Ruby, from a life of captivity. It takes some time, but Ivan and Ruby are eventually moved to a zoo. "The One and Only Ivan" is a book of great courage and hope.

Ivan lives in a stationary circus with Stella the elephant and Bob, the stray dog. One day the owner of the circus buys a new elephant, a baby named Ruby. Stella takes charge of Ruby, mothering her in absence of Ruby's own mother. Only Stella has a foot that is often infected and the owner of the circus, Mack, does not like to call the vet because of the expense. Stella gets another infection in her foot and she dies because Mack never calls the vet.

Before Stella died, she made Ivan promise to take care of Ruby. Ivan is not sure how to do this, but he knows he must when Mack begins hitting Ruby with a claw-stick in order to train her to do Stella's tricks. One night, the janitor's daughter, Julia, gives Ivan some finger paints and it gives him an idea. Ivan makes a huge picture of Ruby in the zoo and writes the word home at the bottom. Ivan gives this picture to Julia. Ivan hopes Julia can help him get Ruby to the zoo, but instead Julia talks her dad into placing the pictures on a billboard used to advertise the circus.

Reporters come in response to the billboard. They take pictures of both Ivan and Ruby, as well as the circus and mall. Then a cameraman sees the claw-stick and shows that on television as well. Protestors come and then an inspector. Soon a woman from the zoo begins visiting. In time, Ivan comes to realize the zoo woman wants to take him and Ruby to the zoo. Ivan convinces Ruby it is safe and she should do what the woman wants.

Ivan and Ruby are taken away. Ivan is placed in a strange cage that he finds to be cleaner, but smaller than his last one. Then they begin showing him a television show of other silverback gorillas. One day, the zoo lady opens a door and Ivan can see the gorillas on the other side of a large glass door. In time, Ivan is allowed to go out with the gorillas. It takes some time, but he finally remembers how to act like a silverback.

The zoo lady shows Ivan Ruby on the television. She is with a new elephant family somewhere in the zoo and she looks happy. A short time later, Julia comes to visit. Ivan learns she has taken in Ivan's dog friend, Bob.



Chapters 1-30

Chapters 1-30 Summary

Chapter 1. Ivan is a silverback gorilla.

Chapter 2. Ivan is often called many things.

Chapter 3. Ivan can understand humans, but they rarely understand himself.

Chapter 4. Ivan describes his appearance, stressing the silver markings on his back.

Chapter 5. Mack is the owner of the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade where Ivan lives. Ivan lives in a large domain at one end of the ring that has glass walls and a fake jungle scene painted on one wall. Ivan cannot read, but he knows there is a billboard for the circus that calls him the one and only Ivan. Mack read it to him once.

Chapter 6. Many of Ivan's neighbors can do tricks in the circus show. Ivan cannot. Stella, the elephant in the next domain, belonged to another circus and she does many tricks.

Chapter 7. People come to look at Ivan every day.

Chapter 8. Julia, the daughter of the janitor, gave Ivan a crayon once. Now he likes to draw pictures with the crayons. Mack sells them for twenty bucks in the gift shop.

Chapter 9. Ivan remembers drawing on his mother's back in mud.

Chapter 10. Ivan aspires to draw like Julia.

Chapter 11. Many of the visitors have stopped being amazed by Ivan. Some think he is lonely.

Chapter 12. Ivan has a television that he likes to watch.

Chapter 13. Ivan saw a silverback gorilla on television once, and wonders about him and if they will ever meet. Ivan thinks they are the only two silverback gorillas in the world.

Chapter 14. Stella and Ivan are good friends even though they have little in common.

Chapter 15. Stella has an injured foot that never heals properly. It is an injury she got from the other circus she once was owned by.

Chapter 16. Few visitors come to the circus anymore and Mack's is worried. Ivan decides he should eat more because this is entertaining for the visitors.

Chapter 17. Bob does not think this is a good plan. Bob is a tiny, stray dog who was abandoned by humans on the side of the road with his brothers and sisters. He does not trust people.

Chapter 18. Bob does not want to be owned by humans.

Chapter 19. Mack gives Ivan a new crayon. It is yellow, so Ivan draws ten bananas to be sold in the souvenir shop.

Chapter 20. Three people come to see Ivan and they throw things at him.

Chapter 21. The visitor return and tease him. Ivan throws a me-ball at them.

Chapter 22. Ivan is sorry for thinking badly of the rude children.

Chapter 23. Julia comes every night with her father, George, the janitor. Julia is a real artist, but her father makes her do her homework first. Julia often sits outside Ivan's domain and draws elegant pictures of him.

Chapter 24. Julia is the one who named Bob. She once drew him and when she was done, she put the name Bob under it. She told her dad she was inspired to name him that when she drew him.

Chapter 25. Bob will not humans near him, but he likes to sit by Julia.

Chapter 26. Mack comes to talk with George, asking about his sick wife. Before he leaves, he gives George money to buy Julia crayons.

Chapter 27. Ivan has trouble sleeping that night. Stella tells him to remember his former keepers. Ivan does not remember much, but he does remember some of his keepers when he thinks about it.

Chapter 28. Ivan draws a beetle that has wondered into his domain, but only Julia recognizes it.

Chapter 29. Stella and the other animals sense a change. A new animal is coming.

Chapter 30. Stella believes the new animal will be a baby elephant.

Chapters 1-30 Analysis

The early chapters introduce the first person narrator, Ivan. Ivan is a silverback gorilla who lives in a stationary circus called the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade. Ivan lives in a small domain that has a painting on the wall of the jungle, though it confuses him that the waterfall has no water and the flowers no smell. Ivan is a personable gorilla who likes the company of his neighbor, Stella the elephant, and a stray dog named Bob. Ivan also likes to draw.

Ivan is owned by Mack, the owner of the circus. Mack is a contrary man who at first seems kind, especially in his treatment of the janitor, George, and his daughter, Julia. However, Mack also seems somewhat indifferent toward the animals. Mack worries about business and is always trying to find ways to make more money. Mack even sells Ivan's drawings even though to him they are mostly scribbles.

Julia is the daughter of the janitor. She is a kind young girl who likes Ivan and Ivan likes her. It was Julia who gave Ivan his first crayon and encourages his drawings. Julia is friendly with all the animals and she speaks to them each night. However, Julia has problems in her own life, particularly the illness of her mother.

Chapters 31-64

Chapters 31-64 Summary

Chapter 31. Ivan convinces Stella to tell the story of Jambo. Jambo is a gorilla who lived in a zoo. When a child fell into Jambo's habitat one day, he protected the little boy until he could be rescued.

Chapter 32. Bob wonders why Stella and Ivan are not in a zoo. Ivan says because they are lucky.

Chapter 33. The new animal arrives. It is a baby elephant. Mack struggles to get the elephant, Ruby, out of the truck.

Chapter 34. Stella is upset about the new arrival. When Mack opens her cage to get her help with the new elephant, she immediately goes to the truck and coaxes Ruby out.

Chapter 35. Julia comes and draws the new elephant. Ivan worries she might not like him anymore, but Julia comes to sit with him later.

Chapter 36. Stella tells Ivan how the circus that owned Ruby abused her to get her to learn their tricks.

Chapter 37. Ivan meets Ruby. He finds her very inquisitive.

Chapter 38. Stella spends all day with Ruby.

Chapter 39. Mack and George change the billboard that announces Ivan's presence at the circus to include a picture of a baby elephant.

Chapter 40. Ivan gives Ruby a quick art lesson.

Chapter 41. George tells Mack he should have Stella's foot checked on, it seems to be hurting her again.

Chapter 42. Ruby wakes Ivan early in the morning because she is bored. Ivan tells her a bad elephant joke. Ivan then shows Ruby a picture he has made of her and Stella. Ruby then tells a joke of her own.

Chapter 43. Stella never had children, but Ivan once told her she would have been a good mother.

Chapter 44. Mack is happy because business has picked up since Ruby's arrival.

Chapter 45. Ruby tells Ivan and Bob a story about how she once fell into a hole when she still lived with her mother and aunts. Humans came, helped her out of the hole, and then took her back to her family. Bob does not believe humans could be that nice.



Chapter 46. Stella's foot is hurting so much she cannot do the daily shows.

Chapter 47. Julia grows concerned about Stella and asks her father to call Mack. George says that Mack will have the vet come in the morning.

Chapter 48. Stella asks Ivan to promise to care for Ruby when she is gone. Ivan agrees.

Chapter 49. Ivan knows that Stella has died before anyone else.

Chapter 50. Bob tells Ivan that five men and forklift dumped Stella's body into a garbage truck.

Chapter 51. Ivan tries to comfort Ruby.

Chapter 52. Julia is sad after Stella dies. George accuses Mack of failing to provide Stella with medical care.

Chapter 53. Bob reminds Ivan that he promised to protect Ruby and that he is the one and only Ivan.

Chapter 54. Ruby cannot sleep and asks for a story. Ivan tells her he cannot remember his past. However, for Ruby, Ivan tries to remember.

Chapter 55. Ivan remembers playing tag with his sister.

Chapter 56. Ivan remembers being named Mud because he was always using mud to draw.

Chapter 57. Ivan remembers that his father was a great guide, teacher, and protector.

Chapter 58. Ivan remembers his childhood was filled with learning and making mistakes. He remembers it was perfect.

Chapter 59. Ivan remembers one day the humans came.

Chapter 60. Ivan remembers being in a crate.

Chapter 61. Ivan remembers living with Mack and his wife, Helen. He remembers breaking many things.

Chapter 62. Ivan remembers missing his family, but afraid of remembering.

Chapter 63. Ivan remembers once Helen brought home a painting and it inspired him to draw with mud-like cake icing.

Chapter 64. Ivan remembers getting in trouble.

Chapters 31-64 Analysis

Life at the circus is pretty quiet for Ivan. He spends his days drawing, watching television, or talking with Stella. Stella and Ivan are good friends even though they have little in common. They often talk and Stella tells Ivan stories. Then a new elephant comes and Stella is upset about this poor creature. For this reason, when Stella realizes she is dying, she asks Ivan to take care of Ruby. It is in Ivan's nature to be the protector of his family and he considers Stella, Bob, and Ruby to be his family. For this reason, Ivan agrees.

Ivan does not remember his past well and he does not like to think about it. However, for Ruby, he begins trying to remember. It turns out that Ivan was born in the wild, but was captured as an infant and brought to America. Ivan was bought by Mack and raised in his home like a human child, causing some confusion for Ivan.

Ivan is a creature who is mixed up about who he is. He wants to be the main attraction, to make Mack and Julia and George happy. However, he also has a natural instinct to protect those he loves and live the life of a wild creature. This often leaves Ivan conflicted, trying to decide what is best to do.



Chapters 65-99

Chapters 65-99 Summary

Chapter 65. Ivan remembers coming to the circus with Mack. He even remembers holding a human baby once.

Chapter 66. Ivan remembers Helen moving out on Mack.

Chapter 67. Ivan remembers when Mack gave him his domain at the circus and how happy he was to have his own space. However, he is confused over whether he is human or gorilla.

Chapter 68. Ivan takes some magic markers Julia gave him and marks an x on the wall for each day he has lived in America.

Chapter 69. Mack comes and speaks briefly to Ivan.

Chapter 70. Mack begins working with Ruby. When Ruby grows tired and stops responding to his commands, Mack gets the claw-stick and hits Ruby with it. Ruby hits Mack in the groin with her trunk. Mack leaves.

Chapter 71. Julia worries about Mack hurting Ruby and asks her dad what to do, but he does not know.

Chapter 72. Julia paints a watercolor picture of Ruby, but she does not like it and gives it to Ivan. Julia then gives Ivan some finger paints and paper.

Chapter 73. Ruby begins having bad dreams. Ruby and Ivan talk. Ivan becomes more determined than ever to protect Ruby.

Chapter 74. Ivan tells Ruby a story about a young elephant who goes to a zoo and has a new family.

Chapter 75. Ivan worries about how to get Ruby to a zoo.

Chapter 76. Ivan lies awake and remembers the past.

Chapter 77. Ivan remembers humans killing his parents.

Chapter 78. Ivan remembers that Mack sells ashtrays made of gorilla paws in the store.

Chapter 79. Ivan finally comes up with an idea to save Ruby.

Chapter 80. Ivan paints all night, every night.

Chapter 81. Ivan paints and hides the paintings under his dirty pool.



Chapter 82. Ruby asks Ivan what he does all night.

Chapter 83. Ivan thinks something is missing from his picture.

Chapter 84. Ivan talks to Bob about his project, worried it is stupid. Bob assures him it is not.

Chapter 85. Mack finds one of Ivan's pictures and takes it to sell in the store.

Chapter 86. Ivan is watching television when he sees an ad for the zoo that features a group of elephants.

Chapter 87. This is a different kind of painting for Ivan.

Chapter 88. Ivan being hiding his paintings inside his stuffed gorilla, Not-Tag.

Chapter 89. Mack wants Ivan to paint for him now, so Ivan paints during the day too.

Chapter 90. Ivan worries that Mack might hurt Ruby when she resists during the shows.

Chapter 91. Ivan overhears Julia asking her father about spelling words. This inspires Ivan to add a word to his painting.

Chapter 92. Ivan draws a big H and tells Bob he will add the word, home.

Chapter 93. When the drawing is done, Ivan waits for the perfect moment to give it to Julia.

Chapter 94. Just before Julia and her father prepare to go home, Ivan begins to shove the many pieces of his picture out of his domain to Julia. Julia does not understand it is one big picture.

Chapter 95. Julia takes all the drawings. Her father wants her to leave them in the office for Mack.

Chapter 96. A silverback gorilla who beats its chest is loud.

Chapter 97. Ivan beats his chest, startling George and Julia.

Chapter 98. Julia has dropped the paintings and begins to gather them up. She begins to see that they fit together in a pattern.

Chapter 99. Julia and her father put the pieces of Ivan's picture together until they can see what it is. Julia understands that it is a picture of Ruby in the zoo. Julia thinks Ivan wants them to put it on the billboard and she convinces her father to do it.

Chapters 65-99 Analysis

Ivan remembers more about his past. He finally allows himself to remember how his parents were killed by humans, how his sister died while being shipped to America, inspiring him to forget the jungle before he dies too. Ivan remembers what it was like to have a family and someone to protect. He has promised to protect Ruby and he intends to do just that.

Ivan knows the best place for Ruby is the zoo. For this reason, Ivan creates a giant picture of Ruby in the zoo and writes the word home underneath. Ivan shows it to Julia with the hope that she will understand and make it happen. Julia does understand, she is the only one who has ever truly understood Ivan's drawings and paintings. However, she does not understand that she is to make it happen. Instead, she encourages her father to put the painting on the billboard advertising the circus.

Mack was once a kind, gentle man. However, he has become a bitter man, perhaps fueled by the loss of his wife, Helen. Whatever the reason, Mack is not as kind to his animals as he should be. Instead, he failed to get Stella a vet when she needed one and he begins to abuse Ruby in order to get her to behave the way he wants her to. Mack is desperate not to lose his business, but it seems this darkness is something much deeper than a need to make money. The reader must wonder what the future holds for Ivan and Ruby in the care of this man.



Chapters 100-153

Chapters 100-153 Summary

Chapter 100. Mack sees the billboard.

Chapter 101. Mack is angry.

Chapter 102. Mack receives a phone call from the local newspaper. They want to do a story on Ivan.

Chapter 103. The article appears the following day. More visitors come and Ivan's paintings sell for more.

Chapter 104. Ivan worries his plan is not working.

Chapter 105. A man comes with a video camera and takes footage of everything, including the claw-stick.

Chapter 106. The circus is on the news. So is the claw-stick.

Chapter 107. Protestors come to the circus.

Chapter 108. More protestors come the next day.

Chapter 109. A man comes to inspect the circus.

Chapter 110. The man comes back with a woman. They give Mack a paper that upsets him.

Chapter 111. The woman, Maya, brings a box that is Ruby sized.

Chapter 112. The woman trains Ruby to expect a treat when she hears a clicking sound. Ivan explains to Ruby what is happening and that she should get in the box.

Chapter 113. A vet comes and checks out Ruby, but he is afraid of Ivan.

Chapter 114. No visitors come.

Chapter 115. Another box comes that is Ivan sized. Bob says they are all leaving.

Chapter 116. Julia comes. She tells Ivan her father has been fired, but the zoo might have a job for him soon. Julia wants to adopt Bob, but her father says no.

Chapter 117. Maya begins training Ivan to go in his box.

Chapter 118. Ivan worries about Bob, but Bob insists he will be fine.



Chapter 119. Ruby asks questions about the zoo.

Chapter 120. Mack visits Ivan and shows him a picture of Ivan as an infant. Mack leaves without looking back.

Chapter 121. The day comes for Ruby and Ivan to enter their boxes. Ivan gives Bob Not-Tag and says goodbye.

Chapter 122. Ivan goes in his box and is given medicine to make him sleep.

Chapter 123. The box moves.

Chapter 124. Ivan wakes in a new cage in the zoo. He is disappointed there are no other gorillas.

Chapter 125. Ivan misses his friends.

Chapter 126. Ivan likes the food.

Chapter 127. Ivan does not have visitors except Maya and her friends.

Chapter 128. Ivan senses a change.

Chapter 129. Maya brings Ivan a television tuned to a channel of gorillas like him.

Chapter 130. Ivan watches the gorillas every day.

Chapter 131. Maya opens a door at the back of his cage.

Chapter 132. There are real gorillas, the same from the television, outside Ivan's cage.

Chapter 133. Ivan is surprised.

Chapter 134. Ivan watches them each day.

Chapter 135. There is a female Ivan is particularly interested in.

Chapter 136. Maya opens the door, but Ivan is not ready.

Chapter 137. Ivan worries about Ruby, but knows she would have gone through the door.

Chapter 138. Maya opens the door again.

Chapter 139. Ivan is happy with the grass and outside elements.

Chapter 140. The female challenges Ivan and he does not know what to do.

Chapter 141. Ivan tries to remember what it was like to be a gorilla.



Chapter 142. The young male challenges Ivan.

Chapter 143. Ivan makes a nest that is not well made, but lovely to sit in.

Chapter 144. Maya shows Ruby on the television. She is with other elephants and she looks happy.

Chapter 145. Ivan plays tag with his new gorilla family.

Chapter 146. Ivan romances the female.

Chapter 147. Ivan wishes Bob were there to give him advice.

Chapter 148. Ivan enjoys being groomed by other gorillas.

Chapter 149. Ivan tells his troop about his past.

Chapter 150. Ivan goes to the top of a hill in his new cage. He finds a large wall and some mud.

Chapter 151. Ivan paints on the big wall with the mud. He climbs a tree to see what he has done and spots Ruby with her elephant family.

Chapter 152. Ivan is glad Ruby is safe and happy.

Chapter 153. Julia comes and tells Ivan that her father will soon work at the zoo. Bob is with her. It turns out Julia adopted him after all.

Chapters 100-153 Analysis

Ivan's painting leads to a great deal of publicity for the circus. This publicity comes with the secret of the claw-stick that Mack accidentally left lying around. Soon the animal rights people begin to protest and an inspection of the circus causes the animals to be taken to the local zoo. Ivan has finally gotten what he wanted. Ivan's plan worked, though much slower than he had hoped.

Ivan only wanted for Ruby to go to the zoo, therefore he is surprised when he taken there as well. Ivan worries about his friends and what might happen to him when he gets into the crate that is meant to transport him. The last time Ivan was in a crate, his sister died. Ivan is frightened, but for Ruby's sake, he pretends not to be. Instead, Ivan goes bravely.

Ivan is slowly integrated with a troop of silverback gorillas at the zoo. At first Ivan cannot remember how to behave like a gorilla and is not accepted by the others, but he soon learns how to act. Ivan becomes one of the group and even has a girl in the group. Ivan is very happy. This happiness only spreads when he learns that all his friends are safe

and happy in new homes as well. It is a happy ending to a story that could have ended much differently.

Characters

Ivan

Ivan is a silverback gorilla who lives in a stationary circus. Ivan is a talented gorilla who can draw pictures and write simple words. He lives in his domain all the time, never leaving it for any reason. Ivan is good friends with Stella, the elephant who lives beside him, and Bob, a stray dog who likes to sleep on Ivan's belly.

When Stella is dying, she asks Ivan to take care of Ruby, a baby elephant who is new to the circus. Ivan grows concerned for Ruby as the owner of the circus, Mack, begins to train her to take Stella's place in the ring. Ivan finally draws a large picture that eventually draws enough scrutiny on the circus that it causes an inspection and the removal of all the animals to the zoo. Ivan has gotten what he wanted for Ruby and a better situation for himself.

Bob

Bob is a stray dog who does not trust humans because humans threw him and his siblings out of a car. Bob is the only one who survived. Bob found himself at the circus and he began sleeping on Ivan's belly. Bob and Ivan have been good friends ever since, and Bob is often a source of comfort for Ivan. When the animals are taken from the circus to the zoo, Bob goes to live with Julia and her family despite his claims that he dislikes humans and will never live with a family.

Stella

Stella is an elephant that was born in the wild, but captured and bought by a circus. Stella was often abused in the circus. Stella has a foot that was injured in the circus and it often becomes infected. Stella works in this circus with Mack in the ring when her foot does not hurt. When the new baby elephant, Ruby, comes to the circus, Stella takes her under her wing. Stella remembers everything about her past and she worries that Ruby is in for a hard time. For this reason, she asks Ivan to protect Ruby when Stella realizes she is dying.

Ruby

Ruby is a baby elephant that was owned by another circus for only a month before they declared bankruptcy. Ruby is not well trained and is weary of humans. For this reason, she does not do well when Mack tries to train her. Mack uses a claw-stick to encourage Ruby to cooperate. This could cause Ruby great harm and Julia and Ivan worry about her. Ivan has promised to protect Ruby, therefore he makes a drawing of her in the zoo.

in hopes that Julia can make it happen. Instead, Julia puts his picture on a billboard but this eventually leads to both he and Ruby going to the zoo.

Julia

Julia is the daughter of the janitor who works at the circus. Julia is an artist and she often gives art supplies to Ivan. Julia is a good friend to Ivan and the only one who sees what are in his drawings. For this reason, Ivan wants Julia to have the drawing he has made of Ruby in the zoo in hopes that she can make it happen. Instead, Julia has her father put the picture on a billboard. This brings media attention that eventually leads to Ruby and Ivan both going to the zoo.

George

George is Julia's father and the janitor at the circus. George does not like what is happening with the animals at the circus, but he cannot do anything because his wife is sick and he needs the job. It is a difficult situation for George. In the end, the animals are saved because George put Ivan's pictures on the billboard. George loses his job, but is offered one with the zoo.

Mack

Mack is the owner of the circus. Mack is a good man, but he has become depressed since his wife left him. Mack treats the animals with indifference and his decision not to call a vet to help Stella leads to her death. In the end, Mack loses all his animals and is forced to try to survive in his business without the animals.

Tag

Tag is Ivan's twin sister. Ivan and Tag were taken at the same time by humans and transported to America. However, Tag hung on to her memories of the jungle and Ivan believes it is this that eventually led to her death. For this reason, Ivan refuses to remember the past.

Maya

Maya is an employee of the zoo. Maya comes with the inspector to the circus and checks out the animals. When the zoo decides to take custody of the animals, Maya works with them to make them feel comfortable with the transport crates. When Ivan arrives at the zoo, Maya becomes his primary caretaker, helping integrate him with the other gorillas.

Inspector

An inspector comes to the circus and checks out the facilities and the treatment of the animals. The inspector eventually comes to the conclusion that the animals are not well cared for and he arranges for the zoo to take them.

Objects/Places

Crayons

Julia begins giving Ivan crayons and he uses them to draw. Sometimes he eats them.

Fingerpaints

Julia gives Ivan some fingerpaints. He uses these to make his painting of Ruby at the zoo.

Yogurt Covered Raisins

Both Stella and Ivan love yogurt covered raisins.

Claw-Stick

The claw-stick is a stick with a large hook on one end that is used by trainers to force elephants to obey commands. Mack uses one with Ruby.

Drawings

Mack sells Ivan's drawings in the store at the circus.

Ruby at the Zoo Drawing

Ivan draws a large drawing of Ruby at the zoo to try to get Julia to help him get Ruby somewhere safe, like the zoo. This drawing is placed on a billboard, causing a great deal of media coverage for the circus and eventually leading to intervention by the zoo for both Ruby and Ivan.

Not-Tag

Ivan has a stuffed gorilla he calls Not-Tag because it reminds him of his sister, Tag. Julia gave it to him.

Stella's Domain

Stella's domain is a small enclosure where she lives beside Ivan's domain.

Ivan's Domain

Ivan's domain sits just off the main ring. It is made of large windows with a solid wall that has a painting of the jungle on it.

Exit 8 Big top Mall and Video Arcade

Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade is the stationary circus where Ivan lives.

Themes

Fulfilling a Promise

Before Stella dies, Ivan makes a promise to take care of Ruby. Stella does not want to ask such a promise, but she knows that Ivan will keep his word. Ivan has never had to protect anyone before, but it is in his basic nature to do so. Ivan is determined to keep his promise.

A gorilla in the circus has little power. Ivan struggles with finding a way to fulfill this promise. All he knows is that things are bad for Ruby and he must do all he can to save her. Ivan eventually draws a picture of Ruby in the zoo hoping his friend Julia can make it happen. It does happen, slowly. Ivan is afraid of the change, but happy when he discovers his friend is safe and happy. Ivan has fulfilled his promise.

Friends

Stella, Ivan, Ruby, and Bob have been torn away from their families by humans, and left in a difficult position in order to survive. Bob and Stella distrust humans, but Ruby has a different opinion of them because of a good experience she once had with them. Ivan has no opinion of humans. However, what Bob, Stella, Ruby and Ivan all have in common is each other.

Ivan and his friends are close even though they have very little in common. Ivan loves his friends and he willing to do whatever it takes to make them happy. Therefore, when Stella asks for a promise, not only does Ivan promise before he knows what she wants, but he works hard to fulfill it.

Friends is an important theme of this novel because it is all these animals have. They do not have family and they cannot trust the humans who care for them. It is this friendship that allows these animals to find happiness outside of the circus.

Abuse of Animals

The main theme of this novel centers around the treatment of animals in the circus. Stella knows about abuse in circuses because she has witnessed it at the previous circus where she lived. Although Mack never outright abuses the animals, he does use a claw-stick on Ruby and he reduces their feed and the heat to save money.

There are a great number of documented cases of abuse in circuses. This author touches on some of these things in her novel while still keeping the tone of the novel light. Abuse of animals is real, however, and in this novel it is clear that this circus is not a good place for these animals. It is this that makes abuse of animals a theme of the novel.

Style

Point of View

"The One and Only Ivan" is written in the first person point of view. The main character, a gorilla named Ivan, is the narrator. Ivan tells his story in narration, his thoughts a touch scattered but clear and intelligent. Ivan is a gorilla who has been separated from his kind and struggles to understand who and what he is. This comes across clearly in his unique voice.

The point of view of this novel allows a close relationship to develop very quickly between reader and main character. This relationship makes the reader care about what happens to Ivan. The reader is rooting for Ivan throughout the novel and happy when Ivan finds happiness. For this reason, this point of view works well with the novel.

Setting

The novel is set in a circus in an unnamed town off a local highway. The circus is part of a stationary show that includes a mall and arcade. It is clearly an attempt to make money with a unique type of business. However, the business is not doing well and this causes the owner, Mack, to buy another unfortunate animal to entertain is non-existent customers.

The setting of this novel is interesting for several reasons. The setting is a circus, but it does not travel, therefore there are no trains or trucks for the animals to travel in. The setting is also a small, privately owned business that has little oversight, allowing the animals to be treated as the owner dictates. It is a business that is both unique for visitors, but potentially dangerous to the animals. It is an unusual setting, but it fits well with the plot of the novel.

Language and Meaning

"The One and Only Ivan" is narrated by a gorilla who has learned English by listening to the humans around him. His language is very strong and clear, but he occasionally misunderstands certain things as does his young friend Ruby. The language includes no foreign phrases or words or slang that a reader might not understand, therefore it is a clear language that enhances the plot of the novel.

The language of the novel is authentic to its main character and the intended audience of young adults. The language is not confusing, but is somewhat poetic. It is a nice language that tells a fascinating story in a quick and easy read. Therefore the language works well with the plot.

Structure

The novel is divided into one hundred and fifty three chapters. Each chapter is a page or shorter, though some to be as long as two or three pages. These short chapters keep the story moving. The story is told in a linear time line, though it does include some flashbacks toward the middle of the story as Ivan begins to remember his past.

The novel has one main plot and multiple subplots. The main plot follows Ivan as he attempts to save his friend Ruby from the circus. One subplot follows the story of Ivan's childhood. Another subplot follows Ivan's friendship with Julia. Another subplot follows Ivan as he readjusts to being a gorilla. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.

Quotes

"I am Ivan. I am a gorilla. It's not as easy as it looks." Hello, pg. 9

"One of my neighbors plays baseball although she is a chicken. Anther drives a fire truck, although he is a rabbit." The Littlest Big Top on Earth, pg. 15

"At times like that, I wish humans could understand me the way I can understand them." The Loneliest Gorilla in the World, pg. 22

"Her trunk is remarkable, but still it can't unlatch the door of her tumble-down domain." Stella's Trunk, pg. 27

"I wonder who Picasso is. Does he have a tire swing like me? Does he ever eat his crayons?" Picasso, pg. 33

"Humans always smell odd when change is in the air." Change, pg. 47

"Right now I would give all the yogurt raisins in all the world for a heart made of ice." Knowing, pg. 78

"I slept in human beds, sat in human chairs, listened while human words swarmed around me like angry bees." The Temporary Human, pg. 90

"These paintings are for Ruby. Every one of them." Nights, pg. 116

"I can't let Ruby be another One and Only." More Paintings, pg. 135

"I wonder if I have stopped being famous." Not Famous, pg. 174

"I try to imagine Ivan as he might have been." What it was Like, pg. 188

"I nod, then turn toward my family, my life, my home." Silverback, pg. 201

Topics for Discussion

Who is Ivan? Where does he live? Why? How did Ivan learn to draw? What does he draw? What is done with his drawings? Is this a fair thing to do? Why does Ivan watch television? What is on the television that Ivan enjoys? What does Ivan learn from these programs?

Who is Bob? Where did he come from? Why does he not like humans? Why does Bob always remind Ivan that he is the one and only Ivan? What does this mean? How does it help Ivan? How did Bob come to live with Ivan? Why did he chose Ivan? Why did Ivan not scare him off the first night?

Who is Stella? How did Stella come to live at the circus? What does she think of humans? What things were done to her at the other circus where she lived? What happened to Stella's foot? How does Stella know that Mack has bought a new elephant? How does Stella feel about this new elephant? What is her reaction to the new elephant?

Who is Ruby? Why is she always asking questions? Where did she come from? Why does she not dislike humans? Why does Ruby have such a hard time with the training Mack gives her? What might happen if she does not cooperate with Mack? Why does Ivan want to get Ruby out of the circus? Where does he want to take her? For what reason?

Who is Julia? Why does she come to the circus? Why does she dislike her homework? What would she rather be doing? Who is Julia's favorite animal? Why does Julia bring Ivan drawing supplies? What does Ivan think of Julia's drawings? Why does Ivan chose Julia as the recipient of his drawings? What does she do with them?

Why does the zoo come to take Ruby and Ivan? Why do they use clickers to train them? How does Ruby feel about this? Why is Ruby afraid of the crate the zoo has brought for her? Why is Ivan afraid to get in his own crate? What do Ruby and Ivan think will happen when they go to the zoo? What does happen?

How does Ivan feel about being part of a troop of gorillas? Is he accepted by the gorillas? Does he want to be? What is it like for Ivan to be with these gorillas? Why does Ivan continue to paint with mud? Is this normal behavior for a gorilla? What do the gorillas think of Ivan's story of his past? How does Ivan feel about telling his story? How does Ivan learn what happened to his friends? Is he happy about this?