

ESL Book Club 2024– March Discussion Questions

The One and Only Ivan by Katherine Applegate

Discussion Date: March 1, 2024, 10:30 am – 12 pm in Central Park Library – Sycamore Room

1. Describe Ivan and his domain.
2. Why do you think the sign for the Big Top Mall shows Ivan as angry and fierce? Why doesn't Ivan express any anger in the beginning of the story?
3. What does Ivan learn from watching TV? Why does he like Westerns and nature shows? What do you learn from watching television?
4. What are the characteristics of Stella and Bob that make Ivan call them his best friends? What do Ivan and Stella have in common? How are they different? What does Stella mean when she says, "Old age is a powerful disguise"?
5. Who is Julia? What does she give to Ivan? How does he use them? Why do you think people pay for Ivan's drawings?
6. How much do you think gorillas can understand? Remember?
7. Why do you think Stella was opposed, at first, to the idea of adding a baby elephant? What do you think changed her mind?
8. Compare the personalities of Mack and George. How are they alike and how are they different?
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?
10. What is the turning point when Ivan starts to believe that he will be able to help Ruby, and perhaps himself, as well?

11. What meaning does Julia see in Ivan's drawing? Why does George agree to display it on the billboard, even though he knows it might cost him his job?

12. 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 do to be accepted by the others?

13. How would you rate this book? Why do you think it was awarded the Newbery Medal for most distinguished contribution to literature for children in 2012?

Ivan was a western lowland gorilla born in 1962 what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He was captured from the wild as a baby and brought to live with humans. For the first few years of his life, he lived with his owners, but he soon grew too big for a human house, and they moved him to a 14' x 14' concrete enclosure on display to the public at the B&I shopping center in Tacoma, Washington, where he spent the next 27 years of his life.

After local animal welfare organizations successfully campaigned for his release to a facility that could care for Ivan properly, in 1994 he was placed at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle. Shortly after this, he was placed on permanent loan to Zoo Atlanta in Atlanta, Georgia. He spent his remaining years at Zoo Atlanta and died from complications during a medical procedure in August 2012.

Ivan's story was fictionalized in the 2012 book, *The One and Only Ivan*, by Katherine Applegate, which was adapted into a 2020 film of the same name.