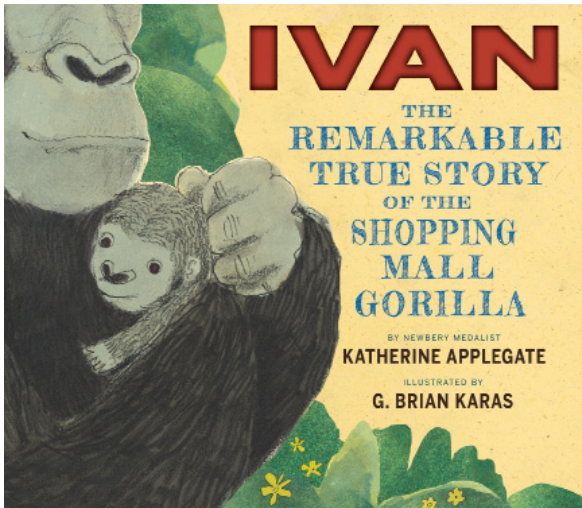


Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla

BY KATHERINE APPLIGATE ILLUSTRATED BY G. BRIAN KARAS



Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla
by Katherine Applegate, illustrated by G. Brian Karas (Clarion, 2014)

About the Book

In 2013, *The One and Only Ivan*, a book about a gorilla who lived in a shopping mall, won the coveted Newbery Medal. The story was based on the real life of a gorilla who was stolen by poachers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Africa. In 1964, when Ivan was snatched from his troop, it was fairly common for zoos and even individuals to buy gorillas this way. In the case of Ivan, a couple who owned a shopping mall in Tacoma, Washington, decided they wanted to boost their sales and bought Ivan and a young female gorilla to showcase in their mall. Times have changed, and gorillas are no longer procured in this illegal manner. Ivan's life, however, was changed forever when the poachers grabbed him. *The One and Only Ivan* is fictional, but this book, *Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla*, gives children the truth about Ivan's life and lets them decide whether capture was ultimately good for Ivan or not.

Ivan's story is a perfect opportunity for teachers to incorporate nonfiction into a unit on mammals. Because Ivan was immortalized in a popular Newbery Medal-winning book, children are keen to learn more about Ivan and about gorillas in general. A wonderful jumping-off point is reading *Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla* aloud to the class. This illustrated picture book is relatively easy to read, which makes it accessible for children to read by themselves as well. Why illustrations and not photographs? Not all of Ivan's history is documented in photographs, naturally. No one thought to record his capture on film back in 1964. The illustrator, G. Brian Karas, provides the needed visuals, and his pictures of Ivan throughout are accurate and endearing.

Nonfiction in the classroom and Common Core Standards

Nonfiction texts are a focus of the Common Core Standards (CSS), and books like *Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla* fit the bill. The CCS calls for instructional practices to move away from rote recitation of facts and toward critical thinking in the texts students read. Specifically, they call for:

- Regular practice with complex texts and their academic language
- Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational
- Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction

Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla addresses all three of these requirements. While the text isn't overly complex, students encounter new terms and vocabulary as they explore gorillas, their habitat, and their societal structure. Words and concepts like silverback, western lowland gorillas, and isolation are offered in the text. The questions you will find below are far from simple or obvious. These questions force the child to synthesize the information he or she has learned and form opinions based on that evidence. Finally, think about what children can learn by reading about Ivan's life. They learn about gorillas, first and foremost, but they also learn about the ethical treatment of animals and how humans have come to know that wild animals need far more than a cage and a dish of food. This nonfiction helps build empathy for all living creatures, and that can only be a good thing.

Specifically, nonfiction falls under the English Language Arts standards at each grade level.

Tasks for kindergarten include identifying the main topic and retelling details from the reading in kindergarten (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.2). In third grade, Standard CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.3 requires students to describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect. This book is intended for children ages 4–8, and there are specific standards for nonfiction that dovetail perfectly with *Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla*.

Nonfiction fascinates children because it informs them about the world in which they live. Teachers are often concerned that they don't know how to use nonfiction in their classrooms properly. It's true, there are differences in the structure of fiction (also known as narrative writing) and nonfiction (expository writing), but once students know how to approach nonfiction, they take to it like ducks to water.

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Children are exposed to fiction from their early years in the form of fairy tales and a wide variety of picture books. Because of this, they are able to negotiate fiction easily. They understand and anticipate that there is a beginning, a middle, and an end. They know that there is a problem that requires resolution. They also know that there is a message or purpose to the story and that the story is made up from someone's imagination. *The One and Only Ivan* is fiction. The author, Katherine Applegate (who wrote both books), heard of Ivan's story and made up a tale based upon it.

The differences between nonfiction and fiction are easily explained and shown to children. First, children need to learn that nonfiction is real. Everything in a nonfiction book is based on fact. While *The One and Only Ivan* is based loosely on Ivan's story, it is not entirely true, is it? For one thing, animals don't talk! That's a simple way to explain the difference between fiction and nonfiction: If it can't happen in real life, it's fiction. Applegate wanted to provide Ivan's point of view in her fictional story about him, and she chose to let us in on his thoughts as if he were talking to us. In nonfiction, everything described must be true and accurate, as in Applegate's follow-up book, *Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla*. Point out to your students that we don't hear Ivan's inner thoughts in this book. In real life, we couldn't, and nonfiction has to mirror real life.

Since *Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla* is based on a real gorilla named Ivan, this nonfiction does have a "story" to it. It tells the reader the true story of Ivan's life. There is no listening in on his thoughts in this book, because it is completely factual. Pairing this book with the fictionalized account is a great way to show children the difference between fiction and nonfiction. Exposing students to both books will enhance their understanding and enjoyment of Ivan's life story.

Activities

Since gorillas are mammals, it would be fun and informative to do a **Venn diagram** comparing and contrasting the characteristics of amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. By looking at all three classifications, children begin to distinguish a mammal from these other creatures. The San Diego Zoo has an outstanding, child-friendly website full of information you will need to compare these three types of creatures. It can be found at admindkids.sandiegozoo.org/animals.

Create a **Jeopardy** game sheet for the children, and separate them into as many teams as you would like. Each team is required to come up with facts about gorillas and/or mammals to quiz their competitors. As in Jeopardy, have columns with categories and dollar amounts as well. The team with the most dollars at the end wins the game. This provides terrific practice for what children have learned, and they have fun doing it. Not only do they have to come up with the facts, but also they get to be the experts when challenging

another team.

For those of you with technology skills, create two teams and have them create their Jeopardy game in PowerPoint. The free template can be found at www.edtechnetwork.com/powerpoint.html.

Website to view the real Ivan

Ivan lived to be fifty years old and died in 2012 in a natural habitat at Zoo Atlanta surrounded by other gorillas. The zoo's website is ZooAtlanta.org, and you can find actual video footage of the real Ivan there. Go to their home page and enter "Ivan" in the "search" box.

Critical-thinking questions based on *Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla*

These questions are not meant to elicit random facts or to constitute a ten-question quiz, but rather to require students to think critically and synthesize the information they read. They are meant to get children thinking and to support a robust discussion. The answers listed are only possible ones; real answers will vary.

- Q. Should anyone in the world be able to purchase wild animals? Why or why not?
- A. *The general consensus is that wild animals should be raised in a habitat as close to their original habitat as is possible. Wild animals are wild, and they can attack humans even if the humans treat them like pets.*
- Q. Ivan lived with the couple who brought him into their home for three years and was treated like a pet. What might be good about that and what might be bad about that?
- A. *Ivan became less and less like a gorilla and more like a human. In the end, he had to be caged, which was far different from having the run of the home where he lived. On the plus side, he did have social interaction, even if it was only with humans.*
- Q. When Ivan was moved to the shopping mall, his living conditions changed dramatically. He was now kept in a cage, where shoppers could stop and look at him. What were the problems with that?
- A. *Gorillas are social animals, and Ivan was all alone with no gorillas to learn from or interact with. He would have been a mighty, dignified silverback swinging from trees if he hadn't been abducted. Now he lived in a very small cage with a TV and an old tire to play with. Behaviors common to gorillas were no longer present in Ivan due to his isolation.*

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- Q. Poachers are people who go into the wild to steal animals they know will command a high price. Sadly, some poachers kill some animals to harvest their organs or their tusks. In our society we have “puppy mills,” which breed lots of puppies to sell. When having animals is all about making money, what happens to the animals?
- A. *They are not cared for properly. The poachers or owners of puppy mills have only a short-term interest in the animals. They need to keep the animals alive so they can sell them, but they generally give only minimal care.*
- Q. Compare Ivan’s life when he lived in the wild with his later life in the cage at the mall.
- A. *Then: His life was carefree, safe, secure, and part of an extended family. He learned by playing, rode on his mother’s back, and mimicked his father by chest beating. In captivity: He had no interaction with other gorillas, was used as a way to get people to come to the mall, and probably had a poor diet and didn’t receive veterinary services as needed.*
- Q. Silverback gorillas typically play an important role in their troops. They find food for the troop and are the protectors. In human society, families have protectors too. Who is the protector in your family and how does this person protect you?
- A. *Answers will include Mom and Dad, certainly, but may be extended to include grandparents and others.*
- Q. Ivan was a silverback, but he had no family to protect. When he moved to Zoo Atlanta and spent time with other gorillas, do you think he knew how to be a silverback?
- A. *Students will have different responses. Always ask them for the reasoning behind their answers so that they learn to connect their thinking with what is said in the text. This is the best way to check comprehension.*
- Q. When Ivan was moved to Zoo Atlanta, he was initially afraid of the other gorillas. Why do you think that was?
- A. *He had lost any connection to his kind. He didn’t know how to socialize or if these other gorillas would mean him harm.*
- Q. At the end of the book, the author says, “In leafy calm, in gentle arms, a gorilla’s life began again.” What does she mean by that?
- A. *Ivan had to relearn what it meant to be a gorilla—in his case, a silverback—and what it meant to be part of a family. He would now be with other gorillas and learn how to socialize. He would no longer be confined to a cage but would roam freely in a large area created for gorillas to feel at home.*
- Q. Based on this book, do you think Ivan would have been better off if the poachers never kidnapped him, or was life in captivity better for him?
- A. *Again, answers will vary.*

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