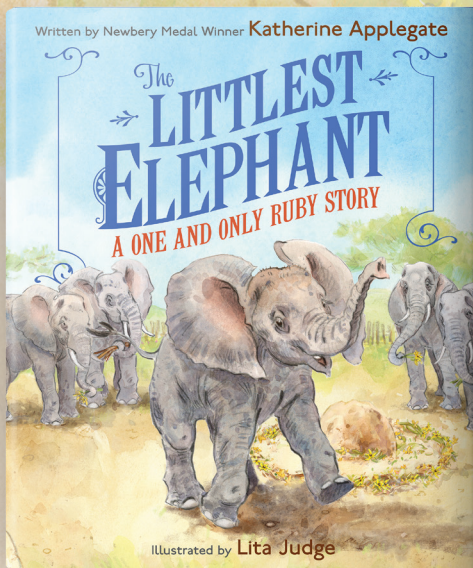


The LITTLEST ELEPHANT

A ONE AND ONLY RUBY STORY



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



ABOUT THE LITTLEST ELEPHANT

Have you ever felt like adults don't listen to you? That's how Ruby, a little elephant, feels. It's especially true because everyone in her herd is an adult elephant. She's surrounded by loving elephant aunts who teach her and take care of her, but do they listen? It's about to be Ruby's Tuskday, a celebration of the fact that she's growing up. Ruby's secret, though, is that she isn't sure she wants to grow up. Luckily, Tuskday brings a welcome surprise: It seems like Ruby's aunts do care what she thinks! Join Ruby in her daily life as she remembers her past and starts to realize just how lucky she really is.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss why the story opens with the sentence, "Nobody ever listens to the littlest elephant." How does the sentence make you interested in the story? Ruby is an elephant child, but can you give examples of how the sentence might also describe the feelings of a human child?
2. The story is told from the point of view of Ruby, the little elephant, using the word "I" throughout. How does it affect you as a reader to hear the story directly from her? What does her voice tell you about her feelings? How would it be different if a narrator told the story using "she" and "her" about Ruby?
3. What do the pictures tell you about Ruby's personality? What do you learn from the text and pictures about the activities of Ruby's daily life? What does she do that looks like fun to you?
4. Take a close look at the pictures throughout the book. What can you see about the environment where Ruby lives? Describe the vegetation and other features. Are there buildings? People? Which of the pictures seem to be flashbacks that show an earlier time?
5. What do you learn through the pictures and words about how the herd takes care of Ruby? How do the adult elephants comfort her? Why do you think she calls them "aunts"? What are some of her feelings about them? Why do you think Aunt Akello is especially important to Ruby?
6. Give examples of what the older elephants teach Ruby. What does she need to know that will help her as an adult elephant? Why do you think there are no other young elephants around?
7. What is Tuskday? Why is it important? How does Ruby feel about her own Tuskday, and why? Instead of celebrating Tuskday, what is her "good idea"? Can you think of any days for humans that are similar to Tuskday?
8. Ruby says, "Sometimes remembering is scary." Why is she afraid of some humans? Discuss the sentence, "I learned that bad humans can make the world change in an instant." Study the pictures as well as the words to understand her fear.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (continued)

9. Talk about why Aunt Akello says to Ruby, “Darkness reminds us to love the light.” What do you think she means? Do you agree with the statement? Why or why not?
10. Why do the aunts ask, “What gifts has the world given you, little Ruby?” Why do they say it’s a good question to ask every single day? What are some of the good things that Ruby thinks of?
11. A related question from the aunts is “What gifts did you give the world today?” Why do you think that question is part of the Tuskday celebration? What is Ruby’s first reaction? How does she finally answer the question?
12. The last two sentences of the story are “I may be the littlest elephant. But I am also the luckiest.” Compare those sentences to the first sentence of the book. What has Ruby experienced or learned in the story that leads her to feel lucky?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Attributes of Elephants

Do basic research about different attributes of elephants, using print and digital resources. Compile a list of five of the most interesting facts that you learn, with a sentence about why you find each one interesting. Create a class list of the facts. Hold a discussion about what you’ve learned and how it relates to the story.

Savor the Language

The author makes the story appealing for reading aloud by using vivid language and dialogue, with words like “slapsplash” and phrases like “their hearts are huge.” Find some language or dialogue that you like in the story and think about how it adds to your enjoyment. Share your findings with others in a small group.

A Closer Look

Working in pairs, choose a spread of two pages and make a close study of the illustrations. Discuss what you can learn from the two pages in terms of setting, characters, action, attributes of elephants, and so on. What do the pictures convey that is mentioned in the text? What do they convey that isn’t in the text? How do the text and illustrations work together to tell the story?

What Gifts?

Consider Aunt Akello’s questions: “What gifts has the world given you?” and “What gifts did you give to the



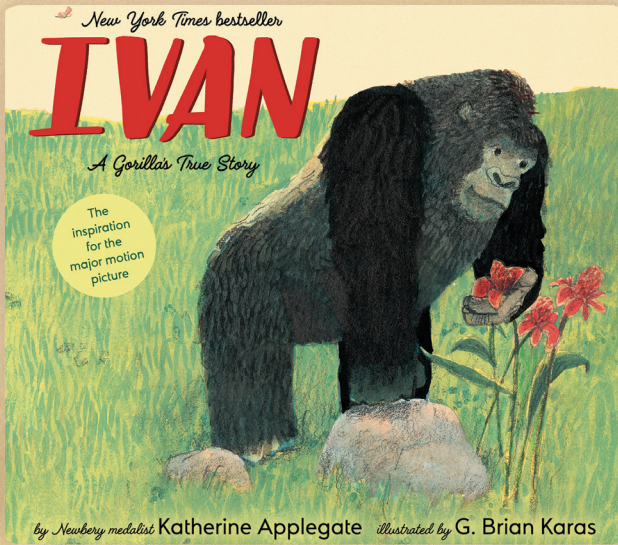
world today?” Answer them in terms of school and what gifts your class receives, such as learning a new song. Consider what gifts your class gives or could give, such as welcoming a new student to the school. Make a colorful poster with the questions and some of your answers.

Ruby’s New Friend

Write a short story in which you create a new friend for Ruby. The friend could be another little elephant, a different animal, or even a human. How do they get to know each other? Why do they like each other? What do they do together? Your story should include both dialogue and description. Illustrate the story and bind it into a simple book. Display the books in the classroom.

Guide prepared by Kathleen Odean, a children’s librarian who served on the Caldecott Committee and chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee.

MORE BY KATHERINE APPLGATE



For
Picture
Book
Readers



For Middle Grade Readers

