

Educators' Guide

ENDING

THE LAST



KATHERINE APPELGATE

Includes discussion questions, extension activities, and information about animal welfare and protecting endangered species

ENDING

THE LAST

From Katherine Applegate, author of *The One and Only Ivan*

About the Book

Byx is a dairne, a rare doglike species with remarkable abilities. Besides being able to talk and walk on two legs like a human, dairnes can also always tell when someone is lying. For this reason, dairnes have been hunted to near extinction, and when Byx's family is murdered, Byx may in fact be the last of her species: an endling. With the help of some unlikely friends, she sets out on a dangerous journey to find a safe haven—and perhaps even others of her kind—all the while being hunted by those who want to eradicate her species.



Grades 3–7

About the Author



Katherine Applegate is the Newbery Medal–winning author of *The One and Only Ivan*, as well as several other books for children and adults. She is also the coauthor with her husband of the popular Animorphs series. She currently lives in California with her husband and two children.

Praise for *Ending #1: The Last*

- ★ “Fantasy lovers are in for a treat with this smartly paced, enthralling adventure.”
—*School Library Journal* (starred review)
- ★ “A bracing, propulsive read that will be a challenge to keep on the shelf.”
—*Booklist* (starred review)
- ★ “Themes of genocide, conservation, and magic are interwoven, providing thought-provoking questions for astute readers and educators.”
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)
- ★ “A suspenseful, tautly drawn quest.”—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

Guide created by Kathleen Odean, librarian, author, and Common Core workshop presenter

Discussion Questions

Before reading: Why does diversity matter among people and among species of animals and plants?

1. Katherine Applegate has created a detailed world with a well-defined social structure, a history, and a mythology. Explain who the governing species are and how they relate to each other. What is the mythological history about how this arrangement was created? Why are other species considered lower than the governing species?
2. Describe Byx and how she ends up on her quest. What makes her a good protagonist? How does she change throughout the course of the novel? Come up with five adjectives to describe her. Discuss why you think the author chose to have Byx narrate the story instead of using a third-person point of view.
3. Byx is known in her family for her curiosity. Her mother says, "I love that you ask so many questions" (p. 10). What role does her curiosity play in the story's plot? Give examples of when she's curious and what difference it makes.
4. Byx and the other dairnes can detect lies. How does that affect her life? When does the ability help her on her travels? When does it hurt her? How do humans feel about this special ability of the dairnes? Explain how Byx's own ability to lie helps her and her friends.
5. Tobble explains the Wobbyk Code after Byx saves his life. What does "code" mean in this context? What is the Wobbyk Code? How do Byx and Tobble meet? Describe Tobble, his background, his personality, and the characteristics of his species. How does Tobble show courage? What is a stibillary and why do Byx and the others perform one for Tobble?
6. Describe how Byx meets Khara. She's a mysterious figure when Byx first encounters her. Why does she pose as male? Why is she working for poachers? What is her family history? What are her goals? Explain how her relationship with Byx changes over the course of the novel.
7. Byx recounts that, "My father had a saying: 'To rush is not necessarily to arrive.' He said it to me often." (pp. 19–20). What did Byx's father mean by this? What are times in the novel that Byx rushes? What are the consequences of those actions? Are there times when she rushes but doesn't arrive?
8. When did Byx, Khara, and Tobble first meet Renzo, and what did they think of him? What is their next encounter? Describe his personality and his occupation. How does magic help him? What role does he play in their quest? How does he change by the end of the story?
9. "The dairnes so true,/So free of greed,/May come and go,/Take what they need" (p. 125). Khara sings these lines about the original place of the dairnes among the governing species. What do the lines mean? Why did Byx's packelder, Dalyntor, call the ability to detect lies "a burdensome gift" (p. 126)?
10. Where is Cora di Schola? How does Byx get there and what is her reaction to the town? Describe the tower, its different levels, and what they are used for. Who is Ferrucci and how does Khara know him? Why does she take Byx to him? Why does Ferrucci betray Khara and Byx?

II. Who is Luca and when does Byx meet him? At first, Luca appears to be helping Byx and her friends. Give examples of his helpfulness. What are Luca's real intentions? Find places in the text that foreshadow those real intentions. How does Luca betray them and why does he do it?

12. What are some general characteristics of felivets? Recount the scene in which Byx meets Gambler. Why is Gambler imprisoned? Why does Byx insist on helping him escape? Describe Gambler, his abilities, and his personality. How

does Gambler prove to be important on Byx's journey? How does his attitude change, especially towards Tobble?

13. Describe enemies besides Luca that Byx and her friends face, including the Knight of Fire, the Pale Soldiers, and others. What are their abilities and what threats do they pose? How do the friends evade them or escape from them? How does evading enemies move the plot forward?

Extension Activities

LIKE THE DAIRNES. Changes over time, and the expansion of human territory and activities around our planet, have led many species extinct or in danger of extinction, not unlike the dairnes. Ask students each to find an extinct or endangered species that interests them, research it through digital and print sources, and create a multimedia presentation to give to the class.

KEEPING BYX'S JOURNAL. Byx starts to keep a journal, saying, "Whenever it came time to rest, I wrote down my impressions of the day or drew pictures" (p. 226). One page shows an excerpt (p. 265). Students should each choose a different chapter or two and write journal entries about it from Byx's point of view, including pictures. Bind the pages together of all the student work in chronological order to create a continuous journal.

WORDS OF WISDOM. Byx mentions several sayings, including "To rush is not necessarily to arrive" (pp. 19–20) and "Only fools know both the beginning and the end of the story" (p. 127). Have students find other sayings in the text. Then hold a

discussion about these sayings as well as traditional sayings that your students have heard, what they mean, and why sayings are part of a culture. Then have each student interview older relatives and friends to collect at least five sayings and what they mean. Designate a bulletin board for posting these.

CHART THE WORLD. The intricate social structure helps create a fully realized world in Endling. Have students create an organizational chart to show the different species, with the governing species on top and the others below, as described in the novel. For each species where it's known, the chart should list some important characteristics. Have students compare their charts to see if there are differences.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN? The fully realized world that Applegate has created also includes a lot of new words such as names of animals, plants, food, ceremonies, places, and so on. Ask students to each create a glossary for the novel that includes proper nouns. Talk about the uses of a glossary and have students find examples in other books.

A Q&A with Katherine Applegate

What inspired you to write this book about a character who is “the last of her kind”?

A single, newly coined word started me on the road to this trilogy: “endling,” which refers to the last member of a species or subspecies. A recent addition to our lexicon, it struck me as a poignant reminder of the delicate balance of life on Earth. What would it be like, I wondered, to be that very last individual? I knew there was a story there, waiting to be told.

So many readers of all ages have been inspired by *The One and Only Ivan*. Is there a kinship between this story and *Ivan* in terms of overall themes of friendship and family?

Both books explore how we define family and how the bonds of friendship develop, sometimes during the most difficult moments of our lives. Byx, the main character in *Endling*, and Ivan, the main character in *The One and Only Ivan*, find strength, meaning, and healing with the help of their friends—something we all hope for.

Byx (the central figure) is a very strong female character in this book. What is it about Byx that’s particularly compelling as a character?

I loved writing Byx! She’s one of my all-time favorite characters: sweet, naive, hopeful ... and one tough cookie in a battle.

Byx is a “dairne,” a member of a doglike species that’s been hunted to near-extinction. As the smallest and weakest in her dwindling pack, she’s convinced she’s unimportant. When she discovers she’s probably the last dairne alive, Byx is filled with understandable self-doubt and fear. Nonetheless, as the story unfolds, she discovers hidden reserves of strength and wisdom.

So many species are at risk due to man’s interference and neglect. Talk a little about your feelings on the importance of protecting and preserving endangered species.

We are in the midst of a man-made mass extinction (some call it the “Sixth Extinction”), losing habitats and species at an alarming rate. It’s my fervent hope that our children will be better stewards of the Earth than we have been. Climate change, species preservation, habitat conservation: there’s so much to be done, and so little time.

We’ve seen too many “endlings” already. I don’t want my kids to witness the demise of the last tiger, the last polar bear, or the last acre of tropical rainforest.

There are both light and dark sides to human nature displayed in this book. What do you hope readers will take away about humanity in this story?

I think it’s vital to be honest. Humans are capable of shocking cruelty. But they’re also capable of breathtaking kindness and remarkable bravery. Hopefully, that’s what this story shows readers. As a matter of fact, that’s what all good stories do.

So much of what drives Byx in this story is the desire to be part of something—to not be alone. Is this something you feel has universal resonance with readers (and why)?

I think we all find meaning through connection, and dairnes are no different. Growing up, Byx has learned to define herself as a member of a pack. The pack is everything: root and branch, heart and soul. But when the pack vanishes, Byx has to learn to redefine herself.

Asking “Who am I and why do I matter?”: that’s about as universal as it gets.

Animal Welfare & Endangered Species

While this story is fictional, the devastation caused by outside forces on some of the world's most precious endangered species is not. Here are some important facts about endangered species everyone should know:

There are more than 25,000 species of plants and animals on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List in danger of becoming extinct. This includes one in four mammals, one in eight birds, one-third of all amphibians, and 70% of the world's cataloged plants.

Only about 12% of Earth's lands are protected as nature reserves.

Poachers illegally kill endangered animals. While there are laws protecting these animals, some countries don't have the resources to enforce them, and poachers often go free.

Take Action

Here are some things you can do, right in your own community, to help protect endangered species:

- Recycle
- Reduce waste
- Pick up trash you see on sidewalks
- Start a garden to create a habitat for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators
- Check out a local farmer's market
- Use reusable food storage containers instead of disposable plastic
- Carpool or use public transportation
- Create a compost pile
- Use your own reusable shopping bags
- Put a bird feeder or bat house in your backyard
- Shorten your showers to save water
- Switch to energy-efficient light bulbs
- Take a nature hike to identify local wildlife and plants
- Raise money for an endangered species fund
- Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth
- Invest in a reusable water bottle instead of disposable plastic ones
- With parent permission, send a letter to your U.S. senators and representative expressing support for endangered species
- Learn more about endangered species at your local library and share what you learn with others
- Turn off lights when you leave the room
- Get your school involved in conservation
- Plant trees

And visit the Animal Welfare Institute online (www.awionline.org) for more resources and information to protect endangered species.



Animal Welfare
Institute