

Teacher's Guide to *Applesseeds: Let's Go to the Circus*

May 2007

Getting Ready:

Set up a display of Circus books (check out this list <http://www.fairrosa.info/lists/circus.html> and/or ask your school librarian for help); arrange a bulletin board of circus pictures, if available, or set up a bulletin board, titled: Why I Would Run Away to the Circus... and invite children to post a story, essay, poem or letter about this idea.

Opening discussion:

Hold up the cover of the magazine and ask, "What captures your attention on this cover?" Move into a discussion of the circus by having students share stories of their circus visits and list the topics they mention on the board (elephants, clowns, cotton candy, etc.). Then discuss ways of sorting the topics into categories (e.g., animal acts, funny acts, daredevil acts or historical circuses and modern circuses). Encourage students to continue associating the information they gain from reading the magazine, class discussions, and projects with specific categories in order to remember what they learn.

Reading, Writing, and Discussion:

The Circus is Coming to Town, p 2 ff.; How Science and Some Elephants Raise the Big Top, p. 5 ff.

Reading for Information:

1. How did the word "circus" begin? (from a Greek word *kirkos* meaning "ring" or "circle"; from the *Circus Maximus* where the Romans watched chariot races and acrobats)
2. What kinds of circus acts did the ancient Greeks enjoy? (acrobatic feats, animal acts, juggling and tumbling)
3. What acts usually took place in the Circus Maximus? (chariot racing; also acrobats and tumbling and fights to the death between animals and human beings)
4. When did the modern circus begin and who started it? (Philip Astley, an English horseman, started the modern circus by doing horseback tricks as he rode around a ring, and then added acrobatic and animal tricks to his act.)
5. What is a menagerie? (a wild animal act)
6. What made Isaac Van Amburgh famous in circus history? (He was the first person to put his head inside a lion's mouth and to put a lion, a lamb, and a child in an enclosure together.)
7. What was the "Floating Palace"? (A Mississippi River paddle boat that towed a circus from town to town along the river)
8. How did the railroad change American circus history? (It made it possible for shows to travel all across the United States.)
9. What two forces make it possible for the Big Top circus tent to stand? (compression and tension)
10. What are king poles? (They are the center poles of the circus tent, usually four to six in number.)

Circus to the Rescue, p. 14 ff.

Questions for discussion:

1. Why did Seth Bloom decide to start a circus in Afghanistan? (He believed that learning circus skills would help children forget about the war.)
2. Can you think of another situation in which learning a new skill gives children hope for the future? (open-ended)
3. In your opinion, did the changes that Bloom hoped for occur? If so, why? If not, why not? (open-ended)
4. Why does the author Diane Sammet begin her story, "Sharifa needed a miracle"? (open-ended)
5. What happened when Sharifa saw the juggler for the first time? (She stared, smiled, and laughed.)
6. What did the Afghan Mobile Mini Circus for Children do for Sharifa? (open-ended)
7. What purposes does the Afghan Mobile Circus for Children serve? (Some purposes: It amuses children, it trains children in circus skills, it helps rebuild children's lives.)
8. How was Sharifa drawn into the juggling group?
9. How have you or someone you know been drawn to learn a new skill? (open-ended)
10. If you encountered children in a country that had faced war, what would you do to help them? Why? (open-ended)

Clowns are Good Medicine, p. 17

Write a compare and contrast essay discussing similarities and differences between the Afghan Mobile Circus for Children and the Clown Care Unit of New York's Big Apple Circus.

Projects and Activities:

Divide the students into teams to explore the circus through the following activities:

- Research the Roman Circus Maximus and make a mural of different activities in the ancient Circus. Next to the mural list ten facts you learned.
- Create an illustrated time line of the development of the circus from ancient to present times.
- Write a biographical sketch, using the magazine and other research materials, of one of these famous circus people or acts: P.T. Barnum, Tom Thumb, Philip Astley, Isaac Van Amburgh, animal trainer Gunther Gebel-Williams, the Flying Wallendas, juggler Francis Brunn, or others they might discover. The class might like to collect the sketches into a book for free reading time.
- Make a diorama of one of the animal shows mentioned in the magazine, e.g., elephants (p.12), Moscow Cats Theatre (p.13), Tiniest Circus on Earth (p.28)
- Create a circus act for a class circus. This can be an art project designing circus acts with wire or pipecleaners and decorated with scraps (such as The San Diego Museum project described in <http://www.sdmart.org/pix/education/Calder.pdf>) or can be clown, juggling, and other acts created by students.

Grand Finale:

Ask parents to provide circus refreshments and have students put on a show of individual projects and/or circus acts.