

TEACHERS' CIRCUS NOTES

The circus is coming! As CIRCUS DAY approaches your students may become excited. We encourage you to focus this excitement in the classroom with the following information and materials.

OUR CIRCUS DAY OBJECTIVES:

- 1) Elevate students' self-confidence.
- 2) Promote agility, exercise and laughter in physical education classes while introducing students to the fun, excitement, and rewards of juggling.
- 3) Help students develop hand-eye coordination, gross motor skills, and concentration skills.
- 4) Reinforce the quality of perseverance and goal attainment.
- 5) Add another successful positive experience students have during their school career.
- 6) Provide a life-long skill that can bring fun and enjoyment on subsequent occasions.
- 7) Offer students a change of pace in their academic schedule.

Juggling is an unusual mental exercise. Treated by the brain as a logical process – as are most learning processes – the left side sorts out how to juggle. Then the right side takes over and students find they can do it easily. A developed right brain contributes to awareness, mental agility, and creativity.

WORKSHOPS:

On CIRCUS DAY, we schedule workshops for students to participate in hands-on juggling (3rd grade and up) or pre-juggling (Pre-K through 2nd grade) classes. You are invited to attend and participate in the workshop by either: 1) learning to juggle alongside your students; 2) watching the instructions and helping to teach and/or; 3) helping students stay focused as we give instructions. We will open our souvenir table at the end of the workshop. Please have your students bring their souvenir money to the morning session.

TEACHING STUDENT TO BUDGET:

To enhance the CIRCUS atmosphere and to reduce its cost, your school has agreed to allow the sale of refreshments and souvenirs. Take this opportunity to give your students a tool that many adults struggle to master – budgeting. During the day, students have the opportunity to expand their learning and further master their new skills by purchasing juggling equipment and other souvenirs. Students may experience the impulse to buy as much as they can, therefore, leaving them with no money for refreshments during the show. By planning, students can take home a souvenir and enjoy a tasty treat. Budgeting is about making informed and well-planned choices. People who fail to budget, find their choices are made for them.

APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR AT LIVE PERFORMANCES

- 1) Sit quietly and listen. It is hard for others to enjoy the show if you are noisy.
- 2) Cheer and applaud when the performers do something you like.
- 3) Laugh if you find something funny.
- 4) Be silent if you do not like something. Hissing and booing are rude.

THE PERFORMANCE:

The day's highlight is our show geared for *children of all ages!* The cultural experience of going to our circus always includes juggling and balancing and never includes animals or clowns. Remind students that they will see things performed by trained professionals and they should not try these things at home.

We are excited to bring CIRCUS OF THE KIDS to your school and hope that these notes help you to prepare for our arrival. We look forward to making circus day a highlight of the school year for everyone!

EXPOSITORY AND CREATIVE WRITING

". . . besides, a writer, like an acrobat, must occasionally try a stunt that is too much for him."

E.B. White

The following is a range of sample circus theme writing assignments. The circus provides a focus for many different kinds of writing assignments. Some of them are as follows:

- Writing circus stories or poems.
- Writing about circus experiences.
- Writing letters for information about a circus.
- Writing advertisements or making programs, handbills, etc. that could be used in presenting a circus.
- Writing speeches for a circus ringmaster.
- Writing jingles for circus clowns.
- Writing circus reports.
- Recording information pertaining to a circus performance, for example, interviews with real circus people.

Many students will no doubt have attended professional circuses and can be asked to write essays, short stories, or poems based on those experiences. A research paper on a circus topic can also be assigned. There is abundant material available, for example, about the Ringling Brothers. A student might want to research some aspect of their tremendous success.

The following epigrams all deal with the circus; they are provided as resources to help teachers in the upper grades prepare writing assignments for their students.

"Thus was accomplished one of the most daring and useless feats (Blondin's crossing of Niagara Falls on a tightrope) that even this fast age has ever witnessed."

The Tribune, 30 June 1859

". . . Five men working harmoniously together to build something that became part of the American tradition, and which in those days of no television, and no cinema, and no radio, gave much of stimulation & color & delight, & even of education, to lives which were hungry for it all."

Hester Ringling Sanford

"Friday, I tasted life. It was a vast morsel. A Circus passed the house--still I feel the red in my mind though the drums are out."

Emily Dickinson

"In the circus parade there is glory clean down
From the first spangled horse to the mule of the clown."

James Whitcomb Riley

"Clowns are pegs, used to hang circuses on."

Phineas T. Barnum

"Fame is nothing more than a place in history and in the mouths of people who talk. It satisfies vanity, but only occasionally brings bread."

Dan Rice

"Tonight has seen me assume the motley for the last time. It clung to my skin as I took it off, and the old cap and bells rang mournfully as I quitted them forever."

Joseph Grimaldi

"Let . . . clowns speak no more than is set down for them."

Hamlet

"You can shake the sawdust out of your shoes, but you can't shake it out of your heart." *Cecil B. DeMille*

"A circus is a bright, spangled girl with a date in a town a hundred miles away tomorrow morning."

F. Beverly Kelley

"It was my fault for making the cat act when he had a headache."

the tiger trainer Proske after a near-fatal mauling.

"It is meat and drink to me to see a clown."

Shakespeare

". . . it is worth reporting that long before the circus comes to town, its most notable performances have already been given. Under the bright lights of the finished show, a performer need only reflect the electric candle power that is directed upon him; but in the dark and dirty old training rings and in the makeshift cages, whatever light is generated, whatever excitement, whatever beauty, must come from original sources--from internal fires of professional hunger and delight, from the exuberance and gravity of youth. It is the difference between planetary light and the combustion of stars."

E.B. White

"In the circus, it is like a dream . . . the flyers really fly and catch each other the way you are caught in good dreams."

Ernest Hemingway

"To ma, the equestrienne in full possession of her skills is superior to all the stars of the ballet, the opera or the theatre, to a Cinte Damoreau or to a Dejazet, to a Taglioni or a Dorval."

Honore' de Balzac

"Circus performers are emancipated beings. For them, the world is not what it seems to us. They see with other eyes. They live in the moment, fully, and the radiance that emanates from them is a perpetual song of joy."

Henry Miller

"Were Congress to pass a bill compelling every adult inhabitant of the United States of America to visit the circus at least twice a year . . . I believe that throughout the country, four out of five hospitals, jails and asylums would close down and millions of psychoanalysts would be thrown out of employment."

e.e. cummings

"People of the circus have in them two attributes, which even singly are rarely found, but which together make nothing impossible in the world, namely boldness and diligence."

Felix Salten

"The aerialists have the happiest smiles of all when they come down to earth after their dangerous flights. They seem to smile from the bottom of their souls, as if they were saying: look, I did it again!"

Vertes

"The circus means to me a brief re-living of eagerness and wonderment of childhood. Nothing else can bring it so vividly into focus."

Helen Hayes

"The circus is the only spectacle I know that, while you watch it, gives the quality of a happy dream."

Ernest Hemingway

"I don't know exactly what the circus gave me. Except that I saw people risking their lives while being beautiful, for the enjoyment of their neighbors. But I think that's enough."

Maxim Gorki

"The circus is change of pace--beauty against our daily ugliness, excitement against our boredom . . . Every man, woman and child comes from the circus refreshed and renewed and ready to survive."

John Steinbeck

"To tell a good clown from a bad one is easy: either you are amused or you are not. But to distinguish a great clown from a good one is more difficult. A great clown will never give anyone the impression that he is playing a part. He never appears to have learnt his lines or studied his gestures. He seems to be a fathomless source of perfect improvisation. One is conscious of a power which appears limitless because it reverses our preconceived ideas . . ."

Antony Hippisley Cox

"No clown can be a real clown without the help of tradition and method, and an exhaustive technical training for his profession. Your clown, just as much as any other artist, is the product of tradition."

Grock

"My boy, if you want to be a successful clown, first you must be an acrobat, then a trapeze artist and a tumbler; in fact you must be able to do everything, and then you can think about being a clown."

Signor Truzzi, a circus proprietor - quoted by Coco the Clown

"The folly of clowns should always be the bouquet of long and slowly gathered wisdom."

James Agate

PERFORMING AND FINE ARTS

THE CIRCUS AS AN EXPRESSION OF ART

"But for one brief moment the young woman of the circus, swinging through space from one trapeze to another, is the grace of the flying Mercury."

Ralph Bergengren

One may reasonably ask whether the circus has any genuine claim to be regarded as an expression of art—and, if so, in what sense. In a 1909 article entitled "Taking the Circus Seriously," Ralph Bergengren argues that it does and that its aesthetic value consists in the visible expression of strength, grace, and vitality. What matters, he argues, is that the performer's movements appear effortless, though they in fact require masterful technique: "Truth to tell we are deceived by the skill of a great actor into the belief that his fictitious danger is real, and by the skill of a great circus performer into the belief that his real danger is fictitious. It is the test of art in both cases."

Teachers are encouraged to refer to the Bergengren essay in preparing to discuss this topic. In learning more about the circus arts, students will enrich their appreciation of the "masterful technique" underlying such things as a circus troupe's routine, the lighting and coloring necessary to create a circus atmosphere, the language used by the ringmaster to introduce circus acts, the training and keeping of circus animals, the sequence of tricks or acts in a performance, the design of circus costumes.

ASSIGNMENTS. The circus provides a focus for many different kinds of studio arts assignments. Some of them are as follows:

- Drawing circus animals.
- Making circus posters and handbills.
- Taking circus pictures and developing the film.
- Building animals and making costumes.
- Designing clown faces.
- Making circus puppets.

GRADE OF DIFFICULTY. The curriculum suggested above can be presented to virtually any rank of students, though of course with different expectations depending on the age and background of the class. For example, students at the elementary school level can be expected to draw a recognizable clown's face in crayon, ninth graders to work with greater skill using pastels or water colors, and high school seniors to create three-dimensional models.