LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
BOYS AND GIRLS,
CHILDREN OF ALL AGES...

COME IN TO THE CIRCUS,

HEAR THE MUSIC,

LAUGH AT THE CLOWNS,

BE THRILLED BY THE
PERILOUS LEAPS OF
THE ACROBATs

MARVEL AT
EVERYTHING
THE PERFORMERS DO...

... ONLY AT THE CIRCUS.
A circus is a travelling company of performers, which sets up its tents in your neighbourhood. When a circus is coming to the village or the town you’re certain to notice, because of the colourful posters they put up. Sometimes there is a parade in the streets. “Come and see, come and see…” This is how people are called to come and see the performance.

A circus is like a small village on wheels, with trailers and caravans where the artists and the animals live. The centre of the circus village is the Big Top. When the spectators come to the performance the Big Top is entirely illuminated and the music is playing. Just like stepping into some kind of fairytale world.

During the performance things will happen that are not usually possible: an animal trainer surrounded by lions, acrobats doing frightfully dangerous stunts in the roof of the tent, a man folding his body into a small case or jugglers keeping seven balls in the air. Everyone can see the performance clearly, because the people are sitting on tiers of seats around a circular ring. That is where the word circus comes from, because that is the Latin word for circle.

The various acts of the performance are announced by the ringmaster. In earlier days the ringmaster used to be the boss of the circus and he presented the acts with horses. Therefore he is wearing riding-boots and a long coat with a top hat.

**Tasks**

1. Have you ever been in a circus? What do you remember about it?

2. Do you understand why a circus tent often has bright colours and stripes?
   Choose an answer:
   - Circus people love bright colours
   - A colourful tent draws more attention
   - A striped tent does not get dirty easily

3. Where does the word circus come from?
The circus as we now know it started in England. From 1768, Philip Astley gave per- formances in London. At first, the performances were in a rented field, but in 1770 Astley set up his ‘Amphitheatre of Equestrian Arts’, with wooden stands for spectators to sit in. The performers were still in the open air.

Mr. Astley had been a horse-soldier, and he started giving riding lessons and horse shows to earn money. For the shows he designed a circular ‘ring’, of about 42 feet. This is the ideal size for acts on horseback so that the artistes can easily retain their balance. This size ring is still in use in almost every circus. After Mr. Astley’s acts with horses the clowns, acrobats and jugglers soon joined. They had been around before the circus existed, but were mainly seen at the fair or the annual market.

**Tasks**

1. Which country had the first circus? How long ago was that?

2. Philip Astley did not perform in a tent, but in a ..... 

3. Why is a ring in a circus round?
As soon as Philip Astley’s new type of performance was successful, other horsemen opened their own shows. Astley never used the title ‘circus’. It was one of his rivals, Charles Hughes, and his manager Charles Dibdin who were the first to call their show by that name. Later, Hughes was invited by Catherine the Great to take his trick-riders to St Petersburg, and this introduced the circus to Russia.

Another famous trick-rider, Andrew Ducrow, invented several circus acts we can still see today, such as the ‘Post’, where the rider stands on the backs of two horses while others pass between his legs. Ducrow was among the first to take his circus on tour. He did not use a Big Top (that was invented later), but set up a temporary wooden building to perform in each new city for some months. In all these early circuses, sawdust was spread in the circus ring so that it was not damp and slippery, and sawdust is still used in that way today -- it’s one of the things that makes a circus smell special.

Helped by his son, Astley also took his shows abroad to Paris, where he performed every year and gave the French people their first circuses. A Scotsman, Mr Ricketts, took the first circus to America. Later, the Big Top tent was invented in America, and British circuses began to use this new idea for touring.

The most famous British circus owner in the nineteenth century was ‘Lord’ George Sanger. He toured every corner of Great Britain, and made regular tours of Europe as well. This was a great adventure in the days when all transport was by horse-power. Sanger’s Circus used several hundred horses to transport everything, as well as the horses in the performance.

Other great British circuses were begun by the Fossett family, the Pinders, the Paulos, the Chipperfields, the Roberts, Billy Smart, and Bertram Mills. Later, Gerry Cottle’s Circus became famous, as well as Zippo’s Circus, Tony Hopkins’ circuses, and others.

**TASKS**

1. **What are the names of the first persons that used the word ‘circus’?**

2. **In what country a ‘Big Top’ was used for the first time to host a circus show?**

3. **Who was the first person that took his circus to America?**
The programme of a circus consists of about ten to fifteen different acts. A circus act is always unusual and exciting. But there is also comedy in the circus. Every circus has its own programme. Usually it is a mixture of animal acts and performances with acrobats, juggling and clowns.

Every act consists of seven to ten ‘tricks’. A trick is a part of the act. For a juggler this may be, for instance, juggling with five balls, then with ten balls and subsequently with seven rings. The tricks get a bit harder every time, keeping it exciting for the public to watch. The music helps to raise the excitement.

Circuses started off with horse acts. There are several kinds of horse acts. In ‘Liberty’ acts, the horses are directed by the trainer to move in formation, and the horses also dance to music. Then, there is ‘High School’ riding, or ‘equitation’. But the most famous act is acrobatics on horseback. The artists make all kinds of jumps while standing on the moving horse.

When the circus had just begun, other animals were trained besides horses. That was the work of the animal trainers. They trained mainly dogs, cats, pigeons, donkeys, cows, goats and pigs. Everyone knew these animals and therefore the public knew how hard it was to teach them tricks.

**TASKS**

1. Which animals did the circus started off with?
   Choose an answer:
   - With dogs, because every clown had a tame dog.
   - With cats and these turned into lion acts later on.
   - With horses, as they were part of the shows that were given.
   - With cows, because they stood in a meadow close by.

2. Why were people interested in seeing pet animals perform?

3. Which acts do you find exciting in the circus?
Tightrope walking literally means walking, or more likely dancing, on a rope. The rope may be tight, though some artists choose to walk on slack ropes instead. Some of them also walk on the ‘high wire’, high in the air. A musician or an orchestra plays while the circus artist ‘dances’ on the rope.

Juggling is the throwing and catching of balls, rings and clubs or other small objects and keeping them up in the air. Sometimes there are a lot of them at the same time. When someone is juggling you always see a certain shape, a pattern. The best-known pattern is the cascade, which means waterfall. For the cascade the juggler must have an odd number of balls to use, at least three of them. He throws the first ball through the air to his other hand. When the ball is at its highest point he quickly throws the next ball back with his other hand and keeps throwing back and forth so that a ball is in the air all the time. Juggling is a bit like magic and you need to practice for a long time to learn it.

TASKS

1. On which of the two photos you see a juggler working?
2. Why does a tightrope walker hold a long pole?
3. Try to make a cascade with three balls at home.
Acrobatics, like juggling, has been done for as long as we can remember, all over the world. There are different kinds of acrobatics.

The best known is the flying trapeze. Acrobats swing on a trapeze (a horizontal bar), high in the tent. They let go of the trapeze, fly at full speed through the air and grab the arms of the catcher. He hangs upside-down on another trapeze. Often the acrobats turn somersaults or other tricks between letting go and catching.

There is also ‘parterre’ acrobatics. This word means ‘on the ground’. The acrobats all climb on top of each other forming a kind of pyramid, and the ones at the bottom must carry all the others.

Contortionists are acrobats who seem to be made of rubber. Their bodies are so flexible that they can stay in weird positions for a long time. They may be able to fold themselves into a small package, or stand on one hand while their leg lies along their neck.

Nowadays there is also a ‘tissu’ act. Two long strips of material (‘tissus’ in French) hang from the ridge of the circus tent, and the acrobats use them to climb up and to perform tricks high up in these ‘curtains’.

**TASKS**

1. Which types of acrobatics do you know?
2. What is a somersault?
3. Draw a pyramid of acrobats, schematically.
From 1850 onwards, acts with large and fierce animals started to appear in circuses. At first the animal trainers mainly showed how wild the animals were. Because most people had never seen any real live exotic animals, they found that very exciting. After 1870 the training of wild animals began, and people started to teach the animals to do tricks. The animals learn those tricks because they are rewarded if they do them right. Nowadays, animal trainers particularly show the love and cooperation between man and animal.

Elephants are very special, partly because they are so big. The first elephants in Europe were shown at fairs. There were so few of them that they travelled throughout the whole of Europe so the people could see them. Elephants performed in the circus for the first time in the nineteenth century. The huge animals often walked in line through the ring while holding each other’s tail with their trunks. They also put their forelegs on ‘pedestals’, small platforms that look like a barrel. Because elephants are so strong, they were also used in the past to help build up the circus at each new site.

**Tasks**

1. What does an animal trainer do? How does he teach the animals their tricks?
   Choose an answer:
   - They are rewarded when they do it right.
   - The trainer demonstrates the tricks himself.
   - They are punished if they don't do it right.

2. Do you understand why people went to the circus, especially for the wild animals, around 1850?

3. Some people are against the presence of animals in a circus. What is your opinion about this?
The word ‘clown’ comes from ‘clod’, which means a simple-minded, clumsy, foolish person. There are several kinds of clowns.

For example there is the Auguste. He wears very over-sized, bright-coloured clothes and shoes which his feet would fit in to three times. His face has been made up in such a way that he always seems to smile, with a big, red, always-laughing mouth, or with eyes made to look sad by the make-up. He also has a big, round, red nose. The Auguste always plays the part of a servant.

His opposite is the whiteface, sometimes called the Pierrot. He has white make-up with red lips and wears a sparkling costume with a white cone-shaped hat. The Pierrot originates from Italy, from the pantomime theatre (a kind of theatre in which the performers don’t speak). This clown has a serious expression, and he is the boss of the Auguste, who constantly gets under his feet and distracts him.

Clowns are the ‘link’ throughout the whole show. When things have to be moved around in between acts, the clowns entertain the public with their jokes. They often imitate the circus act that has just finished, pretending to be clumsy. Then the public can see how difficult the act actually was, and if it was a particularly exciting act the people can relax and laugh.

**TASKS**

1. Choose a partner and determine together which type of clowns you will be. Perhaps you can dress up as a clown or use make-up for the looks. Choose a situation and play it as a funny act.
Circuses and fairs have a lot in common. Just like fairground people, circus people have to travel from town to town. If they would stay in one place too long, the public would not come any more after a while because everyone would have seen the show, so they would not make any money.

After the last show the whole circus is packed away and the circus site is cleaned. Circus people call this ‘pulling down’, because they say that, unlike a theatre show or a music concert, you don’t ‘break down’ a circus. Then everything is loaded on to trucks in order to travel as fast as possible to the next town, where everything has to be built up again.

Early in the morning at the new site the tent master puts a stick in the ground to mark the middle of the ring and the centre of the Big Top. Everything else will be built around this point. Electricity, water and toilets must be installed especially for the circus. Apart from the tent, in some countries called by its French name ‘chapiteau’, the circus encampment always includes a main entrance for the public, an artistes’ entrance, a pay desk, the trailers or caravans of the artistes and the other employees, the homes for the animals and the trucks for transporting everything.

Because a circus always arrives in a town or village suddenly, a lot of advertising has to be done. A few weeks beforehand colourful posters are hung up, so that everyone knows that the circus will be coming to town. Every circus has different posters and perhaps different colours, so that you can clearly see which circus it is.

TASKS

1. The tent master puts a stick in the ground and then indicates the place for the circus tent with sawdust. Try it yourself. Tie a rope to a piece of wood and draw with a pencil the outline of the circus.

2. If you would fly above a circus, what would you see?

3. People that come to work for the circus for the first time are always told to find the key to the chapiteau or the Big Top. Think about where they can find it.
Above all, circus people want to be good artistes. Often they are born in the circus and learn their skills from their parents and family. They have very little security. In the morning they can’t know how many people will come to the show in the evening, so they have no idea about the amount of money the circus will earn. Moreover – no matter how often they practice – there is always the risk that something could go wrong during the performance.

That is why many artists are superstitious. By doing or by not doing certain things, they try to make things go right. Some of the things they do are difficult to understand. Here’s one: they will never wish each other good luck but ‘Toi, toi, toi’, or ‘Hals- und Beinbruch’ (this is German and it means: break your neck and your leg!). They say that because they think that, whatever they wish, the opposite will happen.

Circus people know each other very well, because they travel around together. They not only work together in the circus, but their whole daily life takes place in and around the circus. On top of that most circus people have grown up in the circus, because their parents were circus artistes as well. The people who work in a circus come from many different countries. Many different languages are spoken in the circus because of this. Circus people who were not born into a circus family are called ‘jossers’.

Even if there is no show, everyone works hard. One person may be busy preparing for the next show, another one is training to learn something new, the animals are being cared for, and other people who don’t perform in the ring are needed for the pay desk.

Apart from their work at the circus, everyone must also manage his own household, like cleaning the caravan, doing the shopping and cooking.

**Tasks**

1. How do circus people live? What are they doing in between shows?

2. Are you superstitious yourself sometimes? When, for instance?

3. Find a circus photo on internet and stick it in the painting or, even better, make one yourself when the circus is in the neighbourhood.
Children in the circus have an unusual life. They are always on the move and live in a caravan or a trailer. Because all children have to go to school, some circus children get their lessons in a trailer, from the Travelling School, or they might do their lessons by internet, talking to the teachers at the school they attend when they’re not touring. When the circus or the performers travel abroad, they can also keep up their schooling by this ‘distance learning’. In the past the lessons would be sent and the homework would have to be sent back by regular mail, or the children would have to go to a local school in the town the circus was visiting. At most circuses there are just a few children, so children of all ages will be together in one class. After primary school age, when the children need secondary education, they often go to a boarding school, or they may go to live with family members who do not work at the circus.

The children do not learn to be artistes and performers at school, but from their parents or other circus artists. First they help a little with their parents’ act; later on, they will develop their own act.

These days, you don’t have to be born in the circus to become a performer there. There are circus schools in every country where you can train to be a performer, and also learn how to set up and care for the equipment you use, so that you can perform safely. In England, the most important schools are The Circus Space in London, Circomedia in Bristol, and the Academy of Circus Arts where the students learn while touring with the school’s own Big Top.

**TASKS**

1. Do children at your school come from different countries and speak different languages at home?

2. Who is teaching their circus skills to circus children?

3. Name three differences between the life of circus children and your own life.
WHAT DO YOU NEED:

- scotch tape
- skewers and toothpicks
- styrofoam eggs and balls (large and small)
- cardboard (shoe box and coffee cup)
- painter’s tape (‘masking tape’, made of paper)
- a piece of red curtain material
- a piece of felt
- glue
- a felt-pen
- paint (may be watercolour)
- some pins

PEDESTAL

Drawing 1
Take a cardboard coffee cup and cut off the upper half. Cardboard cups are better for this than plastic cups, because you can’t paint on plastic properly.

Drawing 2
Turn the lower half upside down and paint red and yellow triangles on it. The pedestal is ready for use.
**LION CAGE**

**Drawing 3**  
Put two pieces of scotch tape with the sticky side up on the table and put skewers on it at intervals of almost an inch.

**Drawing 4**  
Stick a second piece of scotch tape over the skewers and paint these 'bars' in a colour that you like.

**Drawing 5**  
Put the bars upright in a circle and the cage is finished.

Paper tape, like painters use (it’s called ‘masking tape’), works the best, because it can easily be painted.

**ARTIST ENTRANCE**

**Drawing 6**  
Take a piece of cardboard, for instance the lid of an old shoe box, and paint the artistes’ entrance on it with the name of your circus above it. Then draw a straight strip, about 4 inches wide, on each side, which will be folded backwards. Now the entrance can stand up by itself.

**Drawing 7**  
Cut out the entrance, fold the 4 inches wide strips backwards and paint the entrance.

**Drawing 8**  
Stick a piece of material behind the entrance as a curtain and the entrance is finished.

**RING**

**Drawing 9**  
Draw two circles on a strong piece of cardboard. One circle with a diameter of 14.5 inch and one of 15.7 inch. This is the circumference of the ring. Cut the entrance out of the circle and divide the circle into four pieces. Cut out the pieces; these are the upper edges of the ring.
Drawing 10
Measure the circumference of the four ring pieces and draw strips of 3.25 inches wide on cardboard, of the same length as the circumference. Draw sticking strips of half an inch wide at the long and the short edges and cut out the whole figure. Then cut out small triangles out of the sticking strips, to make the strip bendable.

Drawing 11
Glue the strips under the upper edges of the ring.

Drawing 12
Paint triangles on the ring. Now the ring is ready for use.

HORSES

Drawing 13
Attach a small styrofoam egg to a large styrofoam egg with one or two skewers and stick four of them into the large egg as legs. You’ve made a horse! Paint the horse in a colour of your choice, for instance brown, or white.

Drawing 14
Cut a strip out of a piece of felt and cut it to frills; these are the mane of the horse. Stick the mane half on the head and let it continue onto the horse’s back. Cut a few thin wisps for a tail and two little pieces as ears from the same piece of felt. The tail and the ears may be attached with a few pins. Draw the eyes on the head with a felt-pen.

LION

Drawing 15
Attach a small styrofoam ball on a bigger styrofoam ball with skewers or toothpicks. Then stick four skewers in it as legs. Paint the balls in the colour of a lion.
Drawing 16
Cut out a few strips of felt of 3.25 inch wide and cut it to frills. Glue the frills around the small ball. Cut an oval shape out of the same felt and cut it to frills all the way around. Draw the eyes and the mouth of the lion in the middle of the oval with a felt-pen. Stick the oval on the front of the small ball and attach it with a few pins while it is drying. Finally cut a few thin wisps of felt as a tail and attach them with a pin to the lion’s behind.

CLOWN

Drawing 17
Take a large and a small styrofoam ball and attach them with a toothpick. These will be the body and the head of the clown.

Drawing 18
Prick four skewers in the large ball as arms and legs. Cut a small styrofoam ball in half and stick the two halves on to the legs as feet.

Drawing 19
Colour the feet and the body of the clown. Draw the face on the small ball and the shoe laces on the feet.

Drawing 20
Cut a piece of rope into short pieces and glue these on the head as the hair of the clown. You can cut a bow tie out of a piece of material and glue it on the body under the face.

You can make the ringmaster and the other artists in the same way. Choose glitter material, because circus artists always look beautiful!
COLOURING PICTURE CIRCUS
1. Where does the word ‘circus’ come from?

2. What is the name of this circus?

3. Are there any animals in this circus?

4. The circus tent is round, usually. It often has bright colours and stripes. Why is that?

5. Which animals did the circus start with?

6. Why is the ring about 42 feet wide?

7. The man who announces the acts is called a ringmaster. Originally he wore riding boots and a long coat with a top hat. Very often he was also the owner of the circus and the most important man for the stables with the animals. Who is the ringmaster in this circus and what is his or her name?
8. Circus artists live in trailers and caravans. They travel along with the circus. How many trailers belong to this circus?

9. In the circus you hear many languages, apart from English. How come? What is the most commonly spoken language here?

10. What is the name of a stool on which an elephant, lion or other animals sit?

11. Why aren’t you allowed to put up an umbrella in a circus tent?

Name:

E-mail address:

Address:

Age:
1. What is a chapiteau?

2. Why is the ring round?

3. The circus programme often has a theme. Which theme is it with this circus?

4. How many acts are there and how many (groups of) artistes?

   Acts:

   Artists or groups:

Can you explain why there are often more acts than artistes?
5. Several disciplines make part of the circus programme. Draw lines from the circus act on the left to the circus discipline on the right.

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6. Who teaches circus artists their trade? Several good answers are possible.
- Their father or mother
- Other artists from the circus
- Teachers at a circus school
- A gymnastics teacher at primary school
- A supervisor in the children's circus
- The music teacher
- A football trainer

7. Why do clowns wear make-up?

8. What did you find the best act and the best artist?

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

Name: _______________________________________

E-mail address: ___________________________________

Address: _______________________________________

Age: _______________________________________

Scouting Expedition Circus
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   Circus means circle, the circle of the ring.

2. What is the name of this circus?

3. Are there any animals in this circus?

4. The circus tent is round, usually. It often has bright colours and stripes. Why is that:
   Stripes and bright colours draw attention and you can see the circus from a distance.

5. Which animals did the circus start with?
   Horses. You could easily do a show with them.

6. Why is the ring about 42 feet wide?
   It makes it easier to stand on the back of a running horse.

7. The man who announces the acts is called a ringmaster. Originally he wore riding boots and a long coat with a top hat. Very often he was also the owner of the circus and the most important man for the stables with the animals. Who is the ringmaster in this circus and what is his or her name?

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    Pedestal

11. Why aren’t you allowed to put up an umbrella in a circus tent?
    Because of superstition. Putting up an umbrella brings bad luck.
1. What is a chapiteau?

A French word for circus tent

2. Why is the ring round?

For the horses, so that the artist can easily do their acts on the horse's back.

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★ Other artists from the circus
★ Teachers at a circus school
★ Gymnastics teacher at primary school
★ A supervisor in the children's circus
★ The music teacher
★ A football trainer

7. Why do clowns wear make-up?

Because of the make-up a clown can have a smiling or a sad face.

8. What did you find the best act and the best artist?
COLOPHON

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, children of all ages...
Original title: Hooggeëerd publiek

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