

★ *Circus Across the Curriculum* ★

The Circus Arts is an interesting and enriching subject to integrate into your school's curriculum. It can be difficult, however, to find ways in which to introduce Circus Arts into every subject. The following is a list of potential focus areas and possible activities to help teachers get a head start in planning for your school's upcoming residency.

Language Arts

- Write a diary from the perspective of a circus performer.
- Use circus lingo to create mad libs, cross words and word searches.
- Prepare questions and interview the artist-in-residence when he arrives.
- Write letters requesting information from different circus organizations.
- Observe hyperbole used on the old circus posters and discuss advertising techniques. Follow up with reports given "barker style".
- Read *If I Ran the Circus* by Dr. Seuss. Have students create their own fantasy circus.
- Have students write a paragraph or story using circus jargon (see glossary)
- Read and write circus poetry.

Mathematics

- Study the rate of speed at which objects fall (juggling balls, clubs, people)
- Explore probability through the study of playing card fortune telling.
- Study time management and "time math" by timing and scheduling acts in a three-ring circus. Figure the number of possible acts in a circus.
- Make graphs about circus facts, use ticket sales, numbers of shows per tour, performer info, or anything you can think of.
- How much does a circus weigh? Research weights of animals and equipment and find a total. (This info. is available, see bibliography)
- Multiplication: How much food (In cost or weight) per day, per performer or animal, per tour.
- Study the use of space, i.e. the size of the ring, how many chairs will fit, how many elephants will fit, how many standing people, etc.
- Geometry: Study various shapes and areas needed to put on a circus show; look at angles of cables, floors, ceilings, ramps, etc.
- Budgeting: Use of money, costs of food, circus tickets, parking for cars, subway fares, concession sales, etc. What does it cost to run a circus? How much income does it generate?
- Using available resources, compare average costs for circus supplies such as apples, hay, meat/pound, and carrots in different markets. Have students research suppliers and costs in different cities. Create a wise purchasing plan.
- Discuss dimensions of a circus ring in radius and diameter.

- Statistics: At the end of the season, use real or made-up data to compile tour stats.
- There are just tons of circus word problems that you could think up.

Social Studies

- Explore circus history from Ancient Greece to Europe to the United States.
- Make a timeline of circus history.
- Study the sideshow and why it died out. Look at the changing American attitude about people with differences.
- Explore the culture of the circus community - modern "gypsy" life. Discover how children on tour with the circus go to school.
- Become reporters and create news briefs about the upcoming show. Write press releases and send to local newspapers.
- Research the Ringling Brothers' tour of North America and map it out.
- Study the impact of the train on the circus.
- Study the impact of major world historical events on circus (such as WWI, WWII, the Great Depression, etc.)
- Learn about all of the different careers with the circus and research their qualifications.
- Study economics and business management using circus as a model.

Science

- Discover what riggers and circus performers need to know about physics to keep the equipment and the acts safe.
- Explore the senses and the circus.
- Experiment with center of balance; center of gravity.
- Study generators as a source of energy for the traveling circus.
- Discover what makes popcorn pop.
- Study the science of lighting and color in performances.
- Study electricity, circuits, and wiring by diagramming a circus site for a show.

Physical Education

- Make pyramids and practice tumbling.
- Strengthen hand-eye coordination through juggling.
- Discuss and demonstrate the importance of stretching prior to performance.
- Develop balance skills by use of pedalos, the balance beam and rola-bolas.
- Encourage students to create acrobatic or dance routines set to music.
- Place a line of masking tape on the floor and have students pretend it is a tight wire. Have them develop routines on it.

Music

- Watch the musical “Barnum”
- Listen to traditional circus music. Discover why “Stars and Stripes Forever” is rarely played under the big top.
- Explore the origins of the three types of calliope. What is a calliope, and how is it played? What is the cultural significance of this instrument?
- Create instruments and march in a circus parade.
- Study the evolution of the circus band and circus music.
- Learn about how circus has used music as advertisement.
- Circus music is 120-132 beats per minute. What does this mean? What does this sound like? Why is this tempo used?
- Explore these questions: What was the role of the keyboard player in the circus band? The drummer? Why live musicians? What can they do that recorded music can not?

Art

- Build props and paint a backdrop for the upcoming circus show.
- Discover the three clown face types. Design clowns and use faces as canvas.
- Explore circus poster art and lithographs. Create posters for your school circus Show.
- Study folk art as found on horse-drawn circus wagons. Recreate a circus caravan in miniature.
- Compare art in advertising the circus from the beginnings of circus to present times.
- Discover the many circus arts and related arts and skills, such as mime, dance, gymnastics, puppetry, theater, street performing, etc.