

# The History of the Circus

## What is a Circus?

Have you ever been to a circus? Did you enjoy it? What was the best part? If you haven't been to the circus, you may have read about them or seen them on television. A circus is a show or **performance**. A circus can have clowns, a ringmaster, trained animals, jugglers and acrobats in it. It is great **entertainment**!

## Who started the **Modern** Circus?

A man called Philip Astley started the modern circus. In 1768, he started a show in London. In the morning, he taught at his riding school and in the afternoon he **performed** horse tricks for an **audience**. Philip Astley decided he wanted some more **acts** in his show too. He used acrobats, rope dancers and jugglers in the show. His show soon became very **popular**. So next, Philip Astley took his circus to Paris!



## Where else did the Circus go?

Soon after that, there were circus shows in America. In America, circus trains were sometimes used to move a circus from one city to the next. The circus trains were like a travelling town. Amazingly, they changed empty fields into **magical** places! Large **canvas** tents started to be used in the circus. Today we call this a Big Top! Circus shows soon got taken all over the world. In Russia, a **university** was started so that people could learn circus **skills**.



## How has the Circus changed?

In the past, lots of **exotic** animals were used in the circus. Sometimes these animals were not looked after well. **Usually**, animals are looked after much better now. Some circus shows do not use animals, for example the Cirque du Soleil. The Cirque du Soleil has lots of dancers and acrobats but no animals.

## Oral Teacher Questions – History of the Circus

What is a circus? (AF2) **A circus is a show or performance which can have clowns, a ring master, trained animals, jugglers and acrobats in it.**

What time in the day did Philip Astley perform his horse tricks? (AF2) **Philip Astley performed them in the afternoon.**

What was Philip Astley doing in the morning? (AF2) **Philip Astley was teaching in his riding school.**

Did people like Philip Astley's show? What word makes you think that? (AF3/AF5) **People did like Philip Astley's show. Popular means lots of people liked it. He had an audience of people watching it.**

How do you think Philip Astley felt when he did his riding tricks? (AF3/AF7) **Any acceptable response, for example proud or excited.**

Why do you think the writer said that circus trains were like a travelling town? (AF5) **They were moving lots of people and animals around.**

Why do you think they used a canvas tent for the circus? (AF3) **So it could be moved to different places easily. So that they could transform fields into magical places.**

Do you think Russian circus performers were good? Why? (AF2/AF3) **They were probably good because they had learnt circus skills at university.**

Is this information text fiction or non-fiction? Why? (AF5) **The text is non-fiction because it is an information text with facts. It is not a made up story.**

What is the writer trying to teach you about? (AF6) **The writer is trying to teach the reader about the history of the circus.**

## History of the Circus – Follow-Up Work

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How do you think Philip Astley felt when he did his riding tricks?

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Why do you think the writer says that circus trains were like a travelling town?

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Why do you think they used a canvas tent for the circus?

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Do you think Russian circus performers were good? Why?

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