



# The Circus

# What is a circus?

A **circus** is a company of performers that may include clowns, acrobats, trained animals, trapeze acts, musicians, hoopers, tightrope walkers, jugglers, unicyclists and other object manipulation and stunt-oriented artists.





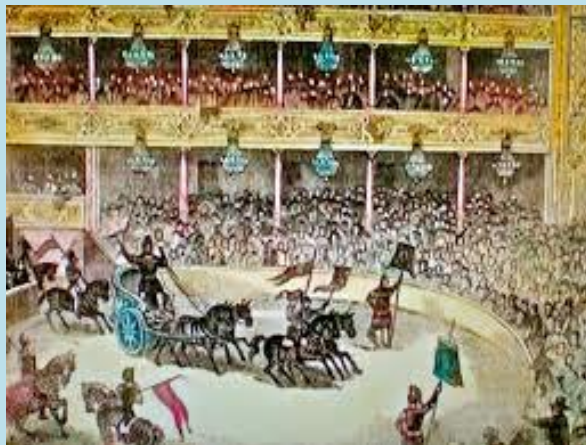
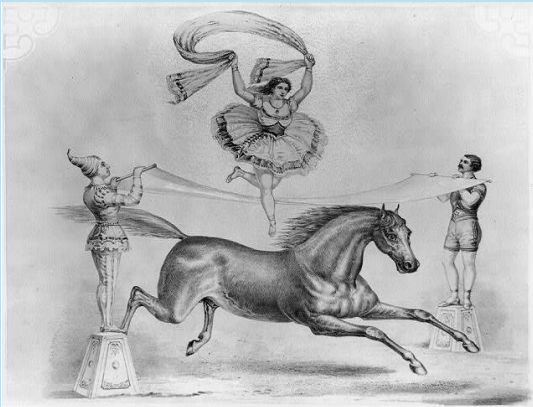
# Circus history

- The modern circus was developed in England by the son of a cabinetmaker and veneer cutter.
- Philip Astley (1742-1814) was a former Sergeant Major in the Fifteenth Light Dragoon Regiment and an outstanding horse trainer.



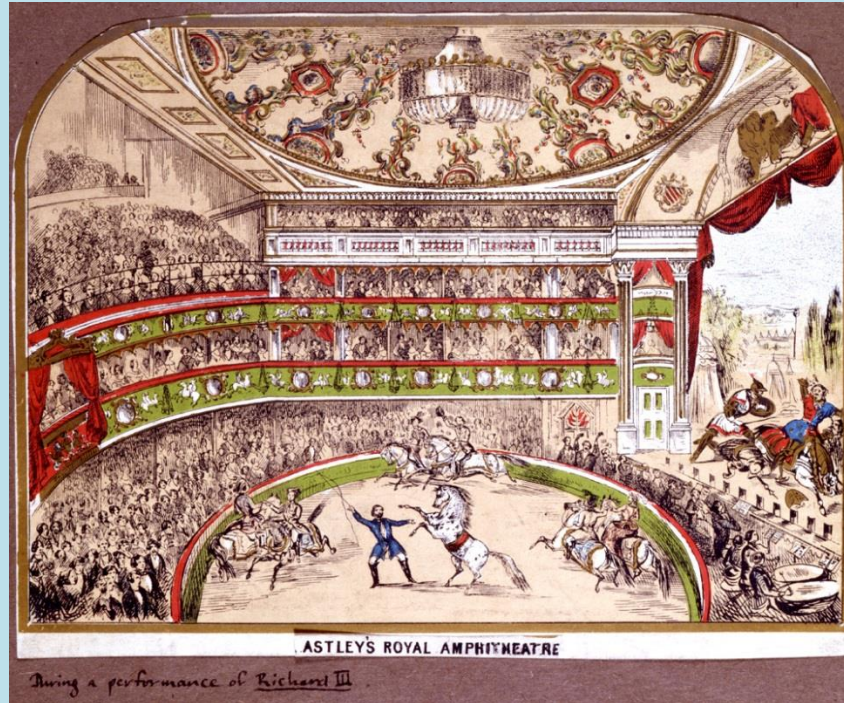
# Circus history

In 1768, Astley settled in London and opened a riding-school near Westminster Bridge, where he taught riding in the morning and performed amazing "feats of horsemanship" in the afternoon.





# Circus history



The school had a circular arena that Astley called his circle, or circus, which would later be known as the ring.

# Circus history

By 1770, Astley had recognised that he needed to bring something new to his performances.

Acrobats, rope-dancers and jugglers were added to his equestrian displays but Astley's real triumph was identifying the circus's need for clowns.

# Clowns

Throughout the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, jesters or fools played an important role in the social culture of Medieval Europe. They alone could answer back to authority. By making fun and satirising social customs and more, jesters were often catalysts for social change.



# Clowns

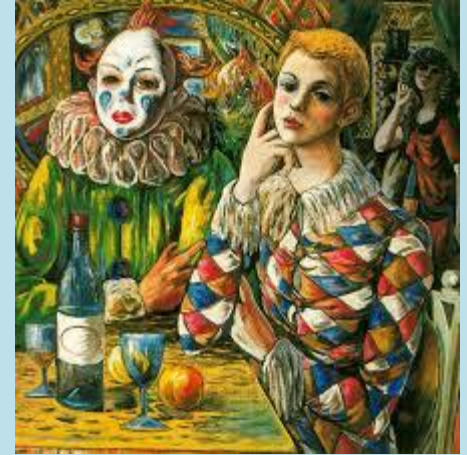
- It was during this period that the colourful costumes associated with today's clowns had their beginnings.
- During this period, Jesters adopted a fairly standard "uniform" of brightly coloured – often green and saffron coloured coats, two coloured hose and a hooded cap which was topped by little bells that rang whenever the wearer moved.





# Clowns

- From the 1500's to the 1700's spontaneous Italian theatre thrived and gave birth to a host of comedic characters which still survive today.
- These include Harlequin, with his patchwork costume, and Pierrot, one of the earliest clowns to use whiteface makeup.



# Clowns

French clowns began the type of funny clown we see in circuses nowadays. They performed juggling, tightrope walking, and tumbling shows in front of fairground theatres. These performances were used to entice fairgoers to pay to see the main show inside the fairgrounds.



# Circus tent

- In Europe, the travelling circus and menagerie reached its peak between World War I and II.
- In the larger cities, tented circus shows were very rare as circus performances were still presented in permanent buildings.



# Circus tent

By the end of the nineteenth century, the smaller tents of the one-ring show had given way to the "big-top" and the circus enjoyed a golden age.



# Lion Tamer

**Lion taming** is the taming and training of lions for entertainment particularly in the circus.



The term often applies to the taming and display of other big cats such as tigers, leopards, jaguars, cheetahs and cougars.

# Trapeze artist

A **trapeze** is a short horizontal bar hung by ropes or metal straps from a support. It is an aerial apparatus commonly found in circus performances.

Trapeze acts may be static, swinging or flying, and may be performed solo, double, triple or as a group act.





# Unicyclist

A **unicycle** is a human-powered, pedal-driven, single-track vehicle having one fixed wheel attached to a frame with a saddle.



# Hooping

**Hooping** is movement and dancing with a hoop (or hoops) to music.

Modern hoopers use heavier and larger diameter hoops, and frequently rotate the hoop around parts of the body other than the waist, including the hips, chest, neck, shoulders, thighs, knees, arms, hands, thumbs, feet and toes.



# Acrobatics

**Acrobatics** is the performance of extraordinary feats of balance, agility, and motor coordination.





# Circus skills

Nowadays, companies offer circus skill workshops, teaching links to many curriculum areas, such as PE, Art, Music, Literacy and Numeracy.

