



dance music theater

Cal Performances

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

SchoolTime 07/08



Study Guide

Circus Oz—*Laughing at Gravity*

Friday, November 30, 2007 at 11:00 a.m.

Zellerbach Hall



dance music theater

Performances

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

About Cal Performances and *SchoolTime*

The mission of Cal Performances is to inspire, nurture and sustain a lifelong appreciation for the performing arts. Cal Performances, the performing arts presenter of the University of California, Berkeley, fulfills this mission by presenting, producing and commissioning outstanding artists, both renowned and emerging, to serve the University and the broader public through performances and education and community programs. In 2005/06 Cal Performances celebrated 100 years on the UC Berkeley Campus.

Our *SchoolTime* program cultivates an early appreciation for and understanding of the performing arts amongst our youngest audiences, with hour-long, daytime performances by the same world-class artists who perform as part of the main season. Teachers have come to rely on *SchoolTime* as an integral and important part of the academic year.



Cal Performances Education and Community Programs Sponsors

Cal Performances' Education and Community Programs are supported by American Express Company Foundation, California Arts Council, California Mortgage & Realty, Design Community & Environment, Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Orton Development Inc., Sharon & Barclay Simpson, Pacific National Bank, The Wallace Foundation, Bernard E. & Alba Witkin Charitable Trust, and The Zellerbach Family Foundation.

Welcome

November 8, 2007

Dear Educators and Students,

Welcome to Cal Performance's *SchoolTime*! On **Friday, November 30, 2007 at 11:00 a.m.** your class will attend the *SchoolTime* performance of **Circus Oz: *Laughing at Gravity*** at Zellerbach Hall on the UC Berkeley campus.

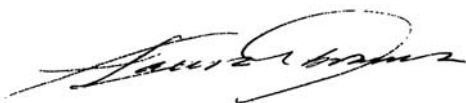
After more than two decades, Circus Oz, Australia's original and best contemporary circus troupe returns to Berkeley with a performance of wit, grace, spectacle, satire, and finely-tuned silliness. For the *Laughing at Gravity* Tour, the company has gathered a mind-boggling array of new world-class performers and created a treat of a show that melds anarchy with absurdity. As New York Daily News says of the show, "It is hysterical and graceful, awesome and intimate, weird and beautiful."

This study guide will prepare your students for their field trip to Zellerbach Hall. Your students can actively participate at the performance by:

- OBSERVING how the performers use their bodies, and how they work together in various acts
- NOTICING how the lights, music and sound enhance the acts
- MARVELING at the skill, technique and preparation required by the performers
- THINKING ABOUT all the ways circus is a theatrical art
- REFLECTING on the sounds, sights, and performance skills experienced at the theater.

We look forward to seeing you at *SchoolTime*!

Sincerely,



Laura Abrams
Director of Education
& Community Programs

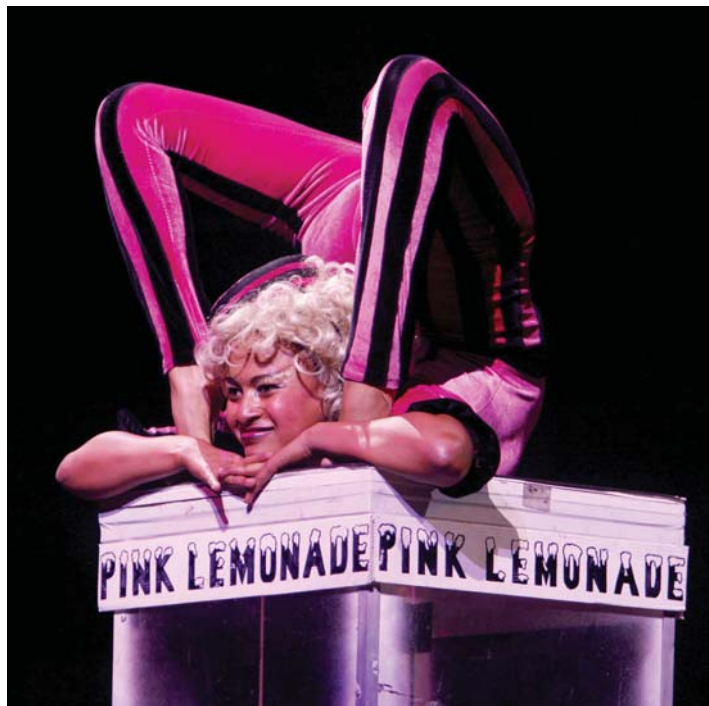


Rica Anderson
Education Programs Administrator

Table of Contents



1. Theater Etiquette	1
2. About the Performance	2
3. About the Artists	5
4. About the Art Form	7
5. About Australia	12
6. Learning Activities	15
7. Glossary	18
8. California State Standards	20



1 Theater Etiquette

Be prepared and arrive early. Ideally you should arrive at the theater 30 to 45 minutes before the show. Allow for travel time and parking, and plan to be in your seats at least 15 minutes before the performance begins.

Be aware and remain quiet. The theater is a “live” space—you can hear the performers easily, but they can also hear you, and you can hear other audience members, too! Even the smallest sounds, like rustling papers and whispering, can be heard throughout the theater, so it’s best to stay quiet so that everyone can enjoy the performance without distractions. The international sign for “Quiet Please” is to silently raise your index finger to your lips.

Show appreciation by applauding. Applause is the best way to show your enthusiasm and appreciation. Performers return their appreciation for your attention by bowing to the audience at the end of the show. It is always appropriate to applaud at the end of a performance, and it is customary to continue clapping until the curtain comes down or the house lights come up.

Participate by responding to the action onstage. Sometimes during a performance, you may respond by laughing, crying or sighing. By all means, feel free to do so! Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form. For instance, an audience attending a string quartet performance will sit very quietly, while the audience at a gospel concert may be inspired to participate by clapping and shouting.

Concentrate to help the performers. These artists use concentration to focus their energy while on stage. If the audience is focused while watching the performance, they feel supported and are able to do their best work. They can feel that you are with them!

Please note: *Backpacks and lunches are not permitted in the theater. Bags will be provided for lobby storage in the event that you bring these with you. There is absolutely no food or drink permitted in the seating areas. Recording devices of any kind, including cameras, cannot be used during performances. Please remember to turn off your cell phone.*



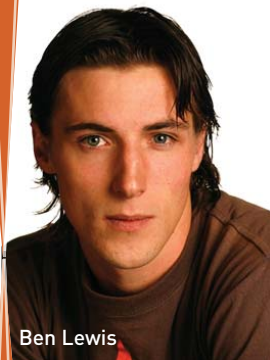
2 About the Performance



Mel Fyfe



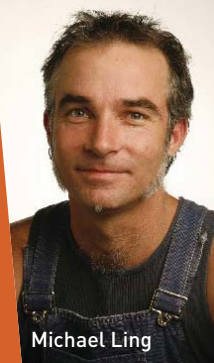
Joel Salom



Ben Lewis



Christa Hughes



Michael Ling

For the *SchoolTime* performance on Friday, November 30, at 11am, Circus Oz will present a selection of acts from their *Laughing at Gravity* Tour. The acts performed in this show include the following:

Circus Oz: Act Descriptions with Performers, from *Laughing at Gravity*

Bricksmash – Mel Fyfe and Joel Salom

As Strong Woman Mel Fyfe bends over backwards, three concrete slabs are placed on her stomach and then broken with a sledge hammer. No hidden tricks are involved in this stunt which uses real bricks, a real hammer and extra strong abdominal muscles.

Straps – Ben Lewis

A traditional Chinese act, Straps is an extraordinary display of strength. In a series of increasingly impressive plunges, performer Ben Lewis slowly rolls against gravity up two thin straps of canvas, then plunges suddenly back down again, barely missing the ground.

JAMIDI Juggle – Joel Salom

JAMIDI stands for Juggling Activated Musical Instrument Digital interface. In 1998, Joel Salom created this act by combining music and juggling. Recording samples from the audience, Joel then mixes these with other pre-recorded beats by bouncing his juggling balls on special pads strapped to his arms. Audiences still find it hard to comprehend that a digital sampler triggered by juggling is mixing the beats live.

Wheel – Mel Fyfe and Christa Hughes

The Rhoenrad Wheel looks like a giant hamster wheel, but it definitely doesn't stay in one place. Used by the Moscow Circus, this apparatus was first introduced to Circus Oz several years ago. The company then added the innovation of suspending the wheel in the air.

Flying Trapeze – The Ensemble

Many trapeze acts have been incorporated into the Circus Oz show. In a flying trapeze routine, there is a high platform at one end from which a performer grabs the trapeze bar and jumps off, and someone who 'catches' the airborne performers from another trapeze bar on the opposite side.

Cloudswing – Rockie Stone

Cloudswing is essentially one piece of rope attached to the ceiling at both ends. The performer hangs in a 'V' shape from the rope and performs dives, rolls, drops and other dynamic moves from the swinging rope. A trained dancer with razor-sharp moves, Rockie Stone's

version of this act is very precise and disciplined. She will often hang from the rope connected only by a single body part such as a hand, a foot, or even her neck.

Duo Acro – Ben Lewis, Rockie Stone, James Holt

Acrobatics is one of the ancient forms of circus arts. In partner acrobats performers work together to do handstands, tumbles, flips, balances and more. With movements ranging from precision control and stillness to mid-air somersaults and ‘pitching’ moves, this version of an old artform is inspired by on-stage performance at Rock concerts.

Swaypole – Michael Ling

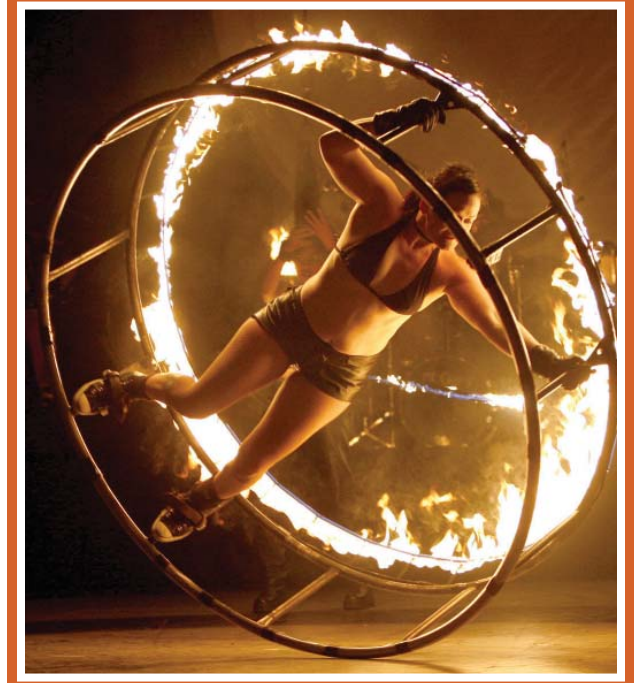
As the name suggests this is a long pole which bends... a lot! Michael Ling performs a comedy act on this flexible pole which actually leans right out over the audience.

Human Pyramids – The Ensemble

Human pyramids are associated with Moroccan acrobatic troupes and with firefighters’ physical displays. There is a village festival sport tradition in Catalunya (a Spanish province) where huge, 8-person high towers are built. Circus Oz’s pyramid techniques are inspired by a combination of these practices, Chinese sources, and their own invention. In the past, Circus Oz has done balances as lawn bowlers, classical human statues and a bunch of back flipping politicians. This time around they’re recreating the sights of their world tour in the form of postcard pictures.



Above: The Ensemble creates a four tier human pyramid.
Below: Mel Fyfe spins in a giant wheel of fire for the finale.



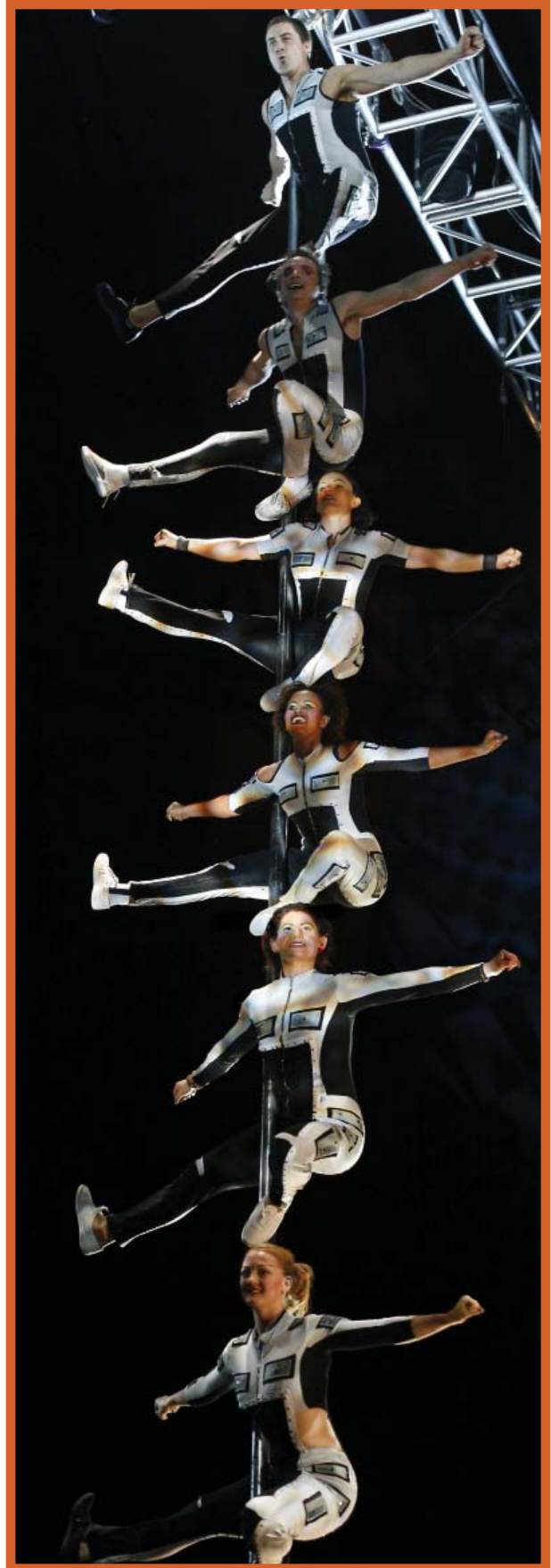


Group Bike – The Ensemble

This is another classic Chinese circus skill which Circus Oz learnt from members from the Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe. Circus Oz does it with a slightly less people, but a lot more cheekiness! Some of the company’s group bike combinations include: The Peacock which calls for 11 people on one bike, the Lotus which looks like a giant flower, and something called The Boat, which requires many people to pile themselves low on one small bike.

Fire Act – The Ensemble

During the fire act Circus Oz takes anything that may burn and sets it on fire—musical instruments, equipment, costumes... the lot! Actually, it’s a marvel of choreography as giant wheels, flaming torches, an aerial hula hoop and even drum cymbals all share the stage in a busy kaleidoscope of movement. It’s the Big Finish.



3 About the Artists

Circus Oz

Origins of Circus Oz

Circus Oz first performed in early 1978 when two already successful Australian groups, Soapbox Circus and the New Circus merged together. The principles at the heart of the original Circus Oz philosophy are still reflected in their performances today: collective ownership and creation, gender equity, a uniquely Australian signature and teamwork.

The founding members of Circus Oz loved the skills and tricks of traditional circus but wanted to make a new sort of show that a contemporary audience could relate to, so they added elements of rock and roll music, popular theatre and satire. They wanted their shows to be funny, irreverent and spectacular, a celebration of the group as an ensemble of multi-skilled individual women and men, rather than a hierarchy of stars. Above all, they didn't want to take themselves too seriously. They sewed and welded together their own circus tent, assembled a collection of old trucks and caravans and went on the road. Circus Oz was a fresh and original voice in circus and the company was immediately popular with Australian audiences. Within a few years, they began to tour internationally, with visits to New Guinea and Europe.

Since that time Circus Oz has performed in over 26 different countries, across five continents, to over two million people. They have broken box office records at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and represented Australia at scores of international festivals. They have



The Ensemble performing a classic Chinese style feat where multiple members all ride a bike at the same time.

performed on 42nd Street in New York, at the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, in a refugee camp in the Middle East's West Bank, in indigenous communities in the Australian desert and in a glass opera house in the Brazilian rainforest. Along the way they have translated parts of the show into scores of languages from Hindi and Japanese to Danish.

Circus Oz's Distinct Style

In the mid-1980s new contemporary circus and physical theatre troupes began to appear across the world, in the wake of Circus Oz. It was at this time that Circus Oz itself underwent a major skills development phase through intensive training with acrobats from China's Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe. Many

of the skills learnt over the years from the Chinese acrobats, such as pole-climbing and hula-hoop, continue to flavor the show; reinterpreted and presented in Circus Oz's own funny, fresh and distinctly Australian style. Only one of the founding members still performs with the company, and yet, as new waves of people have joined Circus Oz over the years, they have embraced the company's co-operative style and philosophy and made it their own.

The overall tenor of performances has remained consistent over the years. There are usually eleven to thirteen performers (normally with at least two specialized musicians) who present an intimate spectacle of unrelenting energy, humor, multi-skill playing, surreal imagery, grace and strength, fully integrated with a live and original musical score. Circus Oz continues at the forefront of international contemporary circus. Its performances today are as distinctive



and dynamic as its touring program – the critically-acclaimed sell-out seasons on Broadway being followed by successful tours of small Australian regional towns. The Circus Oz show is continuously revitalized with the injection of new ideas, skills and people.

Circus Oz's Message

Named after Australians' slang term for their country (Australians refer to themselves as "Aussies" and to Australia as "Oz"), Circus Oz strives to reflect diversity, equality and cooperation in their performances. The company is made up of an equal number of men and women whose body shapes and sizes cover the spectrum. When someone leaves the company, instead of finding a replacement performer with the same set of skills, Circus Oz looks for a uniquely talented performer who is creative, friendly, and capable of working well within an ensemble. Then, they create new material around the performer's skills and personality.

Showing a group of very different people working together to attempt the impossible illustrates one of Circus Oz's main messages. If people are willing to take risks, work together, embrace differences and practice good will and kindness, anything is possible. With a belief in "Social Justice and a Good Time for All," Circus Oz has supported land rights for Australian indigenous people, opposed uranium mining, raised money for sick children and the homeless, assisted asylum seekers and refugees to Australia, and more. All the while, the company keeps its tongue-in-cheek attitude, laughing in the face of adversity, chaos and gravity and poking fun at figures of authority and self-importance in extraordinary, one-of-a-kind performances that are hilarious, intelligent, topical and beautiful.

4 About the Art Form

Circus Performance

Guiding Questions:

- ◆ What kinds of performers might you expect to see at a circus?
- ◆ What theatrical elements go into a creating circus production?
- ◆ Compare and contrast the variety of circuses from around the world. Discuss the performance styles each type of circus exhibits.

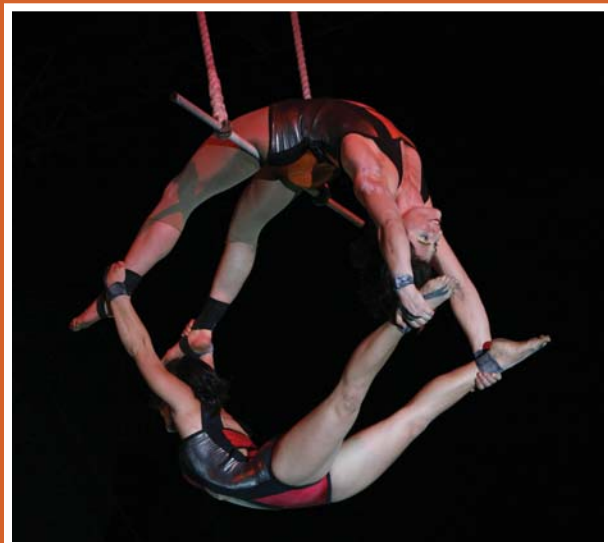
What a Circus Is

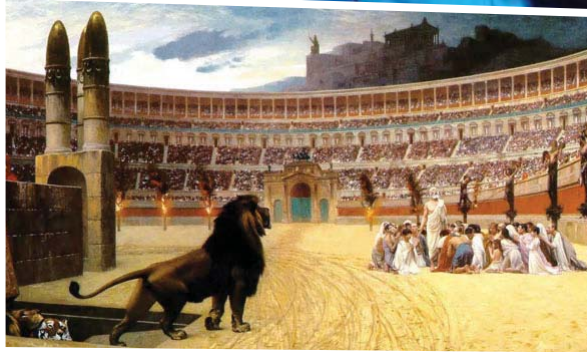
A circus is a group of performers that typically includes acrobats, clowns, jugglers, aerial artists, daredevils, and sometimes, trained animals. Circuses usually tour their show from place to place, setting up “rings” or performance areas in big open spaces, such as sports arenas, or in large tents. A circus performance is led by a ringmaster who acts as a narrator, or Master of Ceremonies, and who interacts with the audience, introducing each performer. Music accompanies the performers’ acts and most circuses have their own musicians or bands.

Since the circus is a theatrical performing art, it can involve special lighting, props, sets, backdrops, costumes and makeup. Some productions use all of these elements, but others are very simple. Lighting, sound, set, prop and costume designers work closely with choreographers to create a specific mood or theatrical effect. Costumes and makeup are also important in a circus. Costumes help define a character, but



Above: Scott Hone and Michael Ling using a bicycle as a prop.
Below: Ruby Rowat and Sharon Gruenert on the trapez.





they also affect a performer's movement or they way the audience sees the movement. Makeup can highlight a performer's own facial features and, like costuming, can enhance a performer's stylized look. It can also be used to exaggerate a particular feature or to create a transformation. As you watch the show, compare the makeup of the clowns to that of the graceful aerial artists and gymnasts to see whether you can tell what effect the makeup is intended to have.

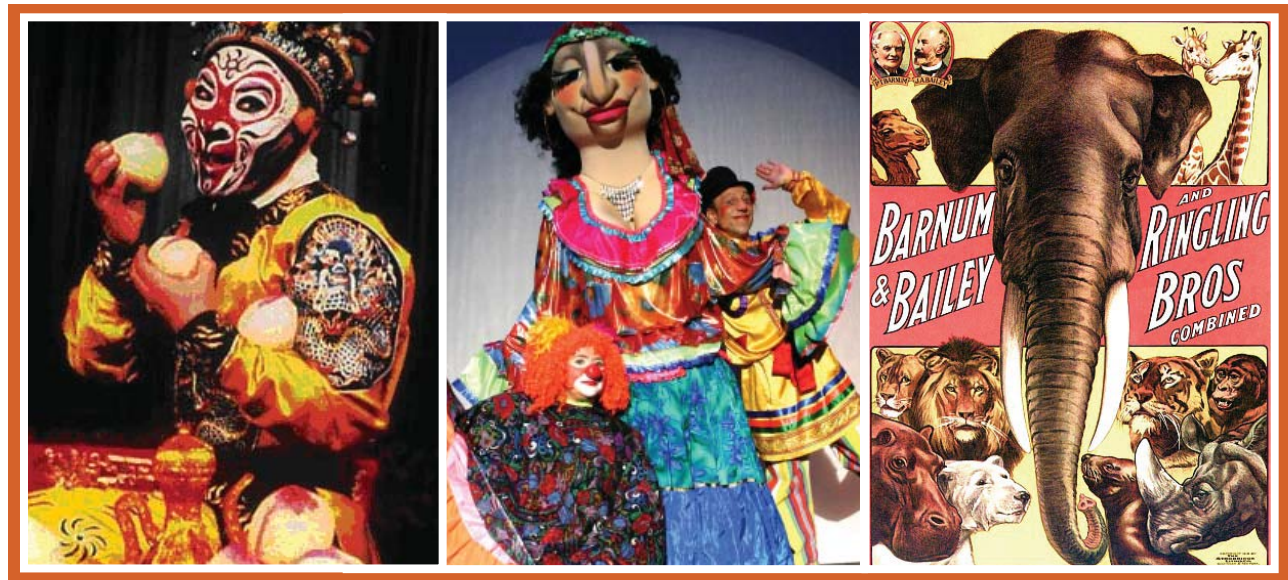
The New "European-Style" Circus

Cirque Nouveau or New Circus emerged in the 1970's from Europe, North America and Australia as a new and important form of performance art. Around this time, traditional circus began to lose popularity to other forms of entertainment. Also, the use of animals in circuses started becoming controversial. Animal rights groups discovered that some circuses treat animal performers cruelly, and in response, many countries have banned or limited the use of animals in circuses.

MoVing in a fresh direction, the New Circus chose to use only humans who performed phenomenal feats staged in ways that captured the imagination and stirred the emotions of the public. Merging traditional circus acts with elements from theater and contemporary culture, the New Circus introduced characters, narrative, and modern live music to their productions.

Origins of the Circus

Historians believe the circus began more than 4,000 years ago in ancient Greece, China, Egypt and Rome. Horse racing, juggling, balancing, tumbling, and clowning have always been a part of circuses. Historians have learned a



lot about these circuses by examining paintings of circus acts on ancient vases, palace walls, and tombs. In Europe and Asia, circus performers traveled from village to village, entertaining rich and poor alike with their amazing acts. Spectacular new feats were constantly added to keep the acts exciting.

Juggling three balls evolved into juggling lighted torches; when seeing riders standing on running horses lost its thrill, riders learned to do somersaults on horseback. Animals have been a part of the circus since the beginning. People who had never traveled far from home clamored to see animals from foreign lands. Circus animals typically included bears, lions and elephants. And although horses were familiar to many people as work animals and transportation, in circuses they were trained to work with riders on increasingly daring stunts.

The circus we're familiar with today became popular in England and then Europe in the mid 1700's when Philip Astley produced events which included trick horseback riders, acrobats, aerial artists, clowns and musicians. Performances were held in a circular arena; soon Astley built a structure around the arena, added seats, and the modern circus was born. Astley's business

boomed and he eventually established eighteen circuses in Europe. An Italian family, Antonio Franconi and his sons, took over Astley's French circus and built it into the biggest circus of its day. Their descendants became one of the most famous circus dynasties in Europe.

Circuses around the World

China

In China, acrobatic skills still admired today date back more than 2500 years. Acrobatic performances began as folk entertainment and later became popular with emperors. Performers incorporated everyday materials into their acts, using objects like plates, vases, chairs, ladders and bicycles as props.

Today, circus-style acrobatics still flourish in China. Chinese acrobats are well-respected as artists, and are famous for plate spinning, contortionists, chair balancing and bicycle tricks.

Ancient Rome

The citizens of ancient Rome (743 BCE to 476 CE) were fans of many kinds of spectacular entertainment, including the circus. Stories from this era tell of jugglers and acrobats, trained animals performing in squares and amphitheaters, and tightrope walkers.

Special buildings were erected just for circus performances; the first building was called Circus Maximus. Roman circuses were well loved and well publicized. Parades promoting circus performances marched through the city, encouraging people to attend. Two Roman emperors, Pompey and Julius Caesar, sponsored violent performances where exotic animals fought with each other and with human beings as large crowds watched.

Europe

After the fall of the Roman Empire in 467 CE, small groups of traveling performers journeyed from town to town to perform in marketplaces or noblemen's courtyards. They drove their wagons into a circle to create a stage for acrobatic, juggling and tightrope walking acts. Later, during the era known as the Renaissance, (1400-1600s CE), culture flourished and the public celebrated art, science and beauty. Florence, Italy was the center of the Renaissance, and Florence's splendid festivals and parades included many theatrical elements of the circus.

Russia

In Russia, the circus is a well-respected art form—as important as ballet or opera. In the late 1700s during the rule of Catherine the Great, an Englishman named Charles Hughes brought circus entertainers to perform in her court. Catherine the Great loved the performance so much she ordered circus rings built to highlight Hughes' production. After Hughes returned to England, his performers stayed in Russia, starting the tradition of the Russian Circus. The circus steadily gained in popularity and by the 19th century, it was the primary form of entertainment in Russia. In 1880, the famous Nikulin Moscow Circus was formed.

America

The circus gained popularity in the United States in the late 1700s, and American circus owners like P.T. Barnum added the display of bizarre human characteristics (such as Little People, giants and conjoined twins) to the circus tradition. America also influenced circuses in other ways. Horse shows were replaced by acts featuring exciting props, as well as by complicated acrobatics and tricks of strength and skill that involved large numbers of performers.

Circus Oz Staging Elements

Some of what makes a Circus Oz show exciting are the technical and staging elements that enhance the performance. These important behind the scenes factors include the following:

Lighting

Stage lighting can define and shape a performance space, make one area of the stage seem more compelling than another, single out one performer surrounded by many others, isolate one place from another and determine the overall tone of the performance, whether it is warm, cold, bright, somber, etc.

Each Circus Oz show is lit with around 100 lights, including "Par Cans," which are used at concert performances, and specialist lights called "Profiles." The last ten years has seen advances in stage lighting with the introduction of moving lights which can be operated to change directions during the performance. There are two types of moving lights: one where the whole light moves, and one that uses a moving mirror to redirect the light. Probably the best-known theater

light is the followspot light, which needs a human operator. Circus Oz uses three followspot lights and of the company's four light operators, three manipulate the followspots. The fourth is the lighting operator who communicates with the followspot operators via headset and maneuvers the moving lights using a computerized lighting board. The lighting operator's job requires a great deal of skill as the whole look of the show (and the safety of the performers) depends on how they control the brightness, color and timing of the lights.

Circus Oz redesigns their lighting each time they invent a new act, so the lighting operator is also a designer and a highly creative member of the team. Most of the lighting work occurs during the design and installation of the lights. Setting up lights in different venues every few weeks is challenging, especially since Circus Oz's ever-changing acts continually require new lighting designs. Each set-up is like a complex puzzle that when complete, creates an interactive, awe-inspiring picture.

Sound

Since Circus Oz's acrobats talk to the audience, sing and play music, the show uses around thirty microphones. Microphones are also cleverly employed

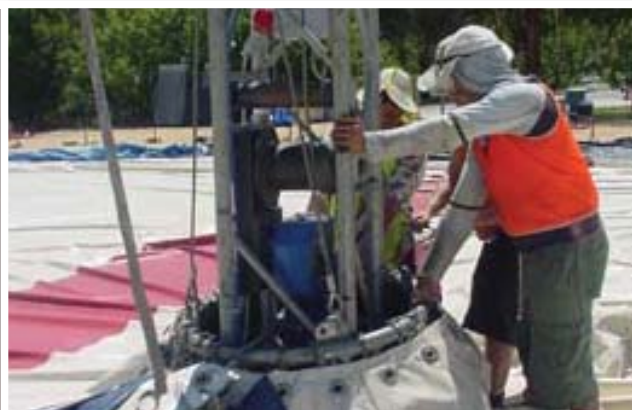
in certain acts, for instance in "Sosi's Ball Bounce," a microphone placed underneath a table captures the sound of the balls bouncing off its surface. This sound is then fed through a processor, which amplifies and distorts it, all in a nanosecond. Like the light operator, the sound operator has to juggle the various sound elements of the show. At times in the show, up to twelve performers might be playing music all at once, so the sound operator needs to integrate all of the different sound levels. At each venue, the company runs an extensive sound check to test the levels, and to make sure all the equipment is working. Once the sound is adjusted to suit the venue, the company also runs a sound check before each performance.

The Riggers

Riggers set up the physical equipment and have the weighty responsibility of making sure all of it is safe for the performers to use. It's a job that takes skill, experience, spatial ability and imaginative thinking, as figuring out how to fit the company's acts into different venues can be difficult. The multi-skilled and creative riggers at Circus Oz not only ensure that the performers stay alive and unhurt during the most daring of feats; they also perform in the show themselves.



Stage lighting adds to the overall drama of the performance.



Circus Oz riggers set up equipment for ariel performances.

5 About Australia

Guiding Questions:

- ◆ How are the climate and wildlife of Australia unique?
- ◆ How have other countries helped shape Australian culture today?
- ◆ What role have the Aboriginal people played in Australia?

Geography

Australia is an island continent in the Southern Hemisphere and is the world's sixth largest country. Australia also consists of the island of Tasmania and a number of other islands in the Indian, Pacific and Southern Oceans. The name "Australia" comes from the Latin word "Australis," meaning southern. Australia has 4,730,735 square miles of landmass and is separated from Asia by the Arafura and Timor seas.

The flattest and driest inhabited continent, the largest area in Australia is desert or semi-arid. The south-east and south-west corners of the continent have a temperate climate, and most of the country's population lives along the south-eastern coastline in cities like Sydney and Melbourne (Australia's two largest cities). Canberra, Australia's capital city, is halfway between Sydney and Melbourne.

The northern part of the country has a tropical climate and the landscapes include rainforest, woodland, grassland, mangrove swamps and desert. The Great Barrier Reef, the world's largest coral reef, lies a short distance off the north-east coast and extends for over 1,250 miles.





Plant and Animal Life

Because of its long-term geographic isolation, much of Australia's plant and animal life is unique and diverse. About 85% of flowering plants, 84% of mammals, more than 45% of birds and 89% of in-shore fish are native to Australia. Well-known Australian animals include the platypus, echidna, kangaroo, koala, wombat, and birds like the emu and kookaburra.

Many plant and animal species became extinct after the first human settlement, and more species disappeared after the European settlement of Australia. Today, several of Australia's ecoregions and the species living within those regions are threatened by human activities and plant and animal species introduced from other countries. Numerous protected areas have been created under the national Biodiversity Action Plan to protect and preserve unique ecosystems. 16 World Heritage Sites have also been established, these include The Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu National Park, famous for its ancient rock paintings, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park containing the large sandstone rock, Uluru (also known as Ayers Rock) which is sacred to the Aboriginal people of that area, several rainforest sites, and many other extraordinary places.

History

Australia's first inhabitants, the Aboriginal people and the Torres Strait Islanders living on the islands near Queensland, are believed to have migrated around 50,000 years ago via land bridges and short sea-crossings from what is now Southeast Asia. Most of these people were hunter-gatherers, with a complex oral culture and spiritual values and traditions based on reverence for the land.

The first recorded European contact with Australia was in March 1606, when Dutch explorer Willem Janszoon sighted the coast of Queensland in the northeast. Over the next two centuries, European explorers and traders continued to chart the coastline of Australia, then known as New Holland. However, it was not until 1770 that Captain James Cook claimed the country on behalf of Great Britain.

Since jails in Great Britain were overcrowded, the British government decided to use its new outpost as a penal colony. Believing hard labor and isolation would punish yet ultimately redeem prisoners, the British had previously sent criminals to work as indentured servants in America. Now, as a way of colonizing Australia, the British government sent thousands of male and female convicts

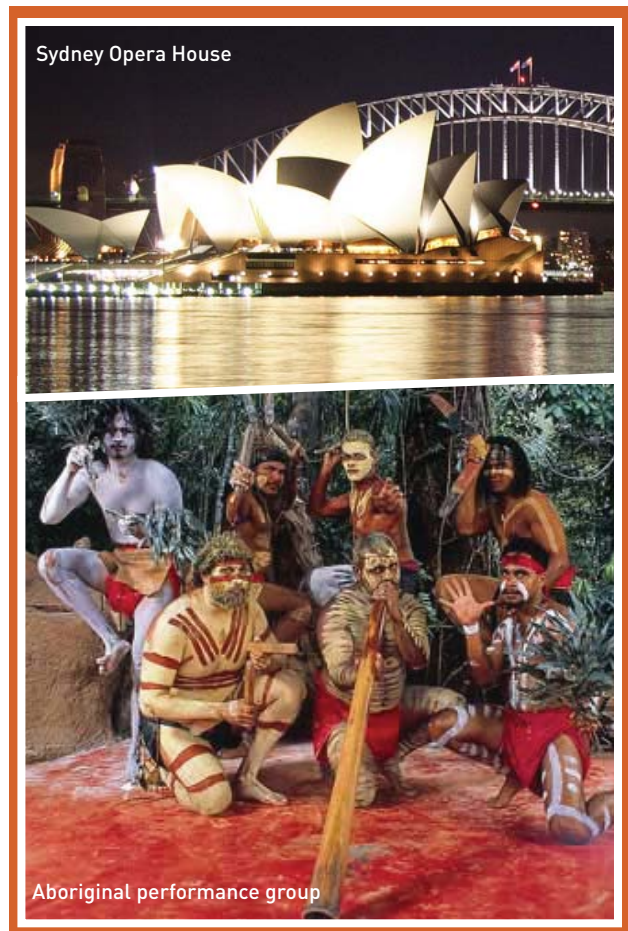
via ships to Australia from 1788 to 1868. Upon arriving, the prisoners were forced into a life of labor. The men were employed according to their skills as brickmakers, carpenters, cattlemen, shepherds and farmers. Most of the women worked in textile factors, although some became servants, and some were married off to settlers or convicts.

Around the 1790's, immigrants began coming to Australia attracted by the wool industry, while The Gold Rush of the 1850's, brought even more settlers. The need for laborers, the vastness of the land and the new wealth based on farming, mining and trade made Australia a land of opportunity. Yet during this period of growth, Indigenous Australians suffered death and illness from infectious diseases brought by the settlers, forced resettlement and cultural disintegration as children were removed from their families, supposedly for protection from what the government considered an "uncivilized" people.

Australia follows a system of government and law inherited from the British, and Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth II is considered their queen. However, in 1901, the country formed the Commonwealth of Australia through a federation of six states under a single constitution. Since federation, Australia has maintained a stable liberal democratic political system.

Culture

Today, around 21 million people live in Australia. While much of Australian culture is influenced by that of the British

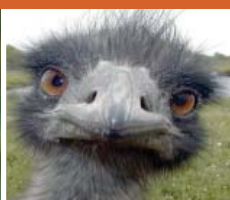


settlers who arrived from the 1700's on, distinctive features have also evolved from the unique environment and indigenous culture. Over the past 50 years, large scale immigration from Asian, Pacific Island and other non-European countries has also enriched the culture.

Sports play a central role with Australians, yet Australia also has an active tradition of music, ballet and theater, with many performing arts companies receiving public funding through the federal government's Australia Council. Australian Aboriginal music, dance and art have had a strong influence on Australian visual and performing arts.



Platypus



Emu



Kookaburra



Wombat



Echidna

6 Learning Activities

Science & Physical Activity (Grades 2-8)

The Science of Balancing

Many of Circus Oz's acts involve the performers balancing solo, in pairs and in groups. In order to balance, humans rely on signals that are sent to the brain from different parts of the body.

1) Walk across the room in a straight line. Easy, right?

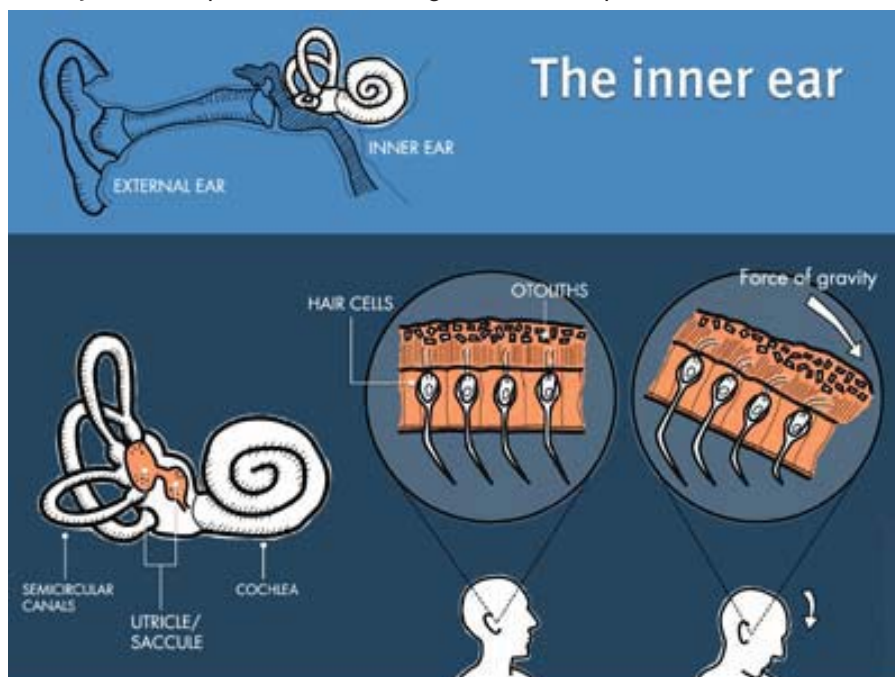
Now spin around 5 times and try to walk in a straight line. What happens? Discuss why you think this happens with the class, or in a small group.

Explanation: Your inner ear has a network of tubes and sacs that are sensitive to changes in the position of your head. When your head tilts or rotates, tiny, sensitive hairs in the ear are nudged which trigger impulses to a part of the brain stem called the vestibular nuclei. This region converts the signals it receives into a representation of your head's movement in space; it helps your body keep itself righted and lets your eyes track objects as your body moves. When you spin around, the extreme motion causes your inner ear to send confused information regarding your body's placement in space.

2) Stand straight up away from any walls and fold your arms. Then, lift one leg off the ground and try to balance. Now close your eyes. What was that like? Try it standing on the other leg and only closing one eye.

Is it easier or harder with eyes closed? Discuss with your group or class.

Explanation: The retinas of your eyes also relay information to the vestibular nuclei. Closing your eyes disrupts the visual signals which part of the brain receives.



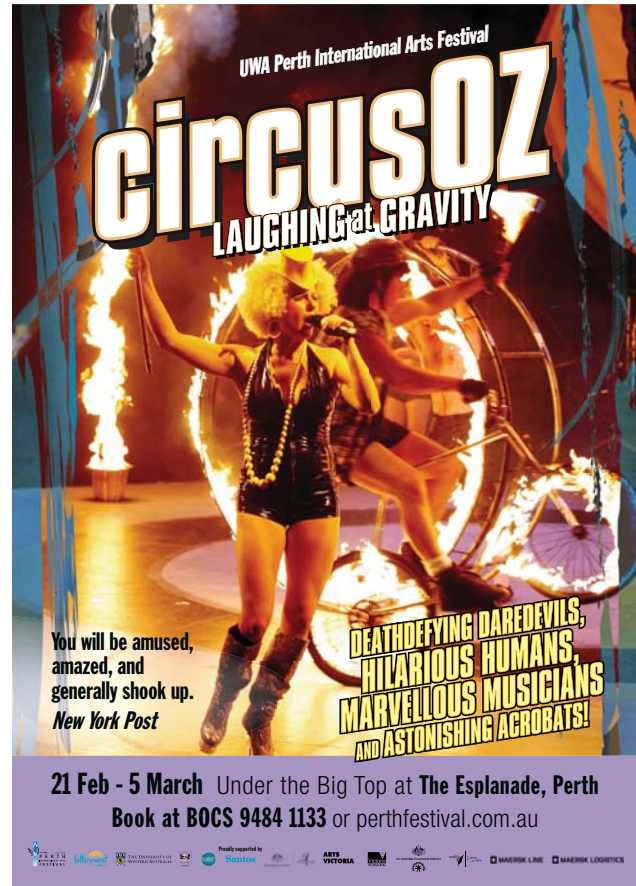
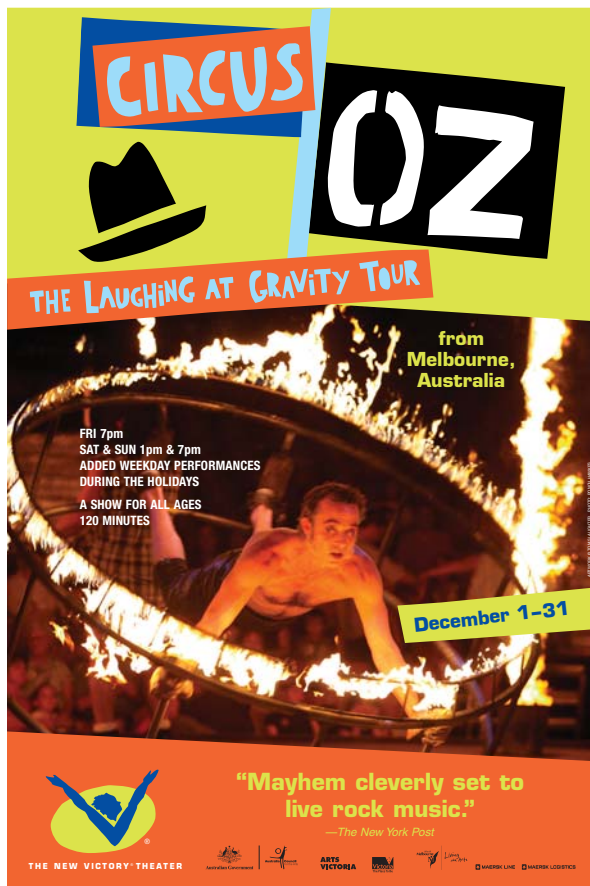
Visual Arts & Literacy (Grades 1-5)

Your Circus Act

Each of the performers in Circus Oz has a distinct personality which shapes the presentation and style of their act. Sometimes performers take on a “persona,” or role they display in public, which may be a heightened version of a part of their personality, or a character they’ve chosen to play.

If you were performing your own circus act what would your persona be? What name, nickname or catchphrase would you have? What kind of an act would you perform? How would you use music, sound and lighting to add to your act?

Describe your persona and your act in a paragraph or two. (Younger students may share verbally instead.) Then, using crayons, markers or paints, create a poster advertising your amazing act. Along with a fabulous illustration, remember to include the date, time, place and other important details of your performance.



History (Grades 4-12)

Australia & America: Compare and Contrast

Great Britain had a large role to play in the histories of both America and Australia. Do some research about the history and culture of Australia. Then, write a few paragraphs describing the ways in which Australia and America may share similarities historically and culturally, and ways in which they differ. You can also compare and contrast the geography, economy, politics, etc. of both countries.

Literacy (Grades 3-8)

Message to the World

In their performance program, Circus Oz states one of their beliefs, “The essence of The Circus is probably diversity combined with cooperation – a lesson for the planet.” Through their shows they hope to promote a message of “Social Justice and a Good Time for All.”

Think about what you believe in, what you value, and what you’d like to see happen in the world. Then, in one or two paragraphs, create your own message for the planet about what you believe, your vision of how the world might change for the better, and what your role in that change might be.

Resources

Circus Oz

<http://www.circusoz.com>

Circuses:

<http://www.circushistory.org/>
<http://www.moscowcircus.biz/>
<http://www.cirquedusoleil.com>
<http://www.chinaacrobats.com>
<http://www.ringling.com/>
<http://www.fairrosa.info/lists/circus.html>

Video & Audio clips on the web:

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=jPixZM7KdAs>
<http://youtube.com/watch?v=Cg-BSUo20tA>
http://youtube.com/watch?v=o9hRbabiT_g
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGXnC18nITg>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eP6AJXprOXc>

Australian Culture and History:

<http://www.about-australia.com/facts/>
<http://www.dfat.gov.au/aib/history.html>
<http://www.convictcreations.com/history/index.htm>
<http://www.freespirit.com.au/workingholiday/quickstart/>

Circus Literature:

[Circus Dreams: The Making of a Circus Artist](#)
by Kathleen Cushman.
[Circus Days Under The Big Top](#) by Glendinning.
[Harriet Goes to the Circus](#) By Betsy Maestro
and Giulio Maestro.
[The Family Circus](#) by Bil Keane.
[You See a Circus, I See...](#) by Mike Downs.

Images:

<http://www.flickr.com> [search circus]
<http://www.images.google.com> [search circus]
<http://www.webshots.com> [search circus]
<http://www.circushistory.org/Photos/Photo.htm>

Local venues featuring Circus Acts:

Red Panda Acrobats

<http://www.redpanda2000.com/>
phone: 415-731-5037

Trapeze Arts

<http://www.trapezearts.com/>
1822 9th Street
Oakland, CA 94607
phone: 510-419-0700

Head Over Heels Gymnastics

<http://www.hohgymnastics.com>
4701 Doyle Street, Building F
Emeryville, CA 94608
phone: 510-655-1265

Splash Circus

<http://www.splashcircus.net/>
phone: 510-655-1265

Prescott Circus

<http://www.prescottcircus.org/>
phone: 510-482-1674

ACROSPORTS

<http://www.acrosports.org>
639 Frederick Street
San Francisco, CA 94117
phone: 415- 665-2276

7 Glossary

Aboriginal people – the earliest known inhabitants of Australia along with the Torres Strait Islanders

aerial artists – performers who do their acts high in the air

asylum seekers – an individual who seeks refuge, esp. political asylum, in a foreign country

choreography – the art of composing dances and planning and arranging the movements, steps, and patterns of performers

commonwealth – an association of states with common objectives and interests who have voluntarily joined together

conjoined twins – twins that are physically united at some part or parts of their bodies at the time of birth

constitution – the system of fundamental principles according to which a nation or state is governed

contortionist – an acrobat capable of twisting into extraordinary positions

daredevil – one who performs dangerous stunts

echidna – Australian egg-laying hedgehog-like mammal with a spiny coat, slender snout, and an extendable sticky tongue used for catching insects. Also called a spiny anteater.

emu – a large, flightless Australian bird related to and resembling the ostrich and the cassowary

federation – the formation of a political unity, with a central government, by a number of separate states, each of which retains control of its own internal affairs.

followspot – a powerful stage light which can be controlled by a human operator to “follow” actors around the stage. Sometimes known as a spotlight.

gender equity – a belief in basic equal rights and opportunities for members of both sexes

hula-hoop – the trademark name for a light plastic hoop that is whirled around the body for play or exercise by the movement of the hips

indigenous – native to, originating in and characteristic of a particular region or country.

Indigenous Australian – descendants of the first known human inhabitants of the Australian continent and its nearby islands. The term includes both the Aboriginal People and the Torres Strait Islanders.

irreverent – showing little or no respect for people and things generally given deference to or considered important

kangaroo – a type of large Australian animal with a small head, short forelimbs, powerful hind legs used for leaping, and a long, thick tail. Kangaroos are marsupials – the females carry and nourish their young in a pouch on the front of their bodies.

koala – an Australian marsupial that has dense grayish fur, large ears, and sharp claws and feeds chiefly on the leaves of eucalyptus trees.

kookaburra – a large kingfisher (bird) of southern and eastern Australia with brown and white plumage and a call that sounds like loud laughter.

liberal democracy – a form of government that is a representative democracy in which the elected representatives’ decision-making power is subject to the rule of law, and usually moderated by a constitution that emphasizes the protection of the rights and freedoms of individuals.

Little People – a term used to refer to people with dwarfism, a genetic or medical condition that results in short stature, usually 4’10” or less in adulthood.

par can – a stage lighting fixture widely used in theatre, concerts and motion picture production when a substantial amount of broad, general lighting is needed to cover a large playing area.

penal colony – a colony to which prisoners are exiled and subjected to hard labor (often located on an island from which escape is difficult or impossible.)

persona – the role that one assumes in public or society; one’s public image or personality, as distinguished from the inner self.

platypus – a semi aquatic egg-laying mammal of Australia and Tasmania, having a broad flat tail, webbed feet, and a snout resembling a duck’s bill.

profile (light) – a spotlight with a moving head that is operated via a computer.

retina – a delicate, multilayered, light-sensitive membrane lining the inner eyeball and connected by the optic nerve to the brain.

rhoenrad wheel – a large wheel invented in Germany and constructed out of two steel hoops that are connected with several horizontal bars. Also called the Gym Wheel.

satire – irony, sarcasm, or biting wit used to attack or expose folly, vice, or stupidity

somersault – an acrobatic stunt in which the body rolls forward or backward in a complete revolution with the knees bent and the feet coming over the head.

temperate – characterized by moderate temperatures, weather, or climate.

textile – of or relating to fabrics manufactured by weaving or knitting.

Torres Strait Islanders – the indigenous people of the Torres Strait Islands, part of Queensland, Australia. They culturally akin to the coastal peoples of Papua New Guinea.

trapeze – a short horizontal bar suspended from two parallel ropes, used for gymnastic exercises or for acrobatic stunts.

tropical – relating to the tropics (the region on either side of the equator); when describing weather or climate; hot and humid.

vestibular nuclei – the cranial nuclei (collection of neurons or gray matter in the brain stem) for the vestibular nerve

wombat – a stocky, burrowing Australian marsupial that somewhat resembles a small bear and feeds mainly on grass, leaves, and roots.



8 California State Standards

1.0 Artistic Perception

Processing, Analyzing and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to Theater

Students observe their environment and respond, using the elements of theater. They also observe formal and informal works of theater, film/video and electronic media and respond, using the vocabulary of theater.

Comprehension and Analysis of the Elements of Theater

1.2 Identify the structural elements of plot (exposition, complication, crisis, climax, and resolution) in a script of theatrical experience.

2.0 Creative Expression

Creating, Performing and Participating in Theater

Students apply processes and skills in acting, directing, designing and script writing to create formal and informal theater, film/videos and electronic media productions and to perform in them.

3.0 Historical and Cultural Context

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of Theater

Students analyze the role and development of theater, film/video and electronic media in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting

diversity as it relates to theater.

Role and Cultural Significance of Theater

3.2 Interpret how theater and storytelling forms (past and present) of various cultural groups may reflect their beliefs and traditions.

5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications

Connecting and Applying What Is Learned in Theater, Film/Video and Electronic Media to Other Art Forms and Subject Areas and to Careers

Students apply what they learn in theater, film/video and electronic media across subject areas. They develop competencies and creative skills in problem solving, communication, and time management that contribute to lifelong learning and career skills. They also learn about careers in and related to theater.



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