The History of the Circus has been produced in celebration of World Circus Day for classroom practitioners and parents to help prepare a child for a trip to Circus Starr. Aimed at KS1 and KS2 children with differentiated activities to include children with Special Educational Needs.
Key Objectives
To find out about some of the acts in the circus.
To research the history of the circus.

Curriculum subjects and areas covered by the end of this lesson include:

- English – participate in discussions, presentations, performances, role play, improvisations and debates.
- History – construct informed responses that involve thoughtful selection and organisation of relevant historical information
- History – understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources.
- Computing - select, use and combine a variety of software (including internet services) on a range of digital devices to design and create a range of programs, systems and content that accomplish given goals, including collecting, analysing, evaluating and presenting data and information
- Computing - use search technologies effectively, appreciate how results are selected and ranked, and be discerning in evaluating digital content

Whole Class Activities
Show the children a range of photographs (resource 1) illustrating the different circus acts. As a group sort them into past and present photographs.
What might they see at the circus? (acrobats, clowns, trapeze artists)
Independent Activities

Children can draw a picture of what they imagine a circus looks like. This could include the big top and some of the acts they may see today.
Different mediums could be used to convey the colours and vibrancy of the circus such as pencil crayons, pens, paints or collaging using magazines and coloured paper.

or

Working in pairs/small groups children should choose an area of interest e.g. the first circus, the different types of acts, the use of animals, what a current circus is like.
Using circus posters (Resource 2) books, magazines, newspapers, ICT they should then research their particular area.
This could culminate in a presentation to the class using a speech, powerpoint presentation or a poster.

Plenary

What have we learnt? Each individual to share one thing they have learnt during the session.
Individuals/groups can present their image or findings to the class.

Resources

Photographs of the circus (resource 1).
Circus Posters (resource 2)
Textbooks with information regarding the circus e.g. Working at a circus by Mary MeinKing.
Access to the internet.
Powerpoint

Success Criteria

Children can create an image of the circus
Children can research a particular aspect of the circus.
Children can present their chosen topic to others
Resource 1

Suitable for KS1 or KS2

The History of the Circus

Danka Dear, Australia: Sascha Williams springs from scattering components of a rollabolla, Circus Sunrise, Victoria, Australia

The Serik Brothers, Circus Starr ©Briscoe Photography

Stefan Nolte, Germany: World-famous Italian clown David Larible in the ring of Circus Roncalli, Germany

Jessica Hentoff, USA: Circus Harmony’s youth performance troupe, the St. Louis Arches, perform at Circus Flora, USA

Nicolino the Clown, Circus Starr ©Briscoe Photography

Stefan Nolte, Germany: World-famous Italian clown David Larible in the ring of Circus Roncalli, Germany
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Circus Starr would like to thank the Federation Mondiale du Cirque for their kind donation of circus photography for use in this resource.

Stefan Gierisch, Germany: Brother-sister duo Rene, Jr. and Merrylu Casselly of Germany perform atop an African elephant, La Grande Fete L’Etoile du Cirque, France.

Manel Sala Ulls, Spain: Second and third generations of the Flying Millas (Chile), perform at Circo Atayde, Mexico City.

Essi Mäkelä, Finland: Equestrian performer Laury Tissuer of France with Picasso, a Lusitano stallion, Helsinki, Finland.

Linda Himsel, Sweden: Equestrian circus performer Claude Bouillon with her beautiful charge, Luna Caballera Circus, Quebec, Canada.

Nicoles and Miss Luna, Circus Starr ©Briscoe Photography.

Christa Fairchild, Canada: Equestrian circus performer Claude Bouillon with her beautiful charge, Luna Caballera Circus, Quebec, Canada.

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Varkus Moll, Germany.
The word ‘circus’ describes a performance which may include clowns, trapeze artists, tightrope walkers, hoopers, trained animals and jugglers.

The circus has been around for hundreds of years and there is evidence that dates it back to Ancient Rome. However, the modern circus is often attributed to a British Cavalry Officer named Philip Astley. In 1768 he created a space in London which brought together acts such as tricks on horses, clowns, acrobats and even wild animals. He called the performance area ‘the circle’ and the building was known as an amphitheatre, but this was later known as a Circus.

In 1792 the circus made its way to America through Englishman John Bill Ricketts who had travelled to Philadelphia. Circuses would tour the country, often building circus theatres in the cities that they visited. It wasn’t until 1825 that a large canvas tent was used to house a circus performance.

The Americans added a combination of animal and human acts, often using the exhibition of humans as a freak show or side show. They also began to use circus trains to move the circus from town to town.

Traditional circuses were and still are led by a ringmaster and often have a band that travels with them. Acts can vary widely, but can include some of the following: acrobatics, the trampoline, trapeze, contortion, stilts, juggling, plate spinning, clowns, human cannonball, fire breathing, knife throwing, magic and even sword swallowing.

Historically animals such as big cats, elephants, horses, bears, birds, sea lions and domestic animals have been used. However, these traditions have changed over time. Since the 1970's there has been a move into contemporary circuses which combine the traditional circus skills with theatrical techniques to convey a story or theme.

Circuses have changed and developed over the years but it is clear to see that they still play an important and significant role in our living social heritage.
Circus Starr is a not-for-profit, charitable organisation also known as 'the circus with a purpose'. With world class performers, aerialists, acrobats, dancers and entertainers from across the globe, it prides itself on creating a magical show that captures the hearts and minds of the youngest to the oldest members of the audience.

Circus Starr operates a unique Donated Ticket Programme that enables thousands of children to attend free circus shows every year thanks to the generous support of local businesses who, in turn, enjoy the opportunity to 'give back' to their communities.