HISTORY OF THE CIRCUS

Words

Look for the following words as you read the passage. Match each word with its correct definition.

Words	Definitions
1. ancient	A. v., to make something smaller
2. band	B. v., to continue, stay alive
3. century	C. n., something shown to the public; a display
4. develop	D. n., a special ability
5. entertainment	E. n., a small group
6. exhibit	F. n., a person who watches an event
7. exotic	G. n., a period of 100 years
8. found	H. n., a small leftover piece
9. grandeur	I. v., to grow and change
10. massive	J. adj., very old, of the distant past
11. permanently	K. n., place where an event is held
12. popular	L. n., a performance or show
13. reduce	M. n., a person who teaches skills to people or animals
14. remnant	N. n., greatness
15. renovation	O. adj., very big
16. spectator	P. adv., for always
17. survive	Q. n., repair or rebuilding
18. talent	R. v., to start or establish an institution
19. trainer	S. adj., liked by many people
20. venue	T. adj., unusual, from a foreign place

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Reading

History of the Circus

The circus is one of the oldest forms of entertainment in history. Although the modern circus has been around for a few centuries, related forms of public entertainment have been in existence for millennia. The animal trainers, clowns, and other circus performers who are familiar to us today can trace their roots to the coliseums, stadiums, and racetracks of the ancient world.

The ancient Romans were the first to enjoy the circus. Around the sixth century B.C., the Circus Maximus was founded in Rome as a venue for public entertainment, mostly chariot races, which were a popular spectator sport. Other events held at the Circus Maximus included gladiator fights and exhibits of exotic animals such as elephants and tigers. These entertainments were less common than chariot races but still very popular. The original Circus Maximus venue was built entirely of wood. By the height of the Roman Empire, it had gone through several renovations and had become a massive marble stadium that could seat more than 200,000 spectators.

Chariot races continued to be held at the Circus Maximus for almost a century after the last remnants of the Roman Empire had vanished. Eventually, the site was permanently retired, and public entertainment was reduced to small bands of traveling[1] performers and animal trainers. It was during the Dark Ages that the circus began to develop into what we know today. The monarchs of Europe had court jesters, whose duty it was to provide amusement for the court. They combined the talents of jugglers, mimes, and clowns. The more common people enjoyed the performances of traveling entertainers, who went from village to village, putting on shows during festivals. These performers made up the medieval circus, which had little in common with the Circus Maximus other than adopting the word *circus* as its name. Leisure time was extremely rare during the Dark Ages, and people had few opportunities to enjoy circus performances. However, the circus survived to make a return to its former grandeur in the eighteenth century.

England was one of the first nations to embrace the modern circus. During the late 1700s, an Englishman named Philip Astley founded the first modern circus. He was a skilled rider who invented stunt riding on horseback. He performed his stunts in a circus ring, another of his ideas, within an indoor stadium. After his act became popular in London, he was asked by Louis XV to perform in France. He later expanded his act to include clowns, acrobats, and parades of trained animals. The last addition to his act was slapstick humor. He had horseback riders

[1]BrE: travelling

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pretend to fall off their horses and then go stumbling after them. Shortly after Astley's death, the circus spread to America.

During the early 1800s, the United States took to the circus quickly after learning of its popularity in Europe. Joshua Brown, an American businessman, introduced the circus tent in 1825. The use of portable tents allowed him to take his act all over the country. His traveling circus was a massive success as a business enterprise and loved by audiences everywhere. Most circuses today are variations of Brown's circus.

Answer the questions about **History of the Circus**.

Questions 1–4

Do the following describe the ancient circus, the modern circus, or both? Write the correct letter, ***A, B,*** *or* ***C.***

A Ancient circus
B Modern circus
C Both the ancient circus and the modern circus

_____ 1. had animal exhibits

_____ 2. entertained spectators with races

_____ 3. entertainments included falling off horses

_____ 4. took place in a massive venue

Questions 5–7

Choose the correct letter, ***A, B, C,*** *or* ***D.***

5. The Circus Maximus
   A was not a popular place to visit.
   B developed during the Dark Ages.
   C went through a number of renovations.
   D took place in a portable tent.

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6. The court jesters of the Dark Ages usually
   - **A** were skilled animal trainers.
   - **B** had several different talents.
   - **C** performed at village festivals.
   - **D** entertained the common people.

7. In the eighteenth century, the modern circus was founded by
   - **A** a horse rider from England.
   - **B** a Roman businessman.
   - **C** some performers in France.
   - **D** a band of American entertainers.

My Words

Write the words that are new to you. Look them up in the dictionary and write their definitions.

Words	Definitions

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