

HISTORY OF THE CIRCUS

Words

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

Words

1. ancient
2. band
3. century
4. develop
5. entertainment
6. exhibit
7. exotic
8. found
9. grandeur
10. massive
11. permanently
12. popular
13. reduce
14. remnant
15. renovation
16. spectator
17. survive
18. talent
19. trainer
20. venue

Definitions

- A. v., to make something smaller
- B. v., to continue, stay alive
- C. n., something shown to the public; a display
- D. n., a special ability
- E. n., a small group
- F. n., a person who watches an event
- G. n., a period of 100 years
- H. n., a small leftover piece
- I. v., to grow and change
- J. adj., very old, of the distant past
- K. n., place where an event is held
- L. n., a performance or show
- M. n., a person who teaches skills to people or animals
- N. n., greatness
- O. adj., very big
- P. adv., for always
- Q. n., repair or rebuilding
- R. v., to start or establish an institution
- S. adj., liked by many people
- T. adj., unusual, from a foreign place

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 race-tracks 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 traveling¹ 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

¹BrE: travelling

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.

ESSENTIAL WORDS FOR THE IELTS

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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