

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

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Word Families

noun	development	Joshua Brown's introduction of the circus tent was an important contribution to the development of the circus.
noun	developer	Philip Astley is known as the developer of stunt riding.
verb	develop	The circus has developed in different ways over the years.

noun	entertainment	The circus is still a favorite form of entertainment today.
noun	entertainer	The job of a circus entertainer looks like fun, but it is really very difficult.
verb	entertain	People often hire clowns to entertain children at parties.
adjective	entertaining	We spent a very entertaining afternoon at the circus.

noun	permanence	The permanence of the circus as a form of entertainment shows how much people enjoy it.
adjective	permanent	Unlike the traveling bands of performers, court jesters had permanent jobs.
adverb	permanently	Circuses don't stay in one place permanently but travel around from city to city.

ESSENTIAL WORDS FOR THE IELTS

noun	popularity	The circus still enjoys great popularity.
verb	popularize ¹	Joshua Brown helped to popularize the circus in America.
adjective	popular	The circus is popular all over the world.
adverb	popularly	The modern circus is popularly known as the Big Top.

noun	survival	The survival of the circus is due to its ability to change with the times.
noun	survivor	The circus as a form of entertainment is a survivor of the hard times of the Dark Ages.
verb	survive	The circus has survived in many forms throughout the centuries.

noun	trainer	A circus animal trainer has to be able to work with exotic animals.
verb	train	Some animals are easier to train than others.
adjective	trained	Many circuses use trained elephants in their show.

¹BrE: popularise

Word Family Practice

Choose the correct word family member from the list below to complete each blank.

The **1**..... of the modern circus began in England in the eighteenth century. A skilled horseback rider¹ **2**..... audiences with stunt riding. He later added other kinds of performances to the show, such as clowns and **3**..... animals. The show became very **4**....., and the idea spread to other countries. The circus has **5**..... the test of time and is still enjoyed by people today. It holds a **6**..... place in our hearts.

- | | | |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. development | developer | developed |
| 2. entertainment | entertainer | entertained |
| 3. trainers | trains | trained |
| 4. popularity | popularize | popular |
| 5. survival | survivors | survived |
| 6. permanence | permanent | permanently |

¹BrE: horse rider

Dictionary Skill

Different Meanings

Many words have more than one meaning.

Read the definitions below. Then read the sentences and write the letter of the correct definition for each sentence.

QUESTIONS 1-2

found [FOWND]

A verb. to start or establish an institution

B verb. past tense and past participle of the verb *find*

- _____ 1. After we *found* our seats, we sat down and enjoyed the circus performance.
- _____ 2. It takes a lot of money, effort, and daring to *found* an entertainment business.

QUESTIONS 3-4

band [BAND]

A noun a small group

B noun a strip of cloth

- _____ 3. People walked around the tent in bands while they waited for the circus performance to begin.
- _____ 4. The performers wore brightly colored bands around their waists.

Listening**CD 1**
Track
6*Listen to the talk. Choose the correct answer, A, B, or C.*

1. When was the Springfield Circus founded?
A 25 years ago
B 75 years ago
C 100 years ago
2. What has not changed since the circus was founded?
A The venue
B The ticket price
C The number of performers
3. What kinds of animals begin the show?
A Exotic
B Trained
C Massive
4. What is the most popular part of the show?
A Animals
B Clowns
C Dancers