



## Circus Escape

Sue Clarke

Circus Escape is an online flash-animated story for young learners on the British Council's site for young learners LearnEnglish Kids. You can find it here:- <http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-stories-circus-escape.htm>

In the story an elephant escapes from the circus and runs off into town. The elephant meets Billy and saves him from a fire. The story is aimed at learners who already have a basic knowledge of English, and practises narrative tenses in a story context. The story is supported by supplementary materials including vocabulary worksheets, an interactive game and a song 'When the circus comes to town'. The topic of 'The Circus' can provide a wealth of vocabulary in the classroom and is motivating for all learners. This story can also provide a stimulus for learners' own creative writing. With more advanced learners teachers could also exploit the ethical issues surrounding animals in circuses.

### Stage 1: Introducing the topic of 'The Circus'

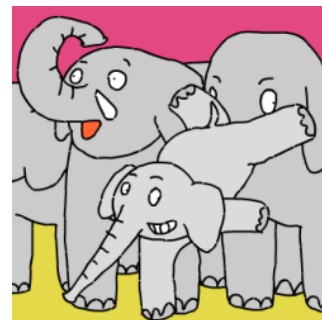
The teacher can introduce the topic by brainstorming vocabulary and eliciting what the students already know about circuses. Ask the students what animals perform at the circus – they could make a list of these in pairs. Then ask students about the people in the circus and what tricks they do. You can start introducing vocabulary specific to the context of the circus – e.g. 'ringmaster', 'acrobat'.



If your learners are younger you may like to practise this vocabulary using a mime game. Divide your learners into teams. Each team takes it in turn to mime a circus act. The first team to guess the act gets a point.

### Stage 2: Story – Circus Escape

Before they listen to the story tell your students that they are going to see and listen to a story about a circus. What acts do they think they will see? Ask each learner to write down five acts they think will appear. Now play the story. Learners can do this in a computer lab or you can use a data-projector and stand-alone computer in the classroom. As learners watch the story they check off which of their five acts are mentioned. Play the story again if you like.



**Stage 3: Follow-up activities**

The follow-up activities you choose for your class will depend on the age and level of your learners and the aims of your lesson. If you wish to focus more on grammar you could gap one or more paragraphs from the story, taking out the verbs and asking learners to complete them focussing on narrative tenses.

If you would like your students to produce a piece of creative writing of their own you could ask them to invent a story outline giving prompts on the board. I usually give my students the following prompts: Which animal? Where? When? How did the animal escape? What happened? Who was involved? The end of the story?. You could write these on the board and ask your learners to think of their own story. It is a good idea for learners to practise telling their story orally before writing. They can do this in pairs or groups, before writing up their own story as classwork or homework. They may also like to provide illustrations.

A nice fun ending to this lesson is the song: 'When the Circus comes to Town'.

You can find this song on LearnEnglish Kids:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-circus.htm>