

The Nation's Most Famous Circus Says the Big Top Will Come Down for Good

SARASOTA, Fla. — The most famous circus in the United States is breaking down its Big Top tent, for good. Say goodbye to trapeze artists. Say so-long to lion tamers cracking whips. Send out the clowns.

Last weekend, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus officials announced that the circus will close in May after a historic 146-year run.

What killed the circus? There are many suspects. The circus travels by railroad and those costs have increased. Animal rights activists fought the circus in expensive court battles that led to an end to elephant acts. After that, some people did not want to see a show without elephants.

Mostly, in a time of "Pokemon Go" and online games, the "Greatest Show on Earth" doesn't seem so great.

Circus Has Weathered World Wars

The circus has "been through a lot of change," including economic downturns and world wars, said Kenneth Feld. He is the CEO of Feld Entertainment, which owns the Ringling Bros. In the past 10 years, something shifted. "I think it isn't relevant to people in the same way," Feld said.

For a long time, the circus was more than important — it was the stuff that dreams were made of.

The first circuses were created in Europe. Americans added their own twist in the 19th century, such as collapsible tents that



allowed troupes to travel far and wide for their audiences.

The most famous circus in the United States started with a group of men. Phineas Taylor Barnum had a wildly popular traveling zoo. The five Ringling brothers performed juggling acts and skits in Wisconsin. Eventually, Barnum, the Ringlings and another performance-minded businessman named James Bailey combined their acts and knowledge. This brand-new circus traveled around America by train, wowing audiences.

Social Changes Came Slowly To The Circus

Deborah Walk works at The Ringling, a mansion-turned-circus-museum that belonged to John Ringling. She said that the circus' effect on small town America is often overlooked.

Every town in the country, from San Francisco to New York, saw the same show. "It brought the wonders of the world to your door. You didn't have to go to Africa or Asia to see the animals," she said.

The circus also brought about social changes. Women became performers in the early 1900s. Yet there would be no

African-American ringmaster until 1999, and no a female ringmaster until 2016.

When the circus came to town, kids dreamed of running away to join it. They wanted to become famous trapeze artists, clowns, and lion tamers.

The circus was also important to home-front morale, or spirit, during World War II. President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave Ringling Bros. special permission to use the railroads back then.

"The circus is the only ageless delight that you can buy for money," famous author Ernest Hemingway wrote in 1953. He wrote that watching it is like a "truly happy dream."

Late 20th Century Was Not Kind To The Circus

As the 20th century went on, kids became less interested. Movies, television, video games and the Internet captured young minds. The circus didn't have cool merchandise or Saturday morning cartoons to boost its image. After 1956, the circus no longer performed under tents and moved to arenas.

Elephants Leave The Big Top

Feld Entertainment removed the elephants in 2016, sending all 40 of them to their Center for Elephant Conservation in Florida. Ticket sales dropped and the circus, already an afterthought for many, receded further in the public mind.

The Felds said they looked at many different ideas and costs. They did the math

The public grew conflicted about animal acts. Circuses without animals — such as Cirque du Soleil — were smaller and growing in popularity.

Animal rights activists put pressure on cities where the circus toured. Los Angeles and Oakland, California, prohibited the use of bull-hooks by elephant trainers. Asheville, North Carolina, prohibited wild animals from performing in the arena.

In 2014, Feld Entertainment won \$25.2 million in settlements from groups including the Humane Society of the United States. This ended a 14-year legal battle over charges that circus employees mistreated elephants.

Kenneth Feld testified about the elephants' importance to the show at that 2009 trial.

"The symbol of the 'Greatest Show on Earth' is the elephant, and that's what we've been known for throughout the world for more than a hundred years," he said.

Asked whether the show would be the same without elephants, Feld replied, "No, it wouldn't."

And, it wasn't.

and tried new things — an interactive phone app, ice skaters in the show, adding motorcycle stunts — but nothing worked.

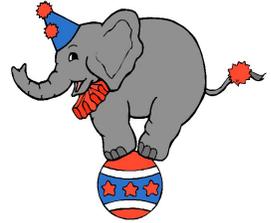
The show will go on at smaller and more specialized circuses. Come May, after almost a century and a half of spectacular shows, the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus will vanish — like a big, colorful, long dream.

Name: _____

SHOULD THE CIRCUS BE SHUT DOWN FOR GOOD?

1. Some people believe the circus impacted our society in a positive way. List three reasons why people feel this way.

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-
-



2. Find two pieces of text evidence to support the following statement:

THE CIRCUS SHOULD BE SHUT DOWN FOR GOOD.

-
-



3. The following text structures can be found in the article: Chronological, Cause and Effect, and Problem/Solution.

- Find one of the text structures and label it in the article
- Draw the appropriate graphic organizer for that text structure in the space below
- Fill in the graphic organizer with details from the text

TWO VOICE POEM

Two-voice poems are written from two different points of view on the same topic. Two-voice poems help us to look at the world from different perspectives. Your two-voice poem will focus on the topic of circuses. The voices in your poem will represent the perspectives of Stella and Mack.

The center of a two-voice poem is reserved for statements they would agree on. However, the two columns on either side represent the two different perspectives.

BRAINSTORM

"Say goodbye to the Big Top for good"

How would Stella feel about this?

How would Mack feel about this?

ROUGH DRAFT

Directions: Write your poem in two separate columns so that each person has a distinct voice. Consider whether or not your two voices will speak together at certain points in your poem. If so, write those lines in the center of the page.

Step 1: Decide which "voice" you will begin with -- Stella, Mack, or both!

Step 2: Write a line (or a stanza) from one perspective in one column, then skip to the next line and write a line (or a stanza) from the other perspective in the other column.

Step 3: Continue the process until you have completed your poem.

