THEMATIC UNIT

Circus

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Introduction

*Circus* is a captivating, language-based, thematic unit. It has 80 exciting pages filled with a variety of cross-the-curriculum lesson ideas designed for young children. For each of the featured books, *Paddington at the Circus* and *See the Circus*, activities are included that set the stage for enjoyment of the book, and extending the specific concepts gained. In addition, the theme is connected to the curriculum with activities in language arts (including language experience and writing suggestions), math, science, social studies, art, music, and life skills (cooking, physical education,). Suggestions and patterns for bulletin boards are additional timesavers for the busy teacher.

This thematic unit includes the following:

- **Literature selections**: summaries of two children’s books with related lessons (complete with reproducible pages) that cross the curriculum
- **Planning guides**: suggestions for sequencing lessons each day of the unit
- **Curriculum connections**: activities in language arts, math, science, social studies, art, music, life skills, and physical education
- **Group lessons**: activities to encourage cooperative learning
- **Circus links**: websites to connect to for additional information about the circus
- **Bibliography of related reading**: suggestions for additional books on the circus theme
- **Fine Arts**: suggestions for activities in music and art
- **Bulletin Boards**: suggestions for content-related bulletin boards
- **Home/School Connections**: suggestions for activities that could be sent home as well as performed at school
- **Culminating Activities**: suggestions for activities that require students to use what they have learned to create a final production to be performed for parents and other members of the school

**Note:** You may wish to punch holes in the pages and store them in a three-ring binder to keep this valuable resource intact so it may be used year after year.
Why a Balanced Approach?
The main advantage to using a balanced approach, is that it involves children using all modes of communication; reading, writing, listening, illustrating, and doing. Communication skills are interconnected and integrated into lessons that emphasize the use of language. Implicit in this approach, is our knowledge that every piece of language, including individual words, is composed of parts. Directed study of these parts can help a child master language communication. Experience and research tell us that regular attention to phonics, other word-attack skills, spelling, etc., develops reading mastery, thereby fulfilling the unity of the whole-language experience. The child is then led to read, write, spell, speak, and listen more confidently in response to a literature experience introduced by the teacher. In these ways, language skills grow rapidly, stimulated by direct practice, involvement, and interest in the topic.

Why Thematic Planning?
One very useful tool for implementing a balanced language program is thematic planning. By choosing a theme, with correlating literature selections for a unit of study, a teacher can plan activities throughout the day that lead to a cohesive, in-depth study of a topic. Children will be practicing and applying their skills in meaningful context. Consequently, the student will tend to learn and retain more.

Why Cooperative Learning?
Along with academic skills and content, children need to learn social skills. No longer can this area of development be taken for granted. Children must learn to work cooperatively in groups in order to function well in modern society. Group activities should be a regular part of school life and teachers would be wise to include social objectives, as well as academic objectives, in their planning.

Why Journals?
Each day your children should have the opportunity to write in a journal. They may respond to a book or an event in history, write about a personal experience, or answer a general “question of the day” posed by the teacher. The culminating journal provides an excellent means of documenting a child’s writing process.

Why Big Books?
An excellent language activity is the production of big books as a whole class or in small groups. Groups of children, or the whole class, can apply their language skills, content knowledge, and creativity to produce a big book that becomes a part of the classroom library to be read and reread. These books make an excellent culminating project for sharing beyond the classroom with parents, librarians, other classes, etc.
Paddington Bear at the Circus

By Michael Bond

Summary
The beloved Paddington Bear has been entertaining children for many years. Once again, he amuses the reader when the circus comes to town! Paddington Bear can’t wait to see the show under the big top. There’s the ringmaster, a band, a very tall clown, and a man that hangs from a rope high above everyone's head. The ever helpful Paddington is always willing to lend a hand, and hurries off to save the distressed trapeze artist. The circus is turned topsy-turvy, but the show goes on, and Paddington Bear becomes the star.

Sample Plan

Lesson 1
- Introduce the unit by singing Go To the Circus (page 6, Enjoying the Book, #4).
- Read Paddington Bear at the Circus (page 6, Enjoying the Book, #1).
- Complete the maze activity (page 6, Enjoying the Book, #7).

Lesson 2
- Reread the story (page 6, Enjoying the Book, #6).
- Sing the song, “Swing So High” (page 18).
- Create a trapeze mobile (page 7, Enjoying the Book, #11).

Lesson 3
- Page through the story focusing on the clowns (page 6, Enjoying the Book, #3).
- Play the Bucket Balance Relay game (page 7, Enjoying the Book, #9).
- Create a tall clown (page 6, Enjoying the Book, #5).
- Teach the poem “Stilts” (page 31).

Lesson 4
- Review Lesson 3 on clowns, focusing on juggling.
- Create a juggling clown (page 6, Enjoying the Book, #2).
- “Let’s juggle!” (page 7, Extending the Book, #4).

Lesson 5
- Perform the activity Draw Me a Story (page 34).
- Teach the poem “Clowns” (page 31).
- Complete the following directions activity (page 8, Extending the Book, #9).
- Review ending sounds (page 8, Enjoying the Book, #14).

Lesson 6
- Recite “Clowns” poem together (page 31).
- Review numbers and counting 1-3.
- Create a fun flap counting book (page 8, Extending the Book, #7).

Lesson 7
- Read another circus story (see Bibliography, page 80).
- Perform “Don’t Burst the Balloon!” experiment (page 41).
Overview of Activities

Setting the Stage

1. Prepare one of the bulletin boards shown on page 71.

2. Make a child-size clown from sturdy cardboard or plywood, using the pattern on page 74. Attach one or two clothespins to the clown's chest or hand using hot glue or epoxy glue. Decorate the clown with paint, fabric, jewels, pom-poms, etc. Place the clown near the door or lesson area, and use the clothespins to “hold” the literature book that will be used that day, a practice sheet, or a special treat for all to eat.

3. Create one or more activity centers listed on page 72.

4. Play circus music in the background as the children work on projects through the unit (see bibliography on page 80).

Enjoying the Book

1. Show the cover of Paddington Bear at the Circus. Ask the children if they recognize the character pictured. Ask the students to predict what the story will be about. Read the story.

2. Teach the children the Juggling song on page 18. Make the Juggling Clown by reproducing pages 9 and 10 onto white construction paper. Each child will need one set. Ask the children to color and cut out both the clown and the juggling wheel. Lay the clown on top of the juggling wheel and fasten the two together by inserting a brad through the center dots. Sing the Juggling song while using the wheel.

3. Turn to the first page of the book. Ask the children with which circus performer Paddington was fascinated (the tall clown). Slowly, show the children the story, asking them to clap their hands each time they see a clown. Show each page with a clown and discuss how the clown is dressed and what he/she is doing.

4. Sing and teach Go To The Circus (page 62) while introducing the circus unit to your class. Draw the children's attention to a circus bulletin board (page 71) as you sing.

5. Here's a Big, or “Tall, ” project the children will enjoy making. It will remind them of the circus character Paddington loved. Make decorations to represent the tall clown. Each child needs to make a silhouette, using his or her body outline. One at a time, ask each child to lie down on his or her back on a piece of butcher paper, three feet (91cm) longer than the child. Using a pencil or crayon, trace around the child's body, but don’t trace around the bottom of the feet, the legs will be extended the extra length of the paper when the figure is cut out. After the child stands up, you may wish to retrace the pencil line using a thick, black, marker. Supply materials such as paint, markers, yarn, fabric, etc., and have each child decorate his or her body shape. Display tall clowns on the classroom or hallway walls. Teach the poem “Stilts” on page 31.

6. Reread the book focusing on the performing acrobats. Ask the children which acrobat Paddington thought needed help (the trapeze artist), and why. Ask if Paddington really did help and who helped Paddington get down.

7. Ask the children to help Paddington find his way to the circus by completing the maze activity, The Amaze-ing Circus, on page 13.