

Thematic Unit (PMLD)



Northern Ireland  
Curriculum

# The Circus is in Town



## OVERVIEW

This unit has a range of activities centred on some of the main features of the circus, such as people and animals.

The learners' awareness of circus themes is developed and embedded through a wide range of carefully planned and personalised sensory experiences such as poetry, stories, songs, musical experiences and art.

These activities are suggestions only. You can adapt or extend them to suit your learners' age, cognitive ability and specific needs.

**Please note:** before beginning an activity, check that all the resources are suitable for your individual learners. For example, some essential oils may not be appropriate for young children and others may have contraindications for learners with complex medical needs, life-threatening conditions and/or epilepsy. It is advisable to consult a trained therapist before using essential oils.

# Contents

## Learning Activity 1

### Here Comes the Circus

An Interactive Whiteboard story ..... 2

## Learning Activity 2

### Roll Up, Roll Up

Whiteboard patting story ..... 4

## Learning Activity 3

### Fun and Games

A range of circus games ..... 6

## Learning Activity 4

### Pop and Floss

Circus snacks ..... 8

## Learning Activity 5

### Thrills and Spills a Plenty

Messy play activities ..... 10

## Learning Activity 6

### Drum Roll

A musical drumming activity ..... 12

## Learning Activity 7

### Experiment Time

Science activities ..... 14

## Learning Activity 8

### Finale

Conclusion to the theme ..... 16

**Resources** ..... 18

**Acknowledgements** ..... 27

## Learning Activity 1

# Here Comes the Circus

### Setting the Scene

Create a 'big top' tent in the classroom using a coloured parachute or fabric to make a 'big top' shape. Alternatively hang colourful streamers in bold colours of red, blue, yellow and green. Start in the centre of the ceiling, working outward toward the edges of the group circle or room.

Cover the walls or bulletin boards with brightly-coloured paper, balloons, clown and animal images or circus posters. Make loud hailers from card which the learners have been helped to decorate.

### What to Do

Organise the learners into a semicircle while playing traditional circus music. Display **Resource 1: The Big Top! (Whiteboard Slides)** on a large screen. Follow the words and actions with the learners.





## Areas of Learning

### Primary

Language and Literacy  
The Arts (Drama, Art and Design)

### Post-Primary

English  
The Arts (Drama, Art and Design)



### Resource 1: **The Big Top!** *(Whiteboard Slides)*

- Traditional circus music available online
- Parachute
- Coloured material scarves
- Clown props such as:
  - wigs
  - funny hats
  - whoopee cushions
- Juggling objects such as:
  - balls
  - beanbags
  - sponges
- Mirrors
- Bells
- Fur
- Switch devices with recorded animal sounds
- Popcorn
- Candyfloss
- Loud hailer (made from card)
- Water squirter/Sprays
- Colourful Streamers
- Clown/Animal images or circus posters
- Balloons
- Brightly-coloured paper
- Light-up balls, bell balls and sponges

## Learning Activity 2

# Roll Up, Roll Up

### Setting the Scene

Play some circus music as the learners are being positioned around a screen.

### What to Do

Display **Resource 2: Fun at the Circus (Whiteboard Slides)** on the screen. Follow the instructions. This activity can be carried out on a one-to-one basis or in a small group, depending on the number of staff available.





## Areas of Learning

Primary  
Language and Literacy

Post-Primary  
English



## What You Need



Resource 2:  
**Fun at the Circus**  
*(Whiteboard Slides)*

# Fun and Games

## Setting the Scene

Collect a variety of clothes and props that the learners can use to dress up as performers in a circus.

If appropriate, paint the learners' faces. You could either do a full clown's face or just a small picture on their cheek. For those learners who do not like anything on their faces, offer to draw a picture on their hand instead. Alternatively, use gentle finger stroking on the face to mimic the painting actions.

Create a large circle in the centre of the classroom with a space for the entrance. Select one game at a time to focus on, and adapt to your learners' needs.

## What to Do

Follow the instructions in **Resource 3: Watch for the Tiger.**







## Areas of Learning

### Primary

The Arts (Drama, Art and Design)

### Post-Primary

The Arts (Drama, Art and Design)

### Hula hoop game

Decorate large hoops with orange, red and yellow paper to create flaming hoops and place them in the circle.

Give each learner the opportunity to interact with the hoops in the most appropriate way for their individual needs. For example, some learners may be able to step inside the hoop, or staff can pass it over their body to represent jumping through the hoops like a lion. Alternatively, support them to throw balls or beanbags into the hoops.

### Clown game

Support learners to experience and become actively involved in the making of a cone-shaped clown hat out of colourful construction paper and curling ribbon. If this is inappropriate use pre-existing props such as clown wigs and hats or clown costumes.

Encourage the learners to enter the ring and act like clowns, such as:

- using water sprays;
- rubbing their hands through shaving foam;
- throwing brightly-coloured balls out of the ring; or
- banging drums.

There is a wealth of other ideas in *Sensory Drama for Very Special People* by Flo Longhorn which can be adapted to suit learners' needs.



## What You Need



### Resource 3: Watch for the Tiger

- A ringmaster's hat
- Clown wigs and hats
- Clown costumes
- Replica circus animals such as elephants, lions or tigers
- Face paints
- A pretend whip (perhaps made with a ribbon)
- Hula hoops
- Balls and beanbags
- Coloured paper
- Construction paper
- Ribbons
- Water sprays
- Shaving foam
- Drums
- Brightly-coloured balls

## Learning Activity 4

# Pop and Floss

## Setting the Scene

Seat the learners in a suitable, safe position where they have a clear view of the activity.

## What to Do

### Popcorn

Make the popcorn in class, optimising every opportunity for the learners to activate their senses:

- **Taste** such as salt, sugar, toffee and the finished popcorn
- **Touch and texture** such as sugar, uncooked and cooked popcorn
- **Smell** such as toffee and popcorn
- **Sound** such as popping popcorn, which could be recorded on a switch device

This rhyme could be used to enhance the experience:

I'm a little popcorn in a pot (*huddle in a ball*)  
Heat me up and watch me pop (*jump up*)  
When I am all white I am done  
Popping corn is lots of fun (*jump around*)

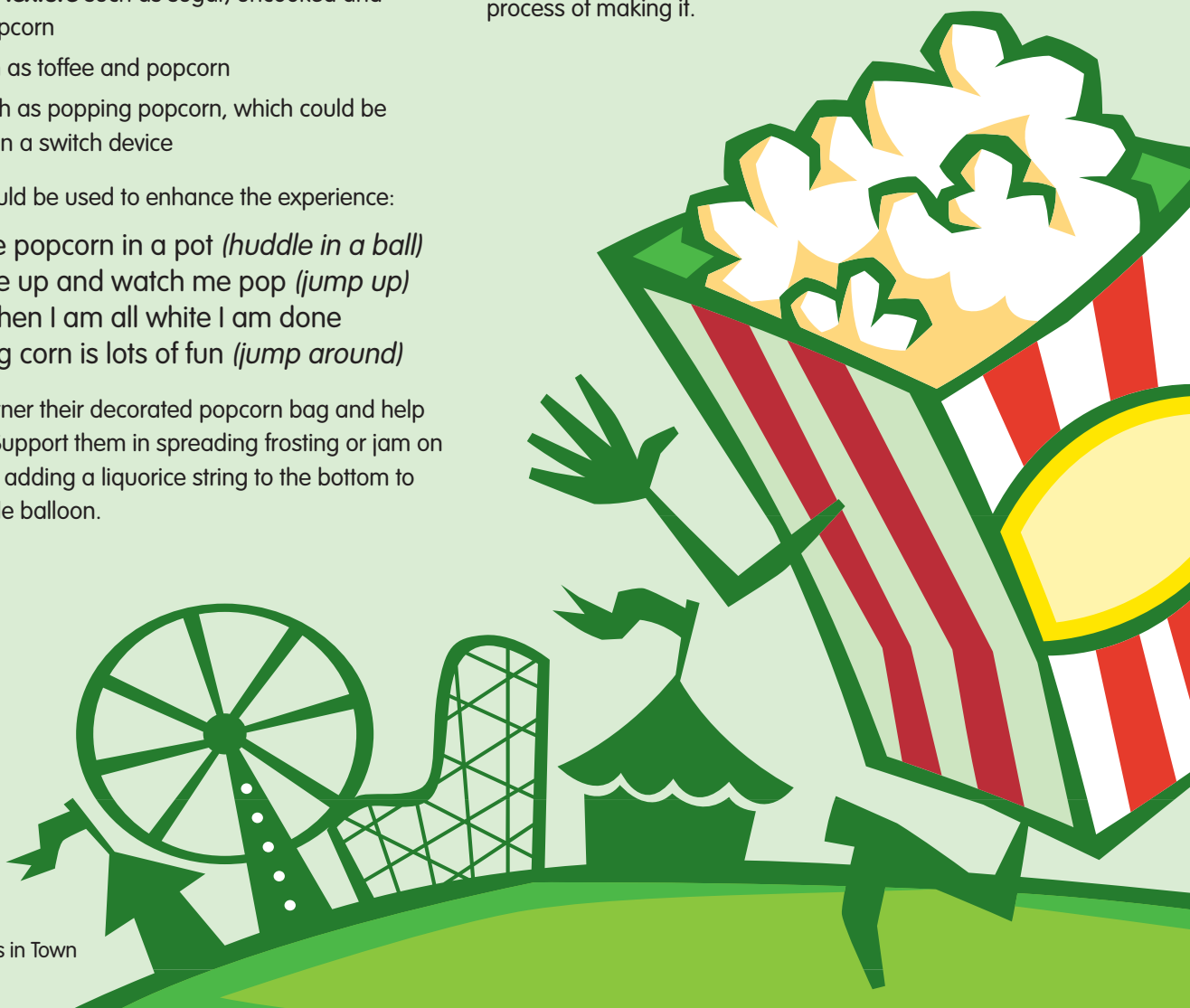
Give each learner their decorated popcorn bag and help them to fill it. Support them in spreading frosting or jam on a rice cake, or adding a liquorice string to the bottom to make an edible balloon.

### Cold clown

Give each learner a scoop of ice cream or frozen yoghurt with an upside-down ice cream cone for a clown hat, and support them in decorating it with dried fruit, nuts or colourful sweets.

### Candyfloss

Make candyfloss (search online for written instructions and a video on 'How to make candyfloss without a machine'). Encourage the learners to touch the completed candyfloss and pull bits off for themselves if appropriate. Alternatively visit a local café that makes candyfloss to experience the process of making it.





## Areas of Learning

### Primary

The World Around Us

The Arts (Art and Design)

Mathematics and Numeracy

### Post-Primary

Learning for Life and Work  
(Home Economics)

The Arts (Art and Design)

Mathematics



## What You Need

- Microwave, popcorn maker or frying pan
- Popcorn
- Ingredients for candyfloss
- Ice cream/Frozen yoghurt
- Liquorice
- Sweets for decoration
- A small white paper bag that has been decorated earlier by the learners dipping their fingers into bright paint and making marks of dots or stripes with support if necessary
- Toffee
- Salt
- Sugar
- Jam
- Rice cakes
- Liquorice strings
- Dried fruit/nuts

## Learning Activity 5

# Thrills and Spills a Plenty



## Setting the Scene

Display a slide of clown images and play some 'clown' music, which you can find online.

## What to Do

### Clown dress up

Follow the instructions in **Resource 4: Clown Dress Up**.

### Making a mess!

Involve the learners in creating the 'messy play' resources outlined in **Resource 5: Slimy Gloopy Things!**

Cover a large area of floor with sheets of strong paper and encourage the learners to engage in the slapstick frolics of clowns by exploring and having fun with the 'messy' resources. Support the learners to:

- use sponges, fingers, hands, feet and other various objects dipped in paint to make marks;
- use washing-up bottles filled with watery paint to squeeze and spray across paper;
- flick brushes across paper to make patterns;
- make up different-coloured runny paint to drop onto paper;
- use a straw to blow the paint in different directions; and
- roll light polystyrene balls onto paint.



## Areas of Learning

### Primary

The World Around Us  
The Arts (Drama)

### Post-Primary

The Arts (Drama)  
Environment and Society

## What You Need



Resource 4:  
**Clown Dress Up**



Resource 5:  
**Slimy Gloopy Things!**

- Clown costume parts (as set out in rhyme)
  - cream pies
  - shaving foam
  - squirty cream
  - water squirter
  - paint
  - wet sponge
  - gloop
  - soap flakes sprinkled onto water
  - mousse
  - custard
  - spaghetti
  - brushes
  - polystyrene balls
- Slide of clown images
- Sheets of strong paper
- Sponges
- Washing-up bottles
- Straws
- Brushes
- Drums
- Paint

## Learning Activity 6

# Drum Roll

### Setting the Scene

Seat the learners in a circle with access to a drum appropriate to their needs.

### What to Do

#### Warm up

Let the learners explore the surface of the drums and the vibrations and sounds made by their fingertips, flat hands or feet.

Encourage the learners to follow the instructions 'Ready, Steady, Go!' and 'Stop!' You can alternate between loud and quiet beats using drumsticks and brushes.

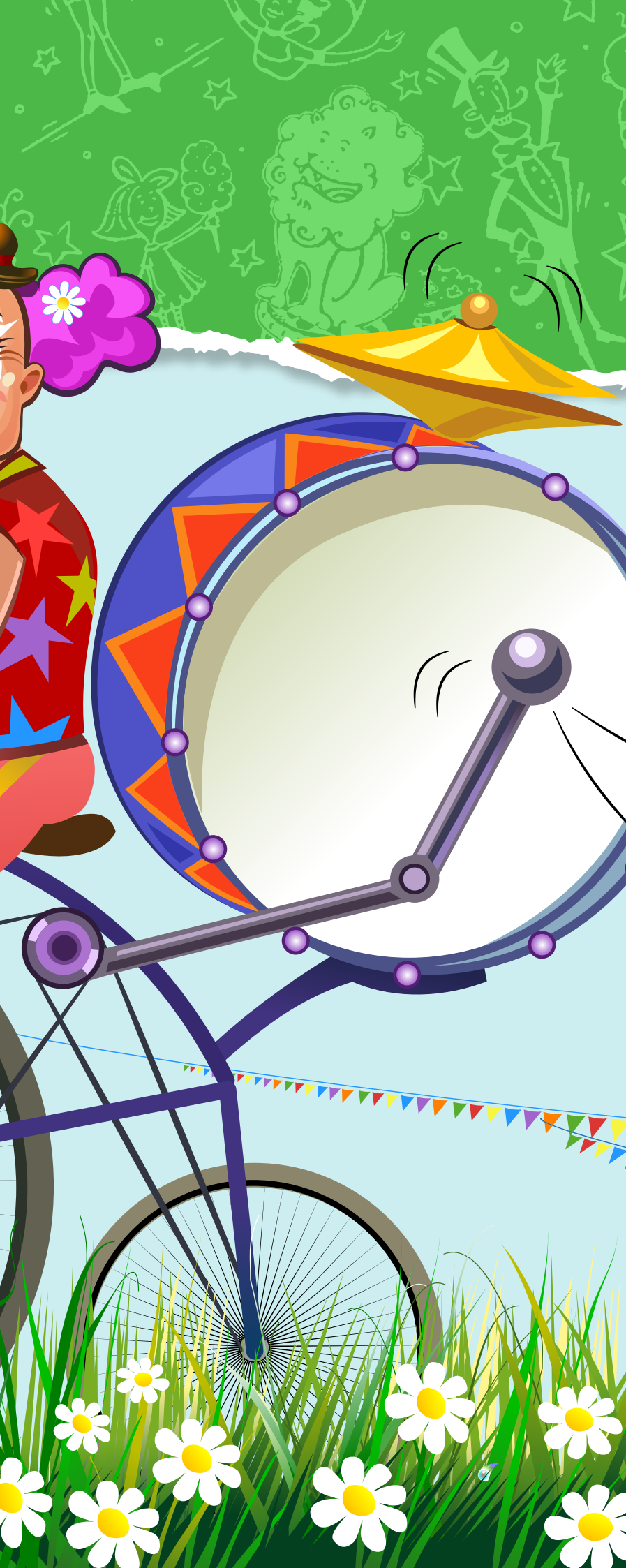
#### Happy drums

Follow the instructions in **Resource 6: Bang the Drum**.

#### Cool down

As a 'cool down' exercise encourage quiet beats on the drums, with lengthening pauses and then silence.





## Areas of Learning

### Primary

The Arts (Music)

Mathematics and Numeracy

### Post-Primary

The Arts (Music)

Mathematics

## What You Need



### Resource 6: Bang the Drum

- A variety of drums
- Drumsticks and brushes

# Experiment Time

## Setting the Scene

Use balloons to decorate your circus-themed classroom. You can search online to find a video of a clown playing with balloons.

Use this poem to read to the learners as an auditory cue. You could also use it while blowing the balloons up with a big, dramatic blow at the end of each couplet:

I can make a big balloon  
Watch me while I blow  
Small at first then bigger  
Watch it grow and grow  
Do you think it's big enough?  
Maybe I should stop  
For if I blow much longer  
My balloon will surely POP!

## What to Do

### Air Experiments

#### Creating movement

- Build anticipation by slowly blowing up a giant balloon before releasing the end so that it flies around the room.
- Blow up a balloon, but do not tie it shut – place some confetti on a table or learners' tray and release the air from the balloon onto the confetti.

#### Creating sound

- Blow up a giant balloon and stretch the open end so it makes a loud squeaking noise.
- Attach a noisemaker to the balloon and on a count of three push the air with force through the noisemaker.
- Slowly blow up a punching balloon ball with popcorn kernels inside. Once it's tied, the learners can take turns throwing, catching, squeezing and punching to hear the kernels rattling.

#### Creating movement

- Support the learners to hit balloons suspended from a hoop.
- Bounce coloured balloons on a coloured parachute and sing the balloon song (sung to the tune of *Three Little Indians*).

One little two little three little circus balloons  
Four little five little six little circus balloons  
Seven little eight little nine little circus balloons  
Ten little circus balloons in the air!

- Make the parachute bounce so the learners can track the balloons going up in the air and then falling back down to earth.

### Bubble Experiments

- Blow up some bubbles and encourage/support the learners to try to catch and burst them.
- Use a bubble machine, wands and hoops to create different sizes of bubbles.
- Add different colours to the soapy mixture and make coloured bubbles – let them burst onto sheets of paper.





## Areas of Learning

### Primary

The World Around Us  
Mathematics and Numeracy

### Post-Primary

Environment and Society  
Science and Technology  
Mathematics

## What You Need

- Balloons
- Confetti
- Noisemaker
- Bubbles
- Tray
- Popcorn Kernels
- Parachute
- Hoop
- Bubble machine
- Sheets of paper

## Learning Activity 8

# Finale

### Setting the Scene

Use the central hall if it is available or create a ring in the centre of the classroom with streamers festooned above it to represent the big top. Invite other classes and staff to watch the finale.

### What to Do

Bring your circus activities to a conclusion with a fun finale. Dress all the learners in circus costumes and paint their faces if appropriate.

Allocate props such as drums, whips and flags to those learners who are able to access them.

Play circus music and have the learners enter the circus ring one at a time.

Give opportunities to those learners who can perform a trick, song or individual movement such as:

- pull a coloured handkerchief from their pocket;
- wave a ringmaster's whip; or
- shake a tambourine.

When all the learners are in the ring sing the goodbye song, encouraging the learners to join in where possible.

### Goodbye Song

Goodbye circus, goodbye circus  
Goodbye circus, we'll come another day  
*(Repeat several times)*





## Areas of Learning

### Primary

The Arts (Drama)

### Post-Primary

The Arts (Drama)

## What You Need

You will need a variety of circus props that the learners can use to dress up as the performers in a circus such as:

- Streamers
- Circus Music
- Clown wigs, hats and clothes
- Face paints
- Pretend whips
- Circus flags
- Coloured handkerchiefs
- Tambourine
- Ringmaster's hat, leotards
- Variety of replicas of circus animals such as elephants, lions and tigers

## Resource 1: **The Big Top!** (*Whiteboard Slides*) (1 of 2)

Available from the SEN and Inclusion PMLD Sensory curriculum at [www.nicurriculum.org.uk](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk)

### **Slide 1: A big top**

**Action:** *As you recite the verse, float coloured materials such as large coloured scarves around and above the learners' heads and bodies. Call out through a loud hailer:*

Roll Up! Roll Up!  
Girls and boys  
Everybody circle round  
Lift the canvas off the ground  
Pull and pull and watch it rise  
Big Top grows before our eyes.

### **Slide 2: Inside of a big top**

**Action:** *Suspend a large coloured parachute from the ceiling and move the learners under it for Slide 2.*

Come and join the fun in our colourful tent!  
You will find the fun won't stop  
If you come inside our amazing Big Top!

### **Slide 3: Clowns**

**Action:** *Give learners a variety of clown props, for example wigs, funny hats, flower water pistols, handshake buzzers, whoopee cushions and so on. Provide mirrors for learners to see themselves dressed up.*

With faces white and noses red, and funny hats upon their head  
And crazy hair and funny suits and great big feet in clumsy boots  
The reason I pay my circus money...  
The clowns! So silly and so very funny!

### Slide 4: Juggler

**Action:** Demonstrate juggling using a variety of objects, for example balls, beanbags or sponges. Vary the sensory stimulus by using light-up balls (visual), bell balls (sound) or sponges (tactile). Encourage the learners to hold, throw, catch and turn-take by throwing and catching the objects.

See the jugglers.  
Watch them go!  
How many balls can they throw?

### Slide 5: Trapeze Artist

**Action:** Encourage rocking or swaying movement with the learners, on either their individual limbs or on their whole body to give vestibular input.

Now you will see an amazing sight...  
The flying trapeze... 'Hold on tight!'

### Slide 6: Elephants

**Action:** Use water sprays to spray water from a distance directly onto the skin, as a fine mist and as a direct jet.

Next come the elephants, trunks long and grey  
See their huge ears and the water they spray.

### Slide 7: Lions

**Action:** Encourage the learners to touch soft fur. Activate lion sounds on a switch device, allowing time for the learners to track the sounds.

Next come the lions  
What a fright!  
Fur so soft and teeth so white.

### Slide 8: Candy Floss

**Action:** Have some popcorn and candyfloss ready for the learners to sample and enjoy.

Before we have to go  
And say goodbye to this wonderful show  
We're going to have a circus treat  
Popcorn and candyfloss for us to eat!

## Resource 2: **Fun at the Circus** (*Whiteboard Slides*) (1 of 2)

Available from the SEN and Inclusion PMLD Sensory curriculum at [www.nicurriculum.org.uk](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk)

### Slide 1

*Action: Pat down the learners' arms and body with small quick movements (to represent excitement).*

I'm going to the circus with my mum and with dad  
So many laughs and fun to be had  
Better get ready, don't want to be late  
Push through the crowd to get up to the gate.

### Slide 2

*Action: Pitter-patter fingertips over the learners' palms.*

And now to the kiosk  
The ticket man I see  
He rips off three tickets  
And gives them to me.

### Slide 3

*Action: Rub/Pat the learner's tummy.*

The circus music is so very loud  
Excitement in my tummy  
As I look round the crowd.

### Slide 4

*Action: Thump gently down the learner's arms with a closed fist.*

'Roll up roll up'  
The Ringmaster calls  
The flying trapeze  
I hope no one falls!

### Slide 5

*Action: Slowly and gently tap down the learner's legs.*

The tightrope walker  
Moves so very slow  
Across the wire so high  
I don't want a go!

**Slide 6**

*Action: Pat down sides of the learner's body from head to toe.*

The elephants splash  
Everyone in my row  
I'm covered in water  
From my head to my toe!

**Slide 7**

*Action: Gently pitter-patter on the learner's cheeks and mouth.*

While I am watching  
I'm munching with glee  
Candyfloss and popcorn  
Just for me.

## Watch for the Tiger

**Action:**

*The Tiger (adult) hides in his den.*

*Another adult sits with the group with a drum and cymbal.*

*The drum beats and the chanting starts.*

Watch for the tiger  
Watch for the tiger  
Watch for the tiger eyes.

**Action:** *Turn a torch on and encourage the learners to track the beam. The tiger roars and peeps out of the den.*

Listen for the tiger  
Listen for the tiger  
Listen for the tiger's cries.

**Action:** *The tiger roars and prances. The tiger chooses a learner and 'roars' towards them while the learner is helped to escape.*

Help! Escape!

**Action:** *The tiger goes back to his den and repeats with other learners.*



A staff member repeats the clown rhyme, dramatising each line with the appropriate action.

**Action:** *Place a long green wig over hair.*

A funny clown with green hair on his head

**Action:** *Put a tall clown hat on over the wig.*

A funny clown in a big tall hat

**Action:** *Pull on a pair of baggy trousers with brightly-coloured braces.*

A funny clown with baggy trousers

**Action:** *Place a red plastic nose over nose.*

A funny clown with a nose so red

**Action:** *Attach a rose which squirts water.*

A funny clown with a squirting rose

**Action:** *Attach a bow-tie around neck.*

A funny clown with a twirling (big) bow tie

**Action:** *Chase a learner or a member of staff with a custard pie.*

A funny clown with a custard pie

## Resource 5: Slimy Gloopy Things! (1 of 2)

### Gloop!

Just mix cornflour and water, which learners can help to mix. It acts like a solid but can pour like a liquid. Kitchen implements, spoons, spades, scrapers, rakes and funnels can all be used in gloop. Experiment by adding food colourings and flavourings to your gloop or a drop of perfumed oil or paint. Try making gloop from cocoa or custard powder and comparing the results.

### Slime!

This is clean messy play! Soap flakes are hard to find nowadays but you can grate baby soap to make your own soap flakes. Then add hot water and leave the mix to stand, preferably overnight. It becomes lovely thick slime!

Blobs of slime can be put in trays or on mirrors for learners to experiment with. You can add pasta shapes, food colouring and other items. Learners can smear slime on surfaces. They can play with slime using spoons, cups or funnels. They could also try using whisks to make it frothy!

### Dough

There are many different types of dough that can be made, all with a slightly different feel. The easiest is to support the learners to mix flour and water together to make soft dough that lasts for the day.

Go to [www.helpinghandsnetwork.btck.co.uk](http://www.helpinghandsnetwork.btck.co.uk) for recipes for cooked play dough that lasts longer, salt dough, and lots of other ideas.

Add food colouring or flavouring, or a drop of perfumed oil, and then add oats, seeds, grains or pasta shapes for texture. Learners can use items with dough such as rolling pins, garlic presses, brushes such as nailbrushes and toothbrushes, scissors and cutters. Salt dough can be formed into shapes, then baked and painted and is particularly good fun for older children.

There are hundreds of other ideas for messy play: as well as the usual finger paints, sand and water learners could try shaving foam, jelly, cooked pasta, ketchup, cereal, ice, sugar and water.

### Florist Gel

If you add a few teaspoons of water to florist gel and leave to stand for a few hours you will produce a mass of gel which comes in a variety of colours. It's safe and non-toxic and if it gets messy it can be rinsed and re-used.

### Magic Milk

Half-fill a large shallow tray with milk and add washing-up liquid to it (good quality washing-up liquid gives the best froth). Then add different food colourings to the washing-up liquid and the milk. Mix together to create colourful patterns.

## **Play Dough Recipe**

### **Ingredients**

- 2 cups of plain flour
- 4 tablespoons of cream of tartar
- 2 tablespoons of cooking oil
- 1 cup of salt
- 2 cups of boiling water
- Food colouring
- Glitter or coloured sand to make the dough more fun
- Smells or flavourings of your choice

### **Method**

Just place all the ingredients in a mixing bowl and mix.

It might not come together at first, but keep on mixing. It will eventually take on a nice play doughy texture.

## Resource 6: **Bang the Drum**

**Action:** Give each learner a turn on the drum and sing the song 'If you're happy...' encouraging them to beat the drum when they hear the words 'bang the drum'.

### **If You're Happy and You Know it Bang the Drum**

If you're happy and you know it bang the drum  
If you're happy and you know it bang the drum  
If you're happy and you know it and you really want to show it  
If you're happy and you know it bang the drum

### **Loud and Quiet Beats**

*(Sung to the tune of London Bridge)*

Play the drums so quietly, quietly, quietly  
Play the drums so quietly, we all play along

Play the drums so loudly, loudly, loudly  
Play the drums so loudly, we all play along

**Action:** This is a counting activity of beats up to five you can use with some learners.

### **Beat the Drum**

Beat, beat, can you beat the drum?  
Beat, beat, can you beat the drum?  
Beat, beat, can you beat the drum?  
How many times can you beat the drum?

## **Acknowledgements:**

Illustrations sourced from Thinkstockphotos.co.uk

Cover: iStock Collection © Terry Katz; danilo sanino *and* eugeneharnam

Page 2/3: iStock Collection © Angela NyAA-ri

Page 3: iStock Collection © David Villeneuve

Page 4/5: iStock Collection © eugeneharnam

Page 6/7: iStock Collection © eugeneharnam

Page 8/9: liquidlibrary Collection © Getty Images

Page 10/11: iStock Collection © Hon Fai Ng *and* brux

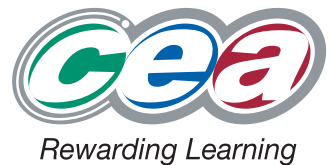
Page 12/13: iStock Collection © eugeneharnam

Page 14: iStock Collection © Bastemann

Page 15: iStock Collection © shelma1

Page 16/17: iStock Collection © artisticco

A CCEA Publication © 2014



**COUNCIL FOR THE CURRICULUM EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENT**  
☎ +44 (0)28 9026 1200 ☎ +44 (0)28 9026 1234 ☎ +44 (0)28 9024 2063

29 Clarendon Road, Clarendon Dock, Belfast BT1 3BG  
✉ info@ccea.org.uk 🌐 www.ccea.org.uk