

Animals in Circuses Comprehension

Do circuses still need animal acts?

For over a century, touring circuses have provided family entertainment with a mixture of human and animal acts. As more information about animal behaviour becomes available, the question arises of whether it is any longer acceptable for animals to be kept for performing.

Supporters argue that circuses are part of our tradition, and that many families visit a circus who might not go to other sorts of live entertainment. But traditions can and do change with time, and a circus without animal acts still provides plenty of variety, with clowns, trapeze and high wire acts, jugglers and acrobats.

It is claimed that circuses are educational, as they give many people the chance to see wild animals such as lions and elephants at close quarters. However, it could be argued that zoos and safari parks offer this opportunity more successfully, since they contain a far wider range of creatures living in a more natural habitat. They also usually provide additional information in the form of leaflets, signs and captions, and have staff available to answer questions.

Those in favour of animals in circuses say that the animals enjoy performing and are trained using rewards and tit-bits, so no cruelty is involved. Nevertheless, opponents point out that animals do not perform in their natural environments, and therefore it is not right to coerce them into doing this merely for the entertainment of humans. They also criticise the cramped living conditions in which circus animals are forced to spend most of their time.

Through watching informative programmes on television, more people have a growing understanding of the needs of wild animals, such as plenty of space to roam and the freedom to live with their own kind. In the 21st century, it seems unnecessary and even cruel to confine wild animals and train them to do tricks for the public's amusement.

1. How long have touring circuses been in existence?
2. Can you find three arguments for keeping animals in circuses in this text? (3 marks)
3. Can you find three arguments against keeping animals in circuses in this text? (3 marks)
4. Can you find three examples of contrasting conjunctions? (3 marks)
5. Why do you think the writer uses the examples of zoos and safari parks in the third paragraph?
6. Without using a dictionary, what do you think the word 'coerce' means in the fourth paragraph?
7. Do you think the writer is for or against animals in circuses? Why? (2 marks)
8. What is similar about the structure of paragraphs 2, 3 and 4?
9. How persuasive do you think this text is and why? (2 marks)
10. What is your opinion, having read this text, on animals in circuses?