

## Teaching News Is Elementary January 20, 2016

Each week, this lesson will share some classroom activity ideas that use the newspaper or other NIE resources. You are encouraged to modify this lesson to fit the needs of your students. For example, some classrooms may be able to use this as a worksheet and others might need to ask and answer the questions in a class discussion.

*Please be sure to preview all NIE content before using it in your classroom to ensure it is appropriate for all of your students.*

**Materials you will need for this lesson:** The Seattle Times print replica, computer or smart board, pencils or pens, paper

**Article: “Ringling Bros. owner sets final curtain for circus”**

**Pages: Main, page A1**

**Date: Sunday, January 15, 2017**

### **Standards:**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.5.b

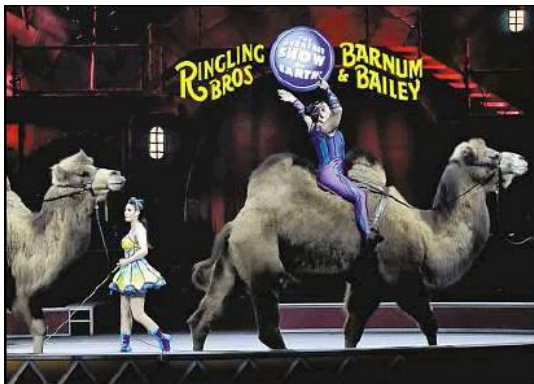
Recognize and explain the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs.

### **Objectives:**

Students will use circus animals as a way to identify, discuss and illustrate idioms.

### **Pre- Reading Discussion Questions:**

Examine the following picture:



What do you see? How does it make you feel? What questions do you have about it? Does it bring back any memories?

## **Vocabulary:**

Read the following quotes and determine the meaning of the word based on how it's used in the sentence.

"The circus was **felled** by a variety of factors, company executives say. Declining attendance combined with high operating costs, along with changing public tastes and **prolonged** battles with animal-rights groups contributed to its **demise**."

**Felled:** killed; brought down

**Prolonged:** continuing for a long time or longer than usual; lengthy

**Demise:** the end of existence or activity

"Phineas Taylor Barnum made a traveling **spectacle** of animals and human oddities popular, while the five Ringling brothers performed juggling acts and skits from their home base in Wisconsin...The sprawling **troupes** traveled around the country by train, wowing audiences with the sheer scale of entertainment and **exotic** animals."

**Spectacle:** a visually striking performance or display

**Troupes:** a group of dancers, actors, or other entertainers who tour to different venues

**Exotic:** originating in or characteristic of a distant foreign country

"The competitor in many ways is time," said Feld, adding that transporting the show by rail and other circus **quirks** — such as providing a traveling school for performers' children — are throwbacks to another **era**.

**Quirks:** a peculiar behavioral habit

**Era:** a period of time marked by distinctive character, events, etc

## **Journal Writing Prompts:**

*"The competitor in many ways is time," said Feld, adding that transporting the show by rail and other circus quirks — such as providing a traveling school for performers' children — are throwbacks to another era.*

Write about what you think it would be like to be the child of a circus performer. What would be fun about the lifestyle? What would be difficult?

\*You can read more about the traveling school and what it is actually like on the Ringling Brothers' website.

### **Discussion Questions:**

*Humane Society leader Wayne Pacelle acknowledged the decision to close was “bittersweet” for the Felds but said: “I applaud their decision to move away from an institution grounded on inherently inhumane wild animal acts.” People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals claimed victory and called on other animal circuses to follow suit.*

What does it mean for something to be “bittersweet”? Is this phrase referring to a taste or something else? Why do you think that someone might describe the closing of the circus as “bittersweet”? Have you ever been to a circus? What did you think about it? How did you feel about the way they treated the animals? What other forms of entertainment do you know have changed or ended since you have been alive? How do you think you would feel if something you do for entertainment today (for instance Instagram or Netflix) went out of business in the future?

### **Small group discussion and activity:**

#### **Part 1:**

*Think back to the picture in the opening activity: have you heard the phrase “the final straw” or perhaps, “the straw that breaks the camel’s back”? In what context was this phrase used? Can you think of a sentence where you might use it? Would you be talking about placing straw on an actual camel, or would you be talking about something else?*

Generally, the phrase “the final straw” is used in the latter of these two contexts discussed above (which is to say, it is used to talk about something that is not literally placing straw on the back of a camel). This is because both “the final straw” and the phrase from which it comes, “the straw that breaks the camel’s back”, are **idioms**.

Before moving on to Part 2, you might want to review the definition of **idioms**. The following includes a description of what an idiom is or you can also find your own!

*What is an idiom?*

**Idiom** is a fancy way of saying “a phrase that people often say, but that means something else beyond the literal meaning”. In the case of “*the final straw*” or “*the straw that breaks the camel’s back*”, this idiom means *something in a series of events that finally makes someone lose patience*.

For example, in the sentence, *“The final straw was that the Brussel sprouts were terribly under-seasoned,”* the idiom is used to explain how a series of frustrating events caused an individual to lose patience and tell his mother that she is the worst cook in America. In the sentence, *“The straw that really broke the camel’s back was when Nick complained about the seasoning of the Brussel sprouts,”* the idiom is used to explain how a series of events (and not a singular comment) caused Nick’s mother to send him straight to his room without dessert. Both examples show how idioms convey meanings that are not their literal words.

Another idiom you might be familiar with is the idiom *“the elephant in the room”*. This idiom would be very confusing (and a little frightening) if you took it to mean that there was an actual elephant inside the very small room in which you were standing. Most of the time though, when people say *“the elephant in the room”* they are using an idiom, and what they mean is that there is something large and/or obvious that is being avoided. If you understand idioms, then you also understand that there is generally no cause for alarm when someone mentions *“the elephant in the room”*—unless the large and/or obvious thing being avoided is a hungry elephant and you are in a room with no way to prevent him from stealing your perfectly seasoned Brussel sprouts.

Another example: in the sentence, *“After Nick was sent to bed without dessert, no one dared to discuss the elephant in the room,”* the idiom really means that no one else in Nick’s family dared to mention how under-seasoned the Brussel sprouts were because they were afraid of being sent to bed without dessert. That said, it is also not always necessarily incorrect to believe that what this sentence really means is *“Nick’s family was in the business of breeding exotic circus animals and often they would feed the less savory aspects of Nick’s mother’s cooking to their pet elephant”*. However, in this case that would be a completely different and idiom-less story.

It is important to remember that idioms, like many other literary devices, depend on the larger context of the story. This is why it is imperative to read very, very closely— even if (especially if) the room where you are reading is actually a small and dark circus boxcar that you are sharing with several elephants.

## Part 2

Can you think of any other examples of idioms? How about idioms that contain animals from the circus? Draw a picture that illustrates one or more of these animal/circus idioms literally, and then describe the figurative meaning of the

phrase below or on the back of your drawing. You might even want to include a circus theme in your drawing.

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