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42 ft

.....
a **MENAGERIE** *of*
MECHANICAL MARVELS

Cirque  **MECHANICS**

Prepared by Aida Lashua & Skye Strauss

- INTRODUCTION -

42ft is inspired by the mid-1930's circus "big top," including the "period" costumes and the music. It takes us backstage and allows the audience to witness "a day in the life of a 1930's circus performer."

THIS GUIDE HAS THREE DISCUSSION SECTIONS

- **CIRCUS HISTORY & PRODUCTION INSPIRATION**
- A brief introduction to historical circus will help students understand circus life and customs as they appear in the production. They will also learn how circus turns of phrase have become familiar idioms.
- This section also introduces artists that inspired the creators of *42ft* from across media platforms. These include LIFE Magazine's photographs of the 1930's, Charlie Chaplin's films, and Sarah Gruen's novel *Water for Elephants*.
- **HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES: THE GREAT DEPRESSION**
- The time period for this show coincides with The Great Depression, framing circus as an important form of popular entertainment and contextualizing it in a wider conversation about arts funding through the WPA.
- **THE SCIENCE OF CIRCUS: NEWTONS LAWS & SIMPLE MACHINES**
- For the acrobats, performing extraordinary feats requires an understanding of basic principles of physics including inertia, momentum, and centrifugal force. The contraptions in the show are based on simple machines that rely on the same principles to help the acrobats fight against gravity.



- GUIDE 1 OF 3 -
CIRCUS HISTORY AND
PRODUCTION
INSPIRATION

.....
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MECHANICAL MARVELS

Cirque  MECHANICS

- CIRCUS HISTORY -

The Circus Ring:

One of the most popular misconceptions is that circus dates back to Roman antiquity. But the Roman circus was actually the precursor of the modern racetrack; there are only a few common denominators between Roman and modern circuses.

- The word ***circus***- which means in Latin as in English, "circle."
- Horses- In the 6th century BCE the Circus Maximus hosted chariot races.
- Physical Feats- The Gladiator's battles also took place in the Roman Circus

The *recognizable* version this popular entertainment began when Englishman Philip Astley staged the first modern circus in London. Astley, a former cavalry sergeant major, found that if he galloped in a tight circle centrifugal force allowed him to perform seemingly impossible feats on a horse's back. He drew up a ring, **42ft in diameter**, and on January 9, 1768 he invited the public to see him wave his sword in the air while he rode with one foot on the saddle and one on the horse's head.

The show takes its name from the diameter of Astley's ring!

In the 19th century, the term "circus" was adopted as a generic name for this new form of entertainment that brought together trick riders, acrobats, clowns, aerialists, trained animals, and other marvels.

When you watch the show: How does this history find a place in the acts of *42ft* as well as the name?



*Andrew DuCrow the “Father of British Circus Equestrianism”
Chief Performer an Eventual Manager of Astley’s Amphitheatre*

AMERICAN CIRCUS

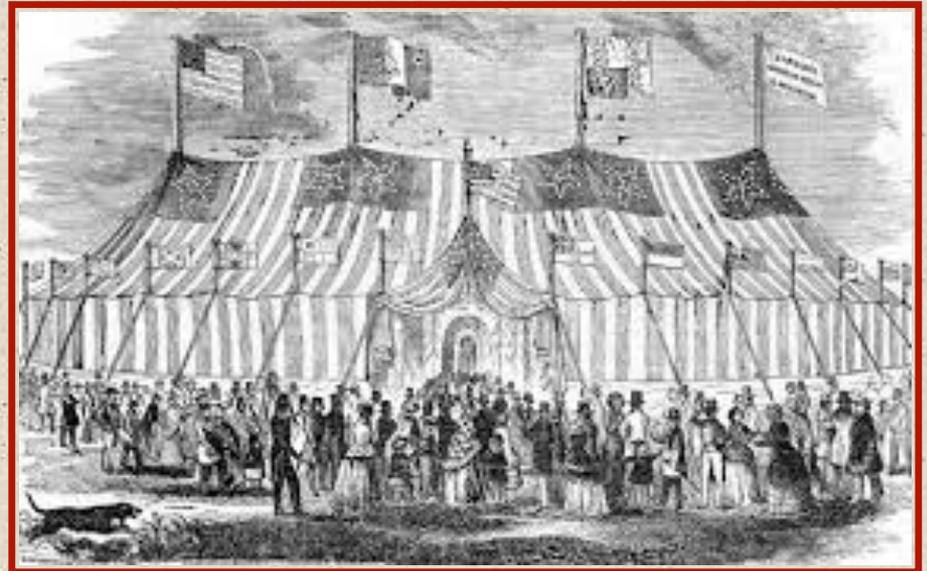
In 1792, English equestrian John Bill Ricketts opened the first American circus in Philadelphia and later opened others in New York and Boston.

- FUN FACT: President George Washington reportedly attended a Ricketts circus and sold the company a horse.

THE AMERICAN CIRCUS'S UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS:

THE CLASSIC "BIG TOP" TENT

Circuses in Europe performed inside wooden buildings. 1800's America did not have cities with large enough populations to sustain permanent shows. In 1825 the enterprising Joshua Purdy Brown replaced the traditional wooden construction with a portable canvas tent and took the show on the road!



THE SIDE SHOW

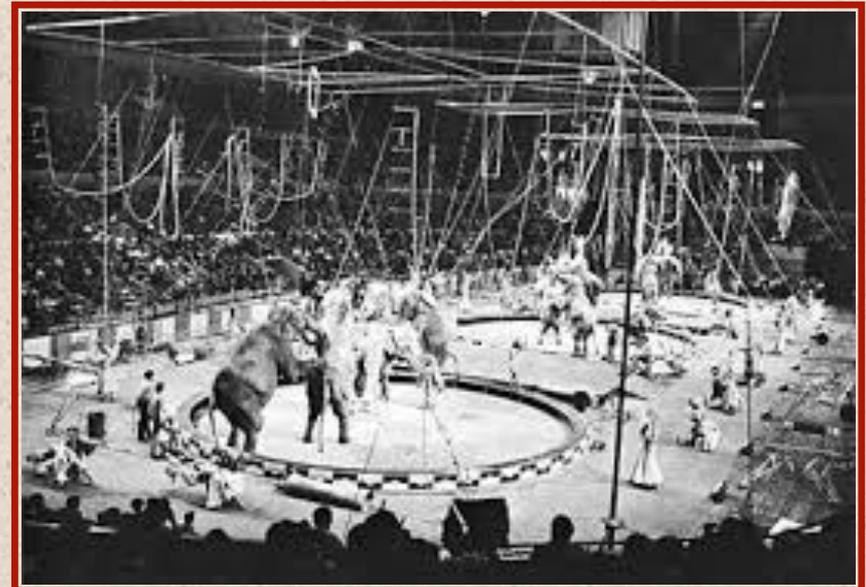
In 1871, Phineas Taylor Barnum and William Cameron Coup launched P.T. Barnum's Museum, Menagerie & Circus, a spectacle they dubbed "The Greatest Show on Earth." A traveling show, whose museum was an exhibition of exotic animals and human oddities, which later became known as the Sideshow.



WAGONS

By 1835 circus wagons began to appear in circus parades. The very first circus wagon carried the band. It was appropriately called the bandwagon.

(This will be important again in our section on circus idioms!)



THE TRAIN

In 1872, P.T. Barnum, together with William C. Coup and Dan Castello, moved their entire show in railroad cars, however, small circuses were still traveling by wagon.



MULTIPLE RINGS

In 1881 P.T. Barnum went into business with James Anthony Bailey; the “Barnum and Bailey” circuses were so large they required simultaneous performances in three rings. They were the first circus to display three rings, which they claimed made it the largest circus the world had even seen.



FUN FACT: Clowns go to college! In 1968, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey opened Clown College, but women were not admitted until 1970.

THE CIRCUS ELEPHANT

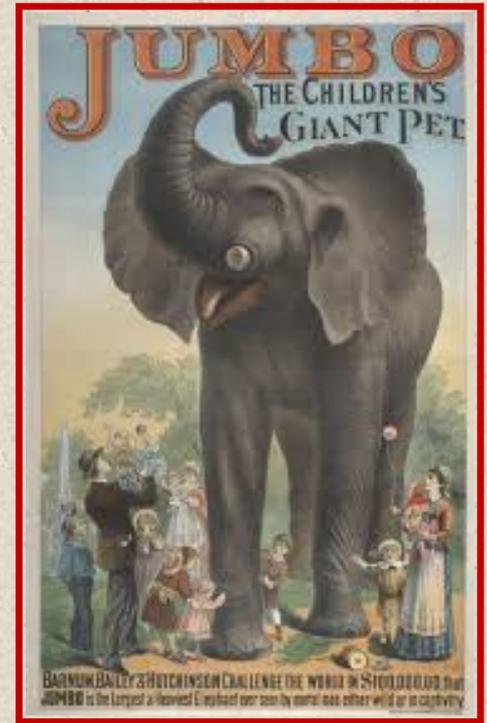
Hachaliah Bailey (1775-1845), a cattle dealer from Somers, New York purchased a young African elephant, which he exhibited around the country with great success. The addition of other exotic animals led to the creation of the traveling menagerie.

- **FUN FACT:** Jumbo the elephant was brought to the United States by P.T. Barnum in 1882. Thereafter, the word “jumbo” became a synonym for large.

**The word “menagerie” is in the full title:
*42ft: A Menagerie of Mechanical Marvels***

The original purpose of a “menagerie” was to show an audience without mass-media all kinds of exotic animals they would otherwise never encounter, including (but not limited to) Lions, and Tigers, and Bears (oh my!)

With changing social standards about the treatment of animals, they are no longer a part of the spectacle of circus. This shift contributed to the closure of Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey’s circus in 2017. Meanwhile, contemporary circuses, like Cirque du Soleil and the Cirque Mechanics, focus on the human performer and have increase the amount of narrative and added more meaningful music and visual spectacle with sets, props, and costumes.



COMMON CIRCUS IDIOMS

The circus is woven into our culture, and that includes our language.

The origin of the term **WHITE ELEPHANT SALE** is the nineteenth-century "White Elephant War" between Barnum & Bailey and a rival circus that taught the public that all white elephants were actually painted hoaxes.

RAIN OR SHINE started out as a prominent advertising slogan for circuses that had moved into big top tents and out of the inclement weather.

The phrase **LET'S GET THIS SHOW ON THE ROAD** comes from the circus manager egging on the crew to pack quickly to move to the next town.

HOLD YOUR HORSES began as a common caution on the circus parade route, if their handlers weren't careful the horses (with their riders in tow!) might bolt from the passing elephants and other exotic animals.

Politics borrows some of its terminology from circus stories. **THROWING YOUR HAT IN THE RING** became a political expression when Woodrow Wilson began his bid for reelection by throwing his hat into the center ring when the Barnum & Bailey Circus came to Washington in 1916. In another instance, Dan Rice was parading his circus through the streets and shouted down to his friend presidential hopeful Zachary Taylor, "Come on up here where the people can see who's going to be their next president! **GET ON THE BANDWAGON!**"

DESIGN

COSTUMES help to elevate performances feats of skill and strength into something greater. They allow the performers to convey character and take the audience on a journey to new places. Or in *42ft*, into times past.

MUSIC has been an integral part of the American circus since the very beginning. The earliest performances were accompanied by string orchestras, but brass bands came into fashion by the start of the 19th century.

Every tent circus day began with a street parade accompanied by a marching band or bandwagon. The last vehicle in the parade was the steam powered calliope that beckoned the townsfolk to follow the parade back to the circus lot.

Legendary Ringmaster Timothy Mack:

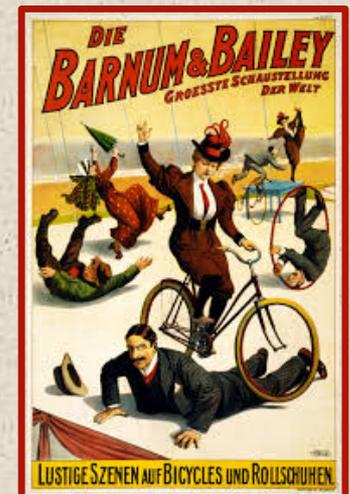
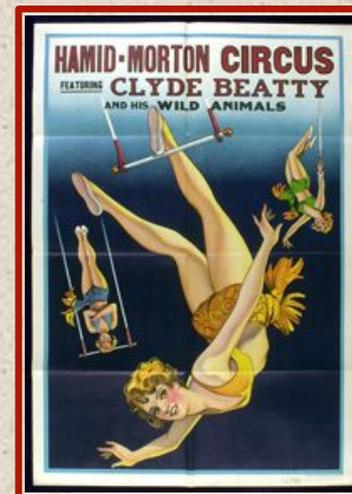
“You are enamored by our ability to place you in another world. Do the people of this other world wear ordinary clothes? No! We wear feathers and makeup. We wear top hats and sequins. Our talent is the center piece, but our costumes create the effect of magic.”



ADVERTISING - POSTERS & BILLS

Advertising a circus was a challenge before radio, T.V. and the internet. As the circus traveled, the managers had only a week to bill the show before what might only be one day of performance. Their success relied on the strength of these images and the recognizable acts they promoted. The date of the show and the name of the circus, recognizable and memorable enough to encourage repeat customers, were also prominently displayed. Teams of artists and lithographers collaborated to print the posters quickly and efficiently, so the names of the printing companies are more recognizable than those of individual graphic designers. According to circus aficionados, the finest printer of circus posters was Strobridge & Company of Cincinnati.

When you watch the show: How are the posters featured? How do they help to advance the story?

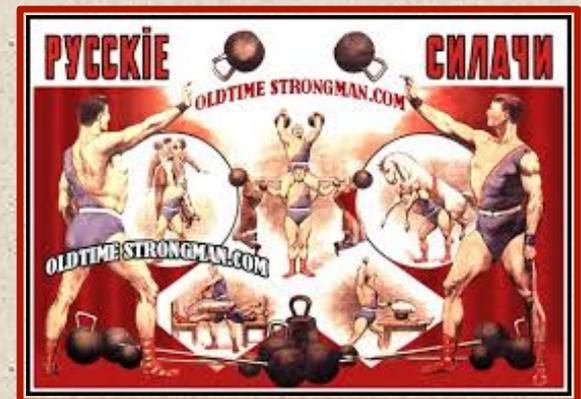


CIRCUS ACTS & CIRCUS FOLK

Some act names – like the “Strong Man” or “Animal Trainer” – are easy to guess. Trapeze is also very familiar. But some circus acts and circus folk require more vocabulary.

Roustabout - Circus jargon for the unskilled, underpaid laborers and workmen on the show. They perform duties such as setting up tents, carrying props in and out of the ring, and helping to clean up after the animals.

Artist is the preferred term for a circus performer. They are higher skilled, higher paid, and some are even the “stars of the show.” Some artists are **Acrobats** who performs acts requiring skill, agility, and coordination. Others are **Aerialists** who perform suspended above the ground on trapeze, silks, or lyra (also called aerial hoop). In duo acts, the performer who is released to flip, turn, jump, or participate in a controlled fall is the “**flyer**” and the flyer's partner is the “**catcher**” or “**porter**.”



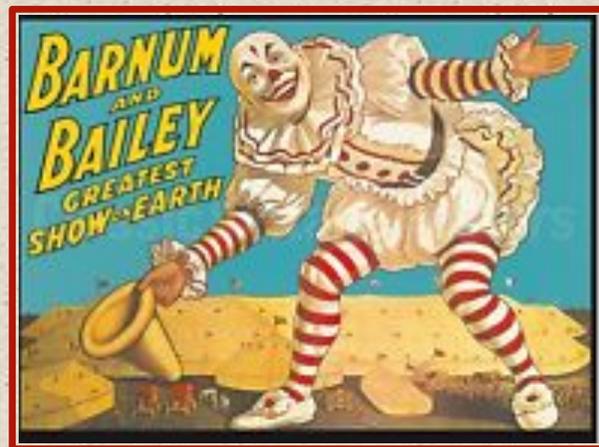
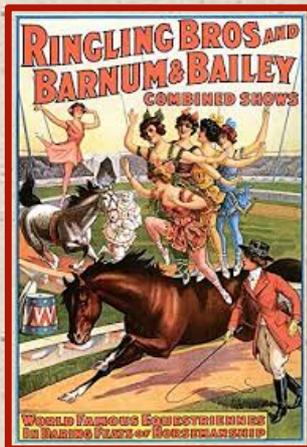
The big hoop apparatuses you will see on the floor are **German Wheel**- the one that looks like a ring made from a ladder. The thinner, lighter single hoop is called a **Cyr Wheel**.

Wire Walkers, including **Slack Wire** performers who use a less taut wire, are another class of performer. There are also **Jugglers** who specialize in throwing and catching various objects and in the smooth actions of **object manipulation**.

When you watch the show: Keep these terms in mind, many artists in 42ft are such impressive athletes that they can showcase multiple skills!

Ring — The circle in which circus acts are presented. The center ring was about 42 feet, and it was heavy to accommodate the animal acts. It was strong enough for the horses to walk on! The side rings were about 36 feet and lighter.

Ring Horse — A horse which performs in the center ring, trained to maintain timing despite distractions from music, performers, or other trained animals.



INSPIRATION BOARD FOR 42FT



The artists used these images as production research. Notice how the collection on the board draws on the poster images and circus acts from the previous slides.

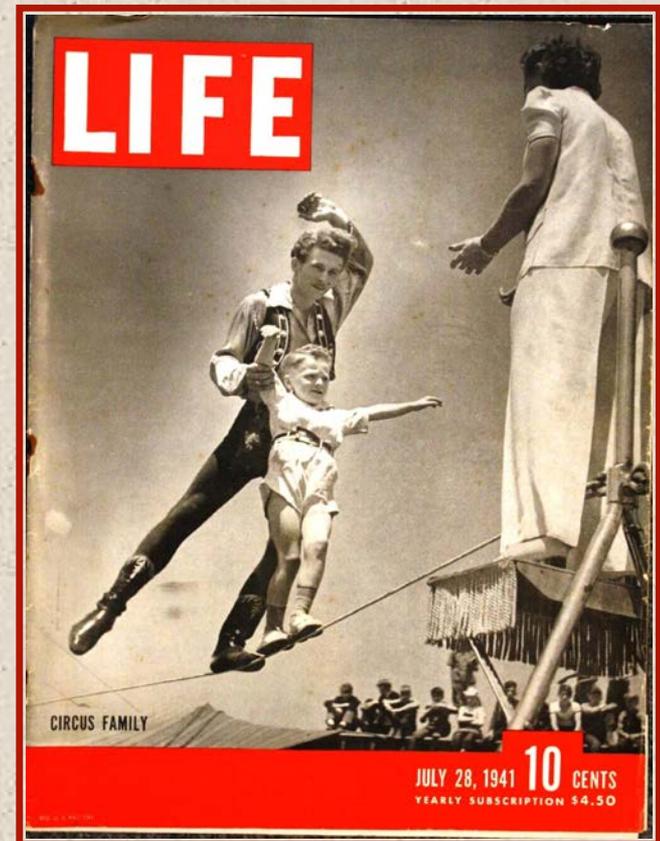
OTHER INSPIRATION FOR 42FT

42ft: A Menagerie of Mechanical Marvels draws its inspiration from the 1930's traveling American circuses visible in the the pages of LIFE Magazine and interpreted through the era's silent film's like Charlie Chaplin's "The Circus." The team also drew inspiration from Sara Gruen's best-selling novel "Water for Elephants" that was also based on historical research.

LIFE MAGAZINE

In 1936, founding editor Henry Luce described the magazine's purpose: "To see life; to see the world...to see strange things — machines, armies, multitudes, shadows in the jungle and on the moon; to see man's work — his paintings, towers and discoveries; to see things thousands of miles away, things hidden behind walls and within rooms, things dangerous to come to; the women men love and many children; to see and to take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed..."

That included exploring the circus of the day, onstage and off, in photo exposes.







THE FILMS OF CHARLIE CHAPLIN

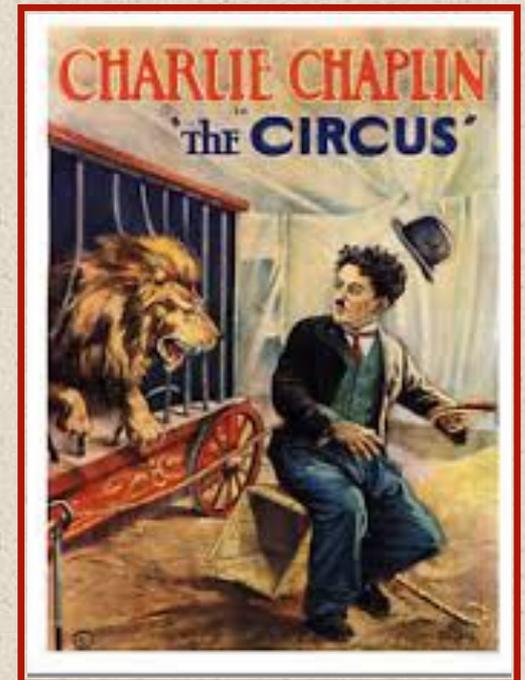
The comedic interactions between some of the characters in 42ft and the performance machines/props were modeled after the famed scenes of Chaplin's "Tramp" character in the 1929 silent classic "The Circus." It also inspired some of the characters, like the roustabout.

Chaplin was known for his performance style- as a mime who started his career on the vaudeville stage his exaggerated facial expressions, loosely fitting clothing, and physical actions are not unlike those of circus clowns. His career spanned over 65 years and he went on to become a producer and director as well as a beloved performer.

The Circus

Charlie Chaplin – 1928

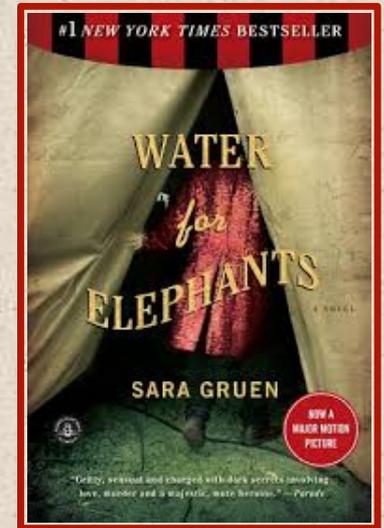
Charlie Chaplin, playing a wrongfully accused criminal ("the Tramp") escaping from the police, who ends up under the big top. He's trapped in a lions cage (among other hilarious scenarios) and falls for the beautiful show rider.



THE NOVEL *WATER FOR ELEPHANTS*

Sara Gruen's bestseller *Water for Elephants* builds its fiction on historical fact, including images of period circuses included within its pages. The 1930s were a tough time for the circus, which had its heyday in the roaring 1920s. The Great Depression and the pull (and affordability) of the cinema were depriving the art form of its audience, and only a few major circuses pulled through to a mid-century revival.

The novel's jacket reads: "It was the early part of the Great Depression, and everyone in this third-rate circus was lucky to have any job at all" and in this hard-scrabble world Jacob, the main character, befriends "Marlena, the star of the equestrian act" and the elephant Rosie. "The bond that grew among this unlikely trio was one of love and trust, and ultimately, it was their only hope for survival" because it was the elephant's new act that was meant to save the circus. It goes on to refer to the world within the pages of *Water for Elephants* as "a world built of wonder, a world so real, one starts to breathe its air."





- GUIDE 2 OF 3 -
HISTORY & SOCIAL STUDIES:
THE GREAT DEPRESSION &
THE WPA

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MECHANICAL MARVELS

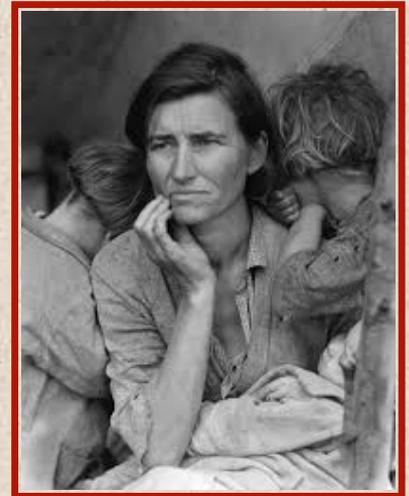
Cirque  MECHANICS

CIRCUS AS POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT: THE GREAT DEPRESSION, ART, AND THE WPA

The decade that inspired the creators of *42ft* was the 1930's, when an unexpected stock-market crash in October of 1929 combined with the environmental disaster known as the "Dust Bowl," which caused crops to fail as drought and corresponding dust choked the plains states, to create a period of unprecedented economic hardship in the United States. Many Americans were left homeless and hungry. The international economic slump in the 1930s created the discontent that would bring Hitler to power in Germany and sow the seeds of WWII.

HISTORICAL PHOTOS

Seeking an understanding of this moment in history brings us to a very different set of photographs. Dorothea Lange captured this image titled "Migrant Mother" in 1936. Families, like the one in this photo, seeking seasonal farming work during the depression lived in roadside camps as they struggled to provide for their children. Lange's work helped to draw attention to their plight and make the case for government intervention.



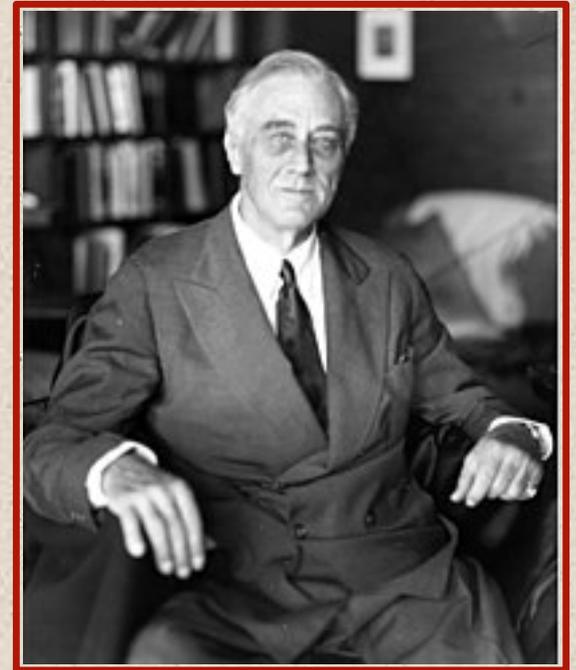
When you watch the show: Think about how this historical context helps you invent a backstory for the main character, with his worn clothes and suitcase.

FDR & THE NEW DEAL

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected in 1932 and instituted a series of relief efforts known as the “new deal” to help the economy and the American people rally. The W.P.A. - Works Progress Administration – commissioned large public works projects in order to get Americans back to work. This included things like work on infrastructure, such as revitalizing roads and creating new public buildings. It also provided funding for arts projects to keep artists and craftspeople employed.

THE WPA & FAP

The Federal Art Project, F.A.P., was the branch of the W.P.A. responsible for arts funding. These arts projects helped to make new construction as beautiful as it was functional, and elevate the quality of life for Americans through the performing and visual arts. Roosevelt hoped not only for the nations survival but “an abundant life” for all its citizens. Many of these projects reflected the politics of the artists involved, such as painting murals that asserted the dignity of farming and labor or creating theatre pieces from newspaper headlines.



WHAT ENTERTAINMENT CAN DO

Even though allocating funding to the arts through the F.A.P. was controversial in the eyes of some politicians, it was deemed a necessary part of the recovery efforts. Entertainment played an important role in fueling the spirit in times of hardship. The most popular films and music of the day reflected the need for cheer and escapism in difficult times. The circus was part of that trend as the self-sufficient tents took the performing arts to rural America.

Famous People:

Clark Gable, Bette Davis, &
Greta Garbo
The Marx Brothers
Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers
Dr. Seuss & Frank Lloyd
Wright

Popular Movies:

The Grapes of Wrath
Gone with the Wind
Snow White
The Wizard of Oz

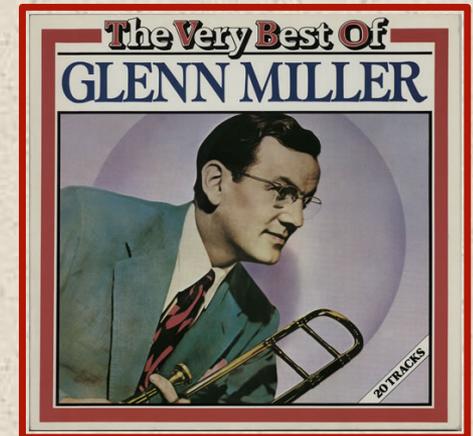
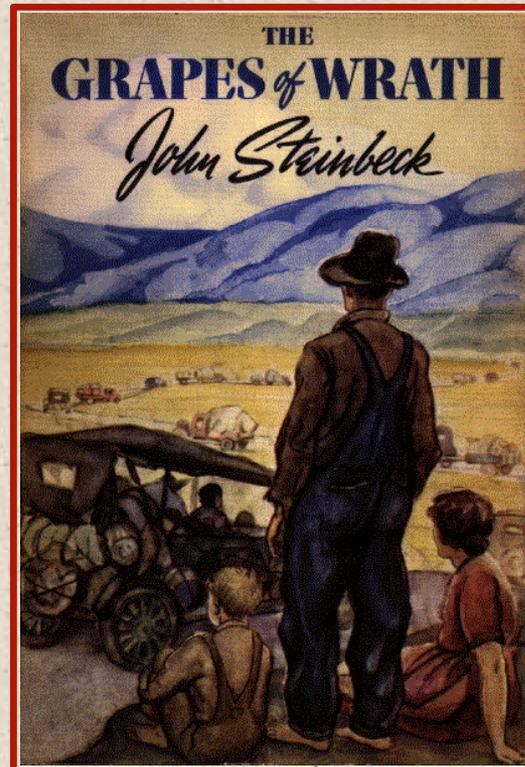
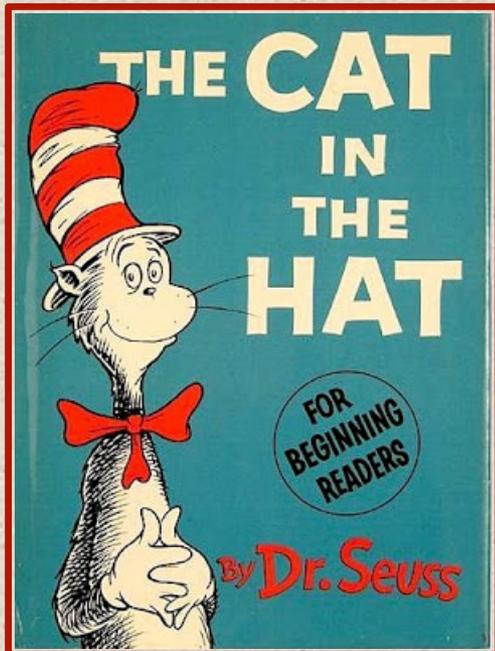
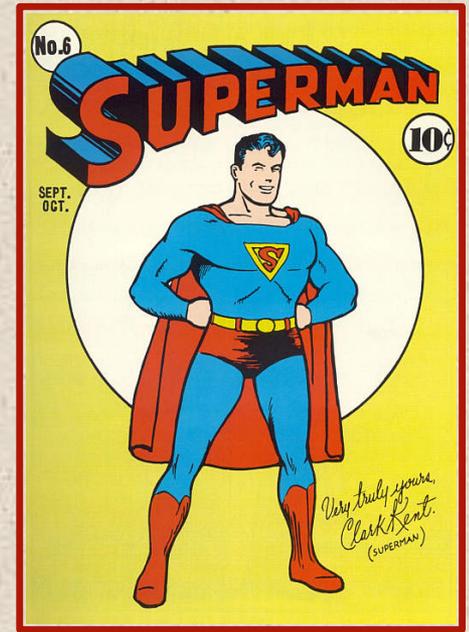
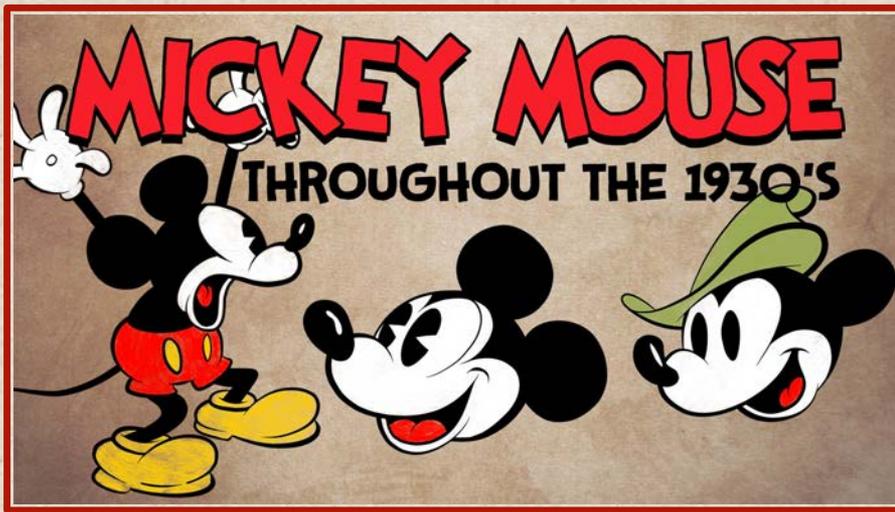
Popular Characters:

Superman
Mickey Mouse



Popular Music:

Big Band – Benny Goodman & Glenn Miller
“Brother Can You Spare a Dime”?
“Anything Goes”
“It Don’t Mean a Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing”
The new anthem- “The Star Spangled Banner”



- WPA ART -

The advent of WWII brought the W.P.A. and the F.A.P. to an end as the rallying wartime economy allowed the arts organizations that had managed to survive the Great Depression to return to pursuing private funding to support their endeavors. The works of the W.P.A. and F.A.P. that remain on display throughout the USA are the project's lasting legacy.





- GUIDE 3 OF 3 -
THE SCIENCE OF CIRCUS
NEWTONS LAWS &
SIMPLE MACHINES

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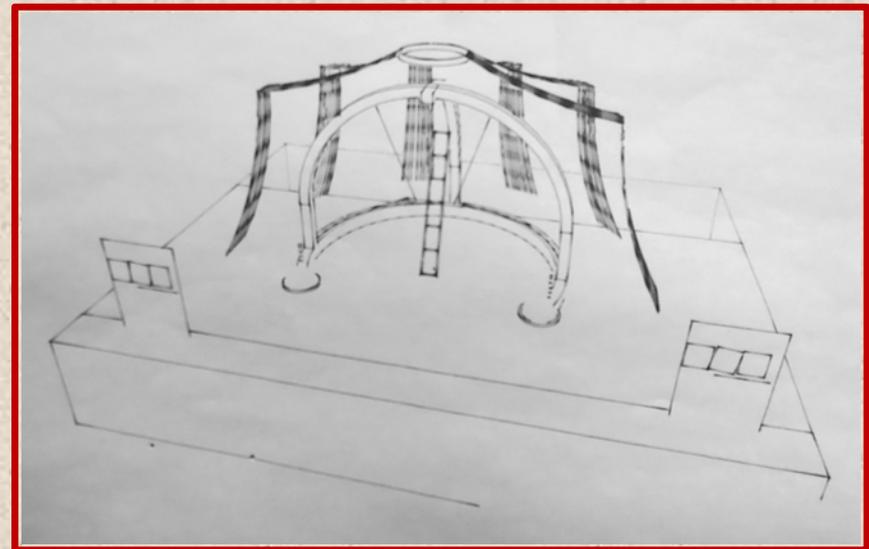
Cirque  MECHANICS

NEWTON'S LAWS OF MOTION

Sir Isaac Newton's Laws of Motion laid the groundwork for classical mechanics in 1687. The Britannica Concise Encyclopedia gives a brief definition of the three laws quoted below. The Cirque Mechanics performers use an embodied awareness of these laws, something not only understood mentally but also put into practice physically, to do extraordinary things in the circus ring.

The first law, also called the law of inertia, states that if a body is at rest or moving at constant speed in a straight line, it will continue to do so unless it is acted upon by a force.

In the show, once the Juggle-Go-Round or the Carousel begins to rotate, clockwise or counter clockwise, it takes deliberate effort on the part of the performers to stop it or change its direction.



When you watch the show: Pay attention to changes of direction, and how hard the performers & crew have to push to overcome inertia and start something moving vs. to keep it in motion using inertia to their advantage.

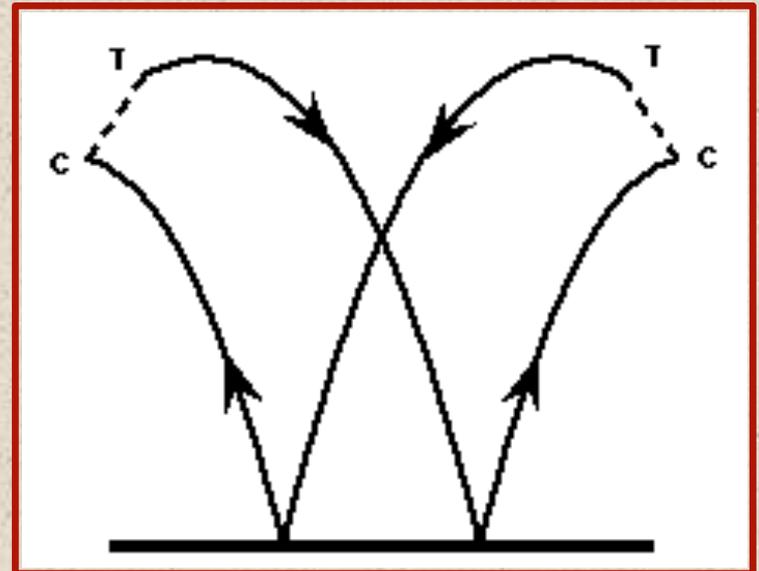
The second law states that the force F acting on a body is equal to the mass m of the body times its acceleration a , or $F = ma$.

The greater the mass of an object is, the more force is needed to set it in motion. **Watch for the moment when even the Strong Man needs an extra push!**



The third law, also called the action-reaction law, states that the actions of two bodies on each other are always equal in magnitude and opposite in direction.

When the balls in a bounce juggling act hit the floor or platform, **it is the “reaction” force that sends them flying back to the juggler’s hand.**

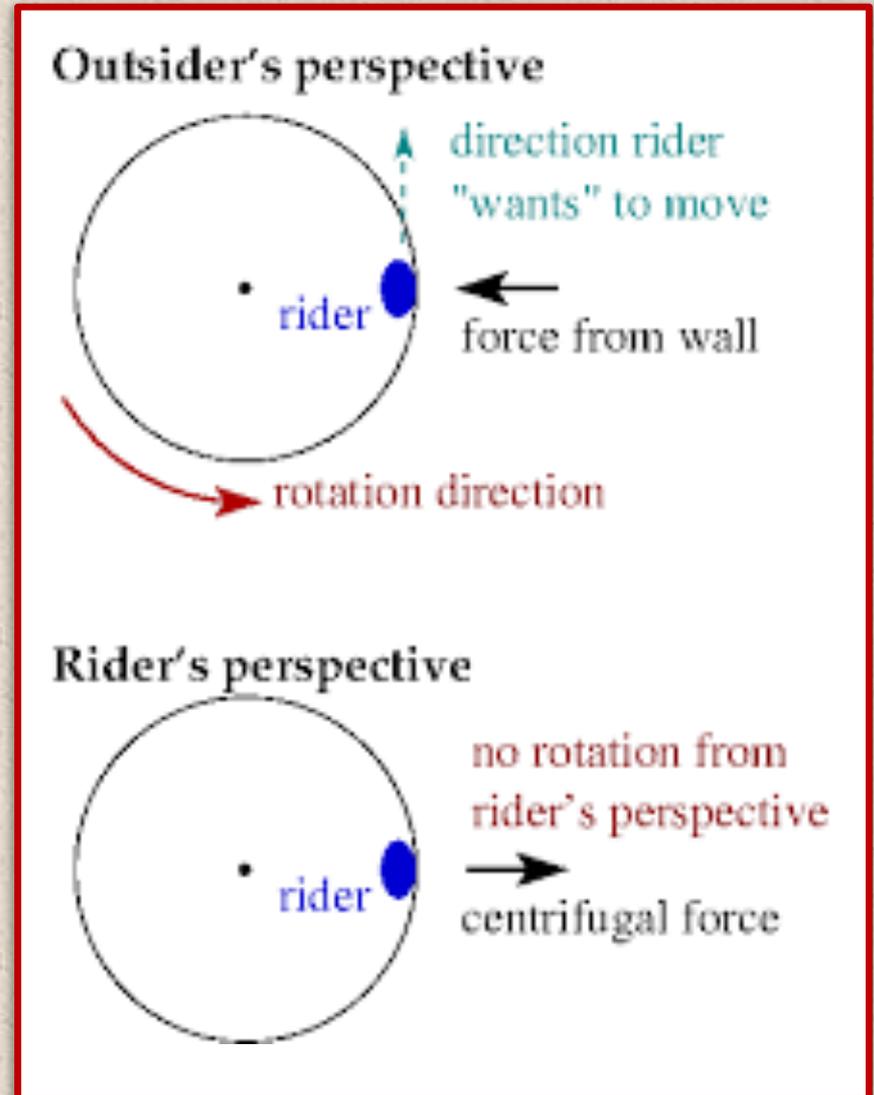


When you watch the show: Try to spot other examples!

Centrifugal Force is another important part of Newton's Laws that explains how the horseback riding tricks from circus's past happened.

The Britannica Concise Encyclopedia defines Centrifugal Force:

Fictitious force, peculiar to circular motion, that is equal but opposite to the centripetal force that keeps a particle on a circular path. For example, a stone attached to a string and whirling in a horizontal circular path is accelerated toward the center of its path by the tension in the string. However, in a reference frame at rest with the stone, another force—the centrifugal force—must be introduced for Newton's laws of motion to apply. Centrifugal force is a useful concept in analyzing behavior in rotating systems.



Centrifugal Force & Circus:

The 42ft diameter of the historical circus ring, where this production gets its name, was the ideal size for Phillip Astley to use centrifugal force to his advantage. With the horse at a gallop, the centrifugal force held him to the horse's back, allowing him to do tricks in spite of the circular motion and high speed. Conveniently, traveling in a circle rather than a straight line also provided the audience with a better view.



When you watch the show: Keep in mind that this historical use of centrifugal force relies on a particular circumference of circle and higher speeds. Though this production references Astley's horseback rider acts, Tatiana is actually working *very hard* to juggle on the back of Rosebud the mechanical horse.

Simple Machines

Machines make tasks easier, including circus ones. The six simple machines are the basic components of all other machines- the lever, wedge, inclined plane, wheel & axel, pulley and screw are the basic building blocks and you can find them all in and around *42ft*. Each simple machine is described below by Todd Kranz on the Simple Machines Learning Site and they are paired with examples from the show or the workshop.

Simple Machines in *42ft*:

A lever is a board or bar that rests on a turning point. This turning point is called the fulcrum. An object that a lever moves is called the load. The closer the object is to the fulcrum, the easier it is to move.

A lever is used to lift & lower the Carousel when it is being placed on blocks to secure it during the aerial performances in *42ft*.

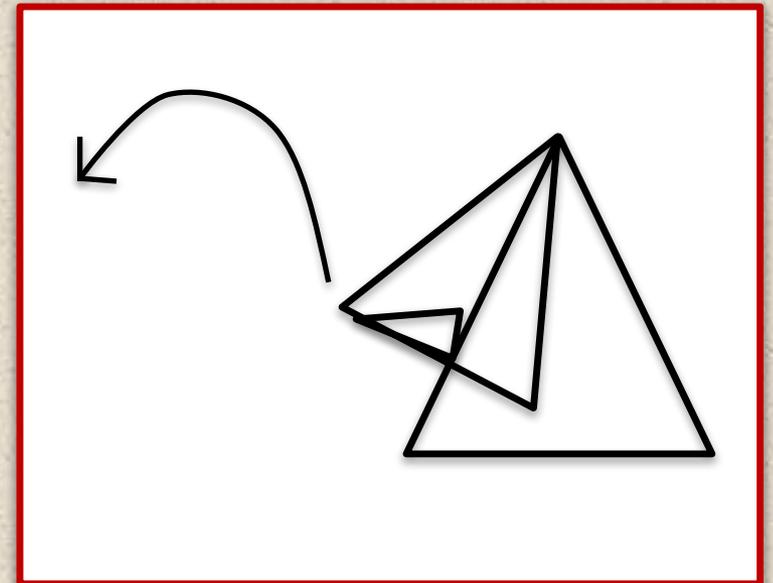
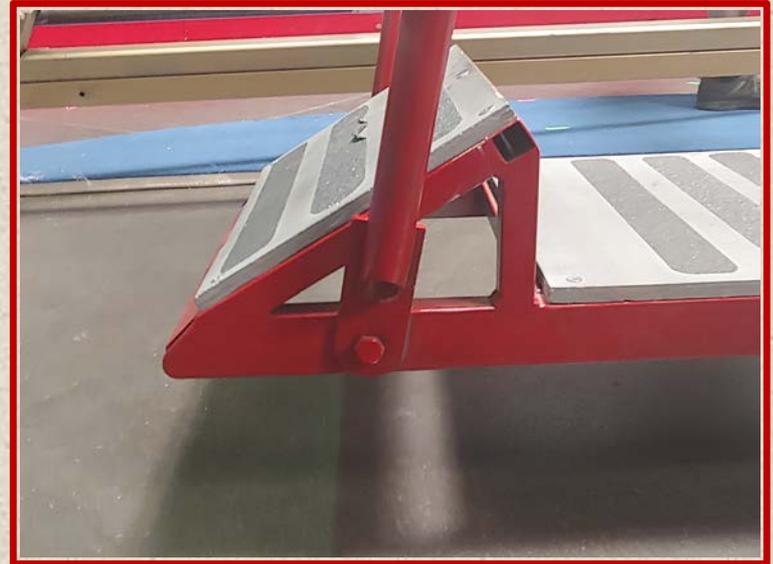


An inclined plane is a simple machine. It is a flat surface that is higher on one end. You can use this machine to move an object to a lower or higher place. Inclined planes make the work of moving things easier. You would need less energy and force to move objects with an inclined plane.

Look closely- there is an inclined plane on the front of the Russian Swing helping the performers channel the energy into flight.

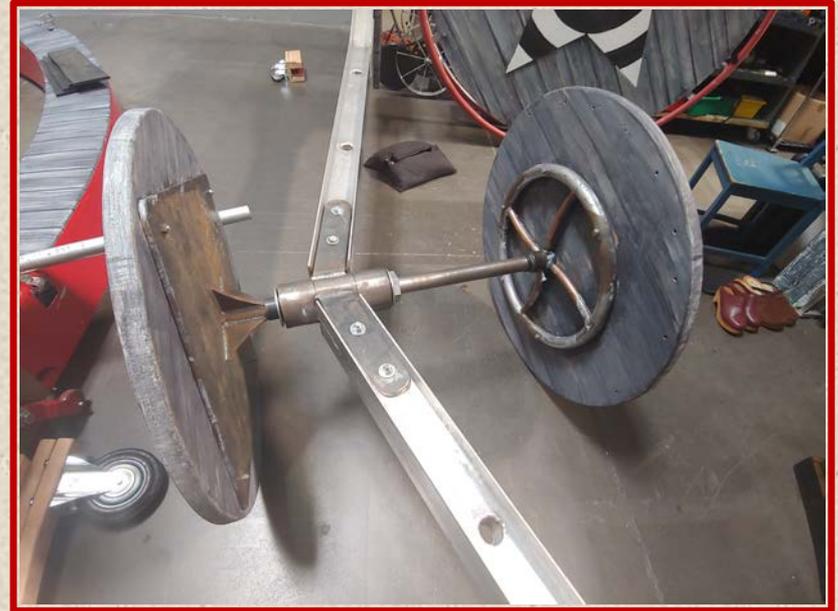
A wedge is a simple machine used to push two objects apart. A wedge is made up of two inclined planes. These planes meet and form a sharp edge, which can split things apart.

Wedges are hard to find in the show itself, but they were certainly used to split and plane the log you will see in the Strong Man act.



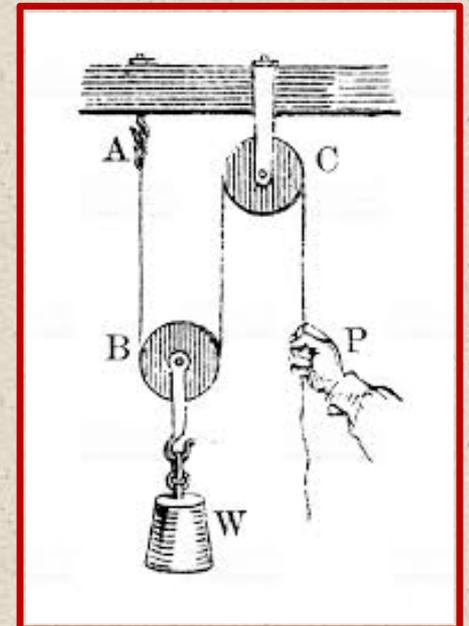
The **wheel and axle** is another simple machine. The axle is a rod that goes through the wheel. This lets the wheel turn. It is easy to move things from place to place with wheels and axles.

The center of the Juggle-Go-Round is a big wheel and axle, if you watch closely you will see the crew move it in and out of place by turning it sideways on that center wheel so it can be rolled into place.



The pulley is made up of a wheel and a rope. The rope fits on the groove of the wheel. One part of the rope is attached to the load. When you pull on one side of the pulley, the wheel turns and the load will move. Pulleys let you move loads up, down, or sideways. Pulleys are good for moving objects to hard to reach places. It also makes the work of moving heavy loads a lot easier.

You will see pulleys at the center back of the Carousel raising and lowering the ladder and the duo trapeze into place for the performance.



A screw is a simple machine that is made from another simple machine. It is actually an inclined plane that winds around itself. A screw has ridges and is not smooth like a nail. Some screws are used to lower and raise things. They are also used to hold objects together.

Although not visible, there are hundreds of screws that hold the machines & props together.

Complex machines combine many simple machines. The prototype of Rosebud the horse that you see here is held together by nuts and bolts (that have threads like screws), contains a wheel and axle, and uses levering action to move the legs up and down. Prototypes are always part of the process of engineering something new- you have to test your ideas!



When you watch the show: Now that you have definitions and examples, see if you can find even more simple machines while you watch the show! Also think about what *complex machines* you see onstage that combine one or more simple machines into a more complicated mechanical marvel.

42ft - STUDY GUIDE BIBLIOGRAPHY

WEB BY TOPIC

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