



Pay No Attention

Creative Learning
Teacher Resource



Pay No Attention

Learning resource for Stages 2–6

- **Subjects:** Drama, Dance, and PDHPE (Health & Physical Education)
- **General Capabilities and Cross-Curriculum Priorities:** Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability
- **Genre:** High-energy, non-verbal performance combining contemporary circus, physical theatre, ensemble choreography, and visual storytelling
- **Themes:** Key themes include resilience, risk-taking, trust, identity, growth, creative collaboration, and physical storytelling

Flying Fruit Fly Circus explores themes of resilience, trust, and creative expression. Through daring physical feats and playful ensemble work, students are invited to witness what it means to support one another, take risks, and celebrate difference.

The performance highlights the power of collaboration—how balance, timing, and care for others are essential both on and off the stage.

In every act, students experience a story of growth, courage, and the joyful possibilities of the human body in motion.

We recognise Circus as an artform and subject in its own right – that can be explored within the frameworks of the PDHPE, Drama and Dance syllabi.

With thanks to the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, Allie Gunton and Christine Huynh for developing this learning resource.

Performance Overview

Step into a circus of contradictions, where nothing is as it seems - a kaleidoscope of illusion, disguise, and reinvention. Performed by the extraordinary young artists of the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, expect breathtaking acrobatics, theatrical trickery, and shifting personas - where each identity tried on, discarded, or reinvented leaves a trace of who we might become.

With spectacular circus skills, sleight-of-hand, and enigmatic performances, thirteen young acrobats pull you into a whirlpool of post-truth malarkey. Everyone has a version, no one agrees. Pay No Attention is by turns hilarious, disquieting, and awe-inspiring - a circus puzzle about what it means to be seen.

Big Sky, performed at the Sydney Opera House in 2024.



Performance Overview

Pay No Attention invites students to question what's real and what's performed. Thirteen extraordinary young artists tumble through personas, illusions, and contradictions, in a circus puzzle about identity and truth.

In an age of “fake news,” digital manipulation, and endless conflicting stories, Pay No Attention reflects the lived experience of today's teenagers: sorting through fragments, questioning authority, embracing fluidity and constructing their own truths and identities. The performance celebrates disguise, and reinvention - where young people try on new selves, where nothing is certain, and where spectacle itself becomes slippery.



What to expect in the performance

Pay No Attention is a visual, high-energy performance combining circus arts, physical storytelling, and visual spectacle in an inclusive and supportive environment.

Lighting

- The lighting is bright and colourful, changing to suit the rhythm of the acts
- Some sequences may include moving spotlights or dimmed transitions
- Colours are used to create mood and highlight action

Seating

- Students will sit in theatre-style seating
- Often circus is performed 'in the round' meaning you may be able to see the performance from many angles, and the stage may be in the middle of the theatre.

Music and Sound

- The performance uses recorded music and natural sound effects (e.g. thuds, claps, rolling objects)
- Music can be energetic and fast-paced during acts, then softer between scenes
- Volume levels remain safe, but some sudden noises may occur (e.g. falls, loud applause, object landings)

Performance

- The young artists perform a series of circus routines
- Storytelling happens through body language, timing, and ensemble coordination
- Performers may look toward or interact gently with the audience, but direct participation is not required

Interaction and Sensory Elements

- Some acts involve moving objects and moments of stillness or suspense
- No audience members will be brought on stage
- Students may respond vocally or physically to moments of surprise, humour, or awe – and that's okay!

Post-Show Experience

- Teachers may wish to continue classroom discussion with reflection prompts or creative tasks

Personal Safety and Wellbeing

- Teachers are encouraged to offer reassurance before the show that students can move, laugh, or step out if needed

Flying Fruit Fly Circus

About the company

Australian contemporary circus has grown up alongside the Flying Fruit Fly Circus and like a magpie it has adopted, stolen, appropriated and plagiarised from many different styles.

In 1979 the local Murray River Performing Group (MRPG) initiated a school holiday program along with a few intrepid circus artists. Together they trained more than 80 school children from the region over a six-week period and performed in a circus big top. The show, called The Flying Fruit Fly Circus, was an extraordinary success and an unstoppable momentum had been generated.

Subsequent landmark projects helped to influence the development of contemporary circus in Australia, including with China's Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe and Moscow Circus, and cement the company's reputation for innovation and excellence.

Today, Flying Fruit Fly Circus shows continue to be in high demand and their unique select-entry circus program is regarded as one of the best in the world.



Flying Fruit Fly Circus performing Spherical at the Sydney Opera House in 2023.

Flying Fruit Fly Circus

About their training approach

Performing is the whole point of circus. The experience of presenting your acts and ideas on a stage in front of an audience is essential to learning and understanding what it is to be an artist.

The Flying Fruit Fly Circus develops its young performers in not just competency in skills and technique, but artistry.

Young artists in the company are taught to be receptive and open to many and all influences. The training philosophy is to strengthen and condition the bodies of the students, so they are capable of learning and adopting chosen skill sets quickly and easily.

This preparation and training enables young people to enter an industry ten years in the future and it is impossible to predict what that industry will look like. Flying Fruit Fly Circus artists are trained to be at the forefront of the future circus, making circus in their own image.



Flying Fruit Fly Circus performing Spherical at the Sydney Opera House in 2023.

What does a circus artist look like?

Developing the next generation of circus artists

Do you think you have what it takes to join the circus? Are you fit, strong, curious, aware of your body and its limits?

At the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, a circus artist learns to build their physical strength and skills; develop their knowledge of history, traditions and contemporary forms of circus; and explore their creative identity – experimenting across art forms, working in a dynamic team, and innovating with passion and curiosity.

Circus artists have a range of career pathways open to them:

- *Specialists* are experts in one skill area, pushing the possibilities of their apparatus, and are sought after as feature artists in big international companies.
- *Generalists* collect a range of skills allowing them to work in teams and perform solo acts in a range of performance environments (with low ceilings, or outdoor and on the move).

Circus artists can move into social or community circus, while others work as feature or generalist artists within large commercial companies and travelling shows.

Glossary

An introduction to Flying Fruit Fly Circus

- **Circus:** A live performance that includes amazing physical tricks like juggling, balancing, and climbing.
- **Acrobatics:** Movements like flips, rolls, and jumps that show strength and balance.
- **Juggling:** Tossing and catching objects like balls or clubs in the air without dropping them.
- **Balance:** Staying steady while standing, walking, or moving – sometimes in tricky positions!
- **Trust:** Believing that someone will help or keep you safe, especially when working in a team.
- **Teamwork:** Working together to do something fun, challenging, or important.
- **Performer:** A person who entertains an audience by doing something special on stage.
- **Rehearsal:** A practice before the real performance, where performers learn what to do.
- **Resilience:** Trying again and again, even if something is hard or goes wrong.
- **Ensemble:** A group of people who perform together and support each other on stage.
- **Choreography:** Planned movements or steps in a dance or circus act.
- **Physical Theatre:** Telling a story using the body—through movement, shapes, and actions instead of words.
- **Props:** Objects used in a performance to help tell the story or do a trick.
- **Stage:** The space where the show happens and performers move, jump, and act.
- **Warm-Up:** Movements, stretches and exercises done before performing to get the body ready and prevent injury.

Activities in the classroom



Performance skills teaching points

Developing presence skills in circus

In a circle, pass a ball from one to another. Find different ways of tossing and transferring the ball: under legs, facing in a different direction, with eyes closed, rolling, bouncing, etc.

Do this for 2 minutes, then ask students to start focusing on the quality of the actions they are making (are they smooth, jerky, fast, aggressive etc...) and be mindful of the way they are holding their body and face throughout. They do not need to inject any particular style into their work at this point, but you will start to notice that their throws become much more considered.

Next, start to articulate qualities you would like to see in their throws, calling them out at random so that students need to think on their feet.

Suggestions might be:

- A joyful throw
- A silly throw
- A super confident throw
- An Australian throw
- A cat-like throw
- A grumpy throw

Once that has been established for approximately 5 minutes, take the physical ball away and mime tossing an imaginary ball around the circle.

As the ball is tossed, students' focus should be on convincingly conveying its size, weight, texture and how difficult/easy it may be to manipulate. These qualities can change with each person, even in mid-air!

Next, explore even more spectacular ways of tossing and catching the imaginary ball; for example, using shoulders, noses, pelvis', bottoms, breath.

Explore how it may be possible for students to make these mimed transfers seem to be very difficult, amazing, spectacular and/or wonderful. Consider the dramatic effect of pausing before a (seemingly) difficult feat. Encourage students to use their voices, bodies, eyes and breath to convey the mimed magic of the ball.

Performance skills teaching points

Deep discussion and possible essay questions

How do the performers use circus discipline to show the following feelings or moods?

- Aerials – freedom and aspiration
- Hand Balancing – control, discipline and expectation
- Tumbling – power and triumph

How does the lighting, staging and production elements support the concept of the time between sunset and sunrise?

What do these choices say about the time between the following:

- Child and adult
- Night and day
- Wake and sleep

How is the idea of adolescence shown through the following choices:

- Circus acts
- Dance
- Drama
- Music

The Big Sky space is where magic is possible. How is this idea shown in the show?

- Make links to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and stories.
- How do the performers relate to the sky throughout the show? Why?
- How does the Big Sky represent magic throughout the show? What is magical about the sky?

Performance skills teaching points

Deep discussion for aspiring performers

- What sort of character traits would be necessary to work as a circus performer? For example; disposition, commitment, trust, cooperation, concentration, etc.
- How do the disciplines and lifestyle of an aspiring circus performer differ from the disciplines and lifestyle of aspiring dancers, singers, musicians, actors?
- Have students identify character traits that they themselves possess which they consider would make them suitable circus members.
- Where possible, interview professional or aspiring circus artists (or artists from other performance disciplines), and find out about the time, energy, mindset and expenses that they and their families commit to their professional goals.



Flying Fruit Fly Circus rehearsal of Big Sky at The Cube Wadonga.
Photograph Zac Edmonds OGA Creative Agency.

Dance and Performance Skills activities for the classroom

Exploring Circus Movements: In pairs, have students list common circus movements (e.g. balances, rolls, partner lifts). Students are to identify which muscles or joints are used in each, choose 3–4 movements to explore safely in open space and then choreograph a short sequence using these movements and perform in small groups.

Metaphor Movement: Have students complete the sentence “Life is like...” or “Trying something new is like...” using a metaphor (e.g. “Life is like juggling too many balls” or “Trying something new is like leaping into the unknown”).

In small groups, students explore how to represent their metaphor through movement using elements such as shape, balance, tempo, levels, and direction. Encourage experimentation with solo and group formations.

Each group performs their short piece for the class. Afterwards, students reflect on how movement can express abstract ideas and emotions—and how different interpretations can lead to rich creative outcomes.

Circus Movement Phrase Composition: Students recall 3–5 movements seen in the show (jumps, balances, rolls, partner lifts) and work in small groups to choreograph a short phrase inspired by them. Encourage use of levels and tempo.

Emotion Through Movement: Choose a theme seen in the performance (e.g. risk, resilience, joy). Students create solo or group movement sequences expressing that emotion using expressive movement and spatial awareness.

Peer Feedback & Reflection Circle: After presenting dance pieces, students give structured peer feedback using prompts like: “I noticed...”, “I liked...”, “Next time you could...”. Reflect on how feedback helps circus artists improve.

PDHPE activities for the classroom

Designing Circus Warm-Ups: Discuss why warming up is important, especially in circus. In small groups, assign each group a muscle group (e.g. core, upper body, legs).

- Have students research or recall appropriate warm-up movements to create a warm-up routine for a circus performer and lead it for the class.
- After the warmup is lead have students write a reflection: How did your body feel before and after?

Skills for Circus Training: On the board, list circus skills (e.g. juggling, trapeze, tumbling).

- Ask students to link each to a physical trait: flexibility, balance, coordination, strength.
- Students set a personal physical goal (e.g. “I want to improve my balance”) and brainstorm daily ways to work on it and track progress over a week or month with a simple log.

Circus Skills Circuit Challenge: Set up a mini physical circuit (e.g. balancing on a line, light juggling with scarves, core strength planks). Students complete and rate their skill level, then create personal improvement goals.

Risk and Safety in Circus: Have students identify safety measures seen in the show (spotters, mats, warm-ups). In small groups, students design a poster or presentation on “Staying Safe While Taking Risks” in physical activities.

Tracking Personal Growth: Give students a simple progress tracker or journal. Over the next 1–2 weeks, they choose one physical goal (e.g. posture, balance, stretching) and record how they work on it daily.

Drama activities for the classroom

Character Traits of a Circus Performer: Explore the emotional and interpersonal skills needed to be a circus artist.

- As a class, brainstorm a list of character traits (e.g. discipline, courage, creativity, trust).
- In small groups, students discuss which traits they think are most essential and why.
- Each student writes a short reflection: “I think I’d be a great circus performer because...”
- Optional extension: Role-play a day in the life of a circus performer, incorporating chosen traits.

Circus Act Recall & Role Analysis: Watch a clip of a previous Flying Fruit Fly Circus show. Clips can be found on their [YouTube channel](#)

- As students watch, have them list what each performer does (e.g. acrobatics, setting props, spotting). Debrief with a discussion on teamwork and multitasking in performance.

Big Sky, performed at the Sydney Opera House in 2024.



Drama activities for the classroom

Tableau and Movement Scenes: In groups, students create still images (tableaux) of key moments they remember from the performance (e.g. a balancing act, a trust fall, a group lift).

- Add movement transitions and sound effects to develop these into a short performance.

Theme Exploration – Trust and Teamwork: Using improvisation games (e.g. “Yes, Let’s!”, “Mirroring”, “Trust Walk”).

- Have students explore trust through improvisation - Start with “Yes, Let’s!”, where students take turns suggesting an action (e.g. “Let’s pretend to juggle!”) and the whole group responds with enthusiasm—“Yes, let’s!”—joining in the action together. This encourages spontaneity, group agreement, and playfulness.
- Then move into “Mirroring”, where students pair up and silently mirror each other’s slow, intentional movements. One partner leads while the other follows, then they swap roles; for a challenge, ask pairs to co-lead without a designated leader. This fosters non-verbal communication and trust.
- Finally, try “Trust Walk”, in which one partner closes their eyes while the other guides them safely through the space using only voice or a light guiding touch. After each activity, hold a class discussion about how it felt to lead or follow, what helped them trust their partner, and how these activities relate to working as a performance ensemble and trust in the performance.

Curriculum links and resources



Curriculum Links

Connecting with the classroom

Creative Arts (Dance)

- **Stage 2:**
DAS2.3 Gives personal opinions about the use of elements and meaning in their own and others' dances.
- **Stage 3:**
DAS3.3 Discusses and interprets the relationship between content, meaning and context in their own and others' dances.
- **Stage 4:**
DA4-APP-01 describes dance works from a range of contexts using the elements of dance
- **Stage 5:**
DA5-APP-02 evaluates dance works based on context, the elements of dance, the dancing body and theatrical elements

Creative Arts (Drama)

- **Stage 2:**
DRAS2.4 Responds to, and interprets drama experiences and performances
- **Stage 3:**
DRAS3.4 Responds critically to a range of drama works and performance styles.
- **Stage 4:**
DR4-APP-01 Explains how creative choices shape works and experiences through dramatic contexts, processes and elements
- **Stage 5:**
DR5-APP-01 analyses how creative choices shape intention and meaning through dramatic processes
DR5-APP-02 evaluates how dramatic elements are manipulated to influence audience response through dramatic contexts

Curriculum Links

Connecting with the classroom

PDHPE

- **Stage 2:**
PD2-8: investigates and participates in physical activities to promote the benefits of physical activity on health and wellbeing
- **Stage 3:**
PD3-8: creates and participates in physical activities to promote healthy and active lifestyles
- **Stage 4:**
PD4-8 plans for and participates in activities that encourage health and a lifetime of physical activity
- **Stage 5:**
PD5-8 designs, implements and evaluates personalised plans to enhance health and participation in a lifetime of physical activity

Performing Arts

- **PA5-2** Experiments with ways in which space can be activated and transformed by the selection and manipulation of performance elements
- **PA5-3** Controls energy and expressive skills to create performance presence
- **PA5-4** Explores the skills and techniques needed to engage an audience in a collective experience
- **PA5-5** Analyses the role of context and interpretation in realising artistic intention
- **PA5-6** Researches, documents, and reflects on performing arts concepts, ideas and processes
- **PA5-9** Experiments with relevant essential performing arts concepts to new contexts

Resources

More about the Sydney Opera House

Sydney Opera House: Our Story

- <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/our-story>

How we work – strategic plans and programs

- <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/about-us/how-we-work>

Community projects

- <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/about-us/in-the-community>

Careers and opportunities

- <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/about-us/careers-and-other-opportunities>

Creative Learning resources

- <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/learn/teachers-and-students/classroom-resources>

Get in touch

Got questions? Contact us with any enquiries about our education programs for schools via phone or email.

P +61 2 9250 7770

E creativelearning@sydneyoperahouse.com

