



## BarnumSpeak!

*Can you Speak like P. T. Barnum?*

### Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Read about the history of P. T. Barnum's circus
- Recognize that words in the English language can be combined to exaggerate or make meaning more precise
- Practice writing expanded sentences that include descriptive adjectives and phrases

### Lesson Materials

- Paper, pencil or pen for writing or computer to word process
- Handout #1: **BarnumSpeak**, one per student
- Replica poster for classroom display

### Standards

Language Arts: Reading Comprehension: Read grade-level-appropriate material; follow simple written instructions

Language Arts: Writing: Students use general skills of the writing process and include descriptive detail

Language Arts: Vocabulary: Students will use phonetic analysis, syntactic structure and semantic context to decode unknown words (e.g., vowel patterns, complex word families, syllabication, root words, affixes)

Language Arts: Writing Applications: Students will use alliteration in writing

History: Students will understand historical perspective, i.e., advertising in days before television or computers



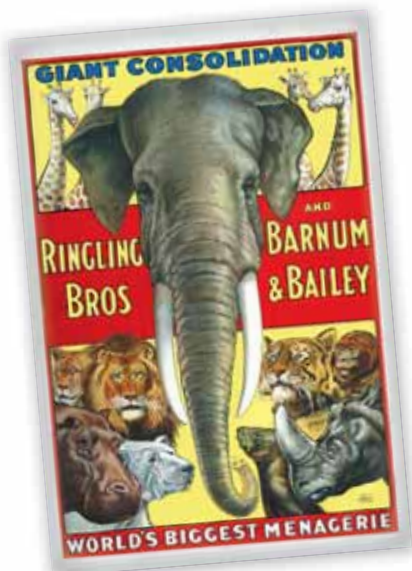
## Teacher Notes

*The Atlantic* magazine asked ten historians to list the 100 most influential Americans. P. T. Barnum was included on this list because of his contribution to advertising and marketing. They explain that his taste for spectacle paved the way for blockbuster movies and reality TV.

P. T. Barnum loved a good show, and his way of advertising his productions became shows unto themselves. P. T. Barnum drew thousands of people to see exhibits at the American Museum in New York City. He was dubbed the “Shakespeare of Advertising” because of his masterful use of language to capture people’s attention and attract them to his museum and later to his traveling shows.

In 1871 he launched his greatest production to date—P. T. Barnum’s Grand Traveling Museum, **Menagerie**, Caravan, and Circus. At the time, it was the largest circus in American history. “We ought to have a big show,” Barnum said. “The public expects it, and will appreciate it.”

To help your students understand the meaning of the word “menagerie,” print and display the replica of a historic *Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey*® poster advertising what was called, “The World’s Biggest Menagerie.” Based upon the image in the poster, what do they think the word “menagerie” means? Here is a thumbnail of the poster:



Menagerie: (mə-ˈnaj-rē) noun—a collection of *wild or foreign animals kept especially for exhibition*

Barnum’s traveling show was a huge success both because of its entertainment value and Barnum’s talent for promotion. He soon began calling his wildly popular circus “*The Greatest Show On Earth*®” and people flocked to see its sideshow attractions, animal acts, menagerie, amazing feats such as sword swallowing, and a multitude of circus acts.

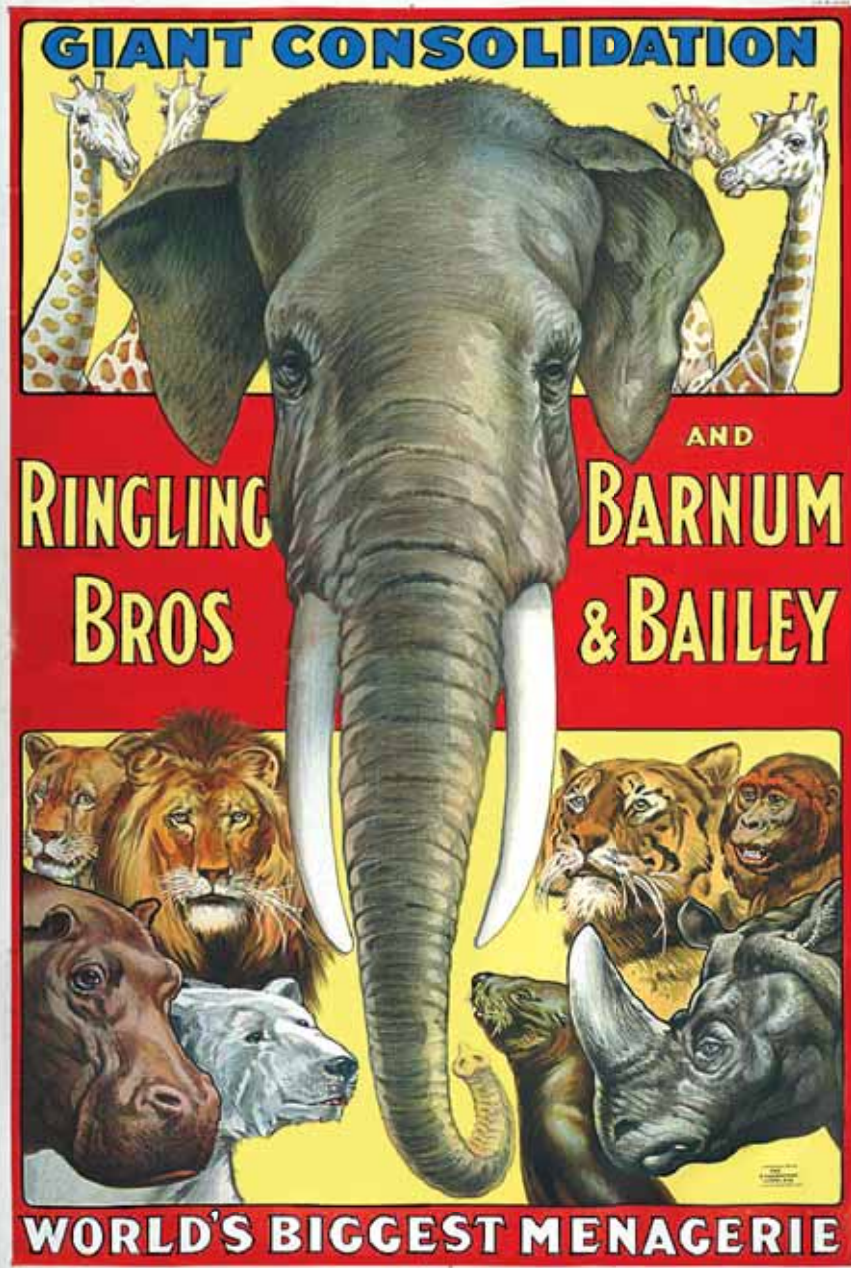


Image courtesy of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital Collection, TR2004-2722.1619



## Activity Directions

1. **Say:** *Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey*® calls the 140<sup>th</sup> Edition of their circus, *Barnum's FUNundrum!*<sup>SM</sup>. Does anyone know what *FUNundrum* means? What do you imagine it might mean?

Explain that when P. T. Barnum started his circus, it became a huge success partly because of how he advertised it. He liked to make up words and use highly descriptive language to attract attention.

Today, as a tribute to P. T. Barnum, *Ringling Bros.*® has made up a new word that promises to capture people's imaginations when they see it or hear it. The word is *FUNundrum*. (NOTE TO TEACHER: Let your students play around with imaginative ideas. You may want to give a little direction by sharing the following: *FUNundrum*, like a lot of words Barnum made up, is made by combining two words: FUN and CONUNDRUM. A simple definition of "conundrum" is a puzzle. When it's a *FUNundrum* it's kind of like solving a puzzle in a fun way.)

As a class, come up with a definition for *FUNundrum*.

2. **Say:** In 1882, Barnum brought an elephant to his show—for many Americans this was the first, and perhaps only time, they would see a live elephant.

3. **Ask:** How would you try to attract people to come to see an elephant? Would you say, "Come see the elephant"?

4. Typical of Barnum, he used exaggeration, humor and highly descriptive language to get people to come see the elephant. He called his elephant Jumbo, a word he made up, and advertised him as *The Towering Monarch of His Mighty Race, Whose Like the World Will Never See Again*. (As needed, review the definitions of the words in this sentence.)

5. **Explain:** People attending P. T. Barnum's shows knew they would have fun and that they would learn something too. Instead of using the word "Exit" to direct people to the doorway that would take them out of his menagerie exhibit, Barnum had a sign that said, "This way to the egress." People would read the sign and exit the tent thinking they were going to see another interesting animal called an *egress*. But people who knew their vocabulary weren't fooled. They knew that *egress* meant exit. Those who didn't know the meaning soon learned it as they found themselves outside the tent, and laughing about Barnum's joke.



## Extension

Each year, *Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey*<sup>®</sup> continues its time honored tradition of bringing amusing, educational and entertaining new circus productions to the public. Today, advertising for the circus still has to be amazing and attention-grabbing, but now it needs to be transmitted with more modern technology.

Today people see advertising on billboards, television commercials, websites, or they hear it on the radio. They see it in short statements on programs such as Twitter or in brief text messages on their mobile communication devices – none of which were available in Barnum's day.

If you only have 15 seconds to capture someone's attention, what words would you use? Have each student shorten a descriptive sentence from the worksheet for a billboard ad or text message.

### Resources:

A biography of P. T. Barnum:

<http://www.ringling.com/FlashSubContent.aspx?id=11734&parentID=366&assetFolderID=368>

<http://www.barnum-museum.org/manmythlegend.htm>



## BarnumSpeak!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### What Would Barnum Say?

Instructions:

Start with a simple sentence and then expand the sentence with thrilling verbs, nouns and adjectives to make it sound more exciting and appealing.



Image courtesy of Barnum Museum, Bridgeport, CT.

Simple Sentence	Barnum would say:
Come see the elephant.	<i>Example:</i> Don't miss the <i>Towering Monarch of His Mighty Race, Whose Like the World Will Never See Again.</i>
My dog does tricks.	
Recess is fun.	
Walking a tightrope is scary.	
Clowns are funny.	

Use a dictionary and/or a thesaurus to help you learn what these words mean and to find other words that mean the same thing (synonyms.)



## BarnumSpeak

Below is a list of words and phrases taken from actual ads Barnum used to advertise his shows. See how many you can use in expanding the sentences on this worksheet. If you don't know what a word means, look it up!

### Barnum Words

Mammoth	Superb	Stupefy
Monstrous	Miniature	Unbelievable
Gigantic	Glittering	Wondrous
Colossal	Gorgeous	Stupendous
Elephantine	Rarity	Incredible
Amazing	Oddity	Ultimate
Marvelous	Sensational	Rip-roaring
Magnificent	Fantastic	Daring
Glorious	Curiosities	Extraordinary

### Barnum Phrases

Most Attractive • Brilliantly Illuminated • Most Pleasing and Fascinating  
 Merest pigmy of humanity • A Fraction of • *Fangtastic* tigers  
 Universally pronounced the Most Attractive and Interesting

### Barnumized Words

Barnum liked to combine words to make new, imaginary words that combined sounds and definitions in an ear and eye-catching way. Words like *FUNundrum!*

Can you write a definition for the following *Barnumized* words?

**Amplitudinous • Unbeliev-a-mazing-able**

Make up a *Barnumized* word and write a definition for it.

### Alliteration

Barnum would add punch to his language by starting as many words as possible with the same letter. This is called *alliteration*.

Strong Man – The Man with the Most Mammoth Muscles in all of the Mountains of Mongolia!

Dancers who handle snakes – Serpentine Sisters that Salsa with Snakes!

Send a *Barnumized* e-mail!

Go to [www.Ringling.com](http://www.Ringling.com), click on FUN ZONE, then "Barnumize Your E-mail."