

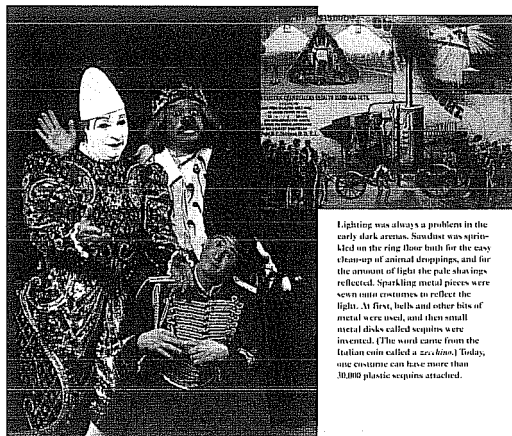
explain the chain of events that led to disaster. In contrast, Ruffman's book eschews a preoccupation with heavy metal and instead uses artifacts from Halifax collections to focus attention on people whose lives were irrevocably changed by the events of 14-15 April, 1912. Both approaches are equally effective, for it is as much the human story as the fallibility of technology that makes these tragedies of enduring interest.

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A History of the Circus

Circus. Linda Granfield. Greenwood/Douglas & McIntyre; 1997. 96 pp. \$19.95. ISBN: 0-88899-292-0. *Kids Perform Circus Arts.* Bobbie Kalman. Crabtree, 1997. 32 pp. \$21.95. ISBN 0-86505-630-7.

Nowadays we can view such things as death-defying aerial stunts, motorcycle acts, and contortionists in popular circuses such as Barnum & Bailey, Cirque du Soleil, or Ringling Brothers. Historians believe that circuses have entertained both young and old alike since at least 2400 BC. In her well-researched book *Circus*, Linda Granfield examines the history of this unique form of entertainment, providing a concise overview of its evolution and its fluctuations in popularity. We learn that four thousand years ago, acrobatics were performed on bulls in Crete and that the modern circus was born in the 1700s with Philip Astley in Britain. Granfield follows



*Illustration from
Circus*

Lighting was always a problem in the early dark arenas. Handlins was squirreled on the ring floor both for the easy clean-up of animal droppings, and for the amount of light the pale shavings reflected. Sparking metal pieces were sewn onto costumes to reflect the light. At first, bells and other bits of metal were used, and then small metal disks called sequins were invented. (The word came from the Italian coin called a *sequino*.) Today, one costume can have more than 30,000 plastic sequins attached.

the circus development from these early times and its evolution throughout Europe, North America and the rest of the world. She also examines the circus as a subject in literature and art. All of this information is presented in a balanced and accessible way, making it a useful reference source, whose sidebars and colourful photos will go a long way in holding the interest of young readers.

The romance and spectacle of circus-life may initially appeal to young readers, but Granfield's coverage provides a clear and informative reality check. Through descriptions of the organization, the setting up, and the detailed preparation, one will discover circus performance is a time-consuming task. Groups of performers live a life on the road that has little privacy, while they spend a great deal of time perfecting, training, and developing new acts. There is truth in Granfield's statement that "the easiest way to join the circus is to be a member of the audience" (36).

As in other forms of entertainment, such as music or movies, the circus has its share of controversy as well, particularly when it comes to its animals. The inclusion of horses, big cats, Russian bears, and the infamous "Jumbo" the elephant continues to cause debate. The author reflects upon on the pros and cons of animal participation in a clear and balanced way.

In *Kids Perform Circus Arts*, Bobbie Kalman examines this popular form of entertainment through a behind-the-scenes look at circus arts. She explains how a variety of trapeze acts are performed and the kind of training children undergo to perform juggling tricks, acrobatic acts, and cycling stunts. Kalman's coverage allows each act to be briefly yet succinctly explained, showing the training, discipline, and commitment of the entertainers. The book is completely illustrated with full colour photographs that demonstrate a variety of tricks and their execution. Complete with a fun page of "circus talk" we learn that "flatties" are spectators, "ponger" is an acrobat, and "joey" is a clown. An informative glossary and index nicely complete the coverage.

Kalman has compiled a book on a subject matter that is not often addressed in the nonfiction category. As well, the book is written for children and about children. Would-be entertainers will be happy to learn that circus arts programs can be found at select vacation camps, gymnastic schools and elementary schools.

Jo-Anne Mary Benson is a writer/reviewer for magazines, newspapers, and journals.

Writing about Animals

The World of Marine Mammals. Adrienne Mason. Illus. Garth Buzzard. Orca, 1999. 64 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-046-0. *A Seal in the Family*. Maria Coffey. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. Annick, 1999. Unpag. \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-581-4. *Elisha the Flamingo and Her Amazing Adventures*. Dan & Jean Mayo. Illus. Alison Stalker. GreenHouse, 1999. 16 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-9686258-0-0.