

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO

CIRCUS



MIRANDUS

A NOVEL BY CASSIE BEASLEY

**Lesson Plan Ideas, Activities, and
Discussion Questions for Grades 4-6**



DEAR EDUCATOR,

Welcome to Circus Mirandus. You and your students are invited to enter the pages of this enchanting 3-ring adventure filled with amazing characters and creatures. This educator's guide was designed as your portal to discovery. Use it to awaken the believer inside each of your students. Author Cassie Beasley has crafted a marvelous tale fueled by friendship, hope, and the power to see magic. Use these activities to stir your students' imaginations, make connections, delight and inspire, all while fostering critical, elaborative, and inferential thinking skills.

In order to gain perspective on the overarching theme, students will explore sub concepts throughout this guide which include the following:

- Friendship
- Figurative Language
- Differing Perspectives
- Magic vs. Illusion
- Faith vs. Fear
- Miracles vs. Wishes
- Logic vs. Imagination

So grab your ticket and enter the world of Circus Mirandus. The most extraordinary things can happen when you believe.

PENGUIN SCHOOL & LIBRARY MARKETING

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

These activities prepare students for important story elements.

IT'S KNOT MAGIC!

Students watch a rope trick and discuss the illusion. What's the difference between magic and illusion? Students work in groups to research and practice other magic tricks. Group members record one another on video, ending with an explanation of the illusion.

<http://magictricksforkids.org/rope-trick/>

KNOTTY PLOTTY

Throughout the story, knots serve as an underlying theme. There are the knots that bind friendships and those that entangle our lives. Use the Boy Scout guide to familiarize students with a variety of knots. Have students practice knot tying using cotton clothesline rope cut into a foot and a half segments. Before the activity, soak the rope in a 50/50 mixture of Elmer's glue and water. Let it dry for a few minutes so it is a bit stiff.

<https://meritbadge.org/wiki/images/5/5d/Six-Boy-Scout-Knots.pdf>

CIRCUS BIG TOP:

Explore the elements of a circus in this interactive circus website.

<https://www.circusworldbaraboo.org/>



SECTION 1 (CHAPTERS 1-9): ACTIVITIES

FRIENDSHIP BRACELET:

Students explore the theme of friendship. Although Micah and Jenny disagree with each other about magic, the two are becoming close friends. Students are given a cord cut into 8-inch segments and 6 wooden beads. Students create a friendship bracelet for a best friend. Alternate 7 knots with 6 beads. Students write a letter to their friend explaining the significance of each knot and bead. Beads represent things the two friends have in common, e.g., favorite book, color, movie, etc. Knots represent things that are unique about each friend, e.g., plays the cello, can stand on her head, etc.

<http://www.woojr.com/easy-friendship-bracelets/>

KNOTS OF OPINIONS:

This game gets students up and moving while exploring elements of the reading selection. Each student is provided with a foot long rope segment. Two players sit face-to-face taking turns as the “Knotter” and the “Guesser.” When the Guesser says, “Go!” the Knotter puts his cord behind his back and has one minute to tie one, two, three, or four knots. When time is up, the cord is kept behind the Knotter’s back. The Guesser has just one chance to guess how many knots there are on the cord without looking. Then, each partner must share one connection/opinion/fact from the week’s reading assignment. Students take turns as Knotters and Guessers in the time allotted by the teacher.

LIGHTBENDER:

Who is good and who is evil? Is Aunt Gertrudis a villain because she doesn’t believe in magic? Jenny doesn’t believe in magic either. Is one character “good” while the other is “evil?” Are there shades of gray in between? Explain your thinking in a letter to the Lightbender. Present a logical argument and support your claims with reasoning and evidence from chapters 1–9.

PIED PIPER PARTY:

Students explore fantasy in this open-ended creative exercise. Ephraim is called to Circus Mirandus in the same way that children are drawn to the Piper in the folktale of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. He hears pipes and drums playing that only children can hear. Have students write their own narratives about an imaginary place in which only certain people are lured. What type of individual is called? What type of place is it? Describe the place and why it’s special. Instruct students to create an invitation that includes all of these elements.

SKILLFUL SKYPER:

Using Skype for the classroom, your students can connect with another teacher/classroom of the same grade reading *Circus Mirandus*. Share weekly literature discussions. For example, illustrator Diana Sudyka has a very distinct style of art. Many chapters begin with one of her black and white illustrations that include chapter clues. Have students explore their own unique style to create an illustration depicting one of the chapters from this week’s reading assignment. Share with Skype peers to see if they can guess which chapter the illustration is based on. Discuss details included in the illustrations.

<https://www.educaton.skype.com>

MICAH’S MENTOR:

Grandpa Ephraim plays an important role in Micah’s life. He’s helped nurture Micah’s imagination and hopeful spirit. Have students research an individual who inspires them. Students will create an award, name it, and write a speech for the recipient. Students should explain how this individual inspires them to believe in themselves. Students can use iPads to record their speeches in front of a related green screen background with the Doink app.

<http://www.doink.com/>



SECTION 2 (CHAPTERS 10-15): ACTIVITIES

AMAZING AMAZONIAN BIRD WOMAN:

In this musical activity, students creatively explore tone and mood. On page 72, “The Amazonian Bird Woman swooped up and circled gracefully around the room with her birds, singing a song that didn’t have any words.” Students can use any of the following options to choreograph a song without words: Garageband, Xylo app, or UJAM. The song should communicate the mood and tone of chapters 10 and 18. Discuss why or how the two songs differ.

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/garageband/id408709785?mt=8>

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/xylo-for-dash-robot/id941863690?mt=8>

<http://www.ujam.com/>

HISTORY HACKER:

Students become a part of history in this research-based creative exploration that incorporates cause and effect. On page 109, Ephraim thinks to himself, “*I am inside history.*” Direct students to choose and research an historical event and create a related timeline using Capzles. Instruct students to choose an important point on the timeline. Have students imagine what might happen if they could jump into this point in history. How could they change history? Students must consider how their actions would change history and note any subsequent effects on their timelines.

<http://www.capzles.com/>

MASTER OF LIGHT:

In this text-to-text assignment, students compare Circus Mirandus with Greek mythology. In chapter 10, The Man Who Bends Light is referred to as the “Son of the Sun.” In ancient Greek mythology, Phaethon is the son of the god Apollo. Suggest to students that Greek mythology may have inspired the author. Greek mythology originated as a way to teach life lessons about humility, greed, and the origins of the world. Have students write their own myths about how the Lightbender came to be featured at the circus. Who were his parents and siblings? Where did his family come from? How did he realize his talent? What lessons can we learn from him?

MIRACLE DEBATER:

In this whole group activity, students will discuss and weigh the benefits of keeping or saving a miracle. Tell students that the Lightbender has granted them one miracle without an expiration date. Do they feel it is better to use it now or to wait? Have students brainstorm a list of ways a miracle could be used now and a list of reasons why it’s better to wait. Split students into two teams and debate the pros and cons of using their miracle now or waiting to use it later. Use Survey Monkey to assess the final responses of your audience after the debate.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>

IT’S KNOT HOPELESS:

In this poetic activity students will explore the symbolism of the knot and hope. Students sit in a large circle. Each is given a 3-foot length of rope, which he or she ties to a neighbor’s with any kind of a simple knot so that a circle is made. Students examine each knot and brainstorm words to describe each knot, which the teacher lists on the board. Students compare “hope” to knots. How is hope like a knot? What can loosen or fray a person’s hope? How are others affected by hope? After this activity, students work individually to write three similes or metaphors comparing a knot to hope and then arrange them together as a 3-line poem with an accompanying illustration.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE:

In this writing activity, students create plot diversions and use decision-making skills. Students write a Choose Your Own Adventure based on their predictions for the next reading assignment. Students use index cards or Excel spreadsheet to create a chain of possible events. Their stories must follow one central topic, and should not sway from that topic. The first card should introduce the problem. Every story line must have a solution to the problem, whether the solution is positive or negative! The problem from Card 1 MUST be addressed by the end of the story. The main character in the story is “you,” which is actually the reader. Each story line must go through at least three levels to end.



SECTION 3 (CHAPTERS 16-22): ACTIVITIES

PHENOMENAL MAGIC:

This is a fun research activity that prompts students to take a stand on whether a well-known phenomenon is real or fictional. Most adults don't believe Circus Mirandus is real. Have students research and write a persuasive argument for one of the following unexplained phenomena: Bigfoot, Bermuda Triangle, Loch Ness Monster, Atlantis, Stonehenge, Crop Circles, UFOs. Instruct students to write a speech convincing their audience to believe in their point of view. Students may include actual interviews with Bigfoot or other phenomenal creatures. You can also publish as a radio broadcast or podcast complete with sound effects and music from a royalty-free site like Jamendo. Students may use Garageband and publish/share on Youtube.

<https://www.jamendo.com/?language=en>

MIRANDUS DETECTIVE AGENCY:

Students make predictions in an engaging hands-on assignment. Students take on the roles of Private Investigators who must discover the whereabouts of Victoria Starling. Instruct students to use their imaginations to come up with an interesting scenario regarding the strange disappearance of Victoria Starling. Explain her unusual background, physical attributes, character traits, goals, and any clues or suspects that may be associated with her disappearance. Students dress up in character to present their findings in a confidential PI folder.

LUCK OR LOGIC:

This research activity requires students to explore superstition from differing perspectives. On page 146, Micah brings along Grandpa Ephraim's bootlace and crosses his fingers for good luck. Other common good luck charms: four-leaf clover, rabbit foot, horseshoe, ladybug, wishbone, penny, number 7. Instruct students to research the origin of one of these superstitious items. Have students create a Jenny avatar and a Micah avatar on Voki where students can create personalized speaking avatars. In a few brief sentences, record a logical explanation of the item's origin as Jenny and a fantasy-based explanation as Micah.

<http://www.voki.com/>

CIRCUS MIRANDUS:

This artistic assignment requires students to explore various elements of Circus Mirandus. Have students create a digital poster advertizing four circus acts, instructions for purchasing tickets, and qualifications for ticket holders through the website Glogster. Include a disclaimer about why parents are not allowed. Insert music using Jamendo and images into their digital posters.

<http://edu.glogster.com/>

<https://www.jamendo.com/?language=en>

MARVELOUS MENAGERIE:

Imagination is explored with innovative results in this wild assignment. Micah and Jenny meet miniature hippos, blue bats, two-headed camels, and more (pp. 164–171). Instruct students to create their own amazing animals at Switch Zoo. Have students add a title and a brief backstory to go with their creature. The story should explain why this creature inspires the imagination of visitors at their zoo. Alternate option: Students create human/animal hybrids using Your Wild Self.

<http://switchzoo.com/zoo.htm>

<http://www.buildyourwildself.com/>

NEWSY KNOW-IT-ALL:

Students explore text-to-text connections from fantasy to the real world in this news-based assignment. Visit Newsela, an online site for news articles, which the teacher can adjust to the student's reading level. Type in the keyword "hope," "faith," or "imagination" to find related articles. Set to the appropriate reading level. Have students read an article and explain how it relates to this week's reading assignment. Share with the class as a video-recorded television news show.

<https://newsela.com/>

HUMAN KNOT:

The symbolism of knots is explored within this kinesthetic activity. Have 10 students stand in a circle. Each student places their right hand in the circle and holds hands with another student that is not their neighbor. Then students place their left hands in the circle and, again, hold hands with another student that is not their neighbor. The remainder of the students must unknot the circle without students in the circle letting go of hands. After the activity, discuss how individual students may have offered different solutions to a common goal. How is this similar to the friendship between Micah and Jenny? Can they both help Grandpa Ephraim when each of their beliefs is so different? How will they be able to work together successfully?



SECTION 4 (CHAPTERS 23-29): ACTIVITIES

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

The appeal of social networking is used to engage students in analyzing character and perspective. The expression “birds of a feather flock together” refers to the way people with similar characteristics choose to spend time together. Have students decide which five characters from other books or movies would make good friends for Victoria. Using Fakebook (like Facebook) students will create a social network for Victoria. Upload related images and hyperlink videos to Youtube. Instruct students to have Victoria’s friends post feedback about her behavior or actions from this week’s reading assignment. Have students share a response to each friend’s post from Victoria. Remind students to save their work as a Fakebook template.

<http://www.classtools.net/FB/home-page>

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

Have your students take charge of this imaginative bulletin board display. On page 187, the Lightbender tells Victoria, “magic as we know it is fading,” and that they are all “fighting to keep enchantment alive in the world.” He adds that children “are the key to everything.” Discuss what the Lightbender means by all of this. Instruct students to follow up the group discussion by creating a key template, which includes characteristics that make a child more receptive (open) to magic. Post their keys on a bulletin board display of a door to enter Circus Mirandus. Have the students create the backdrop for this interactive bulletin board. Hinge the door so it can be opened to reveal the circus behind it.

MAGIC OR NOT:

This hands-on activity encourages students to take on different perspectives. Have a student read aloud the passage between Victoria and the Lightbender on pp. 187–189. Discuss each character’s perspective about magic and Circus Mirandus. Have half of your students create a small color poster that reflects the Lightbender’s point of view on one side of the line. On the other side, post students’ posters that reflect Victoria’s point of view. Students may only use pictures to convey their perspective, not words. Note: Students must take on the perspective of the character, even if they don’t actually believe it.

KNOT SO FAST:

In this circle game, students will discuss the symbolism behind the knots in this story. One student ties a knot in a bit of rope and drops it at the feet of another group member who must then untangle the knot before the knotter has run around the circle. Whoever wins ties the next knot, and so on. Discuss what made some knots harder to untangle. Share this quote by Rumi: *Seek the wisdom that will untie your knot.* How can problems be like knots? How can we untangle the problems in our lives? What is the difference between wisdom and intelligence/knowledge/understanding? How can wisdom help untie a knotty problem when knowledge cannot?

FRIEND OR FOE:

The complex nature of friends and enemies is explored in this hands-on card game. Have students create their own card game using index cards. Each Character Card should contain the name of a story character and a picture of him or her. The deck is shuffled. Students play in pairs. The first player draws two cards from the Character Card pile. Example: Student draws Lightbender and Victoria. Student must share what makes them friends or foes using just one word. Example: belief, faith, jealousy, loyalty, fear. Student must then explain why this word was chosen. Other students discuss whether they agree or disagree.

ROSEBUD’S POTION:

Students use their imaginations to create a magic recipe for a potion to keep hope and faith alive. Have students include ingredients and directions on how to prepare. Within the recipe, students must include one simile, one metaphor, and one personification. A related drawing should illustrate the steps to make the recipe or the finished product.

JOIN THE CIRCUS:

It’s our differences that make us unique. Discuss students’ special talents, abilities, and strengths. Explain that these are sometimes called gifts, because they make us special. Ask students to share their special gifts and talents with the class. Can you recite the alphabet backward? Can you solve a Rubik’s Cube with your feet? Then have students perform their talent in an amazing circus act in Circus Mirandus. Instruct students to select a unique name for their act, dress up in character, and perform in your own classroom version of Circus Mirandus.



SECTION 5 (CHAPTERS 30-36): ACTIVITIES

THE CIRCUS MIRANDUS PREQUEL:

Have students write the prequel to the story of *Circus Mirandus*. How did the circus begin way back in the year 500 BC? Where did Mr. Head come from? How and why did the circus change over the years from 500 BC to now? Instruct students to include researched historical notables from each time period. Research using the following websites:

<http://www.timeforkids.com/destination/greece/history-timeline>

<http://quatr.us/timelines/500bc.htm>;

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/pythagoras.shtml

WORDS FROM THE WISE:

Students will take on the perspective of Grandpa Ephraim. Have students write a book of life lessons to leave behind for Micah. Each page of their books should include an important bit of advice and a related illustration. Students must include an appropriate cover and title with 10 inside pages. Hint: What are the top ten things that Grandpa Ephraim learned the hard way? How can Micah benefit from Grandpa's experiences? Students may publish as a hard-copy book or an eBook using an iPad and the Book Creator app.

http://www.blurb.com/lp-make-a-book?gclid=CJn4n_fOjsCFQoqHwodnDUKkQ

DIARY OF AN AMAZONIAN BIRD LADY:

Most of the characters in the story undergo some kind of change by the end of the story, except for Victoria. This activity will encourage students to think about how characters may transition based on their experiences. Have students write a sequel to *Circus Mirandus* in the form of a diary. Have students include experiences and characters that promote some sort of change in Victoria's character, for better or worse. Students write each entry from Victoria's perspective. Where does she fly to after leaving Ephraim?

FREEZE FRAME:

Discuss how Micah faces his fears and risks everything during the final scenes in which he flies over Circus Mirandus holding onto a gorilla balloon and then when he steps out over the edge of the canyon. Instruct students to "freeze frame" the story in their minds at either point. Students work as a group to illustrate a picture of this scene and upload it to Voice Thread, a collaborative, multimedia slide show where students can add comments online. Students may use Voice Thread as an app or website.

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/voicethread/id465159110?mt=8>

BIG JEANIUS:

The brilliance of Big Jean the elephant offers a unique opportunity for teachers to explore problem solving with students. Introduce students to different types of puzzles, e.g., Sudoku, Hanjie, KenKen, Kakuro, logic, crossword, etc. Have students create their own digital or hand-drawn puzzle. Compile printed or hand-drawn puzzles into a BIG JEANIUS printed or ebook to share with other classes.

<http://www.dailysudoku.com/sudoku/kids/>

<http://www.childreispuzzles.net/hanjie.php>

<http://thinkmath.edc.org/resource/introducing-kenken-puzzles>

<http://akidsheart.com/math/prints/kakuro/index.html>

http://kids.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Printable_Logic_Puzzles_for_Kids

ROLE PLAYER GAME:

Students analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the story while taking on perspective of characters in a student-created tabletop role-playing game. Students create PLOT CARDS highlighting key points in the story. Additional cards include imagined scenarios created by students. Playing pieces represent story characters, plus new student-invented characters. When a player picks a PLOT CARD he or she must make a decision to act the same or differently as the character in the story. All moves must be discussed with the group. Imagined characters and scenarios add a twist to decision-making and other possible outcomes.



PRAISE FOR CIRCUS MIRANDUS

★ “The book is a fantastical circus romp... a delicious confection and much more: it shows that the human heart is delicate, that it matters, and that it must be handled with care.” —*KIRKUS REVIEWS, STARRED REVIEW*

★ “This gripping fantasy tale will have readers hooked from the opening scene to the breathtaking—and unexpected—conclusion.” —*SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL, STARRED REVIEW*

★ “Readers will be left with the reminder that ‘just because a magic is small doesn’t mean it is unimportant’ and the hope, reminiscent of *Peter Pan*, that those who still believe will always have magic in their lives.” —*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, STARRED REVIEW*

“A beguiling first novel” —*GREGORY MAGUIRE, AUTHOR OF EGG AND SPOON, IN THE NEW YORK TIMES*

“Manifestations of belief and unbelief run through Cassie Beasley’s charming debut, which takes readers to a marvelous place.” —*THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

“*Circus Mirandus* is an engaging, innovative tale that balances fantastical goings-on with an exploration of love, loss, friendship and the value of being open to the unexplainable.” —*BOOKPAGE*

“Some books take readers to different places or let us experience fantastical lands, but *Circus Mirandus* brings the magic to our world.” —*SCHOLASTIC INSTRUCTOR, “50 BEST BOOKS FOR SUMMER”*

“Beasley elegantly fits together her story’s many pieces, crafting a tale where magic is not an allusion but something we can all find...” —*CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER*

“The tender relationship between grandfather and grandson is delicately drawn, and the family backstory, with its ties to a dark episode in the millennia-old history of *Circus Mirandus*, is intriguing... At the core of Beasley’s debut novel is the theme of eternal life explored in Babbitt’s *Tuck Everlasting*.” —*BCCB*

“Debut author Beasley has built an imaginative world in evocative, painterly prose, particularly the circus, and she’s filled it with compellingly multifaceted characters.” —*BOOKLIST*

“Studded with descriptions that make people and props alike come alive, this story will make readers wish so very badly that a circus, complete with gorilla balloons and mysterious bird ladies, will pop up one day in town and only accept those who truly believe in magic.” —*VOYA*

