

CANNONBALL

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based on the book *Cannonball Simp*, by John Burningham

Themes: Animals, Feelings, Friendship, Humor

Grade Level: K–3 (ages 4–9)

Running Time: 28 minutes

SUMMARY

In this story two lonely characters become friends and help each other. One character is Hugo, a clown whose long-time cannonball act just doesn't get laughs. In fact, the ringmaster warns Hugo that he'll lose his job unless he can find some new material. The other character is a scruffy dog that has been rounded up and sent to the pound. Through clever trickery, the dog escapes the pound, evades the dog catchers and makes its way to the circus. Soon the dog has made friends with Hugo and a girl who is the youngest acrobat. When the circus opens that evening, the dog jumps into the ring and gets blasted out of Hugo's cannon. This saves Hugo's career and gives the dog its name—Cannonball.

OBJECTIVES

- Children will watch and listen to a fictional story about a circus.
- Children will follow a narrative made up of a sequence of causes and effects.
- Children will identify characters, settings, and actions in a story.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Introduce the title of the program and make sure

children know what a cannonball and a cannon are. Show the cover art or tell children that the story is about a circus clown. Ask them to imagine a clown act that would include a cannonball and to predict what might be in such an act. Suggest that they watch carefully to see if their predictions were correct. Explain that the story is told with very few words, so the audience has to pay special attention to the pictures and actions.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Ask children to discuss the feelings of Hugo and Cannonball at different points in the story. Have them imagine how a clown would feel if he couldn't make people laugh and how an older worker might feel if he were about to lose a job. Talk about how a homeless dog would feel inside a pound. Have children share how they felt when the dog escaped and joined the circus and how they felt when the dog saved Hugo's act. Discuss ways in which Hugo and Cannonball helped each other.

To help develop communications skills, ask children to imagine that and their pets have joined the circus. Have them write stories or poems about their circus acts, draw pictures of themselves performing or even take photographs of themselves and their pets in costume. Stage an imaginary circus starring the most unusual animal acts, with children playing the parts of both clowns and animals. Children might also want to pretend to be ringmasters and describe their pets' tricks.

Use the circus theme to help children develop

library skills and to read and report on books. Discuss the difference between fiction and nonfiction books. At the library, show children how to find fiction and nonfiction books about the circus. Have each child find a book, read it and make a report to the class.

Extend the circus theme into math lessons by asking children to write story problems featuring animals in the circus. Give them examples from this story. For example, suppose the circus gives five shows a week for 20 weeks. How many times will Cannonball get blasted out of the cannon?

Devote a series of social studies lessons to the dogs in your community. Work with a local animal shelter or humane society to help children learn how stray animals are controlled. Contact local dog obedience schools and arrange for demonstrations. Have children send away for free materials on pet care and behavior from pet food companies or pick up free brochures at a pet supply superstore. Conduct discussions that emphasize owners' responsibilities and safety for both dogs and people.

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