



PHILIP ASTLEY

# FATHER OF MODERN CIRCUS

An interactive workshop for children  
created by New Vic Education  
and delivered in partnership with  
Newcastle Library, October 2017

THE  
**PHILIP  
ASTLEY**  
PROJECT

**NEW VIC**



## Introduction

In October 2017, as part of the Philip Astley Project, New Vic Education created a drama workshop for Key Stage 2 children which explored Philip Astley's life. Delivered in partnership with staff at Newcastle-under-Lyme Library the workshop used several drama strategies, including active storytelling, to tell the story of Philip Astley's life and increase children's understanding of his achievements. This pack provides details of the activities used during the workshop.

### **This workshop is designed for:**

Age range Children aged 7-11 years old

Group size Up to 30 children

*\* To use the workshop with younger children try working on one of two sections of the active storytelling script at a time, reflecting as a group on what is taking place at this point in the story and how events impact on each of the characters.*

### **To use this workshop in your setting you will need:**

#### **Space**

A space large enough for everyone to sit in a circle - a classroom with chairs and tables pushed back is fine

#### **Time**

45-60 minutes - if doing all of the warm-up activities and the whole of the active storytelling script

#### **Resources**

A top hat - to signify the character of Philip and scarf or square of material (approx. 30cm x 30cm) for each member of the group - to create images such as flames or circles

*\* Don't worry If you don't have these resources. You could use a different object to signify Philip (waistcoat, sash) and ask your group to use their hands to create flames or circles.*

With thanks to Hassell County Primary, St Giles & St Georges Academy, St Mary's Primary, Blackfriars Academy, The Coppice Academy that took part in the workshops at Newcastle-under-Lyme library.

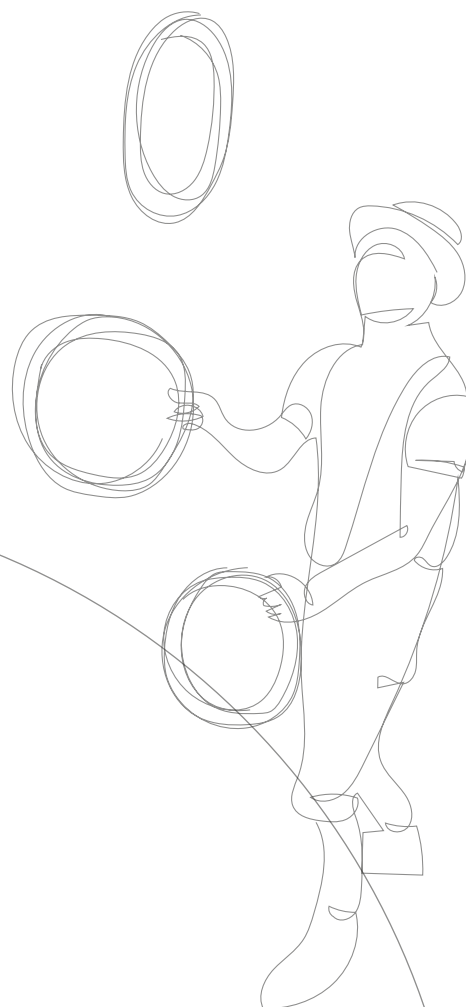
For more information on the Philip Astley Project visit [www.philipastley.org.uk](http://www.philipastley.org.uk)

## The Whoosh and Active Storytelling

The 'Whoosh' is a form of active storytelling, developed by Professor Joe Winston from the University of Warwick. It allows groups of children to participate in bringing characters and events to life by playing the characters and acting out the events as described by the teacher or practitioner leading the activity.

These story events are broken down into sections, which Joe Winston first divided up, using the sound of a rain stick and subsequently, the vocal sound of "whoosh." In this case, we have replaced the sound of the 'whoosh' with a drum roll, in keeping with the build-up of excitement, associated with circus. By breaking it down like this, it helps the children to take in the information and also after each 'whoosh' or drum roll, new people are chosen to play the characters, so different people can have a turn, but we can still recognise them as the characters by using simple costumes or props, such as a hat (top hat for Astley, of course)!

This technique is helpful for children as an introduction to a subject or story that they have no previous knowledge of. It helps the story to become memorable by physicalising important episodes and imagining what it might feel like to be those characters. It is also a good way for teachers to assess the existing knowledge of children as they are quickly asked to show their interpretation of a particular character.



## Workshop Plan

### Introduction - 5 minutes

Lead a brief group discussion to:

- Assess existing knowledge - "Has anyone heard of Philip Astley? Who can tell me something about him?"
- Introduce active storytelling and how it works - "Today we are going to explore Philip Astley's story and we're going to do it together. I will read from a script and ask some of you to become the characters."

### Warm-up activities - 10-15 minutes (if doing all three)

#### Maker game

- Explain to the group that there are a lot of horses in this story and that we can use our bodies to create images of them.
- Ask the children to get into groups of four and together use their bodies to make the shape of one horse. Ask them to work out who will be the head, the tail etc. Remind them to think about using different levels to make their image interesting.
- Have a look at the images; which one works best and why? Can any of the groups make their horse gallop?

*\* For younger children try asking them to create a horse individually. For children with limited mobility see if they can create the rhythm of a horse by using their hands on their laps or another surface such as a chair.*

#### Using props - Scarves

- Hand out the scarves and explain that this prop will help us tell our story.
- Ask the children to work in groups of three to create a circle with their scarves. Again, as a group have a look at the different ideas and assess which work best and why.
- Ask the children if they can wave them as if saying goodbye to someone? Or make them flicker like flames?

#### Using costume - Top hat

- Introduce the top hat and explain that this piece of costume will be used to signify the character Philip Astley. Ask someone to try it on - "How does it make you feel? Does it make you stand or move differently?"

- Explain to the group that if they are given the top hat they will take on the role of Philip Astley. Reassure the group that several different people will play this role during the story and that everyone will take part in bringing Philip Astley's story to life.

### **Creating the whoosh; Drumroll please... - 5 minutes**

To create the whoosh that will be used to move on to the next section of the story:

- Ask the group if they can create a drumroll using their hands on their laps or the floor.
- Explain that when you say "Drumroll please..." that's everyone's cue to get back to their place in the circle, sit down and join in with creating the drumroll. It means we are moving on to the next part of Philip's story.
- Use a simple gesture such as raising your hand or crossing your arm in front of you as a signal to the group to stop the drumroll. Have a few practises.

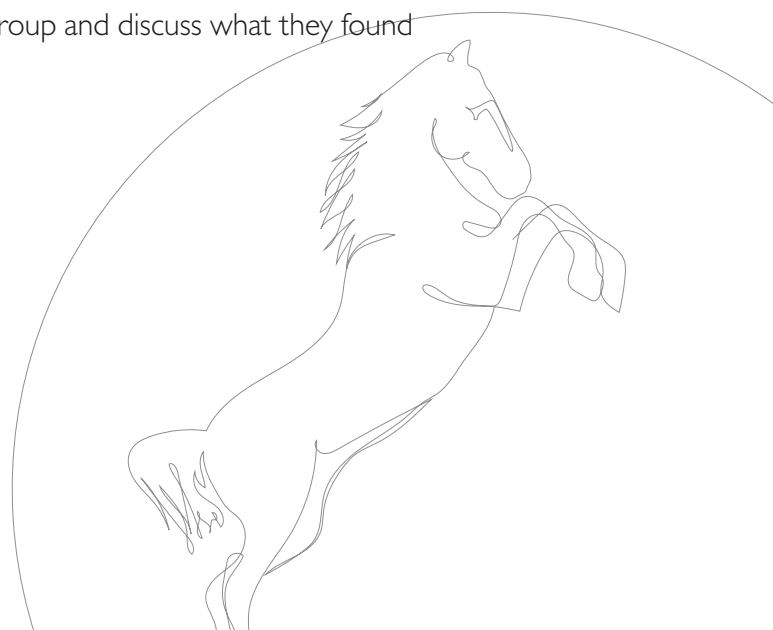
### **Active Storytelling; Philip Astley, Father of Modern Circus - 25 minutes**

Use the active storytelling script (below) to tell, with the help of the group, the story of Philip Astley's life.

### **Snapshots - 10 minutes**

To finish the workshop off and gauge how much information the group have taken in ask them to work in groups of three or four to:

- Discuss the story they have just helped to tell and decide on the part that most interested them and why.
- Create a freeze-frame (frozen image) of that part of the story and give the freeze-frame a title. For example; 'Philip doesn't give up' or 'Patty is worried about using all their money'.
- Share their freeze-frame with the rest of the group and discuss what they found interesting about this part of the story.



## Philip Astley Father Of Modern Circus Active Storytelling Script

### Key

**Large font** is text for you, the Teacher/Practitioner to read out

*Italics* is an instruction for you

Underlined is the title of the next section of the story, for you to announce in true ring master style!

**Bold** means you allocate the character named to a child (and if it's Philip give the child the top hat to wear)

**UPPERCASE** is text for the child playing that character to say. You say it to them first so they can hear it and then they repeat themselves, with feeling!



Arrange the group to sit in a circle. Give each child a scarf. Have the top hat near you.

Are we ready to start our story? Drumroll please...

Start a whole group drumroll of hands on the floor or laps

The 8th of January

1742

Newcastle-under Lyme!

End drumroll

### **PHILIP ASTLEY IS BORN!**

**Philip's** father is a man called **Edward Astley**, a cabinet maker.

Instruct Edward to mime building a cabinet – what tools would he use? Hammering, measuring, sawing...

At the age of 9 Phillip becomes his father's apprentice

Ask if anyone knows what this means? Discuss and clarify

Philip learns how to make cabinets but what he really loves are horses

Pick a group to create a horse for Phillip to interact with – groom, saddle up

Philip: I WISH I COULD WORK WITH HORSES

At the age of 17 Philip leaves home

Encourage Philip and his dad to form a picture of him leaving home. Encourage everyone to wave Philip goodbye, using their scarves

Everyone: GOODBYE PHILIP, BE SAFE

*Take back the top hat, thank the child for playing Philip and ask them to sit back down again.*

*Ask the group where they think Philip is going to and what they think he will do next?*

Shall we find out?

Drumroll please...

*Start a whole group drumroll*

*End drumroll*

## **PHILIP JOINS THE ARMY - THE ROYAL DRAGOONS!**

*Wow the Royal Dragoons! It's a big deal being in the Royal Dragoons.*

*How would soldiers sit? Backs straight everyone!*

Philip is put in charge of...

*Ask the group if anyone can guess*

The horses! Because he is so good with them

*Let's see a **horse** again and **Philip** interacting with it*

Philip Astley is now a grown man, tall and with a loud booming voice

Philip: ATTENTION!

*Encourage everyone to stand to attention*

He fights in the 7 year war

*Encourage everyone to create a frozen image of a soldier fighting. What would that look like in the 18th century?*

and returns... a Major!





As a leaving gift **The Colonel in the Army** gives him a beautiful white horse called **Gibraltar**

Everyone:        **GOODBYE PHILIP, GOOD LUCK!**

*Encourage everyone to wave him off again using their scarves. Take back the top hat*

*Ask the group where they think Philip is going to and what he will do next.*

**Drumroll please...**

*Start a whole group drumroll*

*End drumroll*

After the army Philip heads to...

**LONDON!**

*End drumroll. Instruct everyone to get up on their feet and walk around - it's very busy in London, be careful not to bump into anyone!*

Where **Philip** meets...

*Everyone freeze!*

**Miss Patty Jones**, who later becomes his wife

Everyone:        **CONGRATULATIONS PHILIP!**

**CONGRATULATIONS PATTY!**

*Everyone walk around again. Encourage Philip and Patty to walk arm in arm*

Then one day...

*Everyone freeze! and sit down where they are, apart from Philip, Patty and one other person*

Philip sees a **horse rider**

Standing on a horse's back

Performing tricks

While the horse gallops round and round

*Instruct the rider to gallop round the space, weaving in and out of people*

The man was the first trick rider Philip ever saw!

*Encourage everyone to give the rider a round of applause. Ask the child to sit down again*

**Philip: I CAN DO THAT**

*Ask the group what they think. Could Philip be a trick rider too?*

Drumroll please...

*Start a whole group drumroll*

*End drumroll*

### PHILIP LEARNS TO TRICK RIDE

*Instruct Philip to ride around the inside of the circle, balancing carefully.*

**Patty: MARVELLOUS!**

**Philip: I NEED A BIGGER CIRCLE**

### **A BIGGER RING TO RIDE ROUND**

*Instruct everyone to move back a little bit to allow Philip move room.*

*Instruct Philip to ride a bit faster, a bit more confidently.*

**Patty: WONDERFUL!**

**Philip: A BIGGER RING!**

*Instruct everyone to move back a little bit further to allow Philip more room.*

*Instruct Philip to ride a bit faster, a bit more confidently and then come to a stop.*

Philip has made a discovery!

Philip: THE OPTIMUM SIZE OF RING FOR TRICK RIDING IS...

A RING WITH A DIAMETER OF 42 FEET

*Instruct Patty to walk across the diameter of the circle to demonstrate.*

Patty: 42 FEET

*Explain to the group that 42 feet is almost 13 metres.*

The crowds start pouring in to see Philip trick ride.

**Patty** learns to trick ride too, with swarms of bees covering her hands and arms like gloves

*Instruct Patty to wrap her hands in yellow scarves and ride round the circle like Philip. Encourage people to Bzzz as she passes them*

Things are going well for Philip and Patty

*Instruct them to take a bow and sit counting the money they are earning*

Philip: THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING

But...

Further along the river, Philip's competitors are copying what he does

*Allocate a **competitor** to sit on the opposite side of the circle to Philip and count money just like he is doing*

*Ask the group how they feel when people copy their ideas? What they think Philip will do?*

Philip: WE'LL INCLUDE OTHER ACTS – ACROBATS, JUGGLERS, CLOWNS

*Allocate a **couple of jugglers** to take up a frozen picture on Philip's side of the circle. Then another couple of **jugglers to stand on the competitors' side***

Philip: WE'LL BUILD A ROOF OVER OUR ARENA SO PEOPLE CAN ENJOY THE SHOW EVEN WHEN IT RAINS AND IT'S COLD

THE AMPHITHEATRE!

THAT'S WHAT WE'LL CALL IT

*Allocate a couple of people to create an image of a roof to stand on Philip's side. And a couple to create a roof on the competitors' side*

Philip: THEN WE'LL BUILD A BIGGER AMPHITHEATRE!

AT THE FOOT OF WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

Patty: WE CAN'T, IT'S TOO MUCH MONEY, TOO MUCH OF A RISK!

WE'VE OUR SON **JOHN** TO THINK OF

*Ask John to stand with Philip and Patty. How do we think they will all be feeling?*

Philip: THAT'S EXACTLY WHY WE MUST RISK IT

GIVE OUR CHILD THE OPPORTUNITIES WE NEVER HAD

*Ask the group what they think Philip will do? Listen to Patty, play it safe? Or risk it all to become bigger and better than the competition?*

Drumroll please...

*Start a whole group drumroll*

*End drumroll*

PHILIP BUILDS A BIGGER AMPHITHEATRE!

**Patty:** AND USES ALL OUR SAVINGS TO DO IT

**Philip** brings in **new acts**

*Instruct a few people to come into the circle and be tightrope walkers, jugglers, acrobats*

Philip and Patty's son **John** learns to trick ride

*Instruct John to trick ride round the circle with Philip and Patty. Ask the group if they have seen something like this before in this story. A father bringing his son into the family business. Do they remember Edward? How do they think John might be feeling at this point?*

But...

Disaster!

The Amphitheatre burns down in a fire!

*Encourage everyone to wave their scarves like flames at the edge of the circle and the acts to run off and sit back down in the circle. Instruct everyone to lay their scarves at the edges of the circle and Philip, Patty and John to step into the circle*

Philip: A CIRCLE OF ASHES

PATTY: We've nothing now

Philip: I'M SORRY

*Ask the group what they think Philip will do now? What options does he have?*

Drumroll please...

*Start a whole group drumroll*

*End drumroll*

**PHILIP REBUILDS THE AMPHITHEATRE!**

Philip: WE'LL CARRY ON

Patty: WE'LL TRY AGAIN

Together:       ASTLEY'S GRAND AMPHITHEATRE!

*Instruct Philip, Patty and John to place people's scarves back in their hands to create one big circle of scarves*

Astley's Amphitheatre stood at the foot of Westminster Bridge for over a hundred years!

Everyone who was anyone came to see the show

**Jane Austen** – have you heard of her?

Austen:         HE DELIVERED THE PAPERS TO JOHN AND WAS ASKED BY HIM TO JOIN THEIR PARTY TO ASTLEY'S. MY FRIEND ROBERT COULD NOT RESIST

**Charles Dickens** – what about him?

Dickens:        THERE IS NO PLACE WHICH RECALLS SO STRONGLY OUR RECOLLECTIONS OF CHILDHOOD AS ASTLEY'S

And Philip built other amphitheatres

In Paris!

*Instruct three people to stand up and create a **new circle** with their scarves*

In Dublin!

*Again three people to create a new circle*

And several temporary ones that travelled around Britain and Europe when the company toured

*Instruct everyone else to create new circles. Philip, Patty and John walk between them*

A last drumroll please...

*Start a whole group drumroll*

1814

Paris

*End drumroll*

### PHILIP ASTLEY DIES

Aged 72

The owner of a famous and international business

The man who worked out the ideal size of ring for trick riding

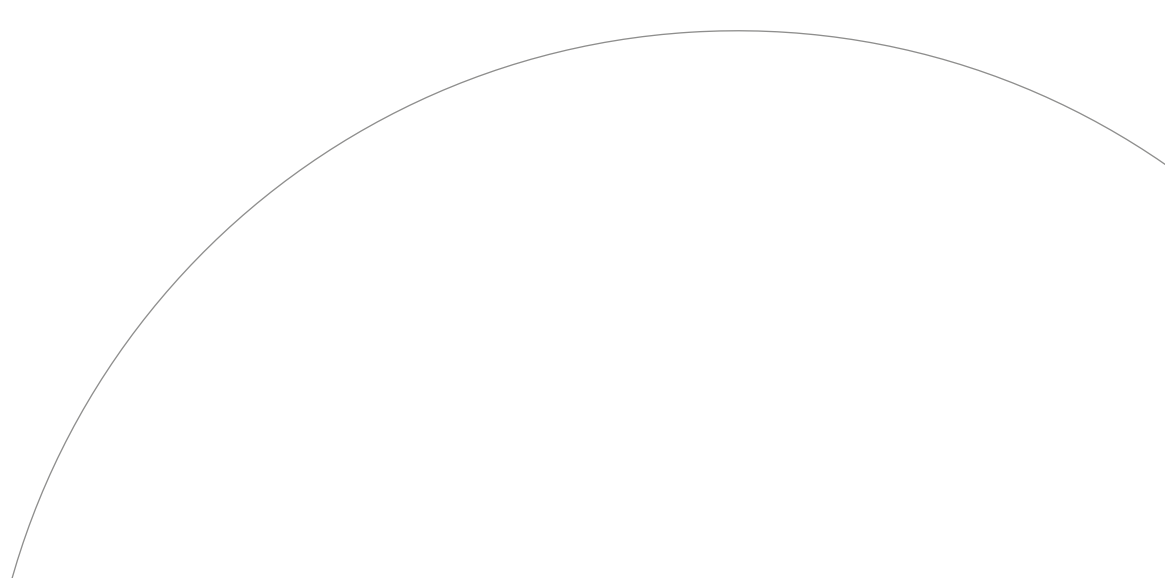
The size still used today by Circuses around the world

A man born in Newcastle-under-Lyme

Philip Astley

The father of modern circus

*Encourage everyone to join in with a big round of applause for Philip and all that he achieved*



## About the New Vic Theatre

Founded in 1962, the New Vic is the producing theatre for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. With around eight major productions a year, it presents a varied and adventurous programme which includes contemporary drama, new commissions, innovative adaptations and accessible classics.

Recent productions have toured nationally and internationally and have transferred to London and Manchester. The theatre enjoys a relationship with the RSC's Associate Schools programme; and has been an Affiliate Company of the National Theatre Studio. The theatre also regularly works with partners including the Manchester Royal Exchange, the Oxford Playhouse, the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Bolton Octagon, Oldham Coliseum and Northern Broadsides.

The New Vic has developed extensive and award-winning community involvement, working regionally, nationally and internationally through its Education Department and ground-breaking New Vic *Borderlines*, which works to change the lives of the most disadvantaged members of the community. The New Vic leads Appetite, an initiative to increase engagement with the arts within Stoke-on-Trent.

The New Vic is funded by Arts Council England, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

## The Philip Astley Project

[philipastley.org.uk](http://philipastley.org.uk)

The Philip Astley Project – Celebrating the Father of Modern Circus was formed in 2015 to celebrate Philip Astley within Newcastle-under-Lyme and beyond, as a result, increase residents' pride in their own heritage.

2018 is the 250th anniversary of the modern circus and thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, and sponsorship from businesses based in Newcastle-under-Lyme, local people are able to get involved in workshops, talks, exhibitions, and performances. Activities began in 2017, leading up to AstleyFest - a one day festival to celebrate Astley in August 2018.

The Philip Astley Project, which has partly been made possible by a National Lottery grant of £167,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and is working closely with local and national partners, including the V&A Museum, Van Buren Organisation, members of the national Circus250 network and the New Vic Theatre's *Circus Past, Present and Future* project, supported by Arts Council England.

The Philip Astley Project is managed by Staffordshire University on behalf of a steering group of local arts, heritage, statutory and educational institutions. The project runs from May 2017 to December 2018 and beyond.

# NEW VIC

