

AXE 7

UNIT 21

SHORT CUT

“FREAKY” FREAK SHOWS

Why did the fascination with human oddities turn into a real business?



YOUR PROJECT

Write an excerpt of the biography of a freak show performer.

Au menu de cette unité :

DÉCOUVERTES CULTURELLES

- 🎪 Les « freak shows » à l’ère victorienne
- 🎪 Le cirque Barnum
- 🎪 *The Elephant Man*
- 🎪 Les « freak shows » aux États-Unis (Coney Island)

OUTILS LINGUISTIQUES

- 🎪 Les comparatifs
- 🎪 La voix passive
- 🎪 Les structures causatives

BEFORE CLASS!

Flash to watch!

Watch the trailer for the series *American Horror Story: Freak Show* (2014-2015). Be ready to talk about it in class!



① Victorian Freak Shows

Why were freak shows popular during the Victorian era?

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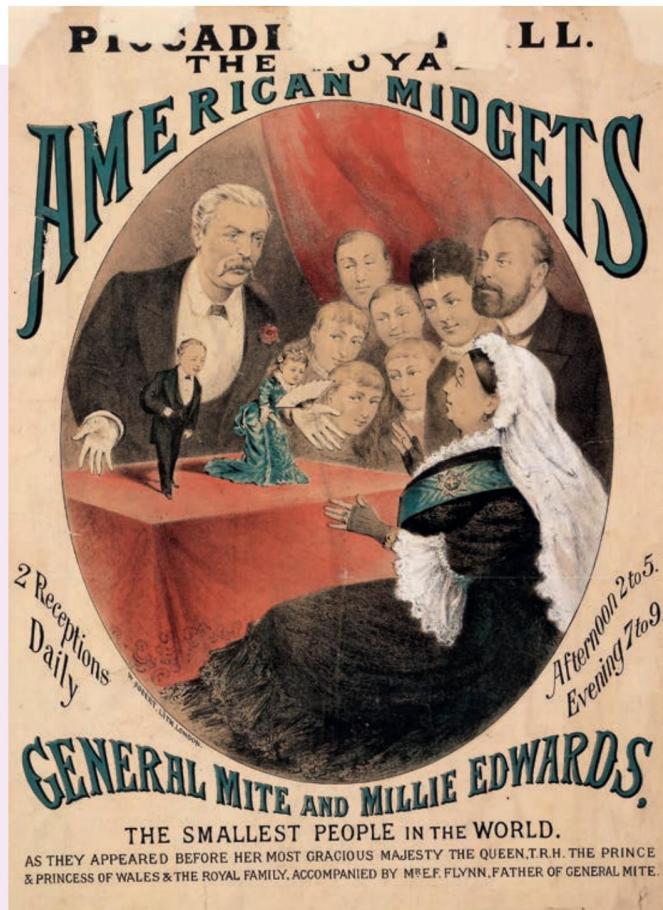
The popularity of Victorian freak shows

- A. Look at the picture. What type of event is promoted? Justify your answer.
- B. Read the text. Explain what a Victorian freak show traditionally looked like (type of acts, performers, audiences).

- C. How were the shows and freaks promoted by the organisers?

The exhibition of freaks, monstrosities or marvels of nature were essential components of travelling exhibitions in Europe and America throughout the Victorian period. What was saleable as far as the freak was concerned was, of course, physical difference, in a form that was both marketable and palatable. The showman was an essential component and it was the relationship between the presenter and the exhibit that produced the freak show. The exhibit could not be seen before a show and therefore needed the showman to market their particular attractions to the curiosity seeking public. An essential part of the telling of the tale consisted of wonderfully and medically impossible reasons to explain to the audience the history of the person they were going to see. The most popular attractions were oddities with extraordinary talents, who could do supposedly normal things despite their disabilities. A famous example of this type of act and sort were Siamese twins, so called because of Chang and Eng, the original twins were born in Siam in 1811 and brought to America in 1829. Midgets were frequently advertised as being much older than they actually were. Hirsute or bearded attractions would range from Jo Jo the Dog Faced Boy and the famous fake show Hairy Mary from Borneo, which was in reality a monkey.

The National Fairground and Circus Archive,



YOUR TURN! 2 Give your opinion

You have just read a press article about freak shows in the Victorian era. Post your opinion on Quora, as a 21st-century reader.

HELP!

Adjectives

- cruel /kru:əl/
- degrading
- exploitative /ɪks'plɔ:tətɪv/
- unmissable = inratable

Verbs & expressions

- feel outraged
- feel unease / uncomfortable
- Opinions on the subject may be divided...
- On the one hand, ..., on the other hand...