



Peanut Pitch - Advertising

Grade Levels 4-6

This classroom activity is based on The “Big Top” Show Goes On: An Oral History of Occupations Inside and Outside the Canvas Circus Tent. It is provided courtesy of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program (OOHRP) at the Oklahoma State University Library.

Formally established in 2007, the OOHRP has collected and preserved firsthand accounts from individuals who have witnessed historic moments. The program explores the lives and contributions of Oklahomans from all walks of life.

The “Big Top” Show Goes On is one of many projects undertaken by the OOHRP. This oral history project aims to preserve the voices and experiences of those involved with the work culture associated with Hugo, Oklahoma’s tent circus tradition. Many circuses have called Hugo home through the years, but only three currently remain. As the number of traditional tent circuses dwindles, their continued existence in Oklahoma is a testament to the dedication this circus community has for providing a magical experience to be shared by people of all ages. Made possible by a 2011 Archie Green Fellowship from the American Folklife Center, oral history transcripts, recordings, and images from this project are available not only at the OSU Library in Stillwater but also the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

The OOHRP invites you to explore the website (www.library.okstate.edu/oralhistory/circus) and learn more about Hugo, Oklahoma’s connection to the circus.

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Background

We encounter advertisements every day. On television, the radio, billboards on the highway, packaging at the grocery store, in the newspaper—things are being advertised everywhere. Advertisements are designed to get people to attend an event, buy something, or choose one item over another. At the circus, it is very important to first of all ensure the community knows when it will be in town and what times the shows start. It is also important for the circus to sell as many items as possible before, during, and after the show.

Read the following oral history excerpt from John Frazier, a seasoned circus veteran, as he explains what a “peanut pitch” is. Listen carefully to get ideas, because you will be writing your own peanut pitch!

John Frazier: [A peanut pitch is] where you sell the little bags of peanuts before the show starts. There are coupons in some of the bags, and they get a prize for them. The whole idea behind that pitch is the guy that's doing the pitch. You're the one that sells the peanuts, the little bags of peanuts. I think we sold them for a dollar when I was doing it.

[Here's an example:] “We have just a moment or two before the show starts, and during that time we have a very special announcement that will be of interest to each and every one of you, especially all the little boys and the girls in the audience, so if I could have your undivided attention. The Cromer Peanut Company of Columbia, South Carolina, is introducing a brand new and different peanut product on the market this summer, and it's going to be known as Cromer's Roasted Peanuts. They're brand new because they're roasted from the inside out in infrared ovens. It's not the old-fashioned way, not the old fashioned way where they dry the peanut out. It's done the new way with infrared roasting, and all the delicious flavor is trapped right on the inside of that juicy little nut, and when you taste them, you'll say the same thing I've said, 'My, oh, my! That's a good peanut.'”

“Now, in addition, as a special added inducement to get you to try their new product, the Cromer Peanut Company has instructed us to place on the inside of some of the bags—not all of the bags—but some of the bags contain coupons. Upon that coupon it says 'Prize.' Now, if you get one of those prize coupons, you can run down to the center ring and give it to Allen Jones, our funny old clown, and he'll give you your prize, a souvenir to take home with you. We have just two minutes for this advertising program. Two minutes only. The vendors are coming through the audience one time, one time only, two minutes, here they come, have your dollars ready, and make sure when you get your package of peanuts you open them up right away. Look on the inside to see if you have a prize coupon. If you do, that makes you a winner. That's right. Just two minutes is all we have. We must hurry along. Hurry along if you will. Get your money ready because the vendors are headed your way.”

Now, the secret to that whole thing—there's a psychology behind it. When you pump those people up, talking about the product—there's a little bit more to it than that, pumping those people up talking about those peanuts—but the whole idea is putting those people into the seats, getting those vendors into the seats.

I've sold as many as 2,000 bags of peanuts in a day, at a buck a piece with that same pitch you just heard. And what you give them is a balloon. And that makes it doubly good because the kids that don't get a prize in the tent, they'll buy a balloon on the way home. (Pages 63-65)

Activity

Now it's your turn! Write your own "peanut pitch" for whatever item you come up with. It does not have to be peanuts that you are trying to sell. Be honest, and point out the best qualities of the item. You only have 30 seconds to deliver your pitch. Be sure to include:

- A description of the item
- The price
- Why they should buy it
- Use descriptive words and give plenty of details

Once you have written your peanut pitch you will have the chance to deliver it to the classroom. When you are in front of the class, try to sound happy and excited about what you are selling, so people will want to purchase this item from you. Good luck!