

CIRCUS PANDA

For quite some time I've been using a video of a giant panda performing in a Chinese circus as a stimulus, from Year 1 upwards. It shows the panda undertaking a variety of stunts more suited to human babies than to wild animals. Here's a link to a similar video, of which there are many others: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJ0dadWNgXo>

I remember an enquiry I did at a Norfolk school, with a Y3/4 class, who all seemed up in arms at the sight of such a beautiful creature being made to drink from a baby's bottle, walk on two legs and, as in this video, play a kind of trumpet. It wasn't until final thoughts that George contributed, but he simply said 'Well, what's wrong with it? It's only entertainment after all.'

He elaborated by saying that he watches 'You've been framed', where both humans and animals usually suffer some mishap, and people laugh at that too, so why not the panda?

George's contribution sparked off lots of post-enquiry talk and of course, he had a point. The whole audience seemed to be enjoying the show, so what was wrong with it? After all, this is possibly only an extension of the pet dog doing somersaults or the cat pole dancing seductively (yes, this does exist!).

George's comments did create an opportunity though. Here are just a few thoughts as to how

this might develop:

- Should we use wild animals for entertainment?
- Should we use any animal for entertainment?
- Some say the panda should be released back into the wild – what does this mean?
- If a panda is born in captivity, is it still a wild animal?
- As humans, do we have the right to use animals how we see fit?
- Are there any examples where we do this?
- This panda was acting in a human-like way. Do humans ever act like animals?
- What's the difference between animals and humans (or for those classes that rise up and declare 'But humans are animals! – what's the difference between animal animals and human animals!)
- Some say the panda should be in its natural environment – what does this mean?
- What's the difference between natural and man-made?
- Are cows on a farm natural – or man-made?

So – this is a great stimulus for enquiry, but it's also a good resource for curriculum subjects too. In English, for example, this could form the basis of a unit on persuasive writing or letters of complaint. Geography could look at distribution and status of the panda and the culture of the countries involved and science could look at habitats, food webs and the environment.

Have fun – but don't be tempted to teach your dog new tricks!