At CTC, our mission is to Educate, Challenge, and Inspire our multigenerational audience. This Audience Resource Guide is just one of the ways through which we aim to enhance your experience and further engagement, beyond just seeing the shows on our stage. Use these articles, conversation starters, and activities both before and after you see Circus Abyssinia: Ethiopian Dreams.

Prepared by the CTC Education, Marketing, and Audience Services teams
CIRCUS ABYSSINIA: ETHIOPIAN DREAMS

September 17 — October 20, 2019
UnitedHealth Group Stage

Best enjoyed by all ages!

Co-Created and produced by MEHARI “BIBI” TESFAMARIAM
Co-Created and produced by BINYAM “BICHU” TESFAMARIAM
Written by CAL McCRYSTAL
Choreography by KATE SMYTH

A whole new kind of circus is coming to town! The rhythm of Ethiopia comes alive as this internationally acclaimed, dream-filled adventure makes its daring Minneapolis debut. Jaws will drop as one amazing feat after another defies gravity and awakens possibility; oh, to be part of the spectacle! It’s incredible range of high-flying hilarity, hula hooping, death-defying tricks, and ridiculously joy-filled juggling with the music and movement of East Africa.

Things to Know About the Show:

- This show features Ethiopian music and is primarily non-verbal; very little English is used.
- Audience cheering is encouraged in this production to add to the circus atmosphere!
- CTC has never featured a show with this level of athleticism and acrobatics. Professional acrobats will be performing stunts on our stage; while it might be nerve-wracking, not to worry—they are trained professionals who have mastered their craft!

Learn About Ethiopia

- Ethiopian New Year: https://theculturetrip.com/africa/ethiopia/articles/how-to-celebrate-the-ethiopian-new-year/
- Ethiopians in Minnesota: https://ethiopiamn.org/

Learn About Circus Abyssinia

- Q&A with Co-Creator and Director Binyam “Bichu” Tesfamariam: https://offbook.childrenstheatre.org/q-a-with-circus-abyssinia-director-bichu-tesfamariam-621680f8338c
*EDUCATE: Meet Bibi & Bichu*

Meet Bibi and Bichu, brother co-creators of *Circus Abyssinia: Ethiopian Dreams!* Read more below about the brothers pursuing their dreams of joining the circus.

We are Ethiopian brothers Bibi and Bichu Tesfamariam, and our story began over two decades ago, with a shared childhood dream of joining the circus. Like so many performers, we’ve lived for the lure and lights of the stage for as long as we can remember; but it was when we glimpsed our first images of the circus on TV that our dream took definite shape. Already close as brothers, we grew up driven by a joint fascination with the feats of circus magic, acrobatic mastery, and glamorous illusions achieved by the superhuman figures in the ring, inspired by a hope that one day, we could join them.

Ethiopia is a country without a circus tradition, so for a long time our fantasy of a circus life was beyond reach. But, like all children, we were indifferent to impossibilities, stubborn and intrepid in the face of doubt, and like all dreams, ours didn’t deal in probabilities. So we performed anyway, taking every chance that came our way to entertain an audience at festivals, at school events, even taking to the Jimma city streets, flipping and tumbling for the jostling crowds.

We picked up our first juggling clubs at 13 and 14 years old, and it was like finding the vital missing piece of a puzzle. With juggling, all our other skills fell into place; juggling’s kinship with rhythm and music, and its relation to acrobatics, allowed us to explore the art as a kind of choreography in its own right. Our juggling skills as a duo, our ability to work in absolute sync, owe so much to what we can only describe as the special communication between brothers.

And it was as if our dream exerted its influence on reality, because as we grew up, so it seemed did the amateur circuses and circus schools around us. By the late 1990s, though they still weren’t held in high esteem, circus arts were burgeoning in Ethiopia. Snatching our chance, we left home and joined Circus Jimma, embarking on a tour through Europe which brought us to the UK for the first time in 1996. It wasn’t until finally coming to England and performing to critical acclaim at Brighton Festival that it hit us, the circus life we’d been chasing was within our grasp; the joy and pride we felt in that moment is something we’ll never forget.
Moving to England in 1999, we quickly discovered London’s Circus Space, where we met the brilliant Sean Gandini. Gandini Juggling has spanned our careers, and Sean’s tenaciously generous support and guidance over the years have been invaluable in the transformation of our childhood vision of the future into reality.

Ultimately, our hope is that the show can help create a space in the world for an African circus tradition that matches the exemplary standards of European circus art. A celebration of dreams, of the people who make them possible, and the strength in all of us to fight for them, Circus Abyssinia uses the wonderful, surrealist language of circus to tell our story—how we dreamed it as children, how we lived it, and live it today.

Check out these photos of Circus Abyssinia!

Photos by Andy Phillipson, Andrey Petrov, Matilda Temperley, and Rod Penn
Children’s Theatre Company – Circus Abyssinia: Ethiopian Dreams

Get the Facts about ETHIOPIA!

- Ethiopia is the 2nd most populous country in Africa, with a population of about 110 million people.
- September 11th is considered the “New Year” in Ethiopia.
- 70% of the mountains in Africa are located in Ethiopia.
- Over 80 languages are spoken in Ethiopia.
- The oldest human fossil was discovered in Ethiopia.
- The capital of Ethiopia is Addis Ababa.
- Ethiopia is the only African country to have never been colonized.
- Coffee was first discovered in Ethiopia.
- Ethiopia has their own alphabet called Ge’ez.
- Ethiopia uses a 13-month calendar, which means that it is the year 2012 right now in Ethiopia.
- The distance between Minneapolis and Ethiopia is 7,730 miles!
- 70% of the mountains in Africa are located in Ethiopia.
- Ethiopia measures the day using a different clock. They believe that the clock should start when the day starts. Therefore, sunrise is at 1 o’clock and sunset is at 12 o’clock.

Ethiopia:

- Population: 110 million
- Capital: Addis Ababa
- Languages: Over 80
- Alphabet: Ge’ez
- New Year: September 11th
- Mountains: 70% of African mountains
- Calendar: 13-month calendar
- Day Measure: Sunrise at 1 o’clock, Sunset at 12 o’clock
**CHALLENGE: Conversation Topics and Activities**

Check out these ideas of what to talk about, write about, or explore before and after you see *Circus Abyssinia: Ethiopian Dreams*!

- A dream board is a visual representation of what you hope to achieve. Create a dream board using magazine cutouts, drawings, or computer images.

- Bibi and Bichu’s story is told non-verbally through circus performances. Were you able to understand the story? What helped you understand?

- Bibi & Bichu make a wish to the Man in the Moon to help achieve their dreams. Explore different myths about the Man in the Moon.

- Bibi and Bichu dream of joining the circus. What do you dream of achieving? What are the steps you need to accomplish to achieve your dream?

- Create a circus obstacle course that includes hula hoops, walking a tightrope line, and balancing.

- Compare and contrast a circus production from a play or musical.

- Do you have a sibling? In what ways are you and your sibling the same and how are you different?

- Which circus act was your favorite and why?

- What emotions did you feel during the show? Why did you feel those emotions?

- Visit one of the many Ethiopian restaurants in Minnesota.

- Bibi & Bichu work hard to master juggling. What is something you worked hard to master? Did you accomplish what you hoped to?

- Hold an Ethiopian New Year celebration on September 11.

- One of the performers creates a clown act using resources he found in his backpack. Create your own clown act using only resources you find in your home.
**CHALLENGE: I Dream Of...**

This is a great activity to do with the entire family, or a group of friends, or classmates! “I Dream Of...” asks you to explore your dreams for the future through physicality and gesture. You will make observations and infer meaning throughout the activity!

**Directions:** Gather in a circle. One at a time, each person will step forward and say, “Hello, my name is (name here) and for my future, I dream of...” They will then show their dream for the future using movement, through gesture, mime, or dance. When everyone has had a chance to share, think about what you observed. What are the similarities between your dreams? Did any gestures stand out? What emotions did you feel while watching these gestures?

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**CHALLENGE: Music-Art-Story**

This activity will challenge you to identify emotions in music, create art inspired by those emotions, and write about imagined events!

**Directions:** Choose a snippet of music (about a minute long works well) from a specific genre such as classical, rock and roll, or gospel. Play the piece of music and for the first time, simply listen to the music sample. You may also close your eyes if it is helpful! When the piece of music is done, write or share with a family member or friend some emotions you felt during the song.

Play the same piece of music again and this time, draw a picture while listening to the song. When the song is over, share your art with someone else. Tell them to share what emotions you felt that inspired the artwork, and make connections to times you felt that emotion in their life. Did a pop song make you feel happy? When do you feel happy in life?

Choose another snippet of music from a different genre, and repeat the activity with this piece of music. When finished, you should have two pieces of art inspired by two separate pieces of music. If you’re ready for a bonus challenge, write a story connecting your two pieces of art!

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**BONUS:** Repeat the above activity with some of the music that will be featured in *Circus Abyssinia: Ethiopian Dreams*! Check out the playlist on Off Book, CTC’s online magazine, at the link here:

*The Rhythms of Ethiopia:* [https://offbook.childrenstheatre.org/the-rhythms-of-ethiopian-dreams-af8e1b7bb443](https://offbook.childrenstheatre.org/the-rhythms-of-ethiopian-dreams-af8e1b7bb443)
**INSPIRE: Explore a Taste of Ethiopia**

Injera is a type of Ethiopian bread that is used as a vehicle or utensil for eating meat, vegetables, or stews. This food acts as an edible table cloth with the food piled on top. Injera is made of teff flour, which is the world’s tiniest grain and originates in Ethiopia.

### Materials
- Mixing bowl
- Spoon
- Non-stick pan or cast-iron skillet
- Plastic wrap
- Spatula

### Ingredients:
- 1/4 cup of teff flour
- 3/4 cup of all-purpose flour
- 1 cup water
- Pinch of salt
- Peanut or vegetable oil

**Step 1:** Stir teff flour and all-purpose flour together in a mixing bowl.

**Step 2:** Slowly add water and stir to avoid lumps.

**Step 3:** Cover bowl lightly with plastic wrap and set aside at room temperature for 1 – 3 days to allow it to ferment. You will see the batter start to bubble. This is how the bread gets a slightly tangy taste.

**Step 4:** Stir in salt.

**Step 5:** Heat the non-stick pan or lightly oiled cast-iron skillet. Coat the pan with a thin layer of batter. The batter should spread quickly. If it is too thick, stir in a bit more water. Injera should be thicker than a crepe, but thinner than a pancake.

**Step 7:** Cook until holes appear on the top of the bread. When the bread appears dry and the Injera is fully cooked, use a spatula to remove it from the from pan and let it cool.

Injera can be topped with hummus, salads, meats, beans, or stew.

“Circus Abyssinia is the first Ethiopian circus made by and for Ethiopian artists. The story at the heart of the show is a mix of autobiography and dream, and tells how we came to be jugglers—not from our adult perspective, but how as children we dreamed it.”

~ Bibi & Bichu
INSPIRE: Build Your Own Mancala

Mancala is thought to be the oldest game in the world by many historians. The earliest physical evidence of this game was found by archeologists in Ethiopia dating back to between 500 and 700 AD (that is over 1500 years ago!). Historically, the game was made by digging small holes in the earth and using stones or seeds for game pieces. You can make your own mancala game using the directions below.

**Step 1:** Gather the materials below.

**Materials**
- Egg carton
- Paint (optional)

**Equipment:**
- Scissors
- Tape or glue

**Figure 1**

![Carton Lid Lid](image)

**Step 2:** Cut the lid off of the egg carton.

**Step 3:** Cut the lid in half vertically.

**Step 4:** Using tape or glue, secure the two lid halves to either end of the egg carton so that approximately 2 inches are open on either side. This gives your mancala board the mancala holes on each side. (See figure 1)

**Step 5:** Gather 48 small objects to use as game pieces, such as marbles, pebbles, small candies or cereal, beads, etc..

**Step 6:** You can paint or decorate your mancala board or skip this step to start playing using the directions below.

**How to Play**

Place the mancala board between you and an opponent with the long side facing you. There will be 6 pits or small holes facing you and your mancala or large hole to the right.

Place 4 game pieces in each small hole. Designate one player to go first. On your turn, grab all of the game pieces in a pit on your side and drop one into each pit going counter-clockwise. You CAN put one stone in your own mancala on your journey around the board. You CAN place pieces in pits on your opponents side of the board but you CANNOT put a piece in your opponents mancala.

If the last piece of your turn lands in your mancala, you get to go again! If the last piece of your turn lands in an empty pit on your side of the board, you capture all of the pieces in your opponents pit directly opposite of the pit you landed in. Always place captured pieces in your pit.

The game is finished when a player has no more pieces on their side of the board. The player who still has pieces on their side captures all remaining pieces for their mancala.

Count pieces in your mancala. The winner is the player with the most pieces.
INSPIRE: Make a Wish!

Bibi and Bichu make a wish to the Man in the Moon. Write in each star a wish you hope comes true! Then, color your night sky!
Cork Board Conversations

Use the sticky notes below to think critically about *Circus Abyssinia: Ethiopian Dreams*.

Three adjectives that describe this play are...

1.

2.

3.

This play made me feel...

This play made me think about...

A question I still have is...

A status I would post on my social media after seeing the show is...

This play taught me...

My Rating of *Circus Abyssinia: Ethiopian Dreams* at Children’s Theatre Company