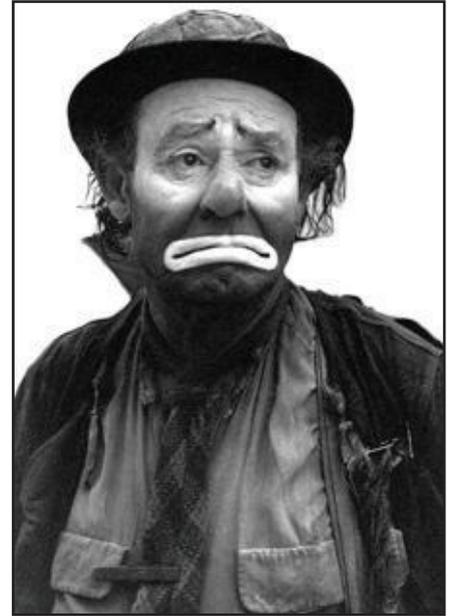


Name : _____

Emmett Kelly

by Guy Belleranti

Born on December 9, 1898 in the small town of Sedan, Kansas, Emmett Kelly became one of the world's most famous clowns. When still a young boy, his family moved to a farm in southern Missouri. While living on the farm Kelly learned he had a talent for cartooning, and his mother enrolled him in a correspondence course. After this, he began giving "chalk talks" or comic illustrations at schools and various functions.



As he became a young man, Kelly worked at various jobs, including work as a painter for a carnival. Here he painted merry-go-rounds, kewpie dolls, signs and other carnival equipment. It was also around this time, in 1920, that while working as an artist/cartoonist for a silent film company he sketched the precursor to his future classic tramp clown character, the sad-faced "Weary Willie".

His work for carnivals spiked his already developing interest in joining a circus. Kelly began saving money hoping to buy trapeze equipment so he could become an aerialist. In 1922, he joined his first circus. He started out as a painter and soon had the opportunity to be an aerialist. By agreement, he also worked as a clown. In 1923, he met Eva Moore, his first wife, and together they formed a double trapeze act. Kelly continued to double as a clown for extra income.

As time went on, he asked to include the clown character from his 1920 drawing into his circus clown routine. However, the circus bosses wouldn't agree to this. The clowns of this period wore ballooning suits and white face makeup and had red spots on their cheeks. Kelly's tatter clothed, woeful faced character looked nothing like this.

Name : _____

By the 1930's, Emmett Kelly was working as a clown full time. It was during this decade that "Weary Willie" would at last be "born". His forlorn hobo clown was an original, different from other circus clowns both in looks and actions. A master of pantomime and improvisation, Kelly had Willie wander the circus arena joining in on other performers' acts, the result was always humorous. He invented and perfected many routines, but his most famous was the act where he tried to sweep up the pool of light from the circus spotlight. While always funny, Willie's actions also always appealed to the sympathy of the audience. Other performers recognized Kelly's genius, and asked him to "wander" into their acts. They, like the audiences, loved him.

The 1940's came, and Emmett Kelly finally joined the "big one", Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus, after twice earlier turning them down. He had performed with many circuses previously, but now from 1942 to 1956 he performed with them.

As the 1950's approached, he used his clown skills beyond Barnum and Bailey, doing side work both on Broadway and in several movies. One of the movies was the 1952 Oscar winning film "The Greatest Show on Earth", where he appeared as "Weary Willie".

In 1956, Kelly left Barnum and Bailey to become a mascot for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He followed this up by working with the Shrine Circus and making appearances on TV and at nightclubs. Kelly was married more than once and had several children. One child, his son Emmett Kelly, Jr., began performing as a clown in 1960 with a similar "Weary Willie" character. Kelly, Jr. soon became a famous clown in his own right.

In 1967, the Emmett Kelly Museum opened in Kelly's hometown of Sedan, Kansas. And in 1989, ten years after his death, Emmett Kelly was inducted into the Clown Hall of Fame.

-Originally purchased by EdGate Total Reader in 2006 for use in a Lexile-based reading assessment program.

Name : _____

Emmett Kelly

- 1) Which of the following best summarizes the author's purpose in writing the text?
- a) to provide the reader with a profound biographical piece on Emmet Kelly.
 - b) to celebrate clowns and argue that clowns deserve a lot more appreciation than they get.
 - c) to talk the reader through the troubles and tribulations that Emmet went through in life.
 - d) to drive home the idea that talent coupled with opportunity can do wonders.

- 2) What various jobs did Kelly take up during his younger days? Which out of these was the most notable one that eventually took him to his true calling?

- 3) Pick out three circus-related words from the passage and write their meanings.

_____	-	_____

_____	-	_____

_____	-	_____

Name : _____

Emmett Kelly

- 4) Success is more about hard work and perseverance than just talent and chance. Provide evidences from the passage in support of this statement.

- 5) Portray a typical 'clown character' in a circus using your imagination. In which ways is "Weary Willie", as described in the passage, different from your image of a clown? Which one do you admire more and why?
