Circus clowns are performers that use pantomime (exaggerated gestures) and slapstick comedy to make people laugh. Slapstick comedy means the clowns act clumsy or silly on purpose with over-the-top movements. Clowns entertained audiences between equestrian (horse) acts during some of the earliest modern circus performances in the late 1700s and are still making people laugh today. Clowns wear colorful clothing and dramatic makeup that helps the audience see them and understand their emotions from far away in big tents and arenas. Keep reading to learn about the three main types of clowns in the circus.

**Whiteface clowns** are the oldest and most serious type of clown. The cover their entire faces and necks with white grease paint and paint either small or large facial features with black paint. This is Whiteface clowns often wear elaborate costumes that with the ruffled collars and small pointed hats that people commonly associate with clowns.
**Character clowns** have personalities that are easy to identify from their costumes and antics, like a policeman. Tramp clowns, who look and act poor and unlucky, are the best known example. They often paint scruffy beards and a sad expression on their faces and use makeup to make them look dirty and messy. Tramp clown costumes appear tattered and worn to the audience.

Emmett Kelly, one of the most famous tramp clowns.

**Auguste clowns** are clumsy, goofy clowns that wear bright, mismatched costumes. They cover their skin with light colored makeup and often paint large white outlines around their mouth and eyes to make them stand out. Auguste clowns also use red or black paint to draw attention to certain parts of their faces and often have red noses and a brightly colored wig.

Lou Jacobs, one of the most famous auguste clowns.
Design Your Own Clown Face!

Before you start, look at the examples of circus clowns and think about these things:

1. Compare and contrast the makeup the clowns wear. How is it alike or different?
2. Describe the clown costumes. How do you think their clothing helps to define the personalities of the clowns?

See even more photos and posters from Circus World Museum’s collection at www.circus.pastperfectonline.com