

The background features a stylized, monochromatic blue-toned illustration. On the left, a large profile of a man with a full beard and mustache is shown, looking towards the right. On the right, a three-masted sailing ship is depicted on a sea with stylized waves. The ship has a Union Jack flag on its mainmast. The overall aesthetic is graphic and artistic.

# TOLEDO OPERA

## Audience Preview Guide

Wednesday, February 17, 2027 - Student Night at the Opera

Friday, February 19, 2027

Sunday, February 21, 2027

Valentine Theatre

GILBERT & SULLIVAN'S H.M.S.

# PINAFORE

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## The Setting

Place: The quarter-deck of H.M.S. Pinafore, at anchor off Portsmouth, England.

Time: Late 19th Century

## Characters

### H.M.S. Pinafore

Music by Sir Arthur Sullivan

Libretto by W. S. Gilbert

*H.M.S. Pinafore* opened at the Opera Comique in London on May 25, 1878, and ran for 571 performances, which was the second-longest run of any musical theater piece up to that time. *H.M.S. Pinafore* was Gilbert and Sullivan's fourth operatic collaboration and their first international sensation.

**Ralph Rackstraw**, a gallant and handsome sailor on the H.M.S. Pinafore

**Josephine**, the melodramatic and temperamental daughter of Captain Corcoran

**Captain Corcoran**, beloved commander of the H.M.S. Pinafore

**Sir Joseph Porter, KCB**, a high-ranking and pompous Victorian aristocrat

**Little Buttercup**, a "Bumboat" woman who sells wares to the crews of ships

**Dick Deadeye**, a salty sailor who is not liked by his fellow crewmen

Sailors; Sir Joseph Porter's sisters, cousins, and aunts

## Character Pronunciations

**Ralph Rackstraw**: Rafe rhymes with "safe"    RAK-straw    rhymes with "back" and "law"

**Josephine**: JO-ze-feen

**Captain Corcoran**: Kap-tin    KORK-o-run

**Joseph Porter**: JO-zeff    POUR-tur

**Little Buttercup**: LIT-uhl    BUT-uh-kup

**Dick Deadeye**: DIK rhymes with "pick"    DED-eye rhymes with "Head"

# H.M.S. Pinafore Glossary

**H.M.S.:** Her Majesty's Ship

**Pinafore:** A girl's frilly apron

**British Tar:** A British sailor, referring to the tar that sailors would put in their ponytails to maintain their hair

**Portsmouth:** A great British naval base and city on England's south coast

**Boatswain (bo-sun):** An officer in charge of rigging ropes and sails

**Bobstay:** Part of the rigging of a sailing boat

**Deadeye:** A wooden block with three holes, used for tightening the sails' rigging

**Bumboat:** A boat carrying provisions to vessels at a distance from the shore

**Jacky:** Twists of chewing tobacco, soaked in rum

**Soft tommy:** A kind of bread

**Conies:** Wild rabbits, in this case, ready for cooking and eating

**Polonies:** A dry sausage made of various ingredients from Bologna, Italy

**Spithead:** The stretch of water lying off Portsmouth

**Reef:** "To reef" is to reduce the area of a sail exposed to the wind

**Fore-yard arm:** The ends of the large wooden spar which crosses the mast

**Selvagee:** A rope made into a strap or sling

**Topman:** A sailor stationed at the top of the mast

**K.C.B.:** Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath

**Grog:** Rum diluted with water and sometimes lime juice - once thought to protect sailors from scurvy

**Cimmerian darkness:** According to Homer's *Odyssey*, the Cimmerians lived in a land where the sun never shines

**Gillows:** Suppliers of high-quality furniture to the richest families in Victorian England

**Cat-o'-nine-tails:** A whip with nine knotted lashes used for punishment

**Fo'c'sle:** A contraction for the fore-castle, the part of the upper deck forward of the foremast

**Roundelay:** A short simple song

**Highlows:** Laced ankle boots of the kind typically worn by Victorian women

**Turbot and Brill:** Both are flat fish; turbot is a delicacy, brill is not

**Nine-pounders:** The smallest cannons carried on Royal Navy ships

**Pocket borough:** A parliamentary seat controlled by a wealthy landowner

**Horn-pipe:** A popular sailor's dance

**Midshipman:** A non-commissioned rank just below officer; young men becoming officers would serve three years as midshipmen before becoming lieutenants

**Asperity:** Roughness of manner or of temper; harshness of behavior or speech that expresses bitterness or anger

# Synopsis

Place: The action takes place on the quarter-deck of H.M.S. Pinafore, at anchor off Portsmouth.  
Time: Late 19th Century.

## Act I: Noon

The sailors are working on deck when Little Buttercup, a dockside vendor, comes on board to sell her wares. She hints that, despite her innocent appearance, she may be hiding a dark secret. Able seaman Ralph Rackstraw, widely regarded as the most proficient sailor in all the fleet, declares his love for the Captain's daughter, Josephine. His shipmates offer their sympathies, for they know there is little hope of Ralph's feelings being reciprocated.

The gentlemanly and popular Captain Corcoran greets his crew and compliments them on their politeness; he returns the favor by never himself using bad language. After the sailors leave, the Captain confesses to Buttercup that Josephine is reluctant to consider marriage to Sir Joseph Porter, the First Lord of the Admiralty. Buttercup says that she knows what it is like to love in vain. As she leaves, the Captain remarks on her attractive demeanor. Josephine enters and tells her father that she is in love with a humble member of his crew. However, she assures him that, as a dutiful daughter, she will never reveal her feelings to this sailor.

Sir Joseph is piped on board, accompanied by his considerable retinue of admiring female relatives. He recounts his meteoric rise from humble beginnings to his present exalted position, achieved entirely through persistence - and despite his lack of nautical qualifications. He then delivers a lesson in etiquette to the Captain, instructing him always to say 'if you please' after giving an order, as a British sailor is any man's equal - excepting Sir Joseph's. Sir Joseph has even composed a song to illustrate the point, and he presents a copy to Ralph. Bolstered by Sir Joseph's views on equality, Ralph decides to declare his love to Josephine. This delights his shipmates with the exception of Dick Deadeye, who maintains that equality's out of the question when people have to obey others' orders.

Shocked by his views, the sailors force Dick to listen to Sir Joseph's song before they withdraw, leaving Ralph alone on deck. When Josephine appears, Ralph confesses his love in terms surprisingly eloquent for a common sailor. She is moved; while she has found Sir Joseph's attentions nauseating, she knows that it is her duty to marry him. Disguising her true feelings, she rejects Ralph.

Ralph summons his shipmates and tells them that he is bent on suicide. He puts a pistol to his head, but as he is about to pull the trigger, Josephine returns and confesses that she loves him after all. The couple plan to elope that night. Dick Deadeye warns them to reconsider, but everyone ignores him.

## INTERMISSION

# Synopsis cont'd

## Act II: Night

The Captain expresses his many concerns, and Buttercup offers him her sympathy. He tells her that, but for the difference in their social standing, he would return her affection. She warns him that things are not all they seem, and a change is in store for him. He fails to understand her cryptic warning.

Sir Joseph complains to the Captain that Josephine has not yet agreed to marry him. The Captain suggests that she is probably dazzled by his exalted rank, and that if Sir Joseph can convince her that love is a leveler of social status, she will accept his proposal. They withdraw, and Josephine enters, feeling guilty about her planned elopement with Ralph and concerned about giving up a life of comfort. When Sir Joseph makes his argument, a delighted Josephine declares that she will hesitate no longer. The Captain and Sir Joseph rejoice, but Josephine is now more determined than ever to marry Ralph.

Dick tells the Captain of the lovers' planned elopement. The Captain confronts the couple as they try to leave the ship. The pair declare their love, justifying their actions because Ralph 'is an Englishman!' The furious Captain is unmoved and, in an outburst, swears at them. Sir Joseph and his relatives overheard the Captain and are shocked by his bad language. The Captain is ordered to his cabin.

When Sir Joseph enquires what provoked the usually polite Captain's outburst, Ralph replies that it was his declaration of love for Josephine. Furious at Ralph's revelation, and ignoring Josephine's plea to spare Ralph, Sir Joseph has the sailor incarcerated in the brig. Buttercup now comes forward to reveal her long-held secret: many years ago, when she practiced baby-farming, she had cared for two babies, one of low birth, the other of noble origins. Unfortunately, she mixed up the children – the well-born baby was Ralph, and the low-born Captain Corcoran.

Sir Joseph now realizes that Ralph should have been the Captain, and the Captain an ordinary seaman. He summons both: Ralph appears now as the Captain, in command of the Pinafore, and Corcoran as a common sailor. Sir Joseph's marriage to Josephine is now impossible – love may well be a great leveler of social rank but, as far as Sir Joseph is concerned, not as

# Sir Arthur Sullivan 1842-1900

Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan (13 May 1842 – 22 November 1900) was an English composer. He is best known for 14 comic operas with the dramatist W.S. Gilbert including *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, and *The Mikado*. His works include 24 operas, 11 major orchestral works, ten choral works and oratorios, two ballets, incidental music to several plays, and numerous church works, songs, as well as piano pieces and chamber music. His hymns and songs include the ever popular “Onward Christian Soldiers” and “The Lost Chord.”



**Sir Arthur Sullivan  
1842 - 1900**

The son of a military bandmaster, Sullivan composed his first anthem at the age of eight and was later a soloist in the boys' choir of the Chapel Royal. In 1856, at 14, he was awarded the first Mendelssohn Scholarship by the Royal Academy of Music which allowed him to study at the academy and then in Germany at the Leipzig Conservatory. His graduation piece, incidental music to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1861), was received with acclaim on its first performance in London. Among his early major works were a ballet, *L'Île Enchantée* (1864), a symphony, a cello concerto (both 1866), and his *Overture di Ballo* (1870). To supplement the income from his concert works he wrote hymns, parlor songs, and other light pieces, and he also worked as a church organist and music teacher.

In 1866, Sullivan composed a one-act comic opera, *Cox and Box*, which is still widely performed. He wrote his first opera with W. S. Gilbert, *Thespis*, in 1871. Four years later, the impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte engaged Gilbert and Sullivan to create a one-act piece, *Trial by Jury* (1875). Its box-office success led to a series of twelve full-length comic operas by the collaborators. After the extraordinary success of *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878) and *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), Carte used his profits from the partnership to build the Savoy Theater in 1881, and their joint works became known as the Savoy Operas. Among the best known of the later operas are *The Mikado* (1885) and *The Gondoliers* (1889). Gilbert broke from Sullivan and Carte in 1890, after a quarrel over expenses at the Savoy. They reunited in the 1890s for two more operas, but these did not achieve the popularity of their earlier works.

Always desiring to be considered a serious composer, Sullivan's work during the 1880s included two cantatas: *The Martyr of Antioch* (1880) and *The Golden Legend* (1886), his most popular choral work. He also wrote incidental music for West End productions of several Shakespeare plays and held several conducting and academic appointments. Sullivan's only grand opera, *Ivanhoe*, though initially successful in 1891, has rarely been revived. In his last decade, Sullivan continued to compose comic operas with various librettists and wrote other major and minor works. He died at the age of 58, regarded as Britain's foremost composer. His comic opera style served as a model for generations of musical theatre composers that followed, and his music is still frequently performed and recorded.

# Sir William Schwenck Gilbert 1836-1911

Sir William Schwenck Gilbert (18 November 1836 – 29 May 1911) was an English librettist, lyricist, poet, and illustrator best known for his collaboration with the composer Arthur Sullivan, which produced fourteen comic operas.



**Sir W. S. Gilbert**  
1836 - 1911

The most famous of these include *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, and one of the most frequently performed works in the history of musical theatre, *The Mikado*. The popularity of these works was supported for over a century by year-round performances of them, in Britain and abroad, by the repertory company that Gilbert, Sullivan, and their producer Richard D'Oyly Carte founded.

Gilbert's creative output included over 75 plays and libretti and numerous short stories, poems, and lyrics, both comic and serious. After brief careers as a government clerk and a lawyer, Gilbert began to focus, in the 1860s, on writing light verse, including his Bab Ballads, short stories, theatre reviews and illustrations. He also began to write comic plays, developing a uniquely absurdist, inverted style that would later be known as his "topsy-turvy" style. He also developed a realistic method of stage direction and a reputation as a strict theatre director. In the 1870s, Gilbert wrote 40 plays and libretti, several blank-verse "fairy comedies", some serious plays, and his first four collaborations with Sullivan: *Thespis*, *Trial by Jury*, *The Sorcerer*, and *H.M.S. Pinafore*. For the

next decade, the "Savoy Operas" (named after the theater D'Oyly Carte built to house them) were Gilbert's principal activity. The successful comic operas with Sullivan continued to appear every year or two, several of them being among the longest-running productions up to that point in the history of the musical stage. After *Pinafore* came *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), *Patience* (1881), *Iolanthe* (1882), *Princess Ida* (1884), *The Mikado* (1885), *Ruddigore* (1887), *The Yeoman of the Guard* (1888), and *The Gondoliers* (1889). Gilbert not only directed and oversaw all aspects of production for these works, but, for some, he designed the costumes himself. He insisted on precise and authentic sets and costumes, which provided a foundation to ground and focus his absurd characters and situations.

In 1890, after this long and profitable creative partnership, Gilbert quarreled with Sullivan and Carte concerning expenses at the Savoy Theatre; the dispute is referred to as the "carpet quarrel". Gilbert won the ensuing lawsuit, but the argument caused hurt feelings among the partnership. Although Gilbert and Sullivan were persuaded to collaborate on two last operas, they were not as successful as the previous ones. In later years, Gilbert wrote several plays, and a few operas with other collaborators. He was knighted in 1907 and died in 1911 of a heart attack while attempting to rescue a young woman to whom he was giving a swimming lesson in the lake at his home.

Gilbert's plays inspired other dramatists, including Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, and his comic operas with Sullivan inspired the later development of American musical theater. According to *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Verse*, Gilbert's "lyrical facility and his mastery of meter raised the poetical quality of comic opera to a position that it had never reached before and has not reached since."

# W.S. Gilbert's Satire and the Royal Navy

*H.M.S. Pinafore* or *The Lass That Loved a Sailor* premiered at London's Opera Comique on 25 May 1878, produced by Richard D'Oyley Carte, with stage direction by W.S. Gilbert. As a result of the successful run, this marked the first "big hit" by the team of W.S. Gilbert, the librettist and Arthur Sullivan, the composer.

During the Victorian era (1837 - 1901), the Royal Navy was instrumental in establishing the British Empire as the unmatched world power. Deemed the greatest military force on earth during the 19th century, it is little wonder why Gilbert set his satirical sights on the Navy's metaphorical omnipotent hull!

At this point in naval history, a sailor's life was nothing short of brutal. If British society subscribed to a tyrannical class system, this was amplified on board a Royal Navy Ship. Officers were only from the upper crust of society, and the uneducated enlisted men held no social standing whatsoever. Indeed, it was not unusual for a young man to enlist in the Royal Navy because he was deeply in debt or was perhaps avoiding imprisonment. Given this lack of education and aristocratic "breeding," enlisted sailors were ruled by their superior officers with iron fists, and their treatment of the sailors brutal and at times wholly inhumane.

These harsh realities of life on a Royal Naval vessel perfectly set the stage for Gilbert's social and political satire: First, a ship of the greatest military force on earth is named after a girl's frilly apron. Second, the crew is cheerful, tidy, and enthusiastic about their duties. Third, the Captain respects his crew, and they, in turn, are very fond of him. Finally, Sir Joseph Porter, the First Lord of the Admiralty, with all his titles and lofty airs, has never even seen a ship until we meet him in Act 1!

This biting satire, combined with clever (somewhat silly!) lyrics and ear pleasing melodies and harmonies set the scene for all Gilbert and Sullivan operettas that followed. It is no wonder that this topsy-turvy realignment of Victorian societal norms remains as popular with audiences today as it was in 1878!

By Kevin J. Bylsma



# What to Listen For

Rollicking choruses, beautiful melodies, and fast-paced patter arias and ensembles make *H.M.S. Pinafore* the joyous romp that continues to engage audiences to this day! Here are just a few of the remarkable teasing tastes to whet your appetite:

## ***I'm called Little Buttercup (Buttercup)***

In first aria, Buttercup describes her wares to the eager sailors.



[https://youtu.be/vCa3G1n9pj0?si=IbIC\\_ILwdhLbnZf1](https://youtu.be/vCa3G1n9pj0?si=IbIC_ILwdhLbnZf1)

## ***My gallant crew ... I am the Captain of the Pinafore! (Captain Corcoran)***

In this aria, Captain Corcoran introduces himself, and his crew responds with fervor and admiration!



<https://youtu.be/Zs6vhKCC4IU?si=7Cln3H4eUksyqb0K>

## ***When I was a lad (Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B)***

Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B. gives the brief history of how he rose from the janitorial staff of a law office to the highest-ranking official of Her Majesty's navy.



<https://youtu.be/BrPEFIOOHuU?si=aSfOpf33d6MiyWb0>

## ***Fair moon, to thee I sing (Captain Corcoran)***

In Captain Corcoran's second act aria, he begs the moon for an answer to his terrible reversal of fortune, wondering "Why is everything either at sixes or at sevens?" And we all thought 6-7 was a 21st century invention!



<https://youtu.be/MwJNLD1HdQI?si=1pZqqVYH-iJo65Ey>

## ***Never mind the why and wherefore (Josephine, Captain Corcoran, and Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B)***

In this clever, witty, and jaunty trio, Josephine, Captain Corcoran, and Sir Joseph plead their cases for why "married happiness is not inconsistent with discrepancy in rank!"



[https://youtu.be/j0yDej3tRRg?si=Z-dXy0\\_w5Os5Akq](https://youtu.be/j0yDej3tRRg?si=Z-dXy0_w5Os5Akq)

# In Gilbert and Sullivan's Time

- 1836** W. S. Gilbert is born in London
- 1837** Michigan is admitted as the 26th U.S. State
- 1838** Queen Victoria is coronated in a five-hour ceremony at Westminster abbey
- 1840** Donizetti's opera comique *La Fille du Regiment* premieres in Paris
- 1842** Sir Arthur Sullivan is born in London, the younger of two boys
- 1845** American writer Edgar Allan Poe's poen *The Raven* is 1st published
- 1847** Verdi's *Macbeth* premieres in Florence
- 1848** French painter Paul Gaugin is born in Paris
- 1851** Linus Yale, Jr. patents the Yale cylinder lock
- 1853** Piano company Steinway & Sons is found in NYC
- 1856** Sullivan awarded the 1st Mendelssohn Scholarship, aged 14
- 1858** Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* debuts at British royal wedding
- 1861** The Pony Express's 1st mail delivery between Missouri & California
- 1863** Gilbert's first play, *Uncle Baby*, opened
- 1865** President Abraham Lincoln is shot at Ford's Theatre. He dies a day later.
- 1866** American desperado, Butch Cassidy, is born in Beaver, Utah
- 1867** The Dominion of Canada is formed with provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, & Quebec
- 1869** Dmitri Mendeleev presents 1st periodic table of the elements to the Russian Chemical Society
- 1870** President Ulysses S. Grant signs a law establishing the National Weather Service
- 1872** Verdi's *Aida* premieres at Teatro alla Scala
- 1875** Gilbert & Sullivan's *Trial By Jury* opens
- 1876** Alexander Graham Bell patents the telephone in the U.S.
- 1878** Gilbert & Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* premieres
- 1879** Gilbert & Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance* premieres
- 1880** Helen Keller is born in Tuscumbia, Alabama
- 1881** Brahms' *Academic Festival Overture* premieres
- 1882** Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of Abraham Lincoln, dies at 63
- 1883** Arthur Sullivan is knighted by Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle
- 1884** Staute of Liberty is presented to the U.S in Paris
- 1885** Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Mikado* premieres
- 1888** Vincent van Gogh cuts off part of his left ear after an argument with Paul Gaugin
- 1890** U.S. President Benjamin Harrison signs the first U.S. law requiring inspection of meat products
- 1891** Music Hall (now known as Carnegie Hall) opens in NYC with Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky as guest conductor
- 1893** English author Beatrix Potter writes *Peter Rabbit* for a 5-year old boy
- 1896** Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème* premieres in Turin
- 1897** Marian Anderson, American contralto and celebrated singer, is born in Phildelphia
- 1900** Sir Arthur Sullivan dies of heart failure at age 58
- 1901** Queen Victoria dies of a stroke after 63 years on the throne
- 1903** Ford Motors under Henry Ford incorporates
- 1907** Maria Montessori opens first Montessori school
- 1911** Sir WS Gilbert dies from a heart attack at 74

# Pre-Opera Discussion & Activities

## Victorian Era Mores and Values

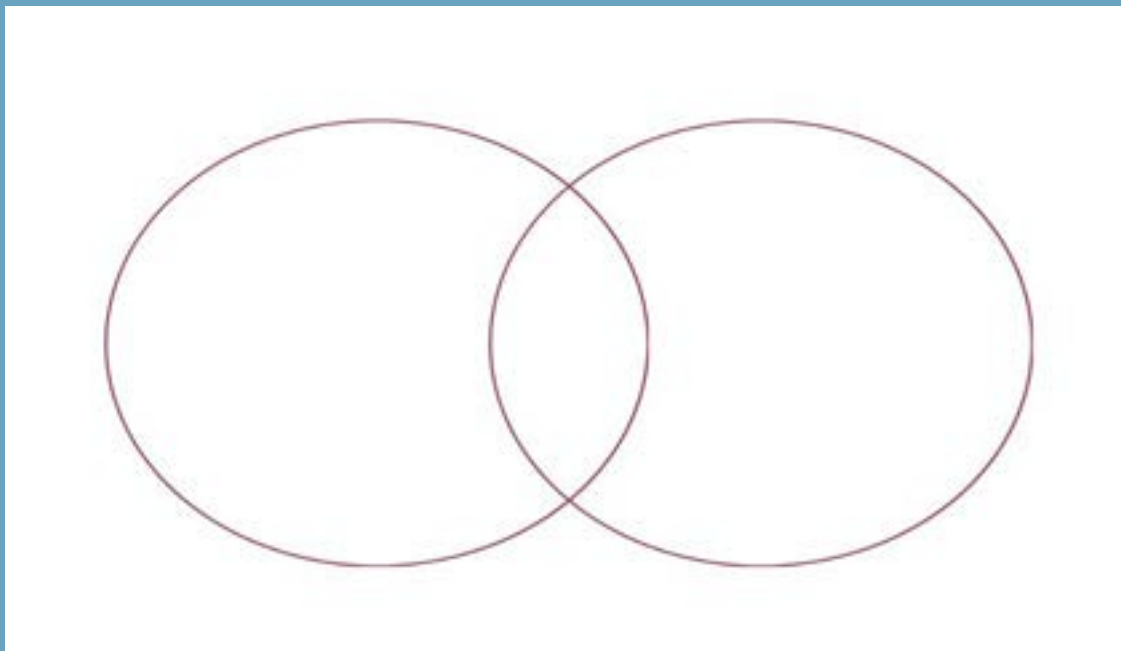
The Victorian Era encompassed the time of Queen Victoria of England's reign from 1837-1901. She, her husband Prince Albert, and their children epitomized the ideal Victorian family, living up to the values of the time—duty, truthfulness, personal responsibility, and a strong work ethic. During the Victorian Era, the middle class rose in prominence, and the upper classes had a responsibility to help the lower classes improve their education and morality. Read the following article which provides more information on the values of the Victorian Era and how they continue to influence 21st century society.

### ***An Overview of Victorian Morality***

(<https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/psychology/an-overview-of-victorian-morality/>)

#### **ACTIVITY:**

Fill in the Venn Diagram with Victorian values on the left and 21st century on the right. Are there any values that both eras share?



Discuss the following questions:

What Victorian mores, values, and traditions still influence society today?

What Victorian mores, values, and traditions have been largely eschewed by modern society?

# Pre-Opera Discussion & Activities cont'd

## Love and Social Classes

Love from Different Social Classes—part of the humor of *H.M.S. Pinafore* comes from the love affairs between varying social classes. This trope is also popular in modern musicals. Read the summaries and watch the videos below. Use them to spark discussion within the activity that follows.

**My Fair Lady**—With the libretto based on the play *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw, the musical *My Fair Lady* traces the education of Eliza Dolittle by Professor Henry Higgins, a dialectician and grammarian. Eliza, a street merchant, goes to him to improve her language skills, so she can work in an actual flower shop. Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering make a bet that not only can Professor Higgins teach her proper English but pass her off as an aristocrat at the upcoming Embassy Ball. In the song, “You Did It,” we see how little attention is paid to Eliza’s accomplishments by Higgins, Pickering, and the staff and how Eliza longs to be appreciated by Higgins for her hard work and devotion.

**Watch Here**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RT3cx1b9ZM&t=2s>)

**The Sound of Music**—Postulant Maria Rainer and Captain Georg von Trapp meet because he is searching for a governess from the local abbey for his seven children. Because Maria has pledged her life to a religious order, she is not searching for a secular love. The Captain is engaged to be married to an Austrian socialite and businesswoman. In this scene, we see the moment when Georg and Maria fall in love.

**Watch Here**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUfWRBGQkz0&t=1s>)

**Hamilton**—Founding Father Alexander Hamilton grew up orphaned in St. Croix. Thanks to the generosity and compassion of friends and neighbors, he was educated at Kings College in New York City because of his strong ambition and keen intellect. Hamilton meets and falls in love with Elizabeth (Eliza) Schuyler, the second daughter of prominent New England family. The song “Helpless” tells the story of the courtship of Eliza and Alexander.

**Watch Here**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3F4XJRObnk>)

**Waitress**—Waitress and gifted pie baker Jenna is stuck in an abusive marriage with her husband Earl. As she is ready to leave him, Jenna discovers she is pregnant with their child. After visiting her ob-gyn Dr. Pomatter, they begin an affair, hoping to escape their loveless marriages. The song “Bad Idea” epitomizes their mixed feelings as they embark on their new, ill-fated relationship.

**Watch Here**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyFmHDCiHdw&t=3s>)

# Pre-Opera Discussion & Activities cont'd

**The Notebook**—The poignant story of Allie, a girl from a wealthy family, and Noah, a working-class boy, transcends time. The plot begins decades later with Allie in a nursing home suffering from Alzheimer's. Told in flashback, the audience discovers that their class differences are central to the story's conflict but that their love prevails. The song "Dance With Me" explores their blossoming relationship against this backdrop.

**Watch Here**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goDEjOZAYUA>)

## ACTIVITY:

On your own or with a partner or two, brainstorm a list of plays, musicals, operas, movies, books, television shows, etc. that use class distinction between lovers/main characters as part of the plot or conflict. After making the list, divide the titles into two groupings—drama and comedy. Use the lists as a springboard for the discussion questions below.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the love affair between the classes influence the plot and conflict of each production?
2. Why do you think these love affairs are not portrayed in a humorous light like in *H.M.S. Pinafore*?
3. How does modern society and entertainment tend to treat love affairs between classes? Why do you think this is so?



# Post-Opera Discussion & Activities

## The Bab Ballad Poems

Many of the operettas by Gilbert and Sullivan were based on the Bab Ballad Poems by W.S. Gilbert. These ballads were a collection of light verses with accompanying humorous illustrations. These poems were published in *Fun* magazine from 1861-1869. The early Bab poems were unsigned, but because of their popularity the magazine publisher began to give credit to Mr. Gilbert, starting in 1866. They were written in an unique “topsy turvy” style where Gilbert would set up a ridiculous situation that would eventually work out through logical consequences. The Bab poems would later inspire the librettos for the operas he would create with Arthur Sullivan. Below are some samples of Gilbert’s Bab poems.

***Haunted*** by W. S. Gilbert - has references to *Pirates of Penzance* - 17 year old boy betrothed to a 47 year old woman. ([https://www.gsarchive.net/bab\\_ballads/html/haunted.html](https://www.gsarchive.net/bab_ballads/html/haunted.html))

***To My Absent Husband*** by W. S. Gilbert ([https://www.gsarchive.net/bab\\_ballads/html/husband.html](https://www.gsarchive.net/bab_ballads/html/husband.html))

***The Baron Klopzetterheim*** by W. S. Gilbert ([https://www.gsarchive.net/bab\\_ballads/html/baron\\_klop.html](https://www.gsarchive.net/bab_ballads/html/baron_klop.html))

**Activity:** Create your own rhyming Babs Ballad. Subject matter could include the absurdity of relationships, politics, institutions. Be sure to include a satirical drawing/cartoon to emphasize your plot or theme.

## Relationships Between Classes and the Rise of the Unqualified Candidate

Sir Joseph Porter, First Lord of the Admiralty, is the character who embodies the themes of romance between different classes, as well as unqualified people rising to levels of prominence. Because Sir Joseph believes in equality among the classes, he is willing to marry Josephine, even though she is beneath his class as the daughter of ship Captain Corcoran. However, Sir Joseph is constantly pursued by his sisters, cousins, and aunts who are of his same class.

Marriage between classes still fascinates the public. Season 4 of *Bridgerton* on Netflix follows a popular story arc in the Regency period with this theme. Lady Penwood’s maid Sophie (spoiler alert: step-daughter) attends a masked ball at the Bridgerton mansion. She intrigues the charming, rakish Benedict Bridgerton, the family’s second son. The remainder of the season chronicles his pursuit of Sophie and the conflict of their relationship—can a nobleman truly love a maid? Can a maid live as a lady in the world of a nobleman? Because of the complications of their relationship, Sophie and Benedict’s love story led to record viewership on the streamer.

Today, the class system in dating is less important than it was 150 years when *H.M.S. Pinafore* was written. While class issues today still play a role in dating, the role mostly has to do with an individual’s education, employment and earnings. Hypogamy is the new term that characterizes the trend. The social trend is that the traditional role of who has the advanced degrees or increased earning potential has been turned on its head in a committed partnership. Because women hold the majority of college degrees in the US, more and more women are

# Post-Opera Discussion & Activities cont'd

the breadwinners in the relationship. Also, today's potential couples put more emphasis on communication and a partner's needs than in previous generations. The article below from *The Amazing Times* defines the pitfalls and advantages of an hypogamous relationship.

[\*\*Read Here\*\*](#)

([https://theamazingtimes.com/hypogamy-on-the-rise/#google\\_vignette](https://theamazingtimes.com/hypogamy-on-the-rise/#google_vignette))

In addition, Sir Joseph had no military training or experience but rose to his distinguished position because of his persistence and charming nature. His promotion is chronicled in the song, "When I Was a Lad."

[\*\*Watch Here\*\*](#)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kfao1s3Tiek>)

Sir Joseph's character satirizes on a real person, W.H. Smith, who actually became England's First Lord of the Admiralty without any nautical experience. The Prime Minister of Great Britain at the time, Benjamin Disraeli, took great umbrage with the character Sir Joseph because the operetta made fun of one his cabinet ministers.

The promotion of incompetent and/or unqualified people into management or supervisory positions happens with shocking regularity in our society. There are several principles that describe this circumstance. The first is the Peter Principle, a concept in management, established by Laurence J. Peter in 1969. The Peter Principle is defined as "people in a hierarchy tend to rise to their respective level of incompetence." In other words, they are promoted for their successes in previous jobs until they reach a level of incompetence, a job they are no longer qualified for because their skills do not translate to this new position. They are then stuck at Peter's Plateau, a position where they will no longer be promoted again because they've reached their highest level of incompetence. A corollary to the Peter Principle was developed by cartoonist Scott Adam called the Dilbert Principle (1995), based on the cartoon of the same name. The Dilbert Principle states that "companies tend to promote in competent employees to management to minimize the their ability to harm productivity." In other words, companies promote the employees that don't do the actual work. The difference between the two principles is that the Peter Principle promotes employees for competence, in direct opposition to the Dilbert Principle when promotion takes place for incompetence.



# Post-Opera Discussion & Activities cont'd

## ACTIVITY:

Read The article on the Peter Principle from *Investopedia* and the article on the Dilbert Principle from *Mentalzon* for further background.

[Read Here](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/peter-principle.asp)

(<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/peter-principle.asp>)

[Read Here](https://mentalzon.com/en/post/3313/why-do-incompetent-people-get-promoted-understanding-the-dilbert-principle)

(<https://mentalzon.com/en/post/3313/why-do-incompetent-people-get-promoted-understanding-the-dilbert-principle>)

What principle do you think was the basis for Sir Joseph's promotion? Are there other reasons? Discuss and debate.

## ACTIVITY:

Create a cartoon that satirizes romantic relationships between different social classes.

## Analyzing the Title of *H.M.S. Pinafore*

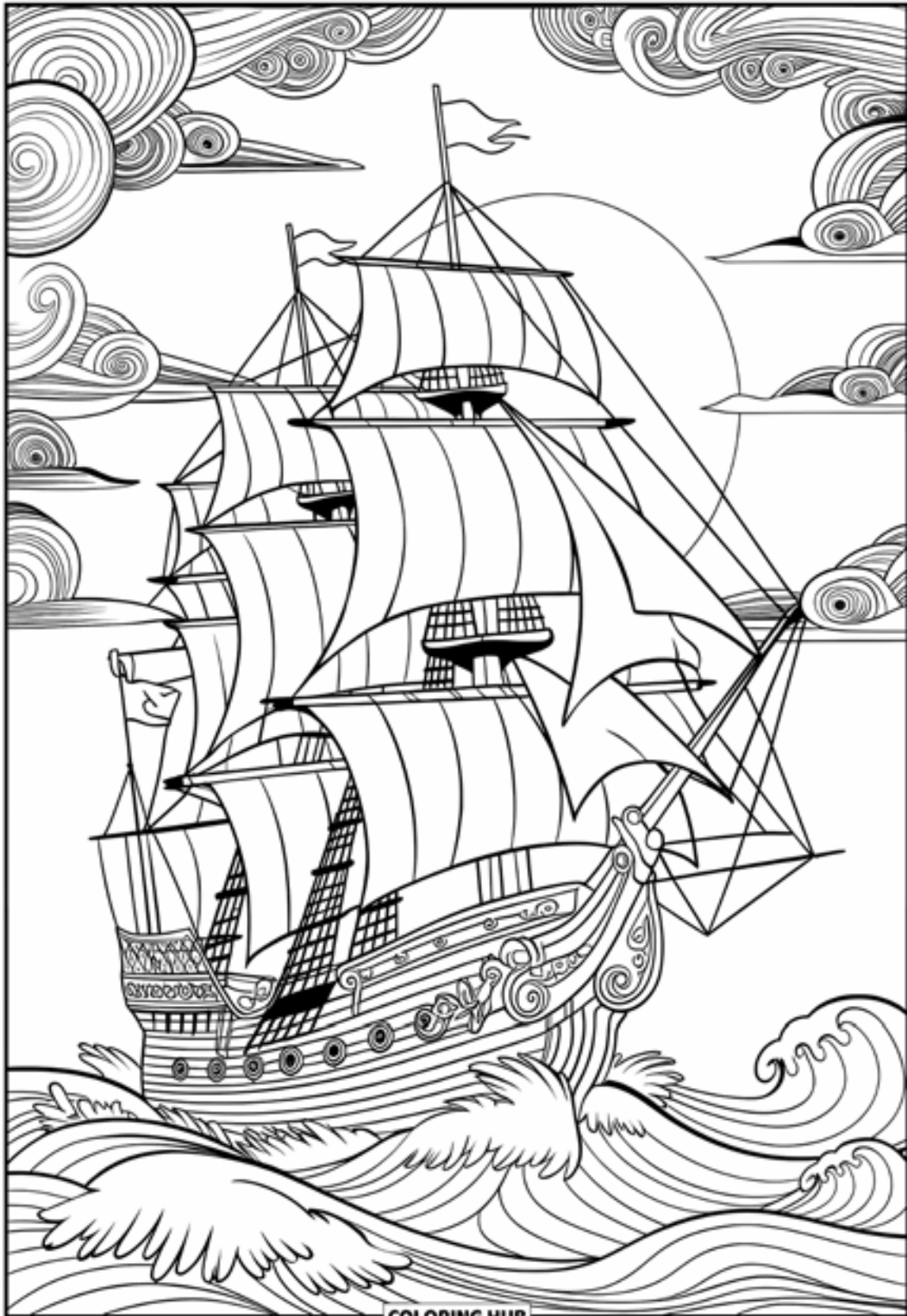
The British Navy in the time of Queen Victoria was known for its powerful presence and global influence on the high seas. It was the crown jewel of military might. Therefore, it is ironic that the fearsome warship H.M.S. Pinafore is named for an over-garment worn by young girls. The title adds another layer of satire to a show that pokes fun of the traditions, values, and institutions of Victorian England

## ACTIVITY:

Create Your Own "Fearsome" Battleship

Choose your battleship from one of the adult coloring pages on the next two pages. Give your ship a name that would strike fear (or not) into the hearts of all who would encounter her might. Color her accordingly. Explain why you chose the name for your doughty dreadnaught of the high seas!

# Post-Opera Discussion & Activities cont'd



# Post-Opera Discussion & Activities cont'd

