



TPAC Education's  
Humanities Outreach in  
Tennessee presents

Nashville Opera's

**H.M.S.**

**PINAFORE**

by Gilbert and Sullivan



2007-2008  
Teacher  
Guidebook



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# DEAR TEACHERS,

Students who have their fingers on the pulse of popular culture, current fads, and fashions can share their interests and enthusiasm at the touch of a phone key. The process was certainly slower in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the fervor surrounding Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore* was as passionate as any craze today.

In Britain, sheet music flew off the shelf - the iTunes of the times. *Pinafore*'s infectious melodies and witty, sarcastic lyrics were shared in parlors and clubs throughout the country, and *HMS Pinafore* ran for 571 performances. One show in July 1879 was interrupted as a "gang of roughs," hired by former partners in the opera company, invaded the Opera Comique stage and tried to steal the *Pinafore* scenery for a rival production in another theater.

Within its first year of creation, an estimated 150 unauthorized and often altered productions of *HMS Pinafore* spread quickly across the United States, including church, school, and regional burlesque versions. The New York Times reported up to five productions in New York City at any one time for almost a year. Catch phrases and songs from the opera became part of everyday life, and Americans found *HMS Pinafore* scenes on a variety of consumer goods and advertising.

Because of the lack of an international copyright agreement, Gilbert and Sullivan received little of the earnings generated by the "Pinafore Craze." Gilbert, Sullivan, and producer Richard D'oyly Carte traveled to America and mounted an authorized production of *HMS Pinafore*, while completing plans to open their next opera (*The Pirates of Penzance*) in New York in order to secure American copyright privileges.

**Compare the mania to Harry Potter, High School Musical, Hannah Montana, or American Idol and students won't be far off!** They have only to learn a bit about the time and tastes of the 1870's to enjoy this operetta fully.

The Nashville Opera production of *HMS Pinafore* promises to be funny and fresh with their customary expert staging and extraordinary singers.



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**This production will  
be accompanied  
by two pianos.  
Though the operetta is  
in English, supertitles  
will be provided.**

Guidebook written and compiled by  
Lattie Brown with contributions by  
William Florescu.

# SYNOPSIS

## H.M.S. Pinafore or The Lass that Loved a Sailor

First produced on 25th May, 1878, at the Opéra Comique in London, England

CHARACTERS	VOICE PARTS	DESCRIPTION
THE RT.HON SIR JOSEPH PORTER, K.C.B.	BARITONE	First Lord of the Admiralty
CAPTAIN CORCORAN	BARITONE	Commanding H.M.S. Pinafore
RALPH RACKSTRAW	TENOR	Midshipmate
DICK DEADEYE	BASS-BARITONE	Able Seaman
JOSEPHINE	SOPRANO	the Captain's Daughter
HEBE	MEZZO SOPRANO	Sir Joseph Porter's Cousin
MRS. CRIPPS (LITTLE BUTTERCUP)	MEZZO SOPRANO	A Portsmouth Bumboat Woman
BOB BOBSTAY	BARITONE	A sailor

MALE ENSEMBLE – Sailors, Marines      FEMALE ENSEMBLE – Sir Joseph's Sisters, Cousins, and Aunts

**SCENE: QUARTER-DECK OF HMS PINAFORE, OFF PORTSMOUTH, ENGLAND**

### ACT I— Noon.

ON the quarter deck of the *HMS Pinafore* sailors are discovered at work cleaning brass-work, splicing rope and singing as they work. Presently their work is interrupted by the arrival of a Portsmouth bumboat woman, nicknamed Little Buttercup. Her basket is crammed with tempting wares--snuff, tobacco, scissors, watches, knives and ribbons and laces for wives and sweethearts. She introduces herself in a charming little ditty:



"I'm called little Buttercup,  
Dear little Buttercup  
Though I could never tell why."

In spite of Buttercup's happy and frivolous exterior she confesses to a canker-worm of worry that is eating its way into her heart. The secret of her remorse, which provides the *dénouement* of the plot, is connected with the name of Ralph Rackstraw. Young Ralph (pronounced 'Rafe'), "the smartest lad in all the Fleet", has fallen in love with Josephine, daughter of his captain. But Josephine is sought in marriage by no less a celebrity than Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., First Lord of the Admiralty. Ralph's love is returned by Josephine and to her father's dismay she confesses her love for Ralph, adding that though she can esteem, reverence and venerate Sir Joseph she cannot under any circumstances love him. "I hate myself when I think of the depth to which I have stooped in permitting myself to think tenderly of one so ignobly born--but I love him! I love him! I love him!" she cries and bursts into tears.

A barge is now seen to be approaching *HMS Pinafore* and from it steps Sir Joseph Porter, accompanied by a collection of ladies, consisting of his sisters, his cousins and his aunts. Sir Joseph introduces himself in an impressive song:

"When I was a boy, I served a term  
As office boy to an attorney's firm."

After this beginning Sir Joseph has risen to the position of First Lord of the Admiralty--Sir Joseph inspects the crew of *HMS Pinafore* and in a democratic speech declares that all men are equal. These sentiments encourage Ralph Rackstraw to propose to Josephine, who, however, temporizes and rebukes him for raising his eyes to the daughter of his commanding officer: "Sir, you forget the disparity of our ranks." In despair, Ralph decides

to take his life, and has actually put the pistol to his head when Josephine intervenes. "Ah! Stay your hand. I love you!" she tells him, making her confession before the whole ship's company. They plan to elope that very night, in spite of objections from the villainous, Dick Deadeye. He vindictively urges Ralph to "remember she's your gallant Captain's daughter and you the meanest slave that crawls the water". But he is howled down by the rest of the crew, who all side with Ralph and Josephine.

## ACT II— *Night*

That night on board *HMS Pinafore* Sir Joseph expresses to Captain Corcoran his disappointment with Josephine, who has not responded favorably to his proposals of marriage. "Josephine is of course sensible of your condescension, Sir Joseph, but perhaps your exalted rank dazzles her," pleads the Captain. So Sir Joseph once again addresses Josephine, and hoping to further his own suit, he tells her that in his opinion difference of social status is no barrier to love. Little does he know how eloquently he has pleaded his rival's cause, and Josephine, who was in doubt as to the propriety of eloping with Ralph, has now no qualms. But Dick Deadeye has warned Captain Corcoran of the intended elopement and the Captain is in time to prevent it. He rebukes Josephine for the company she keeps, and Ralph Rackstraw bitterly resents the Captain's class-consciousness, telling him proudly: "I am an Englishman." The crew backs him up and the boatswain sings in his support:

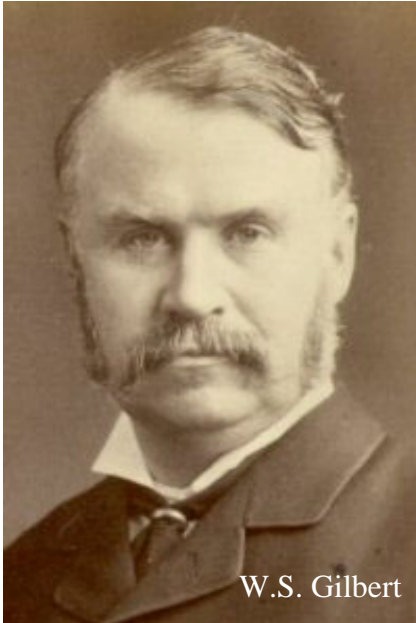
"For he himself has said it  
And it's greatly to his credit  
That he is an English man.  
(That he is an English man.)"

But Captain Corcoran is unable to repress his anger, and in front of all Sir Joseph's female relations, who have arrived on the scene, he turns on Ralph with: "Damme, it's too bad!" Sir Joseph is horrified at the Captain's bad language, and orders him to his cabin in disgrace; then, turning to Ralph Rackstraw, he inquires in fatherly fashion how Captain Corcoran came to forget himself. "I am quite sure you had given him no cause for annoyance." Ralph then admits his love for Josephine, who precipitates herself into his arms. Sir Joseph is livid with rage. "Insolent sailor, you shall repent this outrage. Seize him," he commands. And Ralph is led off in custody. "Josephine, I cannot tell you the distress I feel at this most painful revelation. You, whom I honoured by seeking in marriage--you, the daughter of a Captain in the Royal Navy," says the injured First Sea Lord.

At this point Little Buttercup intervenes with a truly remarkable story. Many years before she had been a "baby-farmer" (a nurse) and in her charge were two infants, one a well-born babe, the other of humble origin. Inadvertently she had mixed them up, and Ralph Rackstraw is really named Corcoran and the Captain is Ralph Rackstraw. On hearing this revelation Sir Joseph sends for the two affected parties, and Ralph enters dressed in Captain's uniform, and Captain Corcoran as a common sailor. Addressing Captain Corcoran, Sir Joseph says: "I need not tell you that after this change in your condition my marriage with your daughter is out of the question." The Captain protests in Sir Joseph's own words that "Love levels all ranks." Sir Joseph replies, "It does to a considerable extent, but it does not level them as much as that." Handing Josephine to Ralph, Sir Joseph admonishes him to treat her kindly. The former Captain, now Seaman Corcoran is now free to love Little Buttercup (who must have been VERY young when she took care of him as a baby!) and Sir Joseph decides to marry his Cousin Hebe. The curtain falls on general rejoicing and a finale in which all the best tunes are repeated and which finishes on a patriotic note in praise of Englishmen.



# GILBERT AND SULLIVAN



Playwright and lyricist William S. Gilbert (1836-1911) and composer Arthur S. Sullivan (1842-1900) defined operetta in Victorian England with a series of internationally successful and timeless works. Both men were moderately successful and prolific in their respective careers of playwright and composer, but the partnership that took hold with *Trial by Jury* in 1875 sky-rocketed them to celebrity.

Their first major hit was *HMS Pinafore* (1878), satirizing the Royal Navy and the British obsession with social status. *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), written in a fit of pique at American copyright pirates, also poked fun at romantic melodrama, sense of duty, family obligation, and the relevance of a liberal education. *Patience* (1881) satirized the aesthetic movement in general and the poet and aesthete Oscar Wilde in particular. *Iolanthe* (1882) pokes fun at English law and at the House of Lords. *Ruddigore* (1887) is a topsy-turvy take on the Victorian Melodrama, and viciously satirizes that entire genre. *The Yeomen of the Guard* (1888), their only joint work with a tragic ending, concerns a strolling jester who finds himself embroiled in a risky intrigue at the Tower of London. *The Gondoliers* (1889) pokes fun at the plot devices of opera in the setting of a

kingdom ruled by a pair of gondoliers who try to run it in a spirit of 'republican equality'. *Trial By Jury* is rather self-evident, but is unique because it was the only operetta with no spoken dialogue. Their most popular work was *The Mikado* (1885), where English bureaucracy was made fun of in a Japanese setting.

Gilbert's plots remain perfect examples of 'topsy-turvydom,' in which primeval fairies rub elbows with English lords, gondoliers ascend to the monarchy and pirates reconcile with majors general. Gilbert's lyrics employ double (and triple) rhyming and punning, and served as the very model for such 20th century Broadway lyricists as Cole Porter, Ira Gershwin, and Lorenz Hart. Sullivan, a classically trained musician, who devoted much of his career to religious hymns and grand opera, contributed catchy melodies which were also emotionally moving. As seamless as their onstage collaboration was, Gilbert and Sullivan were temperamentally incompatible, and their partnership was frequently ruptured. Their last joint work, *The Grand Duke*, opened in 1896, and the sickly Sullivan died four years later.

Their works were originally produced by British impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte, considered by some to be the third member of this partnership, who built the Savoy Theatre in London to present their operettas, and formed the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, which would perform the Savoy Operettas with exacting detail until 1982. The Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were even more popular abroad, and many American cities saw amateur and professional Gilbert and Sullivan performing groups. This trend has continued to the present day, and it can be argued that these operettas and *The Mikado* in particular were instrumental in giving the particular shape to American musical of the 20th century.

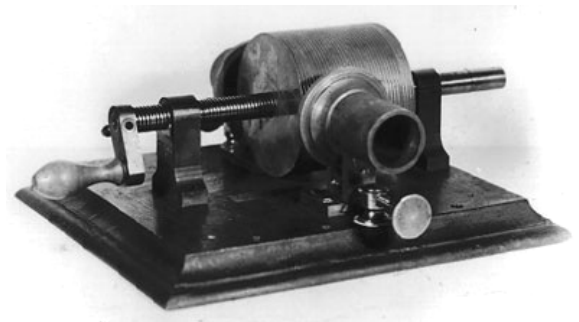
The works of Gilbert and Sullivan are frequently parodied or pastiched; a notable example of this is Tom Lehrer's performance of the Major General's Song (from the operetta *The Pirates of Penzance*), with the chemical periodic table of elements set to Sullivan's original music. The popular TV series *Family Guy* drew from Gilbert and Sullivan with a parody of the Captain's Song from *HMS Pinafore*. Larry David's show, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, uses *Three little maids from school* from *The Mikado* as background music.



With thanks to [http://www.8notes.com/biographies/gilbert\\_&\\_sullivan.asp](http://www.8notes.com/biographies/gilbert_&_sullivan.asp)

# SULLIVAN AND THE FIRST RECORDINGS

In 1888, two models of the brand new Edison "Perfected" Phonograph were sent to England under the care of George Gouraud. The recordings Mr. Gouraud made during this period were discovered at the Edison Library in New Jersey in the 1950's.



On August 14, 1888, Mr. Gouraud held a press conference in his home in London at which he introduced the phonograph. One of the recordings played that night was a piano and coronet recording of Arthur Sullivan's "Lost Chord." This was one of the very first music recordings ever made. In addition, Sullivan attended one of the phonograph parties given that fall by Gouraud, and the recording of his voice survives.

Go to the National Park Service Website which administers the Thomas Edison estate, Glenmont, in New Jersey. Share with students a voice from over 100 years ago.

Go here:

[http://www.nps.gov/archive/edis/edisonia/very\\_early.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archive/edis/edisonia/very_early.htm)

TRANSCRIPT OF SULLIVAN'S COMMENTS

“Dear Mr. Edison, if my friend Edmund Yates has been a little incoherent it is in consequence of the excellent dinner and good wines that he has drunk. Therefore I think you will excuse him. He has his lucid intervals. For myself, I can only say that I am astonished and somewhat terrified at the result of this evening's experiments: astonished at the wonderful power you have developed, and terrified at the thought that so much hideous and bad music may be put on record for ever. But all the same I think it is the most wonderful thing that I have ever experienced, and I congratulate you with all my heart on this wonderful discovery.

Arthur Sullivan.”

# GILBERT'S CARTOONS

Early in his career, Gilbert contributed a large number of comic drawings to the magazine *Fun*. As a child he had been known by the nickname of “Bab” (for “Baby”), and he used this signature for the drawings. And so, when in 1868 Gilbert published a selection of his verse (mostly illustrated), he naturally gave them the title *The Bab Ballads*. In these neat, precise and slightly insane verses with their attractively

ugly illustrations, the first notes of Gilbert's distinctive tone can be heard. The ballads are not so well known today, but they were regarded as comic classics well into this century. Thanks to <http://www.madisonsavoyards.org/Public/reference/gsbio.html>



Captain Corcoran and Buttercup



Little Buttercup sitting between cradles and holding a baby prior to mixing up the two babies.

From *HMS Pinafore*:

“A many years ago/ When I was young and charming/ As some of you may know/ I practiced baby-farming.”

# OPERETTA

**Operetta** (literally, "little opera") is a light opera with spoken dialogue, songs with bright, attractive tunes and plenty of dances. The form flourished during the second half of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th. Their plots are amusing, farfetched, and frothy with plot devices that include practical jokes, fools, and mistaken identities. An operetta's cast normally consists of classically trained opera singers.

**From the director of Nashville Opera's production, William Florescu, the General Director of Milwaukee's Florentine Opera Company (who himself sang the role of Captain Corcoran as one of his first professional performances!)**



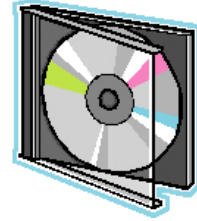
Gilbert and Sullivan create unique challenges for traditional opera singers. Consequently, there are any number of "specialists" - people who concentrate on this particular repertoire. While Sullivan's tunes are hummable and not particularly vocally challenging (with some exceptions), Gilbert's libretto and lyrics require a limber tongue and great timing. G and S are famous for their "patter songs" usually sung by the comic lead (Sir Joseph Porter in *HMS Pinafore*.) This signature tune usually has very dense lyrics that need to be spit out quickly. But these verbal acrobatics are not confined to the comic leads. In *HMS Pinafore*, one of the most famous pieces is the trio, *Never mind the why and wherefore* sung by Sir Joseph, Captain Corcoran, and Josephine. It represents the crux of the challenge of performing Gilbert and Sullivan successfully - perform elaborate and often comedic stage business, while singing very wordy songs, all the while giving the impression that you are doing it effortlessly! Beyond that, since Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas are satiric in nature, the challenge for the singing actor is to inhabit, in a very believable way, a world that is patently absurd. The mistake many singers make is "playing the comedy", instead of playing it realistically, and letting the audience find the laughter as the creators intended. The other mistake singers make in this repertoire is not treating it musically in the same way they would Verdi or Puccini. In fact, G and S works best when you hear it sung and acted with the same care and professionalism that would be given any other piece in the opera world.



Opera singers are vocal athletes. They practice every day to exercise their vocal chords and their enormous breath control. The combinations of notes that they have to sing are very difficult, and the things that they can do with their voices are extreme. You can easily compare a regular singing voice and an opera singing voice to a weekend jogger and a gold-medal-winning Olympic track champion! True opera singers must study for years, creating voices that can be heard over an entire symphony orchestra. Opera houses even today do not use microphones, but rely on the singer's vocal technique.

# CD CONTENTS

## Selections



**1--***I'm called Little Buttercup* ~~ sung by MRS. CRIPPS (LITTLE BUTTERCUP)

**2--***The nightingale sighed for the moon's bright ray* ~~ sung by RALPH RACKSTRAW AND ENSEMBLE

**3--***I am the Monarch of the Sea* ~~ sung by SIR JOSEPH PORTER, K.C.B AND FEMALE ENSEMBLE

**4--***When I was a lad* ~~ sung by SIR JOSEPH PORTER, K.C.B.

**5--***A British tar is a soaring soul* ~~ sung by MALE ENSEMBLE

**6--***Never mind the why and wherefore* ~~ sung by JOSEPHINE, CAPTAIN CORCORAN, and SIR JOSEPH

## GETTING TO KNOW THE MUSIC AND LYRICS

The next three explorations give students a chance to listen to and become familiar with pieces from the operetta in a variety of ways.



One of the keys to the brilliance of Gilbert and Sullivan is the perfect marriage of music and lyric. The listener almost never feels that the two disciplines are working against each other, but rather that they show off the art of each to its full advantage. Occasionally, it is helpful to focus solely on one or the other.

**Listen** to the following CD selections: Track **1--***I'm called Little Buttercup* (a waltz) that Little Buttercup sings to introduce herself, and then to the very different Track **5--***A British tar is a soaring soul* (an English parts song called a *glee*) that the sailors sing to affirm their worth. Both give a great deal of information about the people singing them in musical language.

**Pay attention** to the melody (the tune), the rhythm, the tempo (how fast or slow), the dynamics (how loud or soft) and the sound of the singers' voices. Composers use many tools to communicate with music. What emotional response does the music bring out in the character and the listener? What does the composer want you to know about these characters? Does it agree with what the characters feel about themselves?

**List** adjectives and verbs that describe the feel and mood of each piece of music to you. Circle the top three for each song. What modern popular music do you know that can be described using these words?

**Listen** also to Track **6--***Never mind the why and wherefore*. Without knowing anything about it, what do you notice about the music? How many people are singing? What does it tell you about how they are feeling?

During the performance, make sure to listen only to the music every once in a while. Sullivan's music catches every mood from light-hearted and silly to melodramatic and patriotic. The range of his musical conversation is broad, and it includes beauty and poignancy as well.



## STUDENT EXPLORATION ~ 2

### Focus on the Lyrics



**SIR JOSEPH PORTER**  
**PATTER SONG**  
*When I was a lad*

**SIR JOSEPH —**  
When I was a lad I served a term  
As office boy to an Attorney's firm.  
I cleaned the windows and I swept the floor,  
And I polished up the handle of the big front door.

**CHORUS —**  
He polished up the handle of the big front door.

**SIR JOSEPH —**  
I polished up the handle so carefuller  
That now I am the Ruler of the Queen's Navee!

**CHORUS —**  
He polished up the handle so carefuller  
That now he is the Ruler of the Queen's Navee!

**SIR JOSEPH —**  
As office boy I made such a mark  
That they gave me the post of a junior clerk.  
I served the writs with a smile so bland,  
And I copied all the letters in a big round hand.  
I copied all the letters in a hand so free,  
That now I am the Ruler of the Queen's Navee!  
**CHORUS —** He copied, etc. (as above)

**SIR JOSEPH—**  
In serving writs I made such a name  
That an articulated clerk I soon became;  
I wore clean collars and a brand-new suit  
For the pass examination at the Institute,  
And that pass examination did so well for me,  
That now I am the Ruler of the Queen's Navee!  
**CHORUS—** And that pass examination, etc. (as left)

**SIR JOSEPH —**  
Of legal knowledge I acquired such a grip  
That they took me into the partnership.  
And that junior partnership, I ween,  
Was the only ship I ever had seen.  
But that kind of ship so suited me,  
That now I am the Ruler of the Queen's Navee!  
**CHORUS —** But that kind, etc. (as left)

**SIR JOSEPH —**  
I grew so rich that I was sent  
By a pocket borough into Parliament.  
I always voted at my party's call,  
And I never thought of thinking for myself at all.  
I thought so little, they rewarded me  
By making me the Ruler of the Queen's Navee!  
**CHORUS —** He thought so little, etc. (as left)

**SIR JOSEPH —**  
Now landmen all, whoever you may be,  
If you want to rise to the top of the tree,  
If your soul isn't fettered to an office stool,  
Be careful to be guided by this golden rule—  
Stick close to your desks and never go to sea,  
And you all may be rulers of the Queen's Navee!  
**CHORUS —** Stick close, etc. (as left)

**Read** the lyrics out loud without the music first. Feel the rhythms that Gilbert repeated in each stanza. Try to tap a beat as you are reading out loud.

**Look-up** any words you don't know. What is the most ridiculous part of this song?

**Listen** and read along with the recording, Track 4-- *When I was a lad*.

**Notice** the rhyme scheme (accurately represented in the grey area-the following chorus parts are abbreviated to save space).

**Write** your own lyrics using Gilbert's stanza structure. Begin with "When I was a lad," (or lass, or boy or girl.) Recount something silly you did as a child. Try to follow Gilbert's rhythms, syllables, stresses, and rhymes. Use a rhyming dictionary or the website [www.rhymezone.com](http://www.rhymezone.com) to help you.



## STUDENT EXPLORATION ~ 3

### More listening

Some songs play the dual role of setting up situations as well as introducing characters. This ballad contributes to the central love story that will bear funny fruit later.

**Listen to Track 2**--*The nightingale sighed for the moon's bright ray* (lyrics at right). This is Ralph Rackstraw's first song.

**Decide:** Is it what you expect from a strong seaman, the lead tenor? Matched with the lyrics what does the song communicate about this character and his situation? Is it serious or melodramatic? Is it a mix of both? How can you tell? What effect do you think the chorus adds? (Their voices are very soft and difficult to hear on this recording.)

This song introduces Sir Joseph Porter, a funny situation, and the female ensemble.

**Listen to Track 3**--*I am the Monarch of the Sea* (lyrics below right)

**Discuss:** Sir Joseph is a First Lord of the Admiralty who brings all his sisters and his cousins and his aunts with him to inspect a naval warship. How do Gilbert and Sullivan manage to expose these characters as such buffoons and hypocrites and yet make them amusing and endearing instead of the objects of scorn? How do they avoid it particularly with the character of Sir Joseph, who is based closely on a real person?



**RALPH**--  
The Nightingale  
Sighed for the moon's bright ray  
And told his tale  
In his own melodious way!  
He sang "Ah, well-a-day!"

**ALL**  
He sang "Ah, well-a-day!"

**RALPH**-----  
The lowly vale  
For the mountain vainly sighed,  
To his humble wail  
The echoing hills replied.  
They sang "Ah, well-a-day!"

**ALL**  
They sang "Ah, well-a-day!"

**RALPH**-----  
I know the value of a kindly chorus,  
But choruses yield little consolation  
When we have pain and sorrow too before us!  
I love — and love, alas, above my station!

**BUTTERCUP (aside)**  
He loves — and loves a lass above his station!

**ALL (aside)**  
Yes, yes, the lass is much above his station!

**SIR JOSEPH**--  
I am the monarch of the sea,  
The ruler of the Queen's Navee,  
Whose praise Great Britain loudly chants.

**COUSIN HEBE**  
And we are his sisters, and his cousins, and his aunts!

**RELATIVES**  
And we are his sisters, and his cousins, and his aunts!

**SIR JOSEPH**-----  
When at anchor here I ride,  
My bosom swells with pride,  
And I snap my fingers at a foeman's taunts;

**COUSIN HEBE**  
And so do his sisters, and his cousins, and his aunts!

**RELATIVES**  
And so do his sisters, and his cousins, and his aunts!

ETC.

# VICTORIAN TIMES AND SENSIBILITIES

**Besides timeless human foolishness, what was going on in the late 1800's for Gilbert and Sullivan to satirize and make fun of?**

**Satire** - the use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule, in exposing, denouncing, or deriding vice, folly

**Parody** - a composition that imitates or misrepresents somebody's style, usually in a humorous way  
humorous or satirical mimicry

## Power and influence

As a dominant sea power, the British felt intense national pride in their Navy, and in their own culture which they believed so influenced the rest of the world. The setting of *HMS Pinafore* calls attention to this focus and gives great opportunity for a lambasting of the Royal Navy by Gilbert's powerful wit.

In annotating the works of Gilbert and Sullivan, editor Ian Bradley notes that the two capitalized on the general mood of the country with their "flag waving anthems" *A British tar is a soaring soul* and *He is an Englishman*. Though there are amusing lines in these songs and they can be sung in a funny way, they also have a sincerity to them that the public responded to deeply. Just prior to the opening of *HMS Pinafore*, the British Prime Minister of the time, Benjamin Disraeli, had sent the British fleet to Constantinople to defend it against Russian attack, an action "that produced a wave of patriotism and military adventurism throughout Britain."

Still however, there were things to mock, even during a popular rule. The absurdities of politics and un-merited power and influence in government fueled Gilbert's satire. He made a direct parallel with the character of Sir Joseph to a real political appointee of the day, W.H.Smith.

**The Honorable William Henry Smith, M.P. was a onetime newsboy and bookseller. W.H. Smith made a fortune, entered politics, and eventually got appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, despite virtually no seafaring experience. After the success of the opera, Smith became known as "Pinafore Smith." (Read the lyrics on page 9 again.)**

**Gilbert explained in his summary of *HMS Pinafore* for children, "You would naturally think that a person who commanded the entire British Navy would be the most accomplished sailor who could be found, but that is not the way in which such things are managed in England."**

## Class and society

The class system of royalty, nobles, and commoners remained firmly in place. Birth absolutely determined the realms of social order, and most believed it predicted internal character, talent, and refinement. Ralph Rackstraw is a lowly sailor who, "loves above his station." He is socially subordinate to Josephine. If they are to remain in their current lives (instead

of sneaking away as they try to do), there is no hope of marrying, so Gilbert employs an outrageous, baby-switching plot solution to unite them.

The rising middle class of the Industrial era had begun to have not only economic power, but a new interest in individual improvement and entertainment. These citizens of Britain were finally able to embrace the arts and literature in a way that only the wealthy and educated could enjoy before. Conflicts arose between the old established order and the new lifestyles, and provided Gilbert and Sullivan an abundance of comic situations.



## STUDENT EXPLORATION ~ Mixing Satire and Silliness

Along with their ability to marry music and lyrics, Gilbert and Sullivan had a golden touch in combining insightful satire with delightful silliness. This balance prevents the works from tipping over into idiocy or meanness. Gilbert and Sullivan infuse a simple story with absurd plot twists, contradictory characters, and preposterous behavior. They provide just enough connection to real situations that people can recognize themselves and their fellow humans, and look at those situations with new eyes and insight.

**Think** what's going on now in the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What doesn't make sense - is not as it should be? What needs satirizing in our time and place? Are our comedians doing it? Does it have to do with power and influence or class and society?

**Choose** an aspect of our American society in which we are being foolish. How can you make fun of it using both elements of satire and silliness?

**Describe** a specific example (instead of a general category) of someone behaving in a ridiculous way that contributes to the circumstances or embodies the topic you have chosen. Read the excerpt below that satirizes both war and high school. It moves from the general category to a specific example.

**Imagine** the specific someone above as a character in your satire. The only requirement is that they must be participating in and expanding the absurd without even realizing it. They don't get it.

**Add** a silly, goofy element to the scenario. You want it to be entertaining. Use the techniques of humor: exaggeration, distortion, understatement, misunderstanding, innuendo, bizarre pairings of the unrelated, and opposites. Think of movies that use silliness to satirize and parody: *Scary Movie*, *Elf*, and *The Princess Bride*.

**Make** a plot outline--list a few things that happen. Is there a resolution or ending?

**Reflect:** What is the purpose of satire? To be mean and tear something or someone down? To change things? To instruct? To make people think? To make people laugh? Can you enjoy something that makes you think?

### **HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DEMAND WARS IN EASIER-TO-FIND COUNTRIES "How Come No One Fights in Big Famous Nations Anymore?" They Ask**

**Washington, D.C.** — A delegation of American high school students today demanded the United States stop waging war in obscure nations such as Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and instead attack places they've actually heard of, such as France, Australia, and Austria, unless, they said, those last two are the same country.

"People claim we don't know as much geography as our parents and grandparents, but it's so not our fault," Josh Beldoni, a senior at Fischer High School in Los Angeles, told the Senate Armed Services Committee. "Back then they only had wars in, like, Germany and England, but we're supposed to know about places like Somalia and Massachusetts."

"Macedonia," corrected committee Chairman Carl Levin of Michigan.

"See?" said Beldoni...

Excerpt from **SatireWire.com**. Read the rest!

# WEB QUESTS

~ an online version of this guidebook at [www.tpac.org/education](http://www.tpac.org/education) allows students and teachers to click the links throughout and immediately access listed websites.

1

Gilbert and Sullivan had a HUGE fight and refused to work with each other anymore. What was the “Great Carpet Quarrel”?

<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/html/quarrel.html>

2

When Sir Joseph discovers that Ralph Rackstraw has tried to sneak off with Josephine, he orders him seized and thrown into the ship’s dungeon. Deadeye Dick and others sing these lines:

“He’ll hear no tone / Of the maiden he loves so well!  
No telephone / Communicates with his cell!”

When was the telephone invented that it could be mentioned in this lyric? What kind of cell are they talking about? <http://www.historycentral.com/rec/Telephone.html>

3

What popular 21<sup>st</sup> century series was used to write an *HMS Pinafore* parody? Can you find the re-written lyrics to *When I was a lad*, *A British Tar is a soaring soul* and *Never mind the why and wherefore* ? (Hint: the songs are not in the same order as in the *HMS Pinafore* libretto.)

<http://home.att.net/~coriolan/musical/hmsdumbledore.htm>

4

Scroll down to the bottom and find out about the all-children cast of *HMS Pinafore* in 1879. Who played Sir Joseph?

[http://math.boisestate.edu/GaS/pinafore/html/making\\_pinafore.html](http://math.boisestate.edu/GaS/pinafore/html/making_pinafore.html)

5

Look at this nonsense poem by Gilbert and notice the way his rhyming and rhythm seem so effortless. What stanza talks about babies switched at birth, just like in *HMS Pinafore*?

[http://www.poetry-archive.com/g/general\\_john.html](http://www.poetry-archive.com/g/general_john.html)

6

The chorus sings of Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B. What does the K.C.B. stand for?

<http://www.royal.gov.uk/output/page4883.asp>

How many Americans today can put K.C.B. after their name?

<http://www.modernhistoryproject.org/mhp/EntityDisplay.php?Entity=KofBE>

7

What kind of pet did Arthur Sullivan have? Scroll down to the bottom of this 1897 article and find out which famous author was Sullivan’s admired friend.

[http://diamond.boisestate.edu/gas/other\\_sullivan/lawrence/lawrence\\_1.html](http://diamond.boisestate.edu/gas/other_sullivan/lawrence/lawrence_1.html)

8

Find how Gilbert re-tells the *HMS Pinafore* story in this book for children.

<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/pinafore/book/index.html>

# TEACHER RESOURCES

## Books

*The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*  
Introduced and edited by Ian Bradley

*A Most Ingenious Paradox: The Art of Gilbert and Sullivan*  
By Gayden Wren

## Websites

~ the absolute best Gilbert and Sullivan Research site on the web - much of this guidebook is indebted to this site for information. Full librettos and scores are also available here.

<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/>

~ an extensive site on the Victorian Era

<http://www.victorianweb.org/index.html>

~ a site of nautical terms

<http://phrontistery.info/nautical.html>

~ a site with reviews from the old Savoy Opera where a majority of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were mounted and performed

<http://savoyoperas.org.uk/home.htm>

## VOCABULARY

**Bumboat Woman** – a bumboat was a supply barge that traveled out to the anchored ship, Little Buttercup was a Bumboat woman who acted as a supplier selling wares on board

**Cat-o'-nine-tails** - a whip made of usually nine knotted lines or cords fastened to a handle that was legal instrument of punishment in British Navy until 1881. Captain Corcoran threatens to use one on Ralph Rackstraw.

**Deadeye** – Dick's name came from an actual nautical term for a rounded wooden block with one to three holes, used for tightening or extending the ropes supporting a ship's mast.

**Foremast hand** – members of the ship's company who serve "before the mast", below the rank of officer

**Grog** – a drink of watered-down rum issued daily to sailors on naval ships

**Libretto** - the complete text of an opera. It is an Italian term meaning "little book." The libretto was published for opera audiences to enable them to read the text before or during the performance.

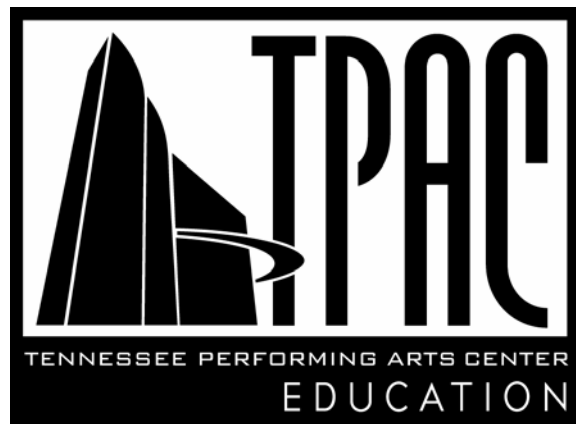
**Monarch** – person who reigns over a kingdom or empire, a sovereign ruler or one who holds preeminent position or power

**Tar** – a sailor. Probably from the black substance which was a staple for waterproofing aboard old ships (sailors also being jocularly called *knights of the tarbrush*) or possibly a shortened form of *tarpaulin*, which was recorded as a nickname for a sailor from the tarpaulin garments they wore.

Thanks to <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=tar&searchmode=none>



[www.tpac.org/education](http://www.tpac.org/education)



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