



W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan

HMS PINAFORE

STUDY GUIDE

vancouveropera

STUDY GUIDE OBJECTIVES

Opera is an art-form that benefits from spoilers; the more prepared students are in advance of attending the performance, the deeper and richer their experience will be!

This study guide has been designed to be accessible to all teachers regardless of previous experience in music or opera. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the lessons to meet the dynamic needs of their students in music rooms, theatres and classrooms. The lessons are designed to engage students in learning about the opera they will be attending and thinking critically about art and its meaning.

How deeply students go into this material will depend on each teacher. However, we do suggest the following as the minimum commitment to preparing for the performance.

- Students are familiar with the synopsis and at least one piece of music.
- Students can identify the socio-historical context of the opera (when and where it was written)
- Students are given the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their response to the performance.

The lessons are designed to be either quick or in-depth and for use before the performance and/or after the performance to provide teachers with the ability to tailor lessons to their classrooms. Each lesson also contains an overview, specific objectives and a list of the materials needed for the activity.

CONNECTIONS TO THE CURRICULUM

The study guide has been prepared in accordance with the new BC Curriculum and targets secondary classes. Each activity includes specific learning objectives and can be adapted for use in most arts and humanities coursework. Elementary teachers will be able to modify the activities to meet the needs of their students with little difficulty.

Throughout the secondary arts education curriculum, the big ideas are connected to the role the arts play in society and in our individual lives. The activities within this study guide address the following themes found within the specific big ideas at each grade level:

1. Dance, drama, music and visual arts are each unique languages for creating art and communicating.
2. The arts are an essential aspect of building community and interpersonal relationships.
3. The arts react and respond to the cultures within which they are performed. Creative works are socially constructed and often challenge the status quo.
4. Personal and collective identity is explored, expressed and impacted through arts experiences.

These larger concepts can be linked to the big ideas found in the social studies and English/French language arts curriculum. The study guide has also been prepared in consideration of the First People's Principles of Learning and whenever possible, activities will include resources that address the learning standards related to Indigenous knowledge and education.

The study guide for *H.M.S. Pinafore* was prepared by music educator Rebecca Paulding.

GETTING READY - THREE QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK (AND ANSWER) BEFORE COMING TO THE OPERA

WHAT IS OPERA?

Opera is an interdisciplinary experience in which singers and musicians put on a dramatic production. This means that, just as in musicals, music (sung and instrumental), theatre, and visual art (the set design and creation, as well as costumes and lights) come together to tell a story. Because opera originated in Italy, many of the words associated with it are from the Italian language. The word *opera* means work in Italian, as in work of art. Opera is usually written in the language of the composer and the language of the country it will be heard in.

Opera has been around for a while (for a little over four hundred years, in fact!), and therefore opera-singers sing without microphones, which hadn't yet been invented by the time opera started. Opera singers have developed a special singing technique to be heard over the orchestra without microphones. They sing so loudly that to protect each other's hearing, they make sure not to face directly towards each other while singing.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO SING OPERA?

If you were a top opera singer, you could make as much as \$20,000 per performance! And what's so hard about being an opera singer, you ask? Opera singers often have as many years of education and training as physicians, and continue training throughout their career. They must learn to have a voice powerful enough to project across a full orchestra, yet flexible enough to taper to a soft *piano* (Italian musical term for quiet or a soft dynamic level) when it is called for. Singers must also learn English, French, German, and Italian – even Russian and Czech! They must be able to memorize and sing many different operas (which can be up to 4 hours long!), and to dance and act while singing under hot lights. Critics and journalists are not always kind, and singers must also learn to brush off negative reviews in time to perform the same show the following night.

HOW DOES AN OPERA GO FROM WORDS AND NOTES ON THE PAGE TO FULLY STAGED PERFORMANCE?

The first thing to happen is the assembly of a creative team which includes the music director, stage director, singers, orchestra musicians, and set and costume designers. Everyone works with the score (the music) and libretto (the text) to prepare for the first rehearsals. Opera singers are expected to arrive at the first rehearsal “off book”, meaning that they must have the entire score memorized in advance! Once the designers have completed their designs, artists and sewers work to create all the props, sets and costumes. Lighting designers work with the stage director to add light and shade to the stage. At first the opera is rehearsed in sections – one scene at a time. During “tech week”, everyone moves into the theatre and all aspects of the opera, from the acting to the music to the moving of the sets, is practiced over and over again. Finally, opening night arrives. Et voilà! There is an opera!

SYNOPSIS

The *H.M.S. Pinafore* is a British warship anchored at [Portsmouth](#) harbour. Little Buttercup arrives to sell her wares to the sailors. Her vending is interrupted by the arrival of Ralph Rackstraw, a deckhand onboard the ship, who confesses that he is in love with a girl who is far above his social status: Josephine, the captain’s daughter who is supposed to marry Sir Joseph Porter, First Lord of the Admiralty. Josephine tells her father she isn’t interested in marrying this man that she has never met. In fact, she has her eye on a cute deckhand, but out of respect for her position and her father she vows to never reveal her secret love.

Sir Joseph is spotted with an entourage of female relatives and reveals to the crew his masterful thoughts about the social ranks. Ralph takes courage from Sir Joseph’s equality speech and confesses his love to Josephine. Josephine, staying true to the vow she made to her father, spurns his advances due to the difference in their social statuses. Eventually Josephine relents and confesses her love, and the couple plan their escape and possible elopement that very night.



That evening, the captain is alone on deck, puzzling through the strange events of the day. He confesses to Buttercup that he would love her if only it were not for the difference in social statuses. Later, Dick Deadeye, another sailor aboard the ship (who incidentally has been working on a nautical children's play), reveals to

the Captain that Ralph and Josephine are planning to elope. The captain intercepts the couple, and in frustration breaks his vow never to swear. Sir Joseph, who cannot abide by such language, has the captain arrested. He then discovers Ralph was about to run off with Josephine and has him arrested as well. In response, Buttercup reveals her long-kept secret: many years ago, while taking care of two infant boys, one high born, one low born, she mixed the children up. The captain was the common-born child, and Ralph the child of privilege!

With everything turned on its head, the characters, of each and every social rank, are given new opportunities to decide their own partnerships and destinies.

ABOUT:

Music by: Arthur Sullivan

Libretto (Lyrics) by: W.S. Gilbert

Gilbert and Sullivan, one of the most famous composer/librettist duos in the past few hundred years, created works that are filled with brilliant satire, humorous jokes that poke fun at the upper class, and delightfully joyous melodies. Gilbert and Sullivan collaborated over a 25 year span, and created 14 well-loved operettas.

WHAT IS OPERETTA?

An “operetta” is a very unique style that includes spoken dialogue, music and dance. It is much lighter than traditional opera, with its orchestra size being smaller, and music being less complex. It began gracing stages in the mid 1800’s in France, and provided a more accessible art form for an entirely different audience. Because of its inclusive nature, operetta became famous, spanning international companies and cities. In the 1930’s, operetta paved the way for the modern musical. Most operettas are sung in English, and contain references that the audience of that region would understand and find humorous. This Vancouver Opera production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* contains contemporary and local references too!

Use this “Beginner’s Guide to Operetta” from our colleagues at English National Opera to learn more about this famous art form:

<https://www.eno.org/discover-opera/beginners-guide-operetta/>

LESSON ONE: *Learn Before You Listen*

Big Ideas: Dance, drama, music and visual arts are each a unique language for creating and communicating. Experiencing art is a means to develop empathy for others' perspectives and experiences.

Category: Before Performance/Quick

Overview: Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* might be one of the most famous operettas to date. This famous tune, sung by Sir Joseph and the chorus, has many rhyming and witty lines, mixed with a chorus that tends to repeat everything. "When I Was A Lad" tells a very hilariously serious story, and is usually performed by a comedic baritone (a low, often male, voice type). This recording is from a 2017 performance at the Stratford Festival in Ontario, Canada.

Objective: The objective of this lesson is to ensure students are familiar with what is happening in the show. They should be able to consider the impact of repeated listening to enhance their understanding of a piece of music.

Materials: High quality recording of:

- "When I Was A Lad" <https://youtu.be/Kfao1s3Tiek>
- 8.5" by 11" piece of paper divided into three sections (labeled Hearing Feeling Questioning)

Lesson:

1. This lesson makes an ideal opening activity for three or four classes before watching a performance. Simply have the students listen to the piece straight through while writing down things they are **hearing, feeling and questioning** each time.

2. To get students started the first time, create a list of things they could listen such as:
 - Type(s) of voice (high, low, soprano, tenor, etc.) Here's a helpful video from the Royal Opera House to learn about voice types <https://youtu.be/hLfvkwTnJVM>
 - Instruments they hear (violin, cello, trumpet, piano, etc.)
 - Tempo (speed) — is it fast, slow, a combination, etc.
 - Energy of a piece - is it exciting, sad, thoughtful, scary?
 - Form — does the aria have sections they can identify – does anything repeat?
 - How does it start? How does it end?
 - What emotions could be used to describe the music?
 - How does it make the student feel?
 - What questions do they have? I wonder....?
3. At the end of each listening session, collect the paper and continue with the lesson
4. Repeat the listening activity at each lesson and encourage the students to add to their list. The questions can be used again to focus on new aspects of the aria.
5. After the final listening session, lead a group discussion on how their understanding and appreciation of the music changed over time. Did the piece grow on them? Were they able to anticipate each section? What did they hear at the end that they didn't hear at the beginning? Compare and contrast with a neighbour!

Extension: Repeat the listening activity by having students bring in a song that is unknown to others in the class. Encourage students to use music that is meaningful to them, and repeat the process. When does a piece of music “stick?” Why is some music easy to listen to repeatedly while other music becomes less interesting over time? Think, Pair and Share!

LESSON TWO: *Ships, Singing Sailors and Sea Shanties*

Big Ideas: Dance, drama, music and visual arts are each a unique language for creating and communicating. Artistic expressions differ across time and place.

Category: Before Performance/Quick

Overview: Believe it or not, but sailors have been singing on ships for centuries. So much so, that there is a genre of music dedicated to this art form - Sea Shanties! The art of singing at sea dates back further than any historian can pinpoint. But Sea Shanties became very popular in the early 1800's, when sailors used catchy tunes with strong rhythmic beats to help with the physical labor of sailing large ships. These songs often told stories of legends and folklore, while giving sailors advice and teaching life lessons while sailing the dangerous seas.

Objective: Students will listen to a variety of Sea Shanties, and then will get to write their own. This very nautical art form not only contains poetic lyrics, but catchy tunes and very prominent rhythmic beats! Students may choose to use an already existing Sea Shanty melody, and re-write the lyrics, or they can create their own melody with lyrics and rhythmic fun. The list below provides a wide range of Sea Shanties, from very traditional and serious, to contemporary and hilarious. Students may experiment with how they present their Sea Shanty - either as a live performance, a recorded audio track, OR a visual art form.

Materials: High quality recordings of

- "Wellerman" <https://youtu.be/qP-7GNoDJ5c>
- "Heave Away" <https://youtu.be/vdhdC0Mbqak>
- "Drunken Sailor" <https://youtu.be/PV-052YJ-Zs>
- "Hoist the Colours" https://youtu.be/_4T5sxTVGoE

- “The Kittyman” https://youtu.be/dN3wEdK_vxw
- Access to recording/film equipment such as a mic set or tablet/laptop
- Paper and pens/writing tools to record lyrics and ideas
- Rhythmic instruments OR household objects/body percussion to create a steady beat - such as: sturdy table or desk, bucket, heavy book, drum sticks... be creative!

Lesson:

1. Play a few of the suggested Sea Shanties for the students, ask what they notice about each one? Any common themes? Any common rhythmic patterns or tunes?
2. While explaining the project of creating their own Sea Shanty in groups, let the students know any parameters or guidelines you wish to add - in regards to word count, how many verses, or what resources they use.
3. Organize students into their respective groups, and give them class time to begin working on their Sea Shanties.
4. Note that their creations can be serious, satirical, or even more classical/fairytale like.
5. Provide platforms for the final projects to be displayed: Either filmed, on a youtube channel or presented in class.
6. Remind students that traditional Sea Shanties usually involve a primary soloist, and a chorus that answers. A “call and response” technique.
7. Sea Shanties do NOT have to be directly about the sea, they can include other topics and reference other things such as land, nationality, daily life, love, loss, legends, even a sporting event or a holiday.

Extension: Have the students or class post to Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, using @vancouveropera and specific hashtags related to the show. Posts or short clips of Sea Shanties will be featured on our social media accounts! Make sure to state your class, school and district! Extra points for costumes and/or cool props and effects.

Lesson Three: Lights, Camera, Action....in 60 Seconds!

Big Ideas: Dance, drama, music and visual arts are each a unique language for creating and communicating. Artists experiment in a variety of ways to discover new possibilities and perspectives.

Category: After Performance/Quick

Overview: *H.M.S. Pinafore* has an outrageously fun storyline with many subplots and surprises along the way. One must pay close attention while observing the fast paced songs, dance numbers and nonsensical farse onstage. Could one argue that the entire storyline could be summed up in a minute or less?

Objective: Students must recreate H.M.S. Pinafore in under 60 seconds. The creation of the storyline can be done in a variety of ways: through film, drawings, stop motion, a musical, dance/movement - options are endless. Make sure to include the most important highs and lows in the storyline, but don't get stuck in detail. Be creative, use your resources, and don't forget to ask for help putting it all together.

View:

Watch a video that explains the opera [here](#) that we made and might inspire your students.

Materials:

- Resources to create with: tablets, laptops, paper, pencils, markers, poster board, construction paper
- Programs to film with such as imovie, or a stop motion video app
- clay/other materials to create characters with if filming

- Props and costumes - OR simple clothing changes for the different characters

Lesson:

1. Divide students into groups
2. Hand out some paper/pencils/ipads to brainstorm in groups how their 60 second recap will unfold
3. Brainstorm as a class what the important highlights of the show are, and what things they may want to include in their 60 second showcase
4. Give parameters - what things should the students include? Any vocab or specific Language Arts requirements? Any restrictions or suggestions with character portrayal?
5. The retelling of the story can be done in the traditional G&S style, OR a contemporary verse. Endless options!
6. Be creative! Gilbert and Sullivan aimed to have fun and laugh with most of their operettas, so go for big laughs and a jolly good time.

Extension: Go above and beyond with the retelling of the storyline - what style should the story be recapped in? Perhaps the addition of a new character to relive the plot. Maybe the underdog, or the lesser known Sailor Number 7 recounts the wildly rambunctious tale.

Lesson Four: *“A Day in the Life Of” - Contemporary wonderings of an 1800’s damsel in distress*

Big Ideas: Dance, drama, music and visual arts are each a unique language for creating and communicating. Artistic expressions differ across time and place.

Category: After Performance/In Depth

Overview: The usual depiction of women in Gilbert and Sullivan operettas is rather one-dimensional. These characters are often in distress about love, their clothing, or whether or not they got invited to a party. This particular Vancouver Opera production is directed AND conducted by two incredibly talented women. Audience members will notice that the women characters in this production have been expanded with more lines, and more scenes, and are given more complex topics in their dialogue than the usual damsel in distress.

Objective: Students will create diary entries of one of the women characters, but in a contemporary setting. Within the existing storyline, give one of the women characters a stronger voice, worldly knowledge, and a modern, well-rounded personality. Students may write in a diary, create a video blog, make a series of instagram posts, or choose another way of communicating. The focus is on re-imagining one of Gilbert and Sullivan’s women characters, and stepping away from the pre-conceived characteristics writers often gave women in the 19th century.

Perhaps Josephine is struggling with pressure from her father to be top of her class and perfect, but she’s in love with a boy from another school or neighbourhood. Maybe Buttercup is pretending everything is going ok in life, but in reality she is struggling with her career choices, and wants to find a more financially stable path where she can support herself, yet still

nurture her passions. Or could one of Sir Joseph's cousins be wishing she was more confident and didn't hide in the shadows?

Materials:

- Materials to write with: paper/pens/pencil crayons
- Materials to record with: ipads/laptop/phone/camera
- Idea board: Construction paper or poster board to create an idea board before the diary entries

Lesson:

1. Have students work on their own or in pairs/groups of three.
2. Make sure group discussions take place: what character should be written about, and why?
3. Choose a format of creating - either a traditional diary entry, an electronic medium OR a social media approach. Make sure students are creating a series of posts/entries.
4. If using a social media platform, have students develop clever and relevant hashtags that tie into the storyline yet showcase the contemporary wonderings of the character.
5. Final Product: Pair and Share! If students are comfortable, they can pair up with another student/group and showcase their work.

Extension:

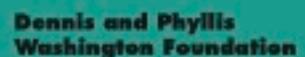
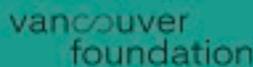
Students may take this a step further, and reinvent some of the characters, which may alter the storyline. What if *all* the characters were women? What if they were combating racial bias to express the potential of their gifts and talents? What would happen if the love relationships were not restricted by class, and also not confined to heteronormive pairings? How would the *H.M.S. Pinafore* look with a more socially just lens?



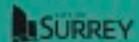
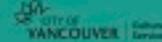
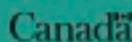
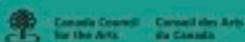
For more information about Vancouver Opera's Education Programs for elementary and secondary students, please visit vancouveropera.ca

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ADDITIONAL THANKS TO



COVER: CURT OLDS AS CAPTAIN CORCORAN AND EMILY PULLEY AS LITTLE BUTTERCUP IN HMS PINAFORE. PHOTO BY ARI DENISON, COURTESY OF EUGENE OPERA. DETAIL FROM VO'S HMS PINAFORE SEASON ARTWORK BY CIELE BEAU.