

The Pirates of Penzance

2021-22 Guidebook



EXPERIENCE OPERA
WITH US!

A LETTER TO TEACHERS

Dear Teachers,

Opera Colorado is pleased to provide engaging educational programs and performances for students across Colorado. What follows is a guide we hope you and your students find useful as we explore Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance*. In the spirit of exploration, we have included various lessons connecting the production with different subjects. The lessons reference the new Colorado Department of Education's Academic Standards, focusing specifically on third grade expectations. This does not mean the lessons should be limited to this age group. While we would be very pleased if you used these lessons in the format provided, we encourage you to expand, alter, and adapt these lessons so that they best fit your students' abilities and development. After all, teachers know their students' needs best. We would appreciate your feedback on our teacher evaluation survey (a link to this survey will be emailed to you following the event), and we hope you enjoy all that Opera Colorado has to offer!

Thank you!



- Cherity Koepke -
Director of Education & Community Engagement
ckoepke@operacolorado.org | 303.778.0371



- Bethany Wood -
Manager of Education & Community Engagement
bwood@operacolorado.org | 303.778.7350

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MEET THE ARTISTS

Each season, Opera Colorado auditions over 400 emerging artists from across the country for its Artists in Residence Program. During their eight-month residency, the selected six singers and one pianist bring opera to over 45,000 students from schools across the Rocky Mountain region.

The Pirates of Penzance is adapted and directed by Cherity Koepke

MABEL
CATHERINE SWINDLE



THE PIRATE KING
THOMAS LYNCH



FREDERIC
SPENCER LAWRENCE BOYD



**SAMUEL/SERGEANT
OF POLICE**
PHILLIP LOPEZ



**MAJOR GENERAL
STANLEY**
JOSEPH GOODALE



RUTH
KENDRA BROOM



**COLLABORATIVE
PIANIST**
OLEG BELLINI



Quick Facts

Composer: Arthur Sullivan

Librettist: William S. Gilbert

Premiere: December 31, 1879, Fifth Avenue
Theater, New York*

Setting: Costal areas in Cornwall during the
reign of Queen Victoria

Genre: Operetta (see page 5)

*A single performance was given in the town of Paiginton, England on December 30th to secure the copyright in England.

Leap Year

Because it takes approximately 365.25 days for the Earth to orbit the Sun, an extra day is added to the calendar every four years to keep the calendar aligned with the actual time it takes to orbit the Sun. "Leap years," as they are called, have 366 days, with the added "leap day" landing at the end of February. Frederic, one of the main characters in *Pirates*, was born on leap day.

The next leap day will be in 2024! Learn more about leap years [here](#).

40

W.S. Gilbert authored approximately forty plays outside of his collaborations with Sullivan.

14

Gilbert and Sullivan collaborated on fourteen operettas.

60

When *The Pirates of Penzance* premiered, Victoria had been England's monarch for 60 years.

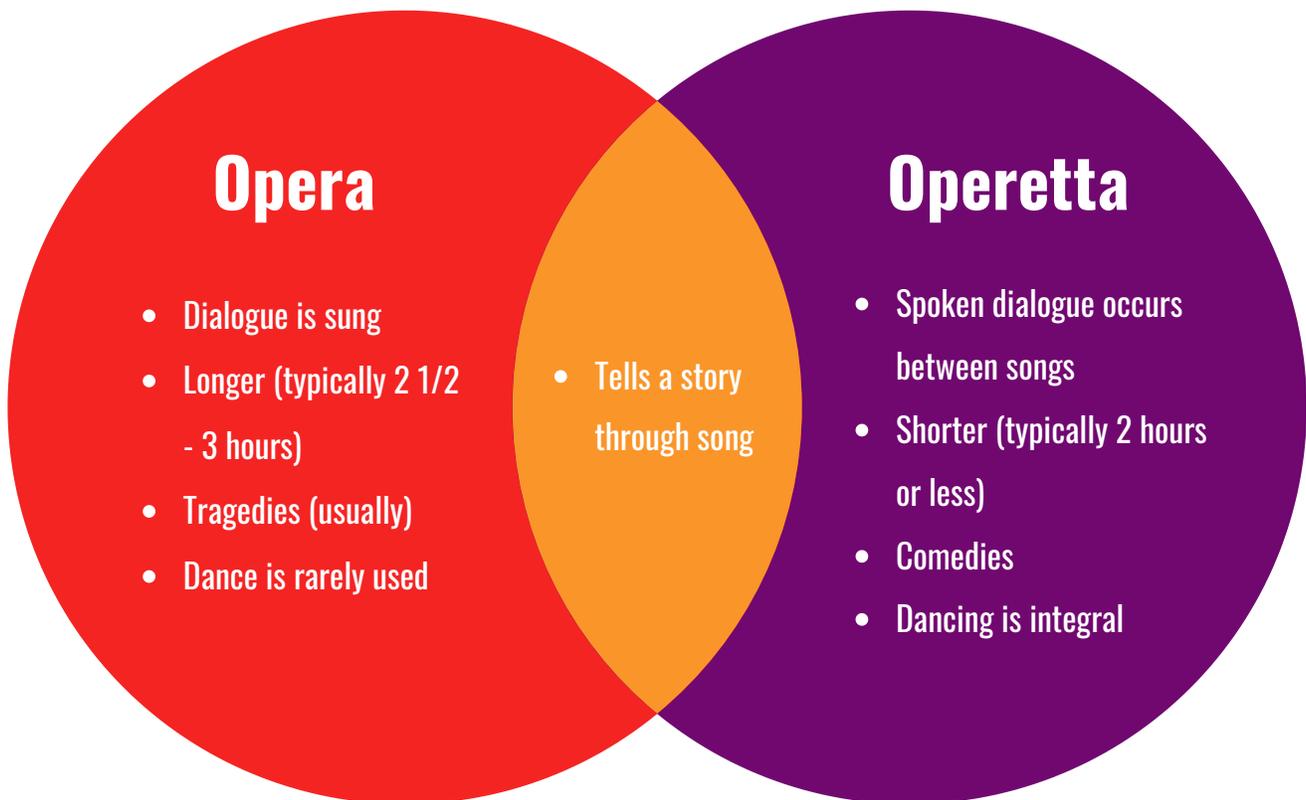




Opera vs. Operetta



The Pirates of Penzance is often referred to as an "operetta," but what is the difference between an "operetta" and an "opera"? While there are no hard and fast rules, below are some generalities to help clarify the main differences.



Opera as an art form developed in Italy in the late sixteenth century and became increasingly popular throughout Europe in the mid-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Known for its spectacle and grandeur, opera soon became established as an artform for the elite. Not surprisingly, popular versions of opera entertainments emerged at fairs and concert venues attended by the middle and working classes. Like the elite grand opera, these "light" operas used music to tell stories, but they focused on comic subjects with broad appeal and used simpler, and less expensive, orchestration and scenery, making them more accessible to the general public. Along with entertainments such as burlesque and revues, operetta was a precursor to the American musical.



VOCABULARY

The Pirates of Penzance was written in 1879, and the story uses some words that are not as common today. Use the list below to learn some of the words in the story and then identify these words in the following synopsis. (Definitions are from merriam-webster.com)

Duty - obligatory tasks, conduct, service, or functions that arise from one's position. The full title of the operetta is *The Pirates of Penzance; Or, The Slave of Duty*. The plot satirizes the characters' complete devotion to the ideal of duty.

Indentures (indentureship) - a contract binding one person to work for another for a given period of time—often used in plural. In *Pirates*, Frederic is indentured to The Pirate King for the period of twenty-one birthdays.

Leap year - a year in the Gregorian calendar containing 366 days with February 29 as the extra day or "leap day" (see page 4).

Natal - associated with one's birth ("natal day" would then be the day associated with one's birth or, more commonly, one's birthday).

Paradox - something (such as a situation) that is made up of two opposite things and that seems impossible but is actually true or possible.

Penzance - a seaside town at the southwest end of Cornwall in England.

Pilot - one employed to steer a ship, a helmsman.



Main Characters

The Pirates of Penzance

Frederic – Apprenticed to The Pirate King until his twenty-first birthday

The Pirate King – Leader of the pirates

Ruth - Frederic's nursemaid and devoted follower

Samuel - A loyal pirate

Honest Citizens

Mabel - Youngest daughter of Major General Stanley

Major General Stanley - A modern major general

Sergeant of Police - Defender of honest citizens

Brief Summary

The story follows Frederic, who was apprenticed as a child to a raucous band of pirates, duty bound to loyally follow them until his twenty-first birthday. After leaving the pirates' way of life, Frederic falls for the beautiful Mabel and vows to prove himself by destroying the pirates. When Frederic's former boss, The Pirate King, captures Mabel and her father, Mabel's father deceives the pirates in order to escape. The Pirate King then discovers that Frederic was born on leap day and his apprenticeship is, therefore, incomplete. Duty bound to the pirates once again, Frederic must assist The Pirate King in exacting his revenge on Mabel and her father. Only loyalty to their Queen will save them!



PLOT SUMMARY

Setting: Coastal areas of Cornwall during the reign of Queen Victoria.

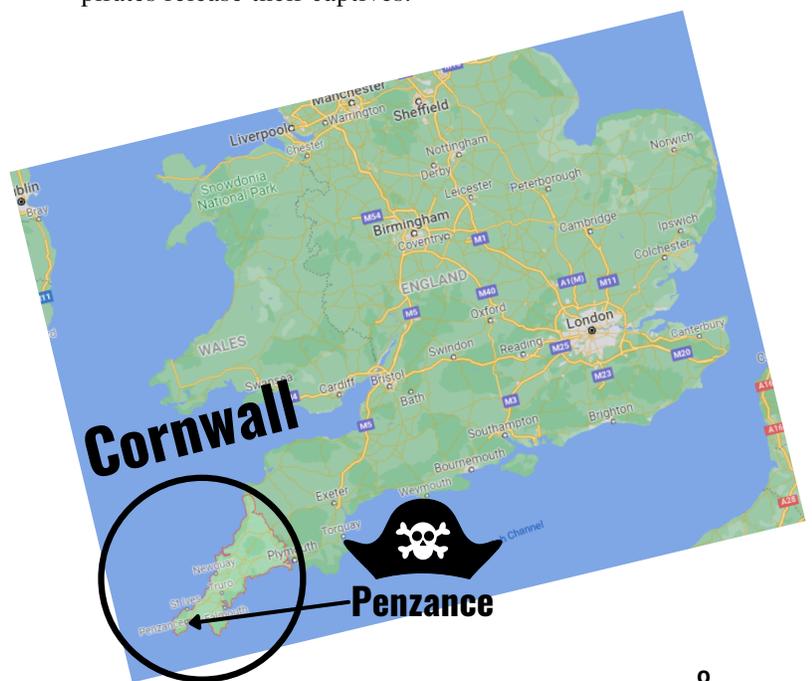
The Pirates of Penzance begins as pirates Ruth and Samuel toast and sing praises to Frederic, who has just turned twenty-one and reached the end of his apprenticeship in the pirate trade. After The Pirate King congratulates him, Frederic's nanny, Ruth, reveals that, when Frederic was a baby, she apprenticed him to The Pirate King by mistake! (She misheard his father's instruction to apprentice Frederic to a ship's "pilot" and apprenticed him to a ship's "pirate" instead—Oops!) Frederic tells Ruth she is forgiven, but, he explains, when the clock strikes twelve and releases him from his obligation to the pirates, it will be his duty to hunt them down and destroy them. Kind-hearted though they are, they are still thieving pirates, and his conscience demands he oppose them once his indentureship is done.

Frederic begs the pirates to come with him to civilization, but The Pirate King declares that being a pirate is more honest than life in respectable society. Frederic, Ruth, and Samuel join him in singing praise to the life of a pirate king. The pirates then depart with the tide, leaving Frederic alone on the beach.

Nearby, Mabel wanders along, straying away from her father on what she believes is a deserted beach. Just as she decides to wade into the water, Frederic appears, startling her. He reveals his past as a pirate

but swears to her he has renounced that profession. Frederic declares his love for Mabel and asks her to help him reform. Mabel agrees and pledges her heart to Frederic.

Just then, the pirates return and capture Mabel, her father the Major General (recently arrived), and Frederic, who is now, by his own declaration, their sworn enemy. Mabel realizes that the pirates are the famous Pirates of Penzance, who follow a strict code against taking orphans captive. Hearing this, the Major General claims that he is an orphan, and the pirates release their captives.





PLOT SUMMARY (continued)

Several nights later, Mabel and Frederic find the Major General wandering mournfully around his newly-purchased estate. He is ashamed for claiming he is an orphan, since his grand estate contains the resting place of numerous ancestors, who are now his family by purchase!

Meanwhile, Frederic prepares to attack the pirates to atone for his past crimes and, thus, become worthy of marrying Mabel. Frederic summons the Sergeant of Police to accompany him, and Mabel and her father praise their great courage in the face of certain death at the hands of the pirates. Their song, however, only serves to terrify Frederic and the sergeant.

The Sergeant of Police leaves, but, before Frederic can follow, Ruth and The Pirate King approach. They tell Frederic they have recently realized he was born on leap day, February 29th, and, because of this, he has lived twenty-one years but has only actually had five natal days (birthdays). Technically, Frederic is a little boy of five and still indentured to the pirates. He is, thus, duty bound to resume his life as a pirate.

Realizing his duty as a pirate, Frederic informs The Pirate King that the Major General lied about being an orphan. The Pirate King vows to attack the Major General in revenge for this lie. Frederic turns away in sorrow as the pirates leave. Mabel enters and asks why he is crying. She pleads with Frederic to stay, but he feels duty bound to follow the pirates until he has had twenty-one birthdays. Mabel declares

her love for Frederic and promises to wait for him.

Frederic leaves to re-join the pirates, and Mabel continues to mourn. Just then, the Sergeant of Police arrives. Mabel tells him of Frederic's renewed alliance with the pirates, but the sergeant determines to capture the pirates regardless.

Later that night, the pirates sneak up on the Major General as he wanders his estate, tormented by the lie he told about being an orphan. They capture the general and Mabel, who plead with Frederic to help them escape. Frederic expresses his desire to help but explains that he is honor bound to assist the pirates. Just then, the Sergeant of Police arrives and tries to arrest the pirates, but he is overpowered. About to meet his doom, the sergeant orders the pirates to surrender in Queen Victoria's name. Due to the love and honor they hold for their Queen, the pirates surrender to the sergeant. All is forgiven, and the pirates join Mabel, the Major General, and the Sergeant of Police in song, anticipating many fair days ahead.





Satire & Parody



Gilbert and Sullivan’s operettas often satirize political and social issues, poking fun at institutions and ideals. *The Pirates of Penzance*, for example, features an inept police force, a protagonist absurdly devoted to duty, and, most famously, a military general with little actual knowledge of military operations. “I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major General” is such an excellent and catchy parody, it is often adapted to comment on political and social issues today. Take a look at some recent versions!



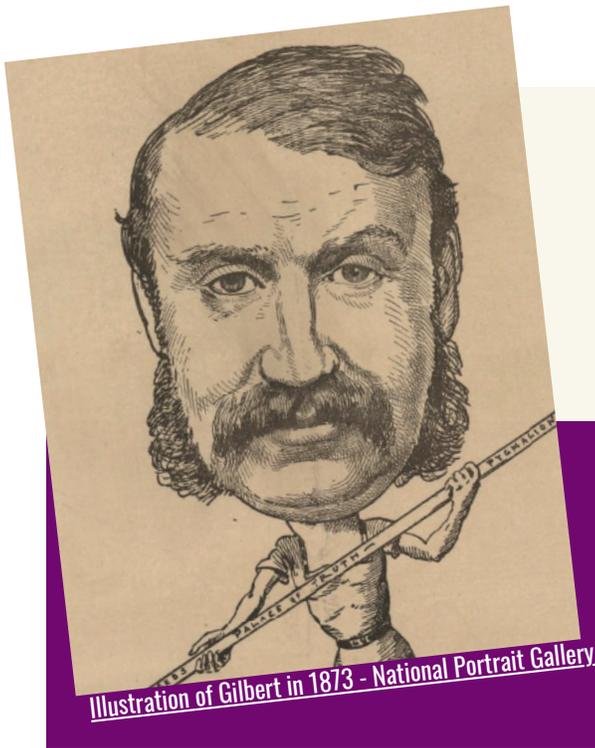
Comic Matt Griffo uses Gilbert and Sullivan's famous tune to advocate social distancing.



In *Despicable Me 3*, the Minions perform a version of the famous song for a competition.



In 2020, *The Tonight Show* used the song to highlight the unprecedented number of democratic presidential candidates.



Librettist:

W. S. Gilbert

November 18, 1836 - May 29, 1911

Early Biography

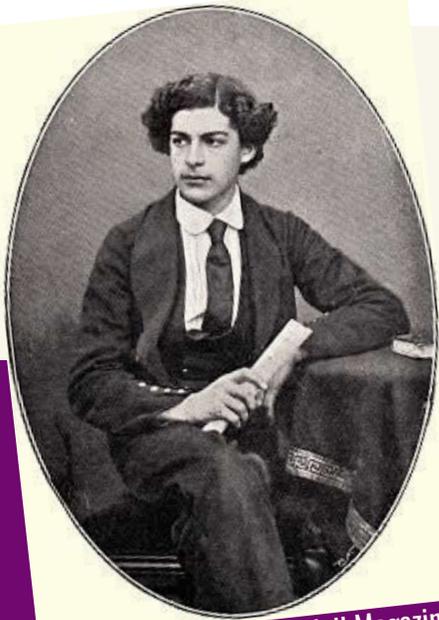
William Schwenck Gilbert grew up in the relative comfort of an upper-middle-class home on the outskirts of London. At the age of fourteen, he was sent to boarding school. While there, Gilbert developed an interest in theatre, often writing, directing, designing, and acting in his own plays. In 1852, he attended a performance of Dion Boucicault's *The Corsican Brothers*, famous for its trap door effects. The experience inspired Gilbert to leave school and appeal to a well-known theatre manager for a job. Unfortunately for young Gilbert, the manager knew his father and promptly returned the truant scholar to his home.

After pursuing varied interests in legal studies, military service, and education administration, Gilbert found employment in 1861 writing and illustrating for *Fun*, a weekly magazine. His comic abilities, combined with his continued interest in theatre, led him to compose a burlesque, a satirical play with exaggerated

characters and plenty of puns. He sold the piece for £30, which he believed a good sum until the manager who bought the play told him he should have asked for more. The experience showed Gilbert that he could make money writing for the stage. In the following years, Gilbert wrote several theatrical works, including small operettas and several burlesques. In 1870, his one-act musical *Our Island Home* premiered. The production featured a character called The Pirate King, whose nurse had accidentally indentured him to a pirate, rather than a pilot, when he was a baby—themes central to *The Pirates of Penzance*.

Gilbert often directed his works and shaped their stage designs. An exacting artist, he tolerated few, if any, diversions from his ideas. This temperament brought him into conflict with many of the artists he worked with and would become an issue in his relationship with Sullivan.

(Continued on next page)



Sullivan as a Teen - Pall Mall Magazine

Composer:

Arthur Sullivan

May 13, 1842 - November 22, 1900

Early Biography

Born in London, Arthur Sullivan learned the foundations of what would become his trade from his father, who worked as both a theatre musician and an army bandmaster. Fascinated by his father's work, Sullivan experimented on the piano as a child and learned to play several wind instruments by the age of eight. He also composed his first song at that age.

When he was twelve, Sullivan petitioned to enroll as a chorister in the Chapel Royal so that he could study music. At the age of fourteen, Sullivan earned a scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Music. From there, he entered the Conservatory in Leipzig, the most renowned music college in Europe. While a student, Sullivan attended every concert he could in order to hear the best musicians of his day. After returning to England, Sullivan became a church organist, taught music, and conducted at music festivals while continuing to work as a composer. Initially, Sullivan wrote incidental music for

productions of Shakespeare, composed choral works, and wrote hymns, including the music for "Onward Christian Soldiers." Charles Dickens attended a performance of Sullivan's music for *The Tempest* and met the composer afterwards.

In 1862, Sullivan met the famous opera composer Gioachino Rossini, known for writing *The Barber of Seville*. The meeting sparked Sullivan's interest in the stage and, according to Sullivan, led to him becoming the organist at the Royal Italian Opera in London. Sullivan composed a ballet and a full-length opera as well as a light comic piece called *Cox and Box*, which earned him a profit. As a composer who often worked on multiple projects to make ends meet, the potential earnings from composing for the stage appealed greatly.

(Continued on next page)



Gilbert in 1890 - National Portrait Gallery



Sullivan in 1888 - National Portrait Gallery

Composer and Librettist:

Combined Biography

By 1871, both Sullivan and Gilbert were well-known artists. Gilbert's plays were becoming popular in America as well as England, and Sullivan received frequent commissions to compose and invitations to conduct. When John Hollingshead, who managed the Gaiety Theatre, requested Gilbert to write and Sullivan to compose a light piece for the holidays, both men agreed, each seeing the commission as an easy task they could accomplish while devoting their primary efforts to more substantial works. The two wrote, composed, and rehearsed *Thespis* in just five short weeks. As a holiday show, the production did well, but it was not a hit.

The spark that would ignite their great collaborations came in 1877 when theatrical agent Richard D'Oyly Carte established the Comedy Opera Company and commissioned a two-act operetta from Gilbert and Sullivan. The librettist and composer had achieved commercial success with a second, brief collaboration entitled *Trial by Jury*. Carte hoped to capitalize on their talents

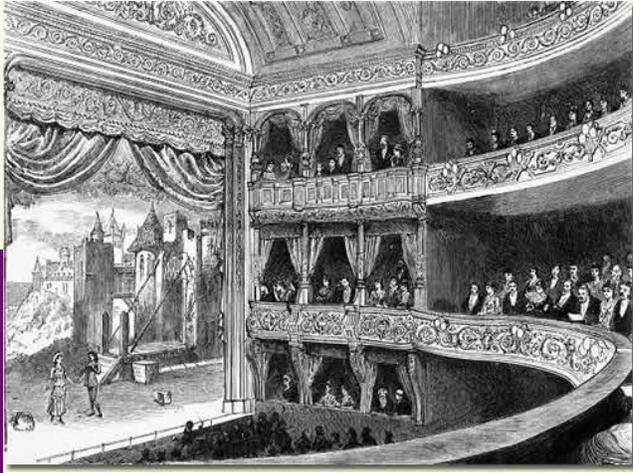
through a more formal arrangement and commissioned *The Sorcerer*, based on Gilbert's short story "An Elixir of Love."

In contrast to their previous, casual collaborations, Gilbert and Sullivan took a methodical approach in crafting *The Sorcerer*, discussing plot details before Gilbert set to work writing the songs, which Sullivan then set to music while Gilbert completed the dialogue. *The Sorcerer* received positive reviews and ran for 175 performances, prompting Carte to commission another show from the successful duo. In 1878, *H. M. S. Pinafore* premiered in London, where it ran for an astonishing 571 performances, solidifying Gilbert and Sullivan as the foremost writers of English operetta. Companies began touring Gilbert and Sullivan's works throughout England, the United States, and Australia, bringing the writer and composer international fame and fortune.

(Continued on next page)

Combined Biography

(continued)



Inside the Savoy Theatre in 1881 - Gilbert and Sullivan Archive

In 1881, Carte opened the Savoy Theatre, which he built to showcase Gilbert and Sullivan's works. The theatre boasted electric light in the auditorium, a novel feature that avoided the close, hot atmosphere produced by gas lighting. Eventually, the theatre would employ electric light for the stage as well.

Unfortunately for Carte, Sullivan was beginning to lose interest in writing light operas, and Gilbert was growing dissatisfied with Carte's financial decisions. A prickly personality, Gilbert often accused Carte of overspending on everything from advertising to chorus salaries to the gas bill.

In 1890, Gilbert's fussing over accounts erupted in a quarrel over the cost of a carpet. The ensuing legal dispute severely strained his working relationships with both Carte and Sullivan. Although the famous collaborators produced two more works together, their partnership ended after 1896. Sullivan turned to writing serious operas but did not achieve success. Having long suffered from various

illnesses, Sullivan died of heart failure in 1900. Gilbert attended to various revivals of his many works but wrote few new scripts between his last collaboration with Sullivan and his death in 1911.

While both men held many accomplishments apart from their work together, it is their operettas that earned them a lasting place in history. Performances of their works abound today, with several societies devoted solely to the performance of their operettas and numerous parodies appearing in popular culture (see page 10).



Richard Temple as The Pirate King 1880

MATHEMATICS

Geometry Lesson Plan

Make a replica of
the set from the
show!

Grade Level: 3rd (adaptable for other grade levels)

Time: 30 minutes

Overview: Use visuals from *The Pirates of Penzance* to teach partitioning rectangles into $\frac{1}{4}$ s

Materials:

•Scissors and Tape or Glue

•Pirates Set Printout (page 16)

COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARD

Standard

4. Geometry

GLE

3.G.A. Reason with shapes and their attributes

Building a Pirates Set With Rectangles (30 minutes)

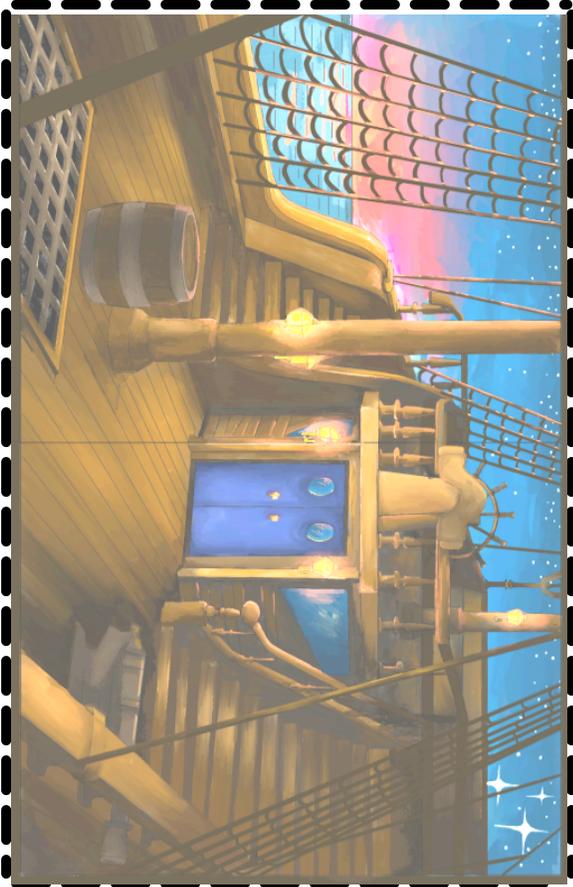
Geometry (30 minutes): Content Area: partitioning rectangles into $\frac{1}{4}$ s

Description: Students use images of the set from *The Pirates of Penzance* to practice partitioning rectangles.

Detailed Steps:

1. Give each student the Pirates Set Printout (page 16).
2. Lead students in a discussion of how *The Pirates of Penzance* set is made up of rectangles.
3. Ask students to identify how many rectangles make up the garden setting (the large set). Then ask them to identify how many rectangles make up the ship setting (the smaller set). Point out that the smaller set is $\frac{2}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ the size of the larger set.
4. Have students cut out the images of the garden and ship set. Remind them to cut down the center line of the ship set (the smaller set).
5. Instruct students to use tape or glue to fasten the rectangle with the rope ladder to back of the rectangle with the silhouetted trees. Then fasten the small rectangle depicting the stairs and ship's wheel to the back side of the end of the colonnade. Students can then fold the side panels to create the garden and ship settings from *The Pirates of Penzance*. The model then works as a practical tool for demonstrating partitioning rectangles.
6. If desired, provide students with the Create Your Own Set printout (page 17) and have them design their own set for a show of their choosing.

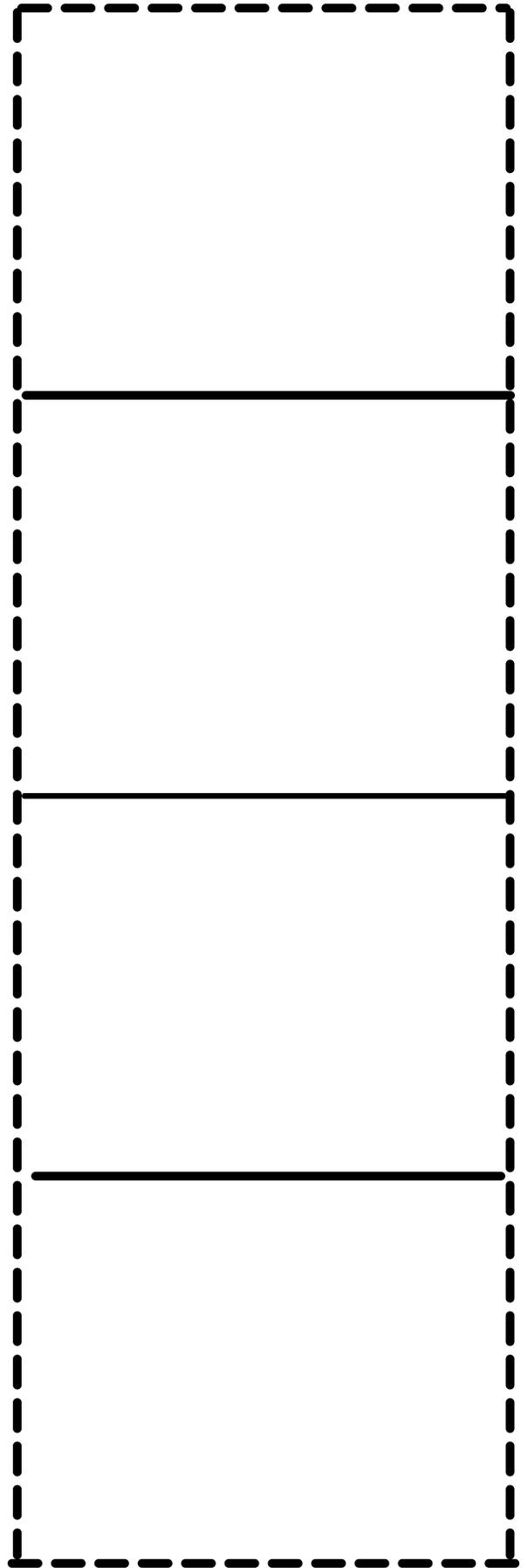
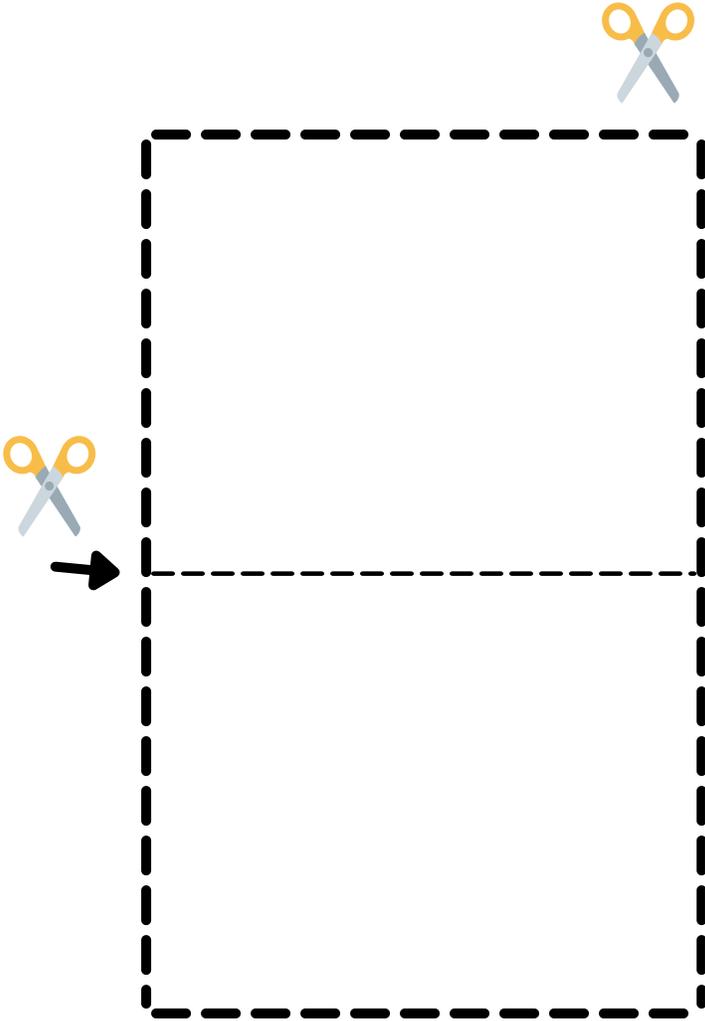
Pirates Set Printout



Finished Project



Create Your Own Set



MUSIC - LESSON

Expressive Qualities

Hear songs from
the show!

Grade Level: 3rd (adaptable for other grade levels)

Time: 30 minutes

Overview: Students use a song from *The Pirates of Penzance* to explore expressive qualities.

Materials:

- Wipe board
- Computer with internet connection and speakers to play links embedded in lesson
- Optional - ability to display videos along with audio

COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARD

Standard

4. Aesthetic Valuation of Music

GLE

1. Select and use specific criteria in making judgments about the quality of a musical performance

Expressive Qualities (30 minutes)

Description: Students use "I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major General," the famous patter song from *The Pirates of Penzance*, to explore how expressive qualities (such as dynamics, modality, tempo and meter) are used to reflect expressive intent (Evidence Outcome a).

Detailed Steps:

1. Review the context of this song in the story. Explain that it introduces a comic character, a military official who is a bit of a know-it-all who knows little.
2. Introduce the video/audio by asking students to listen for how the song portrays the Major General.
3. Play video of "I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major General" (4 minutes).
4. Ask students to describe the Major General, based on this song. Write key words on the board.
5. Divide students into groups. Assign one of the words to each group (i.e. one group has "busy," another has "smart," "fast," etc.)
6. Ask each group to stand or raise their hands when the music sounds like their word and then sit/lower their hands until the next time the music sounds like their word. Let them know that multiple groups may be standing at the same time (a song can sound excited and happy at the same time). Play song again. (You may want to switch words/groups and play multiple times.)
7. Ask students to explain how the music sounded like their word. Use this to explain how aspects like tempo and dynamics can convey mood.

READING, WRITING, AND COMMUNICATING

Oral Expression and Listening

Grade Level: 3rd (adaptable for other grades)

Time: 30-45 minutes

Overview: Students use "I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major General" to discuss formal and informal communication.

Materials:

- Equipment for playing video link below
- Activity may be performed individually or in small groups

COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARD

Standard

1. Oral Expression and Listening

GLE

2. Communicating using appropriate language in informal and formal situations

Oral Expression and Listening (30-45 minutes)

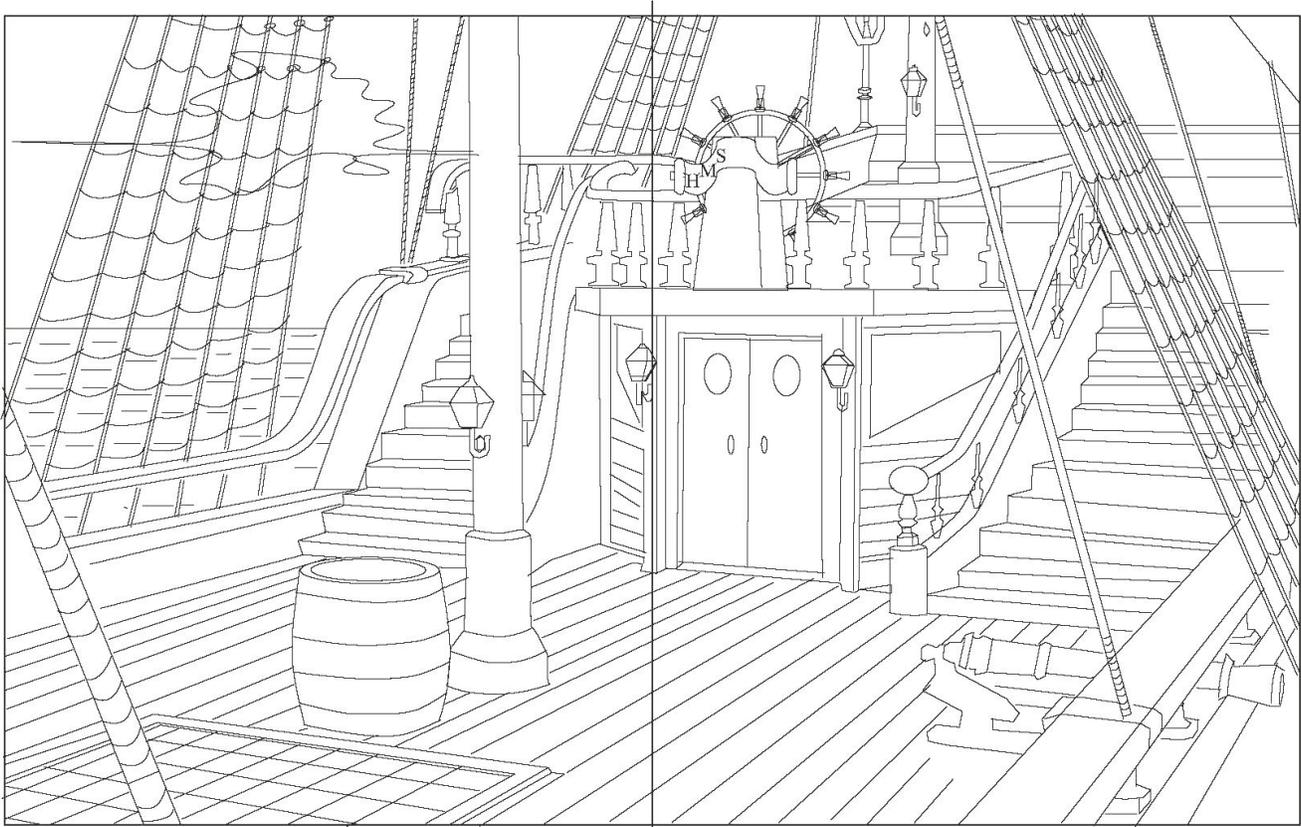
Detailed Steps:

1. Introduction: Briefly review the difference between formal and information communication.
2. Play [video](#) of "I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major General" from the English National Opera's 2015 production (4 minutes).
3. Ask students if they think the song is a formal or an informal form of communication, and ask them to explain why. List their reasons on the board (rhyming, fast pace, etc.).
4. Divide students into small groups and assign one student in each group to be a leader. Give each group one of the "reasons" listed as an aspect of the formal or informal song. Ask students to come up with a song that exhibits the assigned characteristic.
5. Have each group perform or describe their song and explain why it is formal or informal.



COLOR THE SET

The Pirate Ship





COLOR THE SET

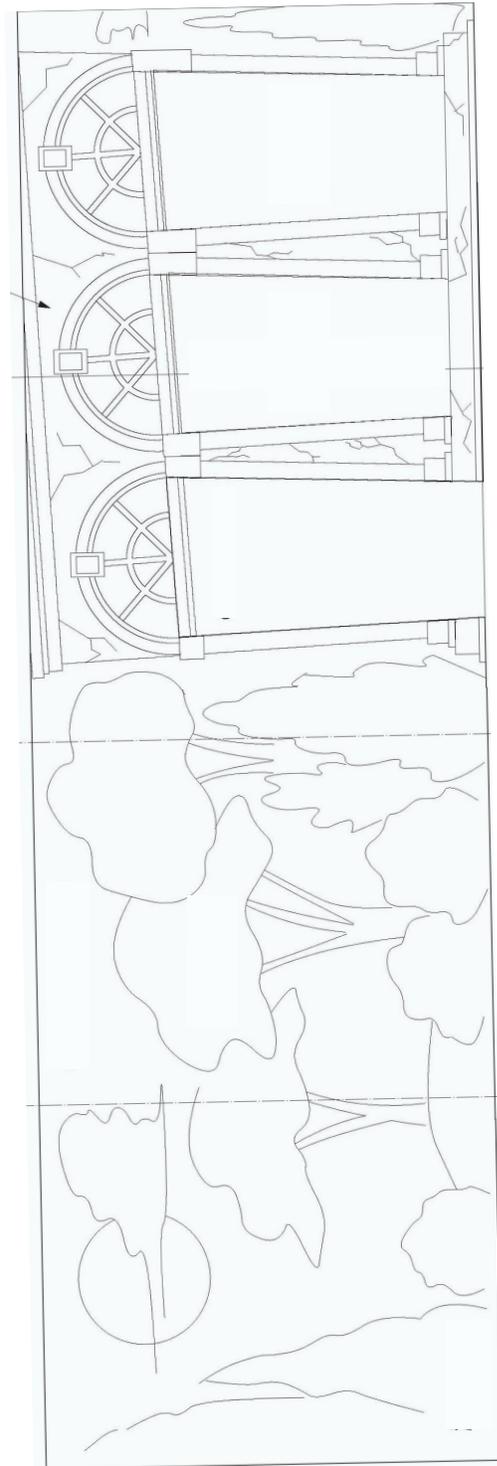
The Cove Entrance





COLOR THE SET

The Garden Scene





PIRATES WORD SEARCH

The Pirates of Penzance

F A W P B C P J R L E A P Y E A R G
Q J H T A W X L I P M R N A T A L L
P C X B E R Z J J Z E K M P G L H V
Q P M O O K A G L V A N I R I C D I
U G D U K O D D S V L S Z N Y L N O
E P R V M T C U O S W Y R A N D O F
H N B V L S H V T X H R Y Q N Q N T
L F T D R D S I J Y I C I P A C R Q
M D S D N K M Y O W A G P Q L W E Q
G A S R A H N D K Y R Z R I N K M F
T A E I N D E N T U R E S H F S R M
R Z K B B B K Q P Q Z P U L S U B W

Find the following words in the puzzle.
Words are hidden → ↓ and ↘ .

DUTY
INDENTURES
LEAP YEAR

NATAL
PARADOX
PENZANCE

PILOT



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