

We Regret to Inform You That

# YOUR CHILD HAS BEEN SHANGHAIED

story and photographs by ILANA DIAMOND

**ON A STORMY NIGHT IN FEBRUARY**, two dozen fifth graders were stripped of their backpacks and lunch boxes and coerced into manning the tall ship *Balclutha*. The ship's captain had asked his first and second mates to rally 10 to 12 sailors to man the ship on its voyage to Oregon to procure lumber in the wake of the 1906 earthquake. Instead, the confused mates kidnapped 10- to 12-year-olds (27, to be exact) from Lafayette Elementary School. Lest you worry about child labor laws, these shanghaied kids were actually on a field trip, known as the Age of Sail Overnight—part dinner theater, part boot camp, part hands-on history education program, put on by the San Francisco Maritime National Park Association. While an unexpected downpour made for a slightly miserable 18 hours for the kids' six chaperones, the field trip provided a worthwhile lesson in self-reliance (and knot tying). "It was a tough, treacherous voyage," said one student turned rigger mate. "But we got through it."



3:30 p.m.



5 p.m.



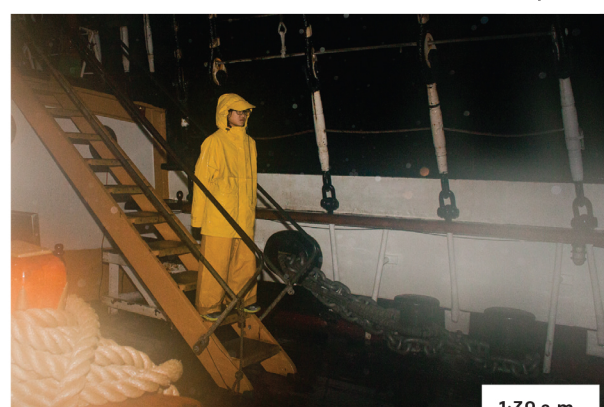
6:30 p.m.



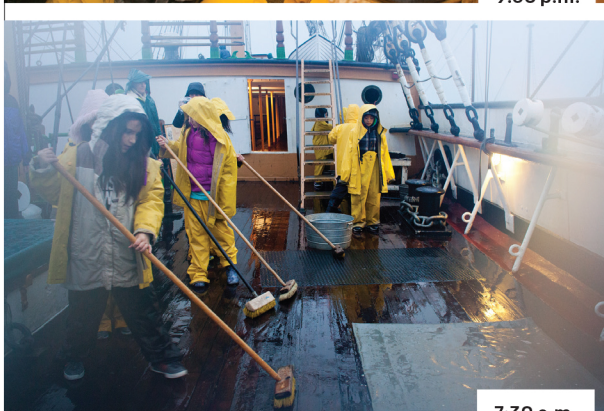
7 p.m.



9:30 p.m.



1:30 a.m.



7:30 a.m.



8:30 a.m.

## FRIDAY

**3:30 P.M.** The crew are informed of the responsibilities to come. Mr. London, the ship's disciplinarian first mate (and a vocal dead ringer for Russell Brand), yells at the students that they are to acknowledge his orders with a hearty "Aye, aye—like the two you've got on your face!"

**5 P.M.** Crew members tie cleat hitch knots and raise and lower a dory under the captain's watchful eye.

**6:30 P.M.** Members of the longboat crew assure another that he'll be safe as they board a rowboat in the pitch-black night.

**7 P.M.** Shipmates sup on a dinner of vegetable stew and corn bread. Crouton, the ship's cook, remarks that this meal turned out better than the one when the crew mistook salt for sugar.

**9:30 P.M.** Enjoying a respite from the drenched deck above, the shipmates gather in the 'tween decks, the driest part of the ship, to partake in dogwatch—otherwise known as storytelling before bedtime. The captain delivers each student a letter written by a family member, purporting to tell tales of the 1906 aftermath.

## SATURDAY

**MIDNIGHT–5 A.M.** In hour-and-a-half shifts, the shipmates take turns standing night watch in the endless downpour. The mates who showed the most resolve during earlier activities are chosen to stand the 2:30 to 4 a.m. shift—their chaperone is not thrilled. During their shifts, the students chronicle their experiences on the *Balclutha* so far. Most remark on how cold and wet it is.

**7:30 A.M.** Their argument that after all the rain the ship is clean having been rejected, the shipmates scrub and sweep the deck after breakfast.

**8:30 A.M.** The crew, having learned how to tie square, lark's head, and bowline knots, raise their teacher on the bosun's chair. After intense negotiations in which they are promised an extra 30 minutes of recess every other Friday, they let her down.