

The Eugene O'Neill Foundation, Tao House

2023 Play/Book Club

Discussion Questions for "*Anna Christie*"

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- What is the significance of the "quotes" around Anna's name in the title?
- What is the significance of fog in the play? Do different characters perceive the fog differently?
- What is the significance of Mat Burke as an Irish American and Chris Christopherson as Swedish American in this play? How did O'Neill's characterization of immigrant voices dovetail with attitudes about immigration in the United States?
- The American stage was obsessed with prostitute characters ever since the 1850's when Marguerite Gautier of *Camille* met her tragic demise. Yet, "*Anna Christie*" is unique in that it is one of the first plays in which a prostitute character *lives*. More importantly, she holds the men accountable who have abandoned and abused her. Which scenes demonstrate how O'Neill breaks with the "repentant whore" prototype to craft a new prostitute figure?
- There has been much debate about the ending of "*Anna Christie*." While praising the rest of the play, most critics from the 1920s viewed the last act as "full of bogus things" (Alexander Woollcott of the *New York Times*) or "inexcusably banal" (Maida Castellum of the *New York Call*). But O'Neill defended the ending of his play, writing: "the happy ending is merely the comma at the end of a gaudy introductory clause, with the body of the sentence still unwritten" (qtd. in Travis Bogard, *Contour in Time*, 163). What is your assessment of "*Anna Christie*"'s ending?
- How does "*Anna Christie*" speak to the Eugene O'Neill Foundation's theme of honoring women's voices in theatre?