

SHAW 20 FESTIVAL 25

The study guide for
The Shaw Festival's 2025 production of *Anything Goes*

The Shaw Festival presents the much-loved, toe-tapping musical *Anything Goes*.
Music and lyrics by Cole Porter.
Original book by Guy Bolton and P.G. Wodehouse, with revisions by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse.
Current book by Timothy Crouse and John Weidman.

The Shaw Festival production is directed and choreographed by Kimberley Rampersad
Music Direction by Paul Sportelli
Set and costumes designed by Cory Sincennes
Lighting designed by Mikael Kangas
Sound designed by Kaitlyn MacKinnon and Corey MacFadyen
Associate Choreographer Matt Alfano

Digital Learning Resource Study Guide
Written and Narrated by Kristi Frank
Voice Direction by Katie Ryerson
Produced by the Shaw Festival Community Engagement & Outreach Department

Production Sponsors



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The Story

Act 1: Sell, sell, sail!

(followed by a gull squawk)

Ahoy there! It is a busy morning in the harbor today. The luxury liner, S.S. American has begun its embarkment. (ship blast) Let's pause a second and test our nautical knowledge is **Embarkment**:

- a. The act of passengers and crew getting aboard a ship or aircraft
- b. The sharp explosive cry of certain animals, especially a dog, fox, or seal

You're right, Embarkment is a. The act of passengers and crew getting aboard a ship or aircraft. Back to the ship (ship blast)

The crew is hustling about in preparation to set sail and passengers are eagerly boarding. Adventure, mishaps and maybe a few tap numbers are in the air.

Enter the handsome young stockbroker, Billy Crocker. He is loved by many, including his pal Reno Sweeney, the showstopping nightclub headliner, but his heart belongs to another woman. Crocker's boss, Mr. Elisha Whitney, tasked Billy with delivering a passport. Once done, Billy is to get back to Wall Street and sell important company shares.

The ship's passenger list is lacking celebrity until Reno Sweeney and her Angels come aboard. She is a smart and glamorous woman who outwits a tedious minister and poses for reporters' cameras within minutes of her arrival. Next, we meet public enemy #13, Moonface Martin, on the run from the FBI with his accomplice Erma Latour. The ship is about to set sail when Billy's heart goes a-flutter upon seeing his love, Hope Harcourt. She is boarding the ship with her mother, Evangeline Harcourt, and another man. That man is her rich fiancé, Lord Evelyn Oakleigh. Billy decides he must stow away on the ship to win back Hope. (ship blast)

A Stowaway is:

- a. A person who hides aboard a ship or plane in the hope of getting free passage.
- b. A small tote bag used to carry leafy greens.

Correct-o-mundo, a Stowaway is a. A person who hides aboard a ship or plane in the hope of getting free passage. (ship blast)

The last blast from the ship's horn has Billy helping Moonface dodge the FBI. In return for this act of friendship, Erma helps Billy stay on the ship by giving him an unused ticket and fake passport. Billy's new alias is now Murray Hill Cleaners.

Once at sea, Hope is thrilled to see Billy until she is reminded that her seasick fiancé, Lord Evelyn, is standing next to her. Billy, undeterred by her upcoming nuptials, woos her through song. She is tempted to

give in to her desire for him, but duty restrains her. She must marry the rich Lord Evelyn for the sake of her widowed and cash-strapped mother.

Beep, beep, beep. Radiogram from the FBI, "Murray Hill Cleaners is Public Enemy #1!" Now Billy has to avoid not only his boss but the ship's captain and crew who are on the lookout for him. Time for a disguise! Meanwhile a plan is hatched between Moonface and Reno to help their friend Billy break up the engagement by capturing Lord Evelyn in a trap. The two would go to great lengths for a friend. Listen to the lyrics of their duet *Friendship*, "If you ever lose your teeth when you're out to dine, borrow mine." Their plan is set into action. Reno enters Lord Evelyn's cabin, and though he is a fan of hers, he is so distracted by his enthusiasm for American slang that he doesn't realize Reno is coming on to him. When Moonface storms into the cabin hoping to see something scandalous he is disappointed to find that nothing improper is going on. Their plan didn't work but a mutual attraction begins to form between Evelyn and Reno.

The excitement of Act 1 increases as Hope and Billy revel in how "De-lovely" it would be to share a life together. That romance is short-lived once all the passengers and crew enter to find Billy without his disguise. Ah, ha! They think they have found their criminal. A definite case of mistaken identity. As Billy protests being thrown into the brig, the captain, on hearing the passengers' disappointment, invites him to be his guest at dinner instead! (ship blast) **The Brig is:**

- a. a trick-taking card game using a standard 52-card deck
- b. An informal word for a jail aboard a ship or vessel

If you guessed b. you are correct. The Brig is an informal word for a jail aboard a ship or vessel (ship blast)

A party ensues as the passengers are thrilled to have a national celebrity on board, the more notorious the better. The old morality is gone. "Times have changed" sings Reno in the final song of the act.

Act 2:

At the nightclub, everyone rejoices in being part of a voyage with the infamous public enemy #1. Reno takes the stage and leads the audience in a mock religious revival song with, "Blow Gabriel Blow". The worse the sin and its confession, the better. All are dancing and singing by the end of the number. When the spotlight turns to Billy for his confession, he apologizes to Hope for his behaviour, and wishes her happiness. His criminal act is dropped with this vulnerability, and his true identity is revealed, much to the dismay of the passengers and crew.

What will happen now that Billy is a regular stowaway? Will Mr. Whitney go bankrupt because Billy didn't sell the shares? Does Reno end up with Evelyn? Will Hope's sense of duty to family stop her from following her heart?

The Creators

It is said that the original idea for *Anything Goes* came from producer Vinton Freedley in 1934. He had a cast of actors in mind and wrote a musical for them, instead of casting them after it was already written. His ideal stars were Ethel Merman, known for her powerful brassy voice, comedian Victor Moore, and former vaudevillian actor William Gaxton. Vinton wanted the two British American writers P.G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton to write the book. They were prolific writers individually and together wrote 20 musicals. Cole Porter was Vinton's choice to write the music and lyrics. Let's chat about Mr. Porter for a minute. Cole Porter was born in Indiana into a well-to-do family on June 9, 1891. He attended the prestigious schools, Yale and Harvard. He defied his grandfather's wishes and switched from Harvard Law to their music program. In his lifetime he wrote for over 30 stage and screen musicals. His Tony and Grammy award-winning music has been covered by Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Alanis Morissette, Natalie Cole, Judy Garland, and many more. He died in 1964.

Back to the show! The original 1934 production of *Anything Goes* was an immediate hit and ran on Broadway for 420 performances. Hit songs included "You're the Top", "Blow, Gabriel, Blow", and "Anything Goes". The show has been so popular throughout the years that it has been adapted for television three times, with two movie adaptations, and a filmed movie version of the 2021 stage production. It has toured and been revived on Broadway and London's West End multiple times. Contemporary writers update the show each time it has been revived. This production has been updated by Timothy Crouse and John Weidman. Timothy's father, Russell Crouse, was one of the writers that worked on an earlier version. The rewriting process can be anything from cutting out offensive material, to altering character storylines, and taking songs out or adding new ones to the show using Porter's vast collection. The hit song *It's De-Lovely*, which appears partway through Act 1, was originally in Porter's musical *Red, Hot, and Blue*. It wasn't added to the show until 1962. Often, a revival polishes up a classic show for a modern audience to fall in love with.

Our Production

The great depression, from 1929-39, was a time of turmoil and uncertainty. Among other hardships, most people faced job losses, poverty, and food insecurity. The original production in 1934 was not just a musical comedy to lighten hearts with catchy tunes and witty jokes, it also packed a social satirical punch. The S.S. American was a metaphor for America at the time, where anything goes. Prohibition had ended a year earlier. It was now legal to manufacture, distribute, and consume alcohol (which happened illegally during prohibition). The population was transfixed by the FBI's most wanted list where gangsters and criminals gained celebrity and, in some instances, became folk heroes. John Dillinger was one of the most famous bank robbers in the 1930s. The public had little trust in banks and the economy at the time and they were captivated by his daring criminal acts. The characters aboard the ship are reflections of society both then and now. Today we are still having discussions of Rich vs. Poor and Sinners vs. Saints. What shines through the story of *Anything Goes* the most is our innate desire to love and be loved. It is a treat to see the lengths these characters will go to for a friend or a sweetheart. In our production, we have the talented Mary

Antonini as Reno Sweeney, Jeff Irving as Billy Crocker, Celeste Catena as Hope Harcourt, and many more fabulous actors ready to sing and dance the cruise away with you.

Heave Ho, you are now ready to set sail. See you at the show!

(Honk, honk, seagull squawk)