



## Book club 24: Identity & belonging

*The Talented Mr Ripley*  
by Patricia Highsmith

### Rules

In this book club you will discuss *The Talented Mr Ripley* by Patricia Highsmith in a group of 4-6 readers. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds:

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 questions about the plot. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of asking and answering questions each of you have about the book/story: in turn, the players say what they did not understand about the book and try to find an answer together. When the biggest confusions are solved, round 3 starts.
- 3 Round 3 consists of discussion questions. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions from round 1 gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is when you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit [www.litlab.nl](http://www.litlab.nl). A teacher's guide and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at [www.litlab.nl/docenten](http://www.litlab.nl/docenten).



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## *The Talented Mr Ripley*

### Introduction

*'Something always turned up. That was Tom's philosophy.'*

Don't we all, at some point, feel the desire to be someone else, even if it's just for a little while? In *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, the famous crime novel by Patricia Highsmith, we meet Tom Ripley, a young man who takes that desire very seriously indeed. The novel is as tense as it is thought-provoking, raising questions about identity, crime, consequence, and sexuality – all set against the sun-soaked backdrop of southern Italy. We quickly learn that Tom Ripley is a strange character but can we really blame him? And what about the people around him? Time to find out. So grab your bathing suit, put on your sunglasses, don't forget the sunscreen, and get ready to dive into this book club on *The Talented Mr. Ripley* by Patricia Highsmith.

### Round 1: Quiz

Turn over the 5 cards with quiz questions one by one. Write down the answer on a piece of paper.

### Round 2: Initial questions

What questions popped into your head while reading *The Talented Mr Ripley*? Were there any parts that left you confused or wondering? Take turns sharing your questions about the story and try to come up with answers together. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

### Round 3: Discussion

The player with the most correct answers to the quiz questions gets to turn over a card first from one of the two piles of discussion questions. Once they have answered the question, the other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

### Round 4: Review

Review *The Talented Mr Ripley* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



### Question 1

Why does Mr. Greenleaf ask Tom to go to Europe?

### Question 2

What is Tom's profession at the beginning of the novel?

### Question 3

What is Dickie surprised to find Tom doing in his room?

### Question 4

Which of Dickie's possessions very nearly gets Tom caught?

### Question 5

Which characters are murdered by Tom in the novel?

### Answers

1. To try and convince his son Dickie to return to the USA.
2. Trick question: he's a scammer with no real job. He lies about working in advertising.
3. He's wearing Dickie's clothes and pretending to be him.
4. His ring
5. Dickie/Richard Greenleaf & Freddie Miles



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



### Personal connections? 1

Have you ever felt the desire to be someone else? Who would that be, and why? In what way is this similar to Tom Ripley?

### Personal connections? 2

Tom Ripley is a typical 'con artist', someone who's skilled at tricking and deceiving others. Can you think of other con artists in films, books, or real life? How are they similar to or different from Tom Ripley?

### Personal connections? 3

Do you think Tom Ripley is a character you can relate to? Which of his traits make that easier or harder?

### Personal connections? 4

Dickie Greenleaf is highly reluctant to return to his native country, the US. Can you understand why he doesn't want to go back home? Would you have acted differently?

### Personal connections? 5

Describe Tom's attitude towards other characters in the book. How did Tom's view of characters like Dickie, Marge, Freddie, and Cleo influence your own opinion of them? Did you ever feel sympathy for them?

### Personal connections? 6

Did you ever feel like you knew how the story would end? How does the writer, Patricia Highsmith, keep the suspense going? Or does she not? Use scenes from the story to support your answer.

### Personal connections? 7

Try to put yourself in Tom Ripley's shoes. Are there any moments where you would have acted differently? Why?

### Personal connections? 8

The story's setting is quite important. Europe clearly holds a certain attraction for the characters in the novel. What do you think that attraction is? How do you view this as someone from your own cultural background?



Personal connections?

3

Personal connections?

2

Personal connections?

1

Personal connections?

6

Personal connections?

5

Personal connections?

4

Personal connections?

8

Personal connections?

7



### Food for thought? 1

How does Tom generally feel about the crimes he commits throughout the story? What does this tell us about his character?

### Food for thought? 2

The novel has been adapted for the screen several times; as an American film starring Matt Damon, and most recently as a Netflix series starring Andrew Scott. Why do you think this story keeps inspiring filmmakers? What makes it so suitable for the screen?

### Food for thought? 3

Discuss the novel's title. Why is Tom Ripley called 'talented'? What kind of talent does he show, and how does he use it?

### Food for thought? 4

How does the writer, Patricia Highsmith, reveal details about Tom's past? What effect does this have on how the reader judges his later actions?

### Food for thought? 5

What does Tom's decision to accept Mr Greenleaf's offer reveal about his ambitions and worldview? What clues in the novel help explain why he agrees?

### Food for thought? 6

What do we learn about Tom's love life and sex life? Which characters play a role in this, and how?

### Food for thought? 7

Tom Ripley often manages to outsmart the authorities and seems quite successful at his deceit. Is this due to his own skill, or mostly luck? Support your answer with examples.

### Food for thought? 8

One key scene in the novel shows Dickie walking in on Tom while he's trying on Dickie's clothes. Why might this be considered a turning point in the story?



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

2

Food for thought?

1

Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

7