

**SYDNEY
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**THE TALENTED
MR. RIPLEY**

By Patricia Highsmith

Adapted for the Stage by Joanna Murray-Smith

Directed by Sarah Goodes

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Image: Will McDonald. Photo: Derek Henderson.

Compiled by Sophia Small.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. You can contact the Education Team on **education@sydneytheatre.com.au**

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Sydney Theatre Company acknowledges the Gadigal of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land and waters on which the Company gathers. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with whom we work and with whom we share stories.

CAST AND CREATIVES

THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY

By Patricia Highsmith

Adapted for the Stage by Joanna Murray-Smith

Directed by Sarah Goodes

CAST

Freddie Miles
Faisal Hamza

Dickie Greenleaf
Raj Labade

Tom Ripley
Will McDonald

Herbert Greenleaf
Andrew McFarlane

Inspector Rolverini
Johnny Nasser

Marge Sherwood
Claude Scott-Mitchell

CREATIVES

Director
Sarah Goodes

Set Designer
Elizabeth Gadsby

Costume Designer
Emma White

Lighting Designer
Damien Cooper

Composer & Sound Designer
Steve Francis

Associate Directors
Tait de Lorenzo
Kenneth Moraleda

Associate Sound Designer
Madeleine Picard

Movement Director
Charmene Yap

Fight & Safety Director
Tim Dashwood

Intimacy Coordinator
Chloe Dallimore

Voice & Text Director
Charmian Gradwell

CREW

Production Manager
Ryan Garreffa

Deputy Production Manager
Julia Orlando

Stage Manager
Stephanie Storr

Deputy Stage Manager
Sophia Morgan

Assistant Stage Manager
Mia Kanzaki

Costume Coordinator
Sam Perkins

**Hair Wig and Makeup
Supervisor**
Lauren Proietti

Backstage Wardrobe Supervisor
Simone Edwards

Wardrobe Day Maintenance
Isabella Sigglekow
Catriona McCabe

**Lighting Supervisor & Head
Technician**
Jesse Grieg

Lighting Programmer
Ethan Hamill

Lighting Operator
Oscar de Gruchy

Sound Supervisor
Hayley Forward

Sound Operator
David Trumppmannis
Jeremy Hoppe

Radio Mic Technicians
Chloe Langdon
Jessica Pizzinga

**Staging Supervisor & Head
Mechanist**
David Tongs

Fly Operator
Zachary White

**Automation Operator &
Mechanist**
Liam Kennedy

Floor Mechanist
Oscar Broadhead

Drafting
Dallas Winspear

Props Supervisor
Emily Adinolfi

Scenic Art Supervisor
Ron Thiessen

Set Construction Supervisor
Boaz Shemesh

Rehearsal Photographer
Daniel Boud

2HRS, NO INTERVAL.

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THIS PRODUCTION OPENED AT ROSLYN PACKER THEATRE, SYDNEY ON 23 AUGUST 2025.

THIS PRODUCTION IS SUPPORTED BY STC ANGELS IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE CHAIR'S CIRCLE.

PPRESENTING PARTNER

Allens >>



SYNOPSIS

Tom Ripley is a young grifter desperate to escape his humble beginnings when a chance encounter grants him entry into a world he's only ever imagined. Mistaken for a friend of Dickie Greenleaf — the charismatic heir to a shipping fortune living lavishly in Italy — Tom is sent abroad with a simple mission: convince Dickie to come home.

But once in the sun-drenched villas and jazz-soaked cafes of the Amalfi Coast, Tom becomes intoxicated by Dickie's golden life and begins to crave it for himself. Armed with charm, cunning, and a talent for imitation, Tom slowly insinuates himself into Dickie and his girlfriend Marge's glittering world. As his envy deepens into obsession, Tom makes a chilling decision to take Dickie's life for himself, whatever the cost.



CURRICULUM LINKS

DRAMA

Stage 5

- Elements of Drama
- Elements of Performance
- Elements of Production

Stage 6

- Improvisation and Play building
- Dramatic Forms
- Performance Spaces and Conventions of Theatre
- Technical Aspects of Production
- Experience of Dramatic Presentations
- Reading and Writing about Drama and Theatre

ENGLISH

Stage 5 & 6

- Appropriation of a classic text
- Core Textual Concepts: Genre, Code and Convention, Perspective, Point of View, Literary Value, Context, Character

SUITABLE FOR

Years 9 - 12

THEMES & IDEAS

- Identity and Authenticity
- Morality
- Social Class

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Tom Ripley

Tom Ripley, the central character in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, is a cunning, intelligent, and deeply insecure young man who longs to escape his lower-class origins and enter the world of wealth and privilege. Initially appearing as a charming and somewhat aimless con artist, Tom reveals himself to be a master manipulator with a chilling capacity for deceit and violence. His intense desire to belong, and his envy of the affluent lifestyle embodied by Dickie Greenleaf, drive him to assume Dickie's identity, ultimately leading to murder covered up by Ripley's increasingly complex web of lies. Tom elicits a strange mix of sympathy and revulsion, embodying the morally ambiguous antihero.



Costume Design for *The Talented Mr. Ripley* – Tom. Emma White © 2025



Will McDonald

Dickie Greenleaf

Dickie Greenleaf is a wealthy, handsome, and charismatic young American, living a carefree expatriate life in Italy. He is alluring and self-absorbed, exuding a casual charm that draws people in, including Tom Ripley, whose fascination with him quickly turns obsessive. Dickie enjoys his privileged lifestyle and the admiration of others but is ultimately shallow, possessive, and dismissive when others threaten his lifestyle. His inability to recognise the depth of Tom's envy and psychological instability contributes to his downfall, and to our response to him as a character. Dickie represents the idle, affluent class that Ripley yearns to join, making him both a symbol of aspiration and a victim of it.



Costume Design for *The Talented Mr. Ripley* – Dickie. Emma White © 2025



Will McDonald as Tom Ripley



Raj Labade as Dickie Greenleaf

Marge Sherwood

Marge Sherwood is an American writer and close companion of Dickie Greenleaf living in Italy. She is intelligent, perceptive, and emotionally grounded – a contrast to the hedonistic and self-centred Dickie, and the manipulative duplicity of Tom Ripley. Though she initially welcomes Tom, she grows increasingly suspicious of him, especially after Dickie’s disappearance.

Marge’s suspicions and emotional sensitivity make her one of the few characters who senses the danger beneath Tom’s charm, but her position as a woman in a male-dominated social circle often limits her influence. She becomes both the story’s moral conscience and its tragic bystander.



Costume Design for *The Talented Mr. Ripley* – Marge. Emma White © 2025

Freddie Miles

Freddie Miles is a brash, entitled, and somewhat crude American acquaintance of Dickie Greenleaf, and a character foil to the adaptable Ripley. Unlike Tom, Freddie is loud, suspicious, and unafraid to voice his doubts, making him a threat to Tom’s carefully constructed identity. His unannounced visit to Dickie’s apartment becomes a turning point in the story, as his suspicion and keen observation pose a potential threat to Tom’s web of lies.



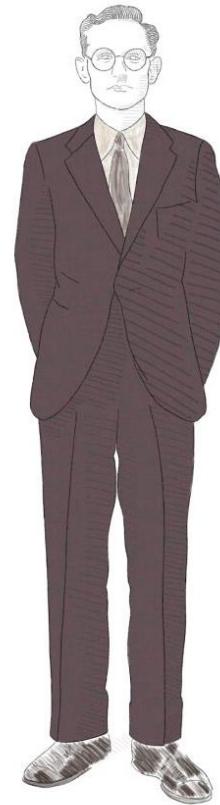
Costume Design for *The Talented Mr. Ripley* – Freddie. Emma White © 2025

Inspector Rolverini

Inspector Rolverini is the Italian police officer investigating the suspicious disappearance of Dickie Greenleaf.

Methodical and observant, Rolverini poses a subtle but persistent threat to Tom Ripley's web of lies. His shrewd ability to detect inconsistencies in Tom's story poses a threat to Tom's plans.

Rolverini represents the pressure of justice and consequences closing in.



Costume Design for *The Talented Mr. Ripley* – Inspector Rolverini. Emma White © 2025

Herbert Greenleaf

Herbert Greenleaf is a wealthy American businessman whose concern about his son Dickie's aimless existence abroad sets in motion the chain of events that leads to Dickie's demise and Tom's subsequent elaborate deception.

He views Tom Ripley as a potential positive influence, a "nice young man" who can persuade Dickie to return home and take responsibility for his inheritance.

Though he only appears briefly at the beginning and end of the story, Herbert represents the conventional, 'American dream' ideal that Dickie has rejected, and that Tom ultimately seeks to usurp.



Costume Design for *The Talented Mr. Ripley* – Herbert Greenleaf. Emma White © 2025

FORM, STYLE AND CONVENTION

Form

Ensemble Theatre

The collaborative nature of theatre making is strongly demonstrated by the ensemble of actors in this production.

During the rehearsal process, actors were given ownership to explore the context of this specific adaptation of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.

The creative process encouraged playful offers, suggested in the text, which invited actors to contribute images and ideas in organic exploration. The director then works with the actors and creative team to discard or refine ideas from the rehearsal room to build a cohesive ensemble, that aligns with the directorial vision of the play.

The actors play both their named characters as well as unnamed figures and bodies in other scenes, which mirrors the theme of identity being fluid and not fixed.

Psychological Thriller

The Talented Mr. Ripley is a classic psychological thriller, deriving its suspense not from external action or the typical 'whodunit' elements, but from the unsettling internal world of its protagonist. The story plunges the audience directly into Tom Ripley's mind, creating a sense of dread and tension as he plans and executes his meticulous schemes, and making us complicit in his chilling lack of remorse even as we reel from the constant threat of exposure.

As we follow our unreliable narrator we must grapple with Tom's warped perspective and question the nature of reality. The 'thrill' emerges from the psychological tightrope Tom walks, as he navigates his escalating lies and murders, as well as from the uncomfortable intimacy we feel with his cunning intellect, even as we are repelled by his amorality.

Style

Noir

The Talented Mr. Ripley is a quintessential example of literary noir, characterised by its bleak outlook, morally ambiguous protagonist, and pervasive sense of fatalism. Unlike traditional detective fiction where a clear moral line is drawn and justice often prevails, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* draws the reader into Tom Ripley's amoral consciousness, where crime is a means to an end, and the 'hero' is a charming sociopath.

The suspense arises not from whether Tom will be caught, but from the intricate psychological game he plays, and the chilling possibility that he might escape the consequences of his actions, leaving a trail of death and stolen identities in his wake. The production adapts the noir aesthetic for the stage, borrowing noir motifs to take a psychological perspective as Tom's psyche begins to fracture.

Suspense

The Talented Mr. Ripley masterfully cultivates suspense by placing the reader firmly inside the mind of its amoral protagonist. Rather than relying on external plot twists or the revelation of a mystery (as we learn early on that Tom commits murder), the tension stems from the constant threat of Tom's exposure.

We follow along with Tom's elaborate deceptions, his internal anxieties, and his ingenious improvisations, experiencing a taut, psychological drama where every close call, every suspicious glance, and every potential misstep heightens the tension.

The lighting and sound design along with other production elements, enhance the audience's experience of the suspense found within the text.

The production, too, focuses on Tom's anxiety at being caught, using character doubling and masks to represent the psychological splitting of the protagonist – who is, ultimately, also the story's antagonist.



THEMES AND IDEAS

Identity & Authenticity

The Talented Mr. Ripley explores the fluidity and performativity of identity, questioning what truly constitutes an 'authentic' self. Tom Ripley, initially defined by his lack of identity and discontent with his social standing, skilfully sheds his past and, through murder and elaborate deception, assumes the life and persona of Dickie Greenleaf. This act of identity theft highlights how deeply intertwined selfhood can be with external markers like wealth, social circles, and mannerisms.

The Talented Mr. Ripley suggests that identity is not an inherent, fixed quality, but rather a malleable construct that can be consciously crafted and performed, exposing the unsettling possibility that authenticity can be an illusion, and that a convincing imitation can become a new reality.

“Tom Ripley has never really been despondent, though he had often looked it. Hadn't he learned something from these last months? If you wanted to be cheerful, or melancholic, or wistful, or thoughtful, or courteous, you simply had to act those things with every gesture.”

Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*



Discussion Question

“Tom Ripley's ability to impersonate Dickie Greenleaf blurs the boundary between self and other, suggesting identity might be more fluid and performative than traditionally thought.”

- How does the production depict identity?
- Is identity something fixed, or can it be assumed, manipulated, or performed?
- How much of who we are is determined by how others perceive us?
- Can someone truly become another person, and what does that mean for authenticity?



Claude Scott-Mitchell, Faisal Hamza, Raj Labade, and Will McDonald

Social Class

Social class divisions are a driving force in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, illustrating how the rigid stratification of post-war American and European society both limited and encouraged desperate ambition. Tom Ripley, an impoverished and unmoored young man, is acutely aware of his own low status and the stark contrast with the privileged, leisurely world inhabited by Dickie Greenleaf. His obsession with Dickie, fuelled by envy and a desire for the finer things in life, is rooted in his yearning to escape his working-class origins and assume the effortless luxury and social acceptance that comes with wealth.

The Talented Mr. Ripley subtly critiques the superficiality of this upper class, revealing how appearances, connections, and inherited wealth can outweigh genuine character, creating a system that Tom, with his talents for mimicry and deception, is ultimately able to exploit. In his increasingly violent attempt to achieve some upward social mobility, the audience is left wondering whether his ambitious rise through the class system really is amoral – or whether he has simply exploited that which was designed to exclude him.

“Tom’s impersonation of Dickie is not only as a criminal disguise but a psychological prop to his own self-hatred. He likes himself more when he is a rich, handsome heir.”

Edmund White

Discussion Question

How might Tom's resentment toward the wealthy and his desire of their lifestyle suggest a critique of social mobility, or its impossibility? What can this tell us about class anxiety in our own, modern-day society?

Morality

Morality in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is not about conventional good versus evil, rather it explores a chilling amoral landscape where personal desire trumps all ethical considerations. Tom Ripley is a protagonist who feels no genuine remorse or guilt for his crimes, including murder and identity theft. Instead, his moral compass is guided solely by self-preservation and the pursuit of a luxurious, unburdened life.

The novel forces the reader into an uncomfortable complicity with Tom, often rooting for him to escape detection, thereby challenging the audience's own moral boundaries and highlighting the seductive power of an intelligent, albeit utterly ruthless, individual operating outside the bounds of societal norms.

The production plays on this notion even more as the play begins with Tom seemingly confiding in the audience, inviting us to become complicit in his escalating web of lies and deceit.

“It is near impossible, I would say, not to root for Tom Ripley. Not to like him. Not, on some level, to want him to win.”

Sam Jordison



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Identity and Authenticity

Activity 1 – Role-Switching Monologues

Skills: Creative writing, interpretation, performance, analysis of character psychology.

Focus: Students explore Tom Ripley's shifting identity through performance and analysis.

Instructions:

- Students choose a key scene where Tom is actively constructing or concealing his identity (e.g., when he first impersonates Dickie).
- They write and perform two contrasting monologues:
 - One from Tom's internal, authentic perspective (his thoughts and motives).
 - One from his outward persona (how he presents himself to others).
- After the performance, discuss as a class:
 - What cues show Tom is being "authentic" or not?
 - How does performance relate to identity in real life? Are there any times when you feel you are 'performing'?



Activity 2 – Identity ‘masks’

Skills: Non-verbal expression, symbolism, group collaboration, dramatic storytelling.

Focus: Students draw on the use of masks in the production to symbolise and physically explore the dualities of Tom’s identity.

Instructions:

- Students create two physical masks representing Tom:
 - One for his true self (timid, envious, insecure).
 - One for his constructed persona (confident, charismatic, sociable).
- In groups, they devise short, silent scenes using the masks to show Tom transitioning between identities in different situations (e.g., socialising, lying, committing a crime).
- Reflection: What did the masks help express? When did Tom seem more "real"?

Activity 3 – ‘Identity’ journals

Skills: Characterisation, voice, word choice, creative writing.

Focus: Students analyse character identity to develop characterisation and voice through creative writing.

Instructions:

- Students write journal entries from Tom’s perspective at three key moments:
 1. Before meeting Dickie.
 2. Just after committing the murder.
 3. While maintaining his double life.
- Optional sentences starters/prompts:
 - “Do I feel more myself now than before?”
 - “What part of me is real?”
 - “Is pretending the same as becoming?”

Extension/Discussion: When do we ‘perform’ different identities in our own lives?

Activity 4 – Characters on Trial

Skills: Role play, debate, persuasive speaking, critical thinking.

Focus: Students evaluate the moral and psychological complexity of Tom Ripley.

Instructions (whole-class, or two halves depending on numbers/time):

- Students undertake a mock trial where Tom Ripley is being evaluated not for murder, but for identity fraud.
- Roles: Tom, prosecutor, lawyers, witnesses (Dickie’s friends, Marge, hotel staff), jury.
- Teams prepare arguments addressing:
 - Was Tom’s transformation inevitable?
 - Is there a ‘true’ Tom Ripley?
 - Can someone be authentic while lying?

Wrap-up: discuss how different characters perceive Tom’s identity and whether identity is static or fluid.

Extended Response

“*The Talented Mr. Ripley* explores the tension between who we are and who we want to be. “

To what extent does Tom Ripley’s journey reveal the dangers of constructing a false identity?

In your response, you should:

- Discuss how Tom Ripley’s identity evolves throughout the story.
- Explore how the production portrays authenticity (or lack thereof) in Tom’s relationships and choices.
- Consider how the story critiques or reflects broader societal expectations of identity.
- Use specific evidence (examples) from the production to support your argument.



Will McDonald & Sarah Goodes

Social Class

Activity 1 – Status Swap Scenes

Skills: Scene analysis, performance, understanding subtext and power.

Focus: Students explore how social class influences status, language, mannerisms and behaviour.

Instructions:

- Students perform a scene between Tom and Dickie or Tom and Marge, but with their social status reversed (Tom is rich, Dickie is poor).
- Before performing, students discuss the original scene and note class-related power dynamics (e.g., speech, posture, entitlement).
- After performing the reversed version, discuss:
 - What changed in the interaction?
 - How does class shape tension between characters?

Activity 2 – Class Diaries

Skills: Point of view, tone, characterisation.

Focus: Students develop insight into how class affects worldview, expressed through word choice and characterisation.

Instructions:

- Students write two diary entries about the same event (e.g., a dinner party, boat trip, or shopping scene):
 - One from Tom's perspective (aspiring, envious, observant of class signifiers).
 - One from Dickie's or Marge's perspective (privileged, casual, possibly oblivious).
- Students consider:
 - How do they describe the event differently?
 - What assumptions or insecurities are revealed?

Activity 3 – Class Costuming

Skills: Symbolism, visual storytelling, close reading through design.

Focus: Students interpret and represent class distinctions visually.

Instructions:

- Students design or sketch costumes for Tom, Dickie, and Marge at different points in the story.
- Justify each design choice: fabrics, colours, accessories, posture, etc., reflecting class status and aspirations.
- Optional: students stage a tableau or photo scene using props/costumes to show the visual gap between Tom and the wealthy characters.

Discussion:

- How does Tom try to “wear” a different class?
- Can class be performed? What gives someone away?

Activity 4 – Debate

Skills: Moral reasoning, persuasive speaking, textual analysis, argument building.

Focus: Students prepare for and engage in a debate, using evidence to support complex claims.

Instructions:

- Split the class into two teams, to debate the question: Does Tom Ripley Deserve Sympathy?
 - The affirmative team argues that Tom is a victim of a rigid class system and deserves sympathy.
 - The negative team argues that class envy does not justify deception and murder.
- Students must use textual evidence to support their argument, considering how class barriers shape Tom’s choices.

Extension/reflection writing: How does class shape our sense of right and wrong?

Extended Response

How are the characters’ motivations and conflicts in *The Talented Mr Ripley* shaped by social class?

In your response, you should consider:

- How class differences influence Tom Ripley’s actions and desires.
- The portrayal of wealth and privilege through characters (such as Dickie and Marge).
- How social class affects relationships and power dynamics.
- Students should use detailed examples to support their analysis.



Andrew MacFarlane, Will McDonald, Claude Scott-Mitchell, and Johnny Nasser

Morality

Activity 1 – Moral Dilemma Hot-Seating

Skills: Improvisation, persuasion/rhetoric, character analysis.

Focus: Students explore characters' moral decisions and how social class influences their choices.

Instructions:

- Students take turns “hot-seating” as Tom Ripley, Dickie Greenleaf, or Marge Sherwood.
- The class asks questions about the characters' choices related to crime, deception, and loyalty, focusing on:
 - Why does Tom justify his actions?
 - How might Tom's social position affect his sense of right and wrong?
 - Do wealth and privilege excuse or complicate moral behaviour?
- Encourage students to answer as the character, considering their background and motivations.

Activity 2 – Tom Ripley Confessional

Skills: Characterisation, reasoning with evidence.

Focus: Students step into the mind of a morally ambiguous character and explore the psychological and ethical dilemmas he faces.

Instructions:

1. **Setting the Scene:** Students imagine they are a journalist interviewing Tom Ripley after the events of the story. Ripley has finally agreed to a tell-all confession.
2. **Writing:** Students write a monologue from Tom Ripley's perspective. The monologue should be a confession or an internal reflection. It should address the following questions:
 - Why did you do it? What was your motivation for killing Dickie and Freddie?
 - Do you regret your actions? If so, what do you regret? The acts themselves? Or the fear of being caught?
 - How do you feel about the life you have created? Do you believe you are a good person?
 - What is your definition of morality? Has it changed?
3. **Performance or Reading:** Ask for volunteers to read their monologues aloud or encourage students to share with a peer. After each reading, the class can provide feedback and discuss the different interpretations of Ripley's character.
4. **Reflection and Analysis:** Students reflect on the experience of writing from a morally complex character's point of view. Was it difficult to empathise with Ripley? Did the activity change their opinion of him?

Activity 3 – Scene Rewriting

Skills: Perspective, characterisation, creative writing, reasoning with evidence.

Focus: Students analyse and reinterpret a key moment focused on morality.

Instructions:

- Students select a pivotal scene involving a moral choice (e.g. the murder of Dickie).
- They rewrite the scene from the perspective of another character (Marge, Meredith) or as if Tom made a different moral decision.
- Discuss how changing moral choices alter the story and reflect on social class influences.

Activity 4 – Ethics and class

Skills: Textual analysis, collaboration.

Focus: Students examine morality as influenced by social class through collaborative exploration.

Instructions:

- In groups, students are allocated key ethical questions from the story where class and morality collide.
Suggested topics:
 - Does talent, intelligence, and ambition make a person more deserving of a life of luxury than someone who simply inherited it?
 - What moral compromises are necessary to maintain a deceptive identity? How does the guilt and fear of being caught corrupt a person's conscience?
 - Does privilege blind people to the struggles and motivations of those in lower classes?
 - Is it morally acceptable to lie, deceive, and impersonate others to escape poverty and achieve a better life?
- Each group presents a case study that includes:
 - The moral dilemma faced.
 - How class pressures affect decisions.
 - Possible alternative outcomes.
- Students present their findings as a dramatic tableau or short scene to highlight the ethical tension.

Extended Response

How does the story explore the complexities of morality through the character of Tom Ripley in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*?

In your response, you should:

- Analyse Tom Ripley's moral choices and the factors influencing them.
- Discuss how the story challenges traditional ideas of right and wrong.
- Consider how the production's perspective, and Tom's direct address (seemingly to the audience) affects our understanding of morality in the production.
- Support your points with examples from the production.

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Rehearsal photos courtesy of Daniel Boud.

Production photos courtesy of Prudence Upton.

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