Book Club Guide

The Rosie Project

by Graeme Simsion

About the Author

Graeme Simsion is the internationally bestselling author of *The Rosie Project*, *The Rosie Effect*, and *The Rosie Result*, featuring Professor Don Tillman, as well as *The Best of Adam Sharp* and, with Anne Buist, *Two Steps Forward*. Graeme lives in Australia.

About the Book

The international bestselling romantic comedy "bursting with warmth, emotional depth, and…humor," (*Entertainment Weekly*) featuring the oddly charming, socially challenged genetics professor, Don, as he seeks true love.

The art of love is never a science: Meet Don Tillman, a brilliant yet socially inept professor of genetics, who's decided it's time he found a wife. In the orderly, evidence-based manner with which Don approaches all things, he designs the Wife Project to find his perfect partner: a sixteen-page, scientifically valid survey to filter out the drinkers, the smokers, the late arrivers.

Rosie Jarman possesses all these qualities. Don easily disqualifies her as a candidate for The Wife Project (even if she is "quite intelligent for a barmaid"). But Don is intrigued by Rosie's own quest to identify her biological father. When an unlikely relationship develops as they collaborate on The Father Project, Don is forced to confront the spontaneous whirlwind that is Rosie—and the realization that, despite your best scientific efforts, you don't find love, it finds you.

Arrestingly endearing and entirely unconventional, Graeme Simsion's distinctive debut "navigates the choppy waters of adult relationships, both romantic and platonic, with a fresh take (*USA TODAY*). "Filled with humor and plenty of heart, *The Rosie Project* is a delightful reminder that all of us, no matter how we're wired, just want to fit in" (*Chicago Tribune*).

Retrieved from: https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Rosie-Project/Graeme-Simsion/9781476729091

Discussion Questions

Professor of genetics Don Tillman's life is turned upside down when he embarks upon the Wife Project in order to find a suitable mate for his quirky habits and demanding personality. When a psychology PhD student named Rosie walks into his office, she's all wrong—her hair is dyed, her clothes are sloppy, she smokes, and she is habitually late. But then again, something is right about her . . . Don just can't recognize it at first. As the Wife Project takes a back burner to Rosie's own project of searching for her biological father, Don finds himself breaking all kinds of rules and breaking out of his routine in ways that are both uncomfortable and exciting. When a research trip takes them from Australia to New York City, and Don's career is threatened by his allegiance to Rosie, Don must face the toughest puzzle of all—himself. In the end, Don must confront his long-held notions of what it means to love and connect with people, and what it truly means to open up and trust someone.

1. Do Don's Asperger's conditions help him or hinder him? Does Don's having Autism offer any advantages in his life?

2. Don goes through a number of spectacularly bad dates. What have been some of your own dating nightmares?

3. Where do you fall on the spectrum between structure and chaos in life? Are you highly rigid in your routines or very relaxed?

4. Do you agree with Don's assessment that "humans often fail to see what is close to them and obvious to others"? (p. 88)

5. What do you think of Gene and Claudia's relationship? Do you know anyone in an open marriage? Can it work?

6. Don says that the happiest day of his life was spent at the Museum of Natural History. Do you have a happiest day of your life? Or is there a special place where you

are happiest?

7. As Don's affection for Rosie grows, he becomes aware of his instincts overriding reason. What is the role of instinct versus reason when it comes to choosing a life partner?

8. Do you have anyone on the Autism spectrum in your life?

9. Don watches a number of movies to try to learn about romance, including *When Harry Met Sally, The Bridges of Madison County, An Affair to Remember,* and *Hitch.* What are your top five romantic movies?

10. Have you ever had a moment of breaking out of your routine and opening up in a significant way? Or has someone broken through your routine for you?

11. Is it smart to have a list of criteria for a potential partner or is it limiting?

12. Don gets in trouble with the dean for using the genetics lab for his personal project with Rosie. Is it ever okay to break the rules in order to help someone?

13. Do you feel happy for Don when he "eliminates a number of unconventional mannerisms" (p. 268) in order to win Rosie, or has he lost something?

14. Does Gene get his comeuppance?

15. Were you surprised at the ultimate revelation of Rosie's biological father? Did you suspect someone else?

Retrieved from: https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Rosie-Project/Graeme-Simsion/9781476729091

Author Interview

1. Do you have experience with Autistic people?

I did a physics degree, worked for thirty years in information technology and taught at several universities. In these areas, technical skills are given more weight than social skills. So I met many people who I'm sure would have been diagnosed as being on the high-functioning end of the autism spectrum–had that diagnosis been common when they were younger. And I know a number of people with kids who have been diagnosed with Asperger's /Austism.

2. What or who was your inspiration for Don?

People I worked with and taught. There are plenty of Dons out there. One close friend struggled for many years to find a partner, and he provided inspiration for my first version of the story but the character and story have changed a lot since then. There is no 'real Don'!

3. Do you love the Museum of Natural History as much as Don does?

Not *that* much! But it's one of my favorite places in New York.

4. Do you have any idiosyncratic "deal breakers" like Don with ice cream preference?

I don't think so, but I've been married for 24 years, so I don't have a lot of recent dating experience (!) I really don't like smoking, but dated a smoker for some time when I was younger. Back in those days, if I was really attracted to someone, I'd make a lot of concessions. Perhaps less so now.

5. What's your BMI?

22.5. I ran a marathon in 2010 and it was quite a bit less then–and even less after I ended up in hospital for a week. The story is at http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/three-encounters-with-the-physical-20130111-2cl32.html

6. Don is a bit of a foodie. You founded Pinot Now and have eaten at El Bulli. Can you talk about the role of food and wine in your life?

I'm also a bit of a foodie and a wine lover. I cook a lot, and put quite a bit of effort into meals. I actually do jog to the local market, though not on a regular a schedule as Don. Cooking is a good opportunity for thinking (as it is for Don), and I enjoy the results. My wife and I drink a lot of wine – probably too much – and treat our travel as an opportunity to try restaurants and local produce. It's a balance to the more intellectual business of writing.

7. How did you develop and dive into Don's voice?

I channeled a close friend who has a background in information technology–a very technical background. In the early drafts I could hear his voice, but over time Don developed his own mannerisms. I borrowed habits like "greetings" and expressions like "human sponge mode" from other colleagues and friends.

8. Do you feel that this is a story of triumph for Don?

Absolutely. Don is the hero of the story in all senses. He sets out to do something that is a huge stretch and overcomes obstacles and his own limitations to achieve it – along the way learning some lessons about what he really needs. And he does this in a fundamentally decent way.

9. You have a background in data modeling. What is that exactly, and did your experience with it contribute to your portrait of Don and his Wife Project?

It's basically the job of specifying a database–describing in precise technical language what data is to be held and how it is to be represented. A bit like an architect describing to a builder exactly what needs to be built, after helping the client express their requirements and proposing a design. The discipline itself doesn't feature in the book, but some of the people I met in the field–precise, highly organized people–contributed to my characterization of Don.

10. You also write, produce, and act in films. How is the process of writing for film

different from writing a novel?

Well, the acting was only one time! But I've produced numerous short films, and in fact wrote *The Rosie Project* as a screenplay before "sideways adapting" it into a novel. In screenwriting, at least for mainstream films, there is a strong emphasis on *story*–and story structure. It's more formulaic than a novel, but it's also a good discipline. In a romantic comedy you only have about 100 minutes, so you have to make every scene count. You see it in Rosie: it's structured as a romantic comedy, and reads as a series of scenes. And it moves along pretty quickly. In a novel, you have the opportunity to describe the character's thought processes – and in The Rosie Project that's an important tool for comedy. On the screen you can use physical action and timing – which are not directly available to you on the page.

11. You own a Porsche, have solo-flown a Cessna, and walked the Camino de Santiago. Is adventure something you seek out in life?

I'm not a physical thrill-seeker, but I enjoy challenges and achievement, and am very conscious that we only get one life. My wife drives the Porsche–most of the time I take the tram.

Retrieved from: https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Rosie-Project/Graeme-Simsion/9781476729091

Links and Other Resources

Why *Asperger's Syndrome* is not commonly used anymore:

https://www.npr.org/2018/05/12/610716324/doctor-behind-asperger-s-syndrome-subject-to-name-change#:~:text=And%20so%20today%2C%20you%20can,from%20other%20criteria%20for%20autism.

About Autism: https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/about-autism/

Share your thoughts with other readers!

DATE: _____

BOOK CLUB: _____

BOOK TITLE: _____

As a group we rated this book:

1	2	3	4	5
Ugh!		It was OK...		Loved it!

Would we recommend this book to other book clubs?

Yes   No   Undecided

Why/why not?

Our discussion: