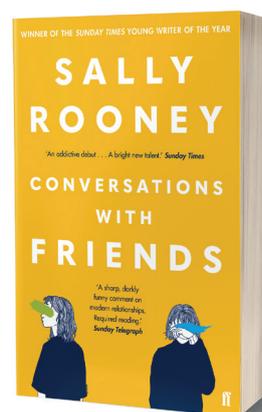


## Reading Group Guide

# CONVERSATIONS WITH FRIENDS

SALLY ROONEY

Aspiring writer Frances is studying in Dublin, when she and her friend Bobbi are befriended by Melissa, a well-known journalist and her actor husband Nick. They begin a complex ménage-à-quatre and when Frances and Nick become closer, she must honestly confront her own vulnerabilities and emotions for the first time.



### Questions

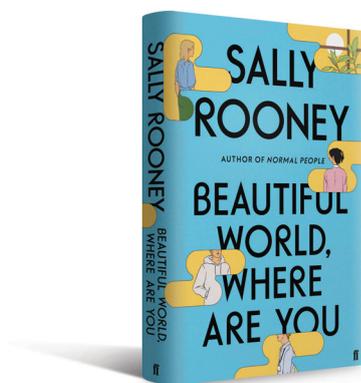
1. 'Bobbi told me she thought I didn't have a "real personality", but she said she meant it as a compliment.' How true do you find this to be of Frances, and why do you think Bobbi regards it as a compliment?
2. 'I looked at Melissa and thought: I hate you. This idea just came from nowhere, like a joke or an exclamation. I didn't even know if I really hated her, but the words felt and sounded right.' Discuss what you feel are the reasons behind Frances' initial animosity towards Melissa.
3. Frances says in one of her texts to Bobbi that, 'I'm just not very emotional', and Bobbi replies, 'I just don't think "unemotional" is a quality someone can have.' Who would you agree with, and do you find Frances unemotional throughout the book?
4. How much do you feel Frances' apparent carelessness in her relationships is down to her inexperience? Does it make her hard to empathise with?
5. Why do you think that Frances doesn't tell Bobbi about the story she has sold to the magazine? Do you feel that she betrayed Bobbi by publishing it without her consent?
6. 'What does it mean for a relationship to "work out"?' he said. It was never going to be something conventional.' How accurate do you think Nick's assessment of his and Frances' relationship is? Do you think that, in fact, Frances did want 'something conventional'?
7. 'I guess because I'm married that means you can just treat me however you want... I think if you're honest with yourself, you're actually glad I'm married, because it means you can act out and I have to take the blame for everything.' What are the primary effects that Nick being married has on the dynamics of his relationship with Frances?
8. Given that they have both had affairs, and they sleep in separate rooms, discuss the possible reasons for Melissa and Nick's desire to stay married.
9. Frances' boss at the literary agency says that, 'You don't seem to have a plan', which she finds unusual. What are your feelings about Frances' seeming lack of direction and her attitude to money?
10. Do you think it is realistic for Frances to keep her diagnosis of endometriosis a secret from her mother and Bobbi, when it is causing her significant problems? Is her desire not to seem like a victim something that you can sympathise with?
11. What was your reaction to Melissa's email to Frances, and her assessment that Nick isn't attracted to good-looking or morally worthy people, but just 'likes partners who take complete responsibility for all his decisions'? Is her view of him fair?
12. 'You live through certain things before you understand them.' How do you think all four characters will eventually process the events in the novel, and what will it mean to them?
13. 'Come and get me, I said.' What do you think happens after the end of the book, and how did the ending make you feel?

### Quotes to think about:

- (p10) With other people I generally had a sense of what to take seriously and what not to, but with Bobbi it was impossible. She never seemed to be either fully serious or fully joking.
- (p41) The acclaim also felt like part of the performance itself, the best part, and the most pure expression of what I was trying to do, which was to make myself into this kind of person: someone worthy of praise, worthy of love.
- (p175) Was I kind to others? It was hard to nail down an answer. I worried that if I did turn out to have a personality, it would be one of the unkind ones. Did I only worry about this question because as a woman I felt required to put the needs of others before my own? Was 'kindness' just another term for submission in the face of conflict?
- (p216) I thought of myself as an independent person, so independent that the opinions of others were irrelevant to me. Now I was afraid that Nick was right: I isolated myself from criticism so I could behave badly without losing my sense of righteousness.
- (p235) He tells me your father is an alcoholic, so was mine. I wonder if we gravitate toward Nick because he gives us a sense of control that was lacking in childhood.
- (p237) I always said I wanted him to be happy, & now I know it was true all along. I do want that. Even when it looks like this I still want it.
- (p296) 'You really do have these sudden bursts of aggression, don't you?' she said. Like with Valerie. Are you threatened by other women?'
- (p299) When there were four of us I always thought in terms of couples anyway, which threatened me, since all the possible couples that didn't involve me seemed so much more interesting than the ones that did. You and Nick, you and Melissa, even Nick and Melissa in their own way. But now I see that nothing consists of two people, or even three. My relationship with you is also produced by your relationship with Melissa, and with Nick, and with your childhood self, etc., etc. I wanted things for myself because I thought I existed.

### Author biography

Sally Rooney was born in the west of Ireland in 1991. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Granta* and *The London Review of Books*. Winner of the *Sunday Times* Young Writer of the Year Award in 2017, she is the author of *Normal People* (the winner of the Costa Novel Award, Novel of the Year and Book of the Year at the British Book Awards) and the editor of the Irish literary journal *The Stinging Fly*. *Conversations with Friends* was a *Sunday Times*, *Observer* and *Telegraph* Book of the Year, and selected as one of the *Sunday Times*' Top 100 Novels of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.



Sally Rooney's new novel *Beautiful World, Where Are You* is publishing 7 September 2021, sign up for news and updates at [www.bwway.co.uk](http://www.bwway.co.uk)

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