

The Talented Ribkins

by Ladee Hubbard

Reading Group Guide

1. In this novel, many characters are changed by the passage of time. Is this inevitable? Are these changes positive or negative?
2. Is it significant that Johnny is seventy-two years old? Can he still effect social change as an old man? (Keep in mind that he's an antique salesman, and that antiques, in his own words, are things "that get more valuable with time" [p. 28].)
3. Discuss the role money plays in this novel. Is it something that corrupts? Or is it something that, while corrupting, also effects positive change?
4. What causes Meredith to change her mind about Johnny? Why does she send Eloise with him? Can we believe her claim that she's looking out for Eloise?
5. Compare Eloise's use of her "gifts" with Johnny's. How is it similar? Different? Is Johnny more honorable for having used his gifts for social uplift? Why does he judge Eloise's use of her gift so harshly?
6. Does the Ribkins family have a moral obligation to use their gifts for good? Why or why not? Do we—as people, readers, thinkers, etc.—have a responsibility to use our own talents for good?
7. Conversely, do we have a social responsibility to help others even if we don't have "gifts?"
8. Does Johnny "dig up" anything besides money? How might those other "things" change our perception of him as a character? (e.g. memories, former ambitions . . .)

9. Can we reconcile Johnny's negative attitude toward money and his active pursuit of it?
10. Is Johnny morally wrong in his pursuit of money? How is he different from the other money-obsessed characters in this book—particularly those he criticizes?
11. Are the Ribkins as close-knit a family as Simone suggests? If so, why do they seem so suspicious of each other?
12. How are members of the Ribkins family similar to one another? How are they different?
13. Why doesn't Simone keep pictures of the Justice Committee in her photo album? Is she trying to erase the past? Can the past be erased?
14. Why don't Johnny and his family members hide their "gifts"? Might there be reasons for their being so open about what are ostensibly supernatural powers? (Conversely: what might be a reason for them to hide their superpowers?)