

***Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?***  
**by Roz Chast**

These discussion questions are designed to enhance your group's discussion about *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?*, Roz Chast's graphic memoir about the death of her parents.

**About this book**

Through words and illustrations, with evident pain and remarkable humor, Roz Chast revisits the struggle she went through with her aging parents as their physical and mental abilities gradually declined and they eventually became unable to care for themselves.

**For discussion**

1. Have you had a similar discussion with your parents and/or children about aging and long-term care plans? What was the result? At what age do you think parents and children should have this conversation?
2. Which part(s) of the book, if any, could you relate to the most? Did you find yourself empathizing more with George and Elizabeth, or Roz? Did this change as you progressed through the book?
3. Which aspects of the role reversal Chast depicts—the child assuming a caretaker role—were the most striking to you? What emotions did you experience as you were reading about the challenges Roz, George, and Elizabeth all faced?
4. Did you enjoy Chast's technique of telling her story through illustrations? Why or why not? Were there scenes in the book that you thought were more or less effective because they were depicted in cartoons rather than in straightforward text? Which ones, and why?
5. Whose experience is more frightening to you—George and Elizabeth's, or Roz's?
6. Which parts of the memoir made you laugh? Which made you cry? Did Chast's use of humor surprise you? Do you think it's necessary or inappropriate to approach this type of subject with humor?
7. In the chapter "The Fall," would you have done anything differently than Roz did? Who did you sympathize with the most in this section?
8. Did your perceptions of George and Elizabeth as parents, spouses, and people in general change as the book went on? If so, in what ways?

9. Were there scenes in the book that you found exasperating? If so, which ones and why?

10. What do you think George and Elizabeth would think about the ways in which they're represented in the memoir?

11. In your opinion, what is the greatest loss that George and Elizabeth experience as they age?

12. Have you considered your own end-of-life plans? Why or why not? Was the book informational for you, and if so, what did you learn? Has reading this book changed your thinking about your own end-of-life care?

13. What is your opinion of Roz's decision to keep her parents' ashes in her closet?

14. Chast discusses at length her complicated feelings regarding her mother, and how her relationship with her mother differed greatly from the one she had with her father. Do you think this has an impact on Roz's approach to her parents' end-of-life care? Do you think Elizabeth was a good mother? Do you think Roz was a good daughter?

15. Toward the end of the book, Roz struggles with the financial cost of her mother's care, compounded by the fact that she's "not living and not dying." What are your views regarding this hardship, and her mother's condition?

### **Suggested reading**

*Last Resorts, What I Hate, and Childproof* by Roz Chast; *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel; *Calling Dr. Laura* by Nicole J. Georges; *A Very Easy Death* by Simone De Beauvoir; *Elder Rage, or Take My Father . . . Please!: How to Survive Caring for Aging Parents* by Jacqueline Marcell

**Roz Chast** grew up in Brooklyn. She has been a cartoonist for the *New Yorker* since 1978, and has written and illustrated several books. *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* won the 2014 National Book Critics Circle Award, the 2014 Kirkus Prize in nonfiction, and was a finalist for the National Book Award. It was also named one of the Best Books of 2014 by more than fifty media outlets, including *People*, Oprah.com, and National Public Radio.