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## Family Discussion Guide for "Always, Clementine"

*Conversation starters for parents and children*

### Getting Started

#### What This Book Is About

"Always, Clementine" tells the extraordinary story of a brilliant laboratory mouse who discovers the world beyond her cage when she's suddenly freed. Finding a new home with a boy named Gus and his Pop (who teaches her chess!), Clementine learns what it means to use her talents for good. The story is told through letters that Clementine writes to her friend Rosie, who is still in the lab, creating a touching tale about friendship, freedom, and finding your purpose.

#### Key Themes Your Child Will Encounter:

- **Using your talents to help others:** How our special abilities become meaningful when we use them to make a positive difference
- **The power of friendship:** How we can support friends even when we're apart, and how sharing our experiences strengthens our bonds
- **Speaking up for what's right:** The importance of advocacy and standing up for those who need help
- **Finding where you belong:** How home is created through love, acceptance, and shared values
- **Big hearts in small packages:** How anyone, regardless of size, can make a significant impact
- **The responsibility that comes with gifts:** How having special talents comes with the opportunity to help others

**Tip for Parents:** The unique letter format makes this a great book for discussing different ways to tell stories and stay connected with friends. Let your child's curiosity about Clementine's abilities and adventures guide deeper conversations.

### Character Connection Questions

#### About Clementine

- What makes Clementine special beyond just being smart?
- How do you think Clementine felt when she first experienced freedom?
- Why do you think Clementine continues to write letters to Rosie?
- What would you want to ask Clementine if you could meet her?



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### **About Relationships**

- How does Pop help Clementine understand her potential?
- What makes the friendship between Clementine and Rosie so strong?
- How does Gus show kindness to Clementine?
- Which character in the story would you most like to be friends with?

### **Big Ideas to Explore**

#### **Talents and Purpose**

- Clementine is brilliant at many things. What are you really good at?
- How can people use their special talents to help others?
- Why do you think Pop teaches Clementine chess instead of just letting her play?
- What's the difference between being smart and using your intelligence for good?

#### **Freedom and Responsibility**

- What does freedom mean to Clementine?
- How does having freedom also bring responsibility?
- If you could do anything you wanted, what would be most important to you?
- How does Clementine use her freedom to help others?

#### **Friendship Across Distance**

- How do Clementine and Rosie stay close even when they're apart?
- What would you write in a letter to a friend who moved away?
- How can we support friends who are going through difficult times?
- What makes some friendships last even when circumstances change?

### **Fun Conversation Starters**

#### **Chess and Strategy**

- Would you like to learn chess like Clementine? Why or why not?
- What other games require you to think ahead and plan strategy?
- How might playing chess help someone become a better problem-solver?
- If you could teach Clementine a new game, what would it be?

#### **Animal Perspectives**

- What do you think would be most exciting about experiencing the world as a mouse?
- How might Clementine see things differently than humans do?
- What would you want to show Clementine about the human world?
- If animals could write letters, what do you think they'd say about us?

### **Making a Difference**



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- What causes or issues do you care most about?
- How can young people make a difference in their communities?
- What would you do if you had Clementine's intelligence?
- How can small actions lead to big changes?

### **Discussion Activities**

#### **Creative Connections**

- Write your own letter from one character to another—what would Gus write to a friend about Clementine?
- Create a comic strip showing one of Clementine's adventures
- Design a perfect home for a brilliant mouse—what would it include?

#### **Real-World Thinking**

- Research how animals are used in scientific research and discuss different perspectives
- Learn about animal welfare organizations and how they help animals
- Explore the game of chess—try learning basic moves together
- Discuss how letter-writing differs from texting or other modern communication

### **Conversation Tips for Parents**

#### **Creating Safe Spaces**

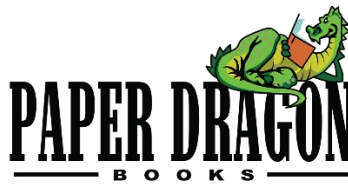
- **Acknowledge the complexity** of topics like animal testing while keeping discussions age-appropriate
- **Celebrate your child's unique talents** and brainstorm ways they could use them to help others
- **Share your own experiences** with friendship, advocacy, or standing up for what's right
- **Follow your child's interests** - if they're fascinated by chess, explore that; if they're drawn to animal welfare, discuss that

#### **Encouraging Deep Thinking**

- **Ask about motivations:** "Why do you think Clementine made that choice?"
- **Explore connections:** "How is this like something in our world?"
- **Wonder together:** "What do you think would happen if..." or "I wonder why the author chose to..."
- **Discuss impact:** "How do Clementine's actions affect other characters?"

#### **Making It Personal**

- **Connect to values:** "This reminds me of how our family believes in..."
- **Share stories** about times when you or someone you know stood up for what was right



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- **Plan activities:** visit an animal shelter, learn chess together, write letters to distant relatives
- **Celebrate uniqueness:** help your child identify their own special talents and brainstorm positive uses

### **Questions by Age Group**

#### **For Younger Readers (Ages 6-9)**

Focus on friendship, kindness, and basic concepts of helping others:

- What's your favorite thing about Clementine?
- How do Clementine and Rosie show they care about each other?
- What would you like to teach a smart mouse?
- How does Clementine help others in the story?

#### **For Older Readers (Ages 10-13)**

Explore deeper themes of advocacy, ethics, and personal responsibility:

- What does the story teach us about using our abilities responsibly?
- How does Clementine's perspective change our understanding of animal testing?
- What role does mentorship play in helping people reach their potential?
- How can individuals create change in systems that seem too big to influence?

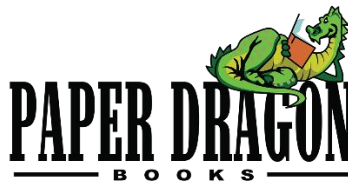
### **Handling Sensitive Topics**

#### **Animal Testing and Welfare**

- Explain that scientists sometimes use animals to test medicines that help people, but there are ongoing discussions about the best ways to do this
- Focus on the importance of treating all living creatures with kindness and respect
- Emphasize that there are people working to find better ways to develop medicines and treatments
- Connect to broader themes of advocacy and standing up for those who need help

#### **The Concept of Captivity vs. Freedom**

- Discuss how freedom means different things to different beings
- Talk about how some animals need care and protection while others thrive in the wild
- Emphasize the importance of making sure all creatures are treated well, regardless of their circumstances
- Connect to themes of making choices and using freedom responsibly



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### **Remember**

"Always, Clementine" provides wonderful opportunities to discuss empathy, advocacy, and using our unique gifts to make the world better. The story's hopeful message—that anyone can make a difference regardless of size or circumstances—can inspire meaningful conversations about your child's own potential for positive impact.

Use Clementine's journey as a starting point to explore your child's interests, talents, and dreams. The book's emphasis on friendship and connection can also spark discussions about maintaining relationships and supporting others through challenges.

Most importantly, let the story's celebration of intelligence, kindness, and courage inspire conversations about the kind of person your child wants to become and the difference they want to make in the world.