

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Dept/Div: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Reading Group Guide – STEPHEN DOWNING IS DEAD by Dan Goss Anderson

1. What various motivations inspired Owen to take Miguel's case? Did he have any doubt that Miguel was innocent?
2. Do you think Owen's agreement to take the case was ethically proper given his lack of experience and the serious consequences of a murder conviction for Miguel?
3. What about the Judge? Should he have appointed Owen given his awareness of Owen's lack of experience? Should the judge have ordered Hiram to continue to represent Miguel? Could he do so, if he'd wished to?
4. Speaking of Hiram, what is your opinion of his withdrawal from the case in all but name on the eve of trial, leaving Miguel in the hands of an attorney who, for all practical purposes, has absolutely no idea of what he is supposed to do? And what about his lack of assistance when Owen was struggling? Do you think he refused to help out of spite? Or just because that was the way he was?

5. Have the interactions between Anglo and Hispanic Americans changed any since 1905? Does the same prejudice exist today that affected the outcome of the murder trial? How did you personally react to the assumption of Miguel's guilt?
  
6. What were your feelings regarding the rule (yes, it was a real Rule) at that time which allowed the trial to begin the same day as the arraignment, with no time for investigation or preparation?
  
7. What motivated Eva to share her husband with Gabby? Was it penitence, catharsis, or a supreme act of friendship? Do you think Eva loved her husband? What drew Gabby and Owen together? What kept them together?
  
8. Recall the hospital scene early in the story, in which the author describes how differently Eva and Gabby handle a cigarette as they smoke. How does this description support the character development of these two women?

9. In literature and on screens big and small, we have all been heavily exposed to portrayals of jury trials and other courtroom scenes. Given the resulting (and perhaps false) sense we have that we understand courtroom procedures and thinking, did Owen's struggles to get up to speed in the courtroom seem realistic to you?
  
10. The story is set mainly in Territorial Arizona. How do the various elements of the setting (the desert, the early 20th century timeframe, the overlapping presence of Mexico and the United States) affect the story? Do you think the story could have been the same if it were set in, say, Chicago, Boston, or New York? If not, how might it have been different?
  
11. Owen and Eva each bears a secret involvement in how Stephen Downing died. Each of them hesitated too long to reveal that secret, and therefore each bears a responsibility for the unjust conviction and the death of Miguel Cordero. Why do you think Eva's lifetime burden of guilt seems so much greater than Owen's?