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Death Along the Spirit Road Reading Guide

Discussion Questions

- 1- Manny returns to Pine Ridge, driving past “shanties and shacks and trailer houses, missing so many windows they looked like school kids who’d been busted in the chops once too often...” What feelings did the contrast between Manny’s white-man’s neighborhood and Pine Ridge’s poverty-ridden area raise in him? How do you think that influenced the way in which Manny conducted himself during the time back home?
- 2- Manny is not the traditional FBI Agent: He drives badly, he usually forgets his gun, and he sports a paunch that running and dieting hardly keep under control. What attributes does Manny possess that offset these shortcomings?
- 3- Acting Tribal Police Chief Lumpy Looks Twice “handpicked” the junior officer on the force, Willie With Horn, to assist Manny in the investigation. How did Manny compensate for Willie’s lack of experience in homicide investigations? How did their relationship change as the case progressed?
- 4- Animosity exists between Lumpy and Manny that predates the novel, back to when they were rivals in school growing up. Besides the obvious historical bad blood between them, why do they find ways to thwart each other’s authority? How do they “bury the tomahawk” and work toward solving the case?

- 5- Manny has relationships of varying types with women in the book: girlfriend Clara; former sister-in-law Elizabeth; niece Erica; reporter Sonja; childhood girlfriend Desiree. Not being especially skilled in the ways of the opposite sex, how does Manny deal with the problems each woman presents?
- 6- Willie maintains an active relationship with his Aunt Lizzy. How does this relationship help Manny and Willie solve the case? How does this relationship throw up stumbling blocks to a successful conclusion of the investigation?
- 7- The locale, Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, is itself like a character in the novel. How important is this setting in helping or hurting the principal characters in obtaining their individual goals?
- 8- Manny and Reuben took different paths in life: Manny went to the nation's capital as a law enforcement officer, Reuben went to state prison as a convicted murderer. How was each man's road shaped by the events in their lives? How did each man learn to understand and accept the other's views? How could the tables have been easily turned early in their lives, with Manny and Reuben swapping destinies?
- 9- Manny was raised by his Uncle Marion after his parents died in a car accident when Manny was five. How does this relationship fall into the concept of family in the *tiospaye* as it relates to traditional Lakota?
- 10- Manny experiences visions as he consciously fights against reconnecting with his Lakota spirituality. How important is this new-found phenomenon in the solving of the homicide? How important is Manny's spirituality to his identity as a Lakota?