

## Reading Guide for NOW AND AGAIN

NOTE: *Some of the questions contain spoilers.*

1. Is *Now and Again* a novel about war or is it mostly about something else?
2. The story is told from 12 different points of view. Why do you think the author made this stylistic choice?
3. Lyle reads in *How To Win Friends And Influence People* that a person usually has two reasons for doing something: one that sounds good and the real one.
  - a. Do you agree with this, or is it overly cynical?
  - b. Why would Maggie say she took the top-secret document from her boss's desk? Is this the real reason?
  - c. Do the soldiers start the website mostly for selfish reasons or mostly for altruistic ones? What does this say about human motivation?
4. The people of Red Bud depend on the munitions plant and the prison for their jobs. Are better lives for some people purchased at the expense of worse lives for others? If so, can anything be done about it?
5. Were the various characters qualified to make some of the decisions they made? If not, what would have qualified them—did they need more information or something else? What does this say about democracy? About government secrecy? How much information does a person need before he or she can act?
6. Maggie leaves home to make a difference in the larger world. Captain Sinclair lets his desire to build a school affect his decision about the convoy.
  - a. Where does a person's first duty lie?
  - b. Can the concept of duty be used to stop people from trying to make a difference in the world?
7. The Professor tells Sinclair that "man is warlike."
  - a. Do you agree, and what does your answer say about the possibility of world peace?
  - b. Colonel Falwell says, "If there's nothing worth fighting for, there's nothing worth living for either." Do you agree with this statement, and does it change your answer to the question above?
8. Chapter 12.1 describes Penn's second meeting with the professor, who declares there is only one meaningful philosophical question, but he is interrupted before he can say what it is. How do you think the professor meant to complete this sentence: "It is whether it is possible to be both moral and..."

9. The novel is told in two parallel plot lines.
  - a. Why did the author keep the two stories mostly separate?
  - b. Only Dolly and Will overlap in both stories. Why?
10. How is the town of Red Bud like the neighborhood in Trenton where the soldiers settle? How is it different? Does small town life empower or repress its citizens, or is it some combination of the two?
11. While the soldiers are searching for truth, Maggie sets off on a quest for justice. Tula wants to make a difference based on her belief in purity.
  - a. Are big ideals within our reach, or is this sort of quest hopelessly Quixotic? What does this say about idealism?
  - b. What does Sandra Day O'Connor symbolize?
  - c. How do Tula's ideas about purity change over the course of the book?
12. What does the novel say about the American dream? Is it likely that characters like Joe Kelly and Tula Santos can escape the circumstances of their birth?
13. What do the windows in the prison basement symbolize? What about the broken ladders that lead to them?
14. What did Louise represent for the captain? Why does he decide to go back to Iraq?
15. What role does journalism play in the book? How does the chorus of voices at the beginning of each chapter fit with this?
16. The last chapter acts as a sort of epilogue to the book.
  - a. What do you think happened to Will? Was he at the mercy of forces beyond his control or was he at least partly in control of his fate?
  - b. What does the ending say about history?