



## Reading Guide for Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is a novel set in Afghanistan, America, and Pakistan that shows how “what happens in a few days, sometimes even a single day, can change the course of a whole lifetime” (p. 142). The book explores themes of privilege and prejudice, friendship and family, guilt and forgiveness.

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### How to be an active reader:

- Use context to determine the meanings of unfamiliar foreign words that Hosseini uses (note how he provides us with translations for the words *laaf* and *Toophan agha* on p. 12, for instance).
  - Use a pen or pencil to underline passages of the text that you find significant. Make comments on your reading in the margin of your text, and jot down your thoughts and reactions at the end of each chapter.
  - Try keeping a reader's journal—at the end of each session of reading, write for five or ten minutes in a notebook: comment on your understanding of each chapter, reflect on the characters, read some of your previous entries, and compare your responses.
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### Think about these issues as you begin to read:

1. The book's narrator believes that he “became what [he is] today at the age of twelve” (p. 1). Is this true? In your own life, what events and choices from your early years have made you the person you are today?
2. Have you ever experienced guilt for acting or for failing to act? What did you do to make your wrong action right?
3. Amir's experiences differ from Hassan's due to the circumstances of his birth, economic class, and ethnicity. Have you ever experienced the benefits of privilege, like Amir did? Have you ever been excluded from a group, as Hassan was? How did you respond?

### Think about these issues as you read further:

4. How do you feel about the narrator in the first part of the book? Is Amir a likeable character? Why or why not?
5. One crucial relationship in this novel is that of Amir and Hassan. Hassan is Amir's friend, kite runner, and often also his protector. But is Amir a friend to Hassan? Can friends envy each other, the way Amir envies Hassan?

6. How does the young Amir understand the reasons why other people treat him and Hassan differently? Does he question the justice of that treatment?
7. Characterize the relationship between Amir and his father, Baba. How does the death of Amir's mother at his birth affect his early years and his relationship with his father? How does immigrating to America change Amir's and Baba's relationship?
8. Throughout the story, Baba worries because Amir never stands up for himself, saying "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything" (p. 22). When does Amir become a person who will "stand up to" things? What causes him to change?
9. In chapter 14, when Rahim Khan calls Amir to ask him to come to Pakistan, he tells him "There is a way to be good again" (p. 192). What does this mean to Amir?
10. Amir's confrontation with Assef in Wazir Akar Khan marks an important turning point in the novel. Why does the author have Amir, Assef, and Sohrab all come together in this way? What is the significance of the scar that Amir develops as a result of the confrontation?

**After you've finished the novel, reflect on the following:**

11. How does Hosseini characterize Afghanistan under the Taliban?
12. What are some of the things that the kite and kite running are symbols of?
13. Identify examples of irony in the book. What themes does Hosseini stress by setting up these ironies?
14. In Rahim's letter to Amir, he says "...in the end, God will forgive. He will forgive your father, me, and you too. I hope you can do the same. Forgive your father if you can. Forgive me if you wish. But, most important, forgive yourself" (p. 303). Why is forgiving himself so important in Amir's development as a character? What actions must accompany his acts of forgiveness?
15. Baba believes that every sin is a variation of theft (p. 17): "When you kill a man, you steal a life.... When you tell a lie, you steal someone's right to the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness" (p. 18). What do you think of his perspective on morality?
16. How does Hosseini characterize religion and spirituality throughout the novel? For example, how does Amir's spirituality change over the course of his life? How do his religious values contrast those of Assef and the Talib?
17. While violence and aggression are how the novel resolves many issues, in real life what are some of the problems—personal, political, and social—that arise from resolving issues in this way?

## Resources for Understanding *The Kite Runner*

### Important Characters

(and page where first mentioned)

<b>Ali</b>	Hassan's father; servant to Baba and Amir (2)
<b>Amir</b>	narrator, Baba's son
<b>Assef</b>	son of one of Baba's friends; child and adult who enjoys hurting others (37)
<b>Baba Farid</b>	Amir's father (2) Amir's driver in Afghanistan (338)
<b>Farzani Hassan</b>	Hassan's wife (205) Amir's boyhood playmate and servant, one year younger than Amir (2); the kite runner (52)
<b>Rahim Khan</b>	Baba's business partner and Amir's friend (1)
<b>Sohrab</b>	Hassan's son (211)
<b>Soraya Zamen</b>	Amir's wife (140) director of the orphanage (253)

### Afghanistan in Summary

- population = slightly less than California
- area = slightly smaller than Texas
- geography = desert and mountainous terrain; little access to water or coastline for trade
- economy = extreme poverty (average yearly income = \$800/per person)

### *Afghanistan's People*

*Population:* 31 million. By comparison, California has 36 million people, New York state 20 million, and Massachusetts 6 million. Of the estimated 4 million refugees in October 2001, 2.3 million have returned.

*Ethnic groups:* Pashtun 42%, Tajik 27%, Hazara 9%, Uzbek 9%

*Religions:* Sunni Muslim 80%, Shi'a Muslim 19%, other 1%

*Age structure:*

0-14 years:	44.6% (male 7,095,117 / female 6,763,759)
15-64 years:	53% (male 8,436,716 / female 8,008,463)
65 years and over:	2.4% (male 366,642 / female 386,300)

*Fertility rate:* 6.69 children born/woman

*HIV/AIDS infection rate:* 0.01%

### *Afghanistan's Infrastructure*

*Communications:* telephone (land lines)--50,000; cellular (mobile)--600,000

*Agricultural economy:* opium, wheat, fruits, nuts, wool, mutton, sheepskins, lambskins

*Industrial economy:* small-scale production of textiles, soap, furniture, shoes, fertilizer, cement, handwoven carpets, natural gas, coal, copper

*Debt (external):* \$8 billion in bilateral debt, mostly to Russia; \$500 million in debt to Multilateral Development Banks

**sources:**

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/af.html#Geo>

<http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0004986.html>

<http://worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/af.htm>

<http://graphicmaps.com/webimage/countrys/asia/afghreg.htm>

### Map of Afghanistan

