



## The Kite Runner

### Khaled Hosseini

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# Introduction

*The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini was published in 2003. Initially published by Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin, *The Kite Runner* was said to be the first novel written in English by an Afghan writer, and the book appeared on many book club reading lists. The novel is set in Afghanistan from the late 1970s to 1981 and the start of the Soviet occupation, then in the Afghan community in Fremont, California from the 1980s to the early 2000s, and finally in contemporary Afghanistan during the Taliban regime.

*The Kite Runner* is the story of strained family relationships between a father and a son, and between two brothers, how they deal with guilt and forgiveness, and how they weather the political and social transformations of Afghanistan from the 1970s to 2001. *The Kite Runner* opens in 2001. The adult narrator, Amir, lives in San Francisco and is contemplating his past, thinking about a boyhood friend whom he has betrayed. The action of the story then moves backward in time to the narrator's early life in Kabul, Afghanistan, where he is the only child of a privileged merchant. Amir's closest friend is his playmate and servant Hassan, a poor illiterate boy who is a member of the Hazara ethnic minority. *The Kite Runner*, a coming-of-age novel, deals with the themes of identity, loyalty, courage, and deception. As the protagonist Amir grows to adulthood, he must come to terms with his past wrongs and adjust to a new culture after leaving Afghanistan for the United States.

The novel sets the interpersonal drama of the characters against the backdrop of the modern history of Afghanistan, sketching the political and economic toll of the instability of various regimes in Afghanistan; from the end of the monarchy to the Soviet-backed government of the 1980s to the fundamentalist Taliban government of the 1990s. The action closes soon after the fall of the Taliban and alludes to the rise of Hamid Karzai as leader of a new Afghan government in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001.

# Author Biography

Khaled Hosseini was born in 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan, the setting of much of the action in *The Kite Runner*. Hosseini and his family moved to Paris in 1976, then immigrated to the United States in 1980 as refugees with political asylum. Hosseini's parents, a former diplomat and a teacher, settled in San Jose, California, where they subsisted on welfare until his father, working odd jobs, managed to independently support the family. Hosseini received a biology degree in 1988 from Santa Clara University and a medical degree from the University of California, San Diego in 1993. As of 2005, he is a practicing physician, specializing in internal medicine in Northern California.

Hosseini published several stories before writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, which was based on an earlier short story of the same title. As a doctor with an active practice and many patients, Hosseini struggled to find time to expand the story, so he wrote the novel piecemeal in the early morning hours. Hosseini contends that treating patients made him a keen observer of people and the ways they express themselves, both verbally and nonverbally.

In 2004, Hosseini was selected by the Young Adult Library Services Association to receive an Alex Award, an honor given to the authors of the ten best adult books for teenagers published in the previous year. Also in 2004, he was given the Original Voices award by the Borders Group, and *The Kite Runner* was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

His next novel, entitled *Dreaming in Titanic City*, is slated for publication in 2006.

# Plot Summary

The Kite Runner tells the story of Amir, an Afghan man living in San Francisco. He receives a call from an old friend of his father's, living in Pakistan, which brings back bittersweet memories of his childhood in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Amir tells of his idyllic childhood in Kabul, where his father enjoyed much financial success and prestige. Amir and his father provide housing for their servants, Ali and his son, Hassan. Social class separates the two boys from true friendship. However, they share much of their time in boyhood. Hassan respects and reveres Amir, even protects him from neighborhood bullies.

In Amir's twelfth year, he wins the neighborhood kite-fighting tournament, which, he prays, will earn his father's respect. All of Amir's childhood, he feels his father wishes for a more manly son. For the tournament, Hassan acts as Amir's helper, holding the spool as Amir works the strings and tries to cut the strings of his opponents' kites. When Amir finally cuts the last kite, Hassan runs it down, as promised.

When Hassan fails to return by dusk, Amir looks for the other boy. He finds a group of bullies taunting Hassan once again. They overtake him easily. Assef, the leader of the group, rapes Hassan as Amir watches, horror-stricken, from his hiding place. He runs part way home and pretends to see Hassan for the first time when he emerges from the alley with the kite.

Amir keeps the crime to himself and tries to bask in Baba, his father's, attention. However, guilt plagues him for years and ruins his relationship with Hassan. He finally makes it look like Hassan stole his birthday money. Ali decides he and his son will leave. Baba weeps as they drive away. Soon, political unrest drives Amir and Baba from Kabul.

They eventually make their way to America, where the previously wealthy Baba becomes a gas station attendant. Amir graduates from high school and enrolls in junior college. He falls in love with Soraya, another Afghan, and they marry just one month before Baba dies of lung cancer.

The call from Rahim Khan, Baba's friend and business partner in Kabul, brings memories and a promise of absolution. Amir flies to Pakistan to see the ailing man. He tells Amir the story of Hassan coming to live with him in Kabul, of Hassan's wife and son, Sohab. The Taliban killed Hassan in the streets months before Amir's arrival in Pakistan. Further, Rahim Khan admits that Baba fathered Hassan, making him Amir's half brother. Such news jolts Amir. He finally decides that he will try to rescue Sohab from the orphanage in Afghanistan.

The trip to Afghanistan proves fateful. Amir learns that Assef, now powerful within the Taliban, bought Sohab. He challenges Amir to a fight to the death. Assef nearly beats Amir to death before Sohab hits him with his slingshot, as his father always threatened to do. They escape to Pakistan. Eventually, they find themselves in Islamabad, where an American Embassy official tells Amir how hopeless Sohab's adoption is. Yet, relatives of Soraya in INS, Immigrations and Naturalization Services, pull strings.

Before Amir can tell Sohab, however, the boy becomes despondent and tries to take his own life. For days, he recovers in the ICU. Eventually, he flies to America with Amir. There, Soraya treats him like the child they could never have. Yet, Sohab lives in silence. Finally, at a New Year's party of area Afghan's, Amir flies a kite with Sohab and sees a hint of a smile. He cuts a competitor's kite and runs it down, offering the same promise Hassan did twenty-six years before.

# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The novel opens in the year 2001. Amir, the narrator and protagonist, lives in San Francisco, California. He shares that he came of age in 1975, while living in Afghanistan at the age of twelve. The past comes to mind after a call from his father's friend, Rahim Kahn, who invites Amir back for a visit. The sight of kites flying in the Golden Gate Park takes Amir back to his childhood in Afghanistan.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The novel occurs in flashback for the first ten chapters. This delays explanation of many elements, such as kites and Amir's relationship to Hassan, though it keeps the reader involved in the plot.

# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter 2 begins a flashback, 26 years, to Amir's childhood. He remembers persuading his childhood friend and servant, Hassan, to slingshot rocks at the neighbor's dog. Ali, Hassan's father, often catches the boys but Hassan never tattles on Amir.

Amir narrates a vivid description of Hassan. He is a slight boy with a china doll face, except for his cleft palate, which Amir refers to as a harelip. The deformity, however, gives the impression that Hassan always smiles, which, for twelve years, is nearly true. Amir also offers a description of his father's estate; a vast home inhabited only by Amir and Baba, his father. Beyond the back yard lies a mud hut in which Hassan lives with his father, Ali. Despite their time together and the close proximity of their homes, Amir rarely visits the mud hut, which he remembers as sparse.

Hassan and Amir share an unusual kinship, because Amir's mother died in childbirth and Hassan's mother left five days after his birth. Therefore, both boys nursed from the same woman. Ali credits their closeness to this fact. One day, Amir remembers, as the boys walked to the cinema, soldiers taunt Hassan, claiming to have had sex with his mother. Amir comforts the younger boy, assuring him the soldiers mean some other woman. However, Sanaubar, Hassan's mother, earned a reputation as an immoral woman, by Afghan standards. She contrasts Ali in every way, with little care for religion, a beautiful body and a harsh spirit. Upon seeing her deformed child, she rejects him and runs away with another man.

One glaring difference between Amir and Hassan, however, lies in their religion and culture. As a Hazara, Hassan occupies a low class in society. He resigns to this fact, serving his masters, Baba and Amir, loyally and happily. The Pashtuns, Sunni Muslims, rule the country. Baba and Amir belong to this class. Amir learns some of

the true history of the Hazara people from an old history book, but his teacher rejects the book as propaganda.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

Though the reader does not yet know of Amir's passion for writing, his character's talent for writing appears in his vivid descriptions of his surroundings. His use of descriptions, from passion and personification add character to many elements of the story. The reader can picture Hassan from Amir's description. Ironically, the reader only learns of the narrator, including his name, from other's conversations with the narrator.

Kinship plays an important role in the novel as well. Amir and Ali seem to infer that, by nursing from the same woman, the boys share a relationship very much like brothers. Later, the reader learns, along with Amir, that the relationship is closer than previously realized. Ali, of course, knows this all along.

Religion, however, plays a smaller role than one may expect. As is universally true, the narrator turns to religion at the hardest points in his life. In childhood, however, it only receives passing attention. Baba's lack of religious involvement prevents a personal connection for Amir.

# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Baba, it is rumored, wrestled a bear in his youth. Amir assures the reader that, though Afghans are known for their tall tales, Baba bares scars that support the story. Baba proves to be a gruff and successful man. Known as Mr. Hurricane, he accomplishes anything he tries. In Amir's childhood, Baba builds an orphanage, though others say it cannot be done. With the orphanage's success comes jealousy from Amir, who wishes for more of his father's attention. Likewise, in business Baba makes a success out of a variety of business endeavors.

Amir sees the seriousness of his father when he questions his religion's teacher's views of sin. Baba assures Amir that the only sin is theft. Any thing, from murder to lying, boils down to theft. Amir later learns that Baba's own father died in a home invasion gone wrong.

Throughout the novel, Amir fears disappointing his father. He proves to possess none of his father's athleticism. What's more, he cannot even pretend to be an interested spectator. He hides his loves for book and poetry. One night, he overhears his father telling Rahim Kahn that he fears his son's fate, if he grows up a weak boy.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Baba's character appears, in the beginning of the novel, as larger than life. Everything he attempts is a success. Amir desires his respect and fears his disapproval. Baba's success makes it difficult for him to tolerate mediocrity in others. In these ways, and in connection with Baba's thoughts on religion, Baba becomes a god-like figure to Amir.

Religion plays only a minor role in the novel, though it is important. Baba illustrates a universal stereotype, that self-made successful people rarely feel a need for devout religion. However, in yet another universal attitude of people, despite their particular religion, during the toughest parts of his life, Amir seeks God's intervention and makes deals to bring about his desires.

# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

The narrator gives even more background information about Baba and Ali in chapter four. The year Baba was born, Ali's parents were killed. Baba's father, a judge, took the orphan boy into his home, as his own son. Despite their close childhood, however, Baba never calls Ali his friend, a habit Amir replicates. The ethnic difference between the Pashtuns, Baba's people, and the Hazaras, Ali's people, appears inseparable.

Amir's memories of Hassan always carry a sense of foreboding, as the frequently points out that they only last for twelve years. The memories include visits by nomads and trips to the cinema. During the day, Amir goes to school and Hassan works as a servant boy. In the afternoons, they retreat to their special place, a pomegranate tree, where Amir reads Afghan legends to the illiterate Hassan.

Amir, however, enjoys pointing out Hassan's ignorance. He taunts and teases the boy with meanings to large words. During one tease, Amir makes up a story as he pretends to read. Hassan reacts with glee, prompting Amir to consider his story writing abilities for the first time.

Soon, Amir writes his first short story, which he takes to his father. Baba does not read the story, seeing writing as a wimpy pastime. However, Baba's friend and business partner, Rahim Kahn, reads the story. He writes a note of encouragement to Amir, offering support for future writing. Amir reads the same story to Hassan, who points out a glaring plot hole. Before Amir rewrites it, however, Afghanistan changes.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

The author frequently uses foreshadowing, in pointing out that Amir's relationship with Hassan only lasts twelve years. Such a device draws the reader into the story,

with a desire to find out what happens to cause the rift between such childhood companions.

The reader perhaps, though, wonders what causes Amir to need to feel superior to Hassan. One reason lies in the fact that Amir perceives Baba's attitude toward Hassan as more than a typical employer and employee relationship. As a result, Amir feels that Hassan draws attention that rightfully belongs to Amir. The real reason for this treatment, however, only comes out in the final third of the novel, when Amir learns of Baba's true relationship to Hassan.

Amir's perception of his father's feelings is exacerbated by the contrasts in the two characters. Amir knows, from an early age, that Baba desires a more masculine son, someone like Assef. Ironically, Amir turns out to be much more decent and productive adult than Assef, who joins the Taliban.

# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Though Ali attempts to reassure the boys that the shooting is only duck hunters, they react with fear. Amir knows, looking back, that such unfamiliar violence was the beginning of the end. That night, however, Amir is glad for the attack, because he receives a rare hug from his father.

The newscasts over the radio fail to make sense to the young boys. They leave to read under their tree. On the way there, they meet neighborhood bully, Assef. Amir's paternity protects him from the bully's taunts. Assef and his friends, however, taunt Hassan about his ethnicity. Though Amir silently considers denying his friendship with Hassan, Hassan defends the boys with his slingshot. Assef offers a threat of future violence and leaves.

Life quickly returns to normal in Kabul. Baba never misses a birthday for either boy. In the boys' twelfth year, he hires a plastic surgeon to fix Hassan's cleft palate. In retrospect, he remembers that, the same year, Hassan stopped smiling.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

The author frequently employs irony in this chapter. First, Amir enjoys the attack, as an opportunity to express and receive emotion from his father. Then, Amir's paternity protects him from threats by Assef, though Hassan enjoys no such protection. Late in the novel, the reader sees the full extent of such an attitude.

Finally, Amir points out that irony of Hassan's plastic surgery, which the reader does not yet fully understand. While Hassan has the deformity of his cleft palate, he smiles frequently. One may assume that a young child would suffer from a deformity and be shy and backward. Yet, after Baba pays to have the surgery, Hassan stops smiling

because the attack of Assef steals the joy from his childhood. The statement of his never smiling is not literal, however, but only a metaphor. The boys enjoy several months between his recovery from the surgery and the attack.

# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Winter in Afghanistan means a three-month break from school. It also signifies the time for kite tournaments. Kite fighting is one of the few activities Amir shares with Baba. However, Baba's equal treatment of both him and Hassan causes jealousy on Amir's part. Amir determines to win the kite tournament, to gain his father's respect and gain pardon for his mother's death in childbirth. Baba predicts a win this year.

For his part, Hassan runs fallen kites better than any other kid in town. The children run down the falling kites, keeping them as a prize. Yet, Amir continues to taunt Hassan. He asks Hassan to vow to eat dirt for him. Ever humble and loyal, Hassan complies. Amir realizes that Hassan is resigned living out his life in the mud hut behind Baba's home.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

The kite tournament signifies the beginning of the conflict of the novel. Here, the introduction ends and the internal struggles of Amir begin. In a traditional way, Amir's tragic flaw is that of his desire for his father's love and approval. However, the factors that prevent him are beyond his control; therefore, there is nothing he can do to gain such affections.

Hassan's limitless love and devotion cause feelings of guilt in Amir, possibly because the young Amir knows that the difference in social class is without real basis. Yet, his lack of emotional connection with adults prevents him from handling such feelings in a fair and honest manner.

# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

The night before the kite tournament, Hassan dreams of rumors of a monster in the lake. Only he and Amir swim safely in the lake. Hassan believes the dream signifies something. Amir ignores Hassan's fears and expresses nervousness about the tournament. Hassan assures him of victory and prays for it. Amir thinks he may be an atheist, like his father.

At the neighborhood field, nearly fifty kites fly high. After hours of fighting and dodging, Amir and Hassan fly one of the two remaining kites. He finally wins the tournament and sees his father clap. He plans to present two kites to his father, his own and that of the second place flier. Hassan runs to catch the second place kite, smiling and promising to find it for Amir. Amir remembers this is the last of Hassan's smiles that he sees.

Hours later, Amir hunts for Hassan, hoping he has the desired kite. He finds Hassan in an alley, with the blue kite. Assef and his gang surround Hassan. Assef demands the kite, but Hassan refuses, wanting to keep his promise to Amir. Amir watches for his hiding place as the gang beats Hassan. Finally, Assef rapes Hassan as the other boys hold him down. The look on Hassan's face reminds Amir of a sheep just before slaughter. Amir weeps and runs home.

On the way, Amir catches up with Hassan. He receives the coveted blue kite, but feels little joy in it. The two boys never discuss what happened in the alley.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter seven shows the greatest range of emotions for a single character within the novel. Amir first suffers from great doubt and desires to drop out of the tournament,

feelings that not trying provides less pain than trying and failing. It is Hassan that encourages him to stay in.

Then, he enjoys the victory and the praise of his father. Yet, this does not satisfy, and he encourages Hassan to chase down the second place kite. In this, Amir's greed for his father's love overrides all else. When he sees Assef with Hassan in the alley, both his fear and his desire to gain the kite override his loyalty to Hassan, regardless of their common background.

The lack of honesty and conversation about what occurs in the alley lives as a real thing between Amir and Hassan. The night before the kite tournament, Hassan has a dream about a monster in a lake where only he and Amir are swimming. Amir sees himself as the monster.

# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Amir goes weeks without seeing much of Hassan. Ali asks Amir something happened after the tournament. Amir denies knowing anything and Hassan just says he is sick.

Anxious to get a way and also enjoy his father's newfound pride, Amir suggests a day trip to Jalalabad. Baba agrees, but before the day comes, he manages to invite a crowd. On the way there, he brags on Amir's win in the kite-fighting tournament.

Internally, however Amir sees himself as the monster in Hassan's dream. He feels no joy in his time away with Baba.

Once they return, Hassan seeks Amir to make amends for the rift in their relationship. The continued loyalty from Hassan brings more guilt to Amir. The continued guilt causes Amir to ask Baba why they never hire new servants. Baba reacts with a vehement denial. He says they are Hassan's family.

Weeks later, after school resumes, Hassan asks Amir to join him at their tree for a story. Amir goes, but feels too much guilt to enjoy the time. He pelts Hassan with pomegranates until the red juice runs down his face. Hassan refuses to fight back. Amir also notices that his relationship with Baba fades after he questions Ali's job.

Nevertheless, Baba throws Amir a large thirteenth birthday party. Local merchant, thankful for Baba's generosity, donate food and supplies. Baba even hires Ahmad Zahir, a famous Afghan pop singer.

Assef attends the party with his influential father. Baba reminds Amir to politely accept Assef's gift. Amir throws the book, a biography of Hitler, into a deserted field. Rahim Khan finds Amir sitting alone. He tells Amir of his attempted marriage to a

Hazara woman years prior. Rahim Khan assures Amir that his family's intervention was for the best. Amir receives a notebook from Rahim, in which to write his stories. In the light of the fireworks that night, Amir sees Hassan serving drink to Assef and his friends.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

The attack on Hassan represents beginning of the action in the novel. It serves as the inciting even of the conflict that only solves when Amir returns to Afghanistan as an adult.

Amir realizes, after Hassan's attack, that personal gain, at the expense of another, rarely brings the satisfaction one craves. Such a principle appears universal in ethical codes worldwide.

Finally, the reader notices a painful situational irony when Assef appears at Amir's party, the one he feels he earned at Hassan's expense. The irony reaches a peak when Hassan serves drinks to Assef, illustrating multiple themes of the novel at once.

# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

The next morning, Amir sees the pile of gifts as blood money. He thinks he only received the attention and gifts because of winning the tournament, because that caused his father's attention. Baba presents Amir with a bicycle and a watch. Amir only enjoys the notebook from Rahim. As he gazes at the pile of gifts, he decides one of them has to go.

The next day, Ali presents Amir with an illustrated copy of the legends the two boys have long enjoyed. After Ali and Hassan leave for the market, Amir hides some of his birthday money and the watch from his father under Hassan's mattress. He reports the theft to his father and waits.

Surprisingly, when Hassan and Ali join them in Baba's office, Hassan confesses to the theft. Amir wants to tell the truth, but fears what it will do to his waning relationship with his father. However, all react with shock when Baba forgives Hassan.

Yet, Ali says they have decided to leave. He resigns his job. It is then that Amir knows Hassan saw him that day in the alley and has told his father the truth. Baba begs them to stay, crying and pleading, to no avail.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

The day after his thirteenth birthday marks the end of Amir's childhood. He feels the consequences of his actions as only an adult can. However, he continues to deal with the results in childish ways, by lying and tattling. Each action to get away from the guilt, however, only compounds it. His childhood spent without emotion close to his father leaves him without the proper social skills to deal with such pressure.

Hassan, however, despite his lack of social status and education, reacts in a healthier and more productive manner. He tells his father the truth and prepares to take the punishment for the actions for which he is accused, despite his innocence.

# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Chapter 10 jumps ahead in time to March of 1981. Amir and Baba flee Kabul as the Russians invade Afghanistan. A man named Karim smuggles them out. They and a truckload of other refugees left Kabul with little trace that they are gone. In the five years since the party, no one in Afghanistan remains trustworthy. They even infiltrate the schools and encourage children to spy on their parents. The new government officials shoot the singer from Amir's party.

At a checkpoint outside of Jalalabad, Russian guards demand further payment, in the form of a night with a young woman in the truck. Baba stands up for her, even when the guard threatens to shoot him. An older guard steps in just before the shot.

Once in Jalalabad, they learn the truck to take them to their next destination is broken. They wait for a week in a crowded, dark basement. Eventually, a man with a fuel tanker agrees to smuggle them into Pakistan. Baba encourages Amir to think happy thoughts and Amir remembers flying kites in Kabul.

Once they evacuate the truck, they learn Kamal, a friend of Assef's, dies in his father's arms. Stricken with grief, Kamal's father shoots himself with the driver's gun.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

The reader never learns of what happens in Kabul between Hassan's departure and Baba's exile after the change in government. Amir does, however, admit that his close relationship with Baba lasts only a short while and dies altogether after Hassan's departure.

Ironically, though, Amir learns that militants raped Kamal, a friend of Assef and one of the boys who held down Hassan in the alley that day. In the manner of many classic tragedies, the incident serves to hurt more than just Hassan. Kamal and Amir suffer, as observers who say nothing. Furthermore, Kamal's father commits suicide after his son's death, which may indirectly connect to the same incident.

# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Ami and his father eventually find their way to Fremont, California. As adults, they share ideas on politics. Baba exercises a more open-minded idea about Israel than most Muslims. He sees their success as earned, regardless of their religion. However, Baba hates President Carter and staunchly supports hopeful Ronald Reagan.

The two men settle into a blue-collar neighborhood, much humbler than their house in Kabul. Baba works as a gas station attendant and refuses ESL classes and food stamps. One day, when a clerk demands an ID for a personal check, Baba reacts with abject offense. Amir remembers how, in Kabul, the bread seller marked notches on stick for credit, and Baba paid him the balance at the end of the month.

One and a half years after reaching America, Baba misses memories of his homeland. Amir, though he enjoys hiding from the memories in America, offers to move back to Pakistan, at least. However, Baba refuses and Amir realizes that the move to America was another gift for his son. In 1983, Amir graduates from high school. A proud Baba insists that his son enroll in college. As a gift, he buys Ami a used car. That night, Baba admits that he misses Hassan. The statement takes some of the joy out of Amir's day.

When Amir enrolls in college, he declares an English major, despite Baba's mumbled protests. Having learned from past mistakes, Amir realizes he cannot live out his father's dreams.

Baba and Amir also find another source of income. Every Saturday, they haggle over items in nearby yard sales. On Sundays, they sell the items for a profit at the San Jose Flea Market. Soon, one corner of the market teems with Afghans, their wares and their culture. There Amir meets General Taheri and his daughter, Soraya. When Amir

questions Soraya's past, Baba rightly guesses that he has feeling for the young woman.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Father and son continue to contrast one another in America. Baba suffers, almost immediately, from the loss of his culture. Amir however enjoys the escape from the land that constantly reminds him of Hassan's attack. In this vein, Baba suffers from poor employment and failing health, while Amir enjoys his high school graduation and falls in love. Amir finally realizes that America represents a final gift from his father. Baba's mention of Hassan lightly foreshadows the truth that Amir learns of Hassan when he returns to Pakistan, later in life.

Though childhood ends for Amir at Hassan's attack, adulthood does not begin until he graduates, as is true for many people. At this point, he begins living for himself and making his own decisions. However cultural norms connect him more to his father than many American young people. Their feelings of loneliness, since leaving their country of birth also drive the two men together in way they never shared in Afghanistan.

# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Amir sees his love for Soraya like an Afghan folk lore. The week represents a long, dark winter. Soraya is the spring's sun. Every week, at the Flea market, he invents reason to walk past Soraya's stand. After nearly one whole year, he briefly talks to her about a book he saw her reading. Such a conversation serves to catch her attention of nearby gossips.

Soraya's mother, who appears hopeful that a decent man shows interest in her daughter, interrupts them. She chaperones many such meetings. Amir learns that Soraya hopes to be a teacher, despite her father's encouragement towards a more lucrative career. A sharp contrast arises between Amir's taunts of Hassan and Soraya's enjoyment in teaching her house cleaner's daughter to read and write.

Finally, Amir drums up courage to give Soraya one of his stories to read. Just then her father, usually absent during their meeting, appears. He throws the papers away and admonishes Amir not to bring shame upon his daughter.

Soon after, Baba becomes sick. After weeks of coughing, Amir takes him to the hospital, where they notice a mysterious spot on his lungs. That night, Amir prays to Mecca for the first time in years. He wishes he possessed true faith.

A biopsy relieves an inoperable tumor. Baba, true to form, refuses chemotherapy. Amir's protests bring a rebuke from Baba for challenging his authority in public. Baba insists that the condition be a secret. As Baba worsens, Amir experiences firsts, such as Baba's first sick day. One day, Baba suffers a seizure at the flea market. The doctor at the hospital shows Amir the masticated tumors in Baba's brain and recommends medicine and radiation, to prolong Baba's life. Many friends visit the hospital, including General Taheri and his family. As Amir cries in the hallway, Soraya

consoles him.

Once again, Baba refuses medical intervention and returns home. Amir seeks for Baba to ask for Soraya's hand before it is too late. He immediately sets up the appointment. The next night, the General accepts the proposal. Soraya insists on telling Amir about her past relationship with an American, that her father forced to her leave. Amir honestly admits that her experience hurts his pride, as he has remained a virgin. However, he envies Soraya's honesty and looks forward to their marriage.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Amir's love interest in Soraya provides a bit of light hearted and positive action for the plot. Up to this point, much of the plot revolves around the tragedy of Hassan's attack. Yet, the reader may enjoy the promise of a love interest between Amir and Soraya. The differing cultures between Amir and many English readers add depth to a sometimes-tired subject.

However, Baba's illness quickly overshadows the lightheartedness of the romance. Baba's death just on the heels of the wedding emphasizes the author's idea that, in life, few things are happy are sad, as much western culture purports. Instead, one's life consists of events that share both positive and negative elements.

# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

The next day, the General throws a proper engagement party. He expresses relief that Amir went about it in the traditional way. According to these traditions, the party begins without Soraya present. Baba offers a stilted speech, given his shortness of breath. The General accepts this offering and Soraya appears. Amir feels quite breathless when he sees her in a traditional red dress. Due to Baba's waning health, the families agree to forgo the long engagement period.

Baba lavishes \$35,000, his life's savings, on the wedding. The author offers a detailed description of an Afghan wedding in chapter 13. Amir first tells Soraya "I Love You" under the sheet at the ceremony. She blushes. He finds himself thinking of Rahim Kahn and Hassan.

Though Amir assumes Soraya will want to set up her own household, she offers to move in with Baba. She assumes much of his day-to-day care. One month after the wedding, Baba dies in his sleep. At a packed funeral, Amir feels without an identity, as he is now as orphan.

Soraya's family, Amir discovers, harbors family secrets, like every family. The General suffers from frequent and excruciating migraines. Also, he lives on welfare willingly, waiting for the Afghan government to recover and call him back for military service. Jamila, Soraya's mother, demonstrates an impressive singing voice, which her husband has always forbidden her to use in public. She could not even sing at the wedding. However, she dotes on Amir. She exhibits some hypochondria, which Amir listens to, when everyone else wearies of the stories.

Soon after marriage, Soraya overhears some women at a cousin's wedding gossiping about her past. Amir reassures her and promises to bury that subject from now on. The

couple gets an apartment and the General gives Amir a typewriter as a housewarming gift. They leave the flea market for the last time and assume the usual marital habits.

Soraya and Amir enroll at San Jose State, in education and English, respectively. The General pushes for a different major for his daughter, but she refuses, rebuking his lack of drive since coming to America.

In 1988, the same year the Russians are driven from Afghanistan, Amir sells his first novel. They also begin trying for a child. Both traditional and medical methods fail. The doctor finally suggests adoption, which Soraya refuses. Amir secretly fears that the infertility is a form of punishment for his dishonesty about the past. With the advance on his second novel, they purchase a house outside of San Francisco and pay for in vitro fertilization. The procedure fails and Amir personifies the infertility as a child, coming between them in their marriage.

### Chapter 13 Analysis

The reader may wonder where Baba gets the money for the wedding when the two men lead such a simple life. Such financial matters, along with Baba's funeral costs, never receive much attention from the author.

Ironically to the reader, Soraya thanks Amir for his acceptance of her past. She feels his defense of his new wife is gallant, However, Amir offers his acceptance mainly out of guilt, for his lack of courage in defending Hassan. Furthermore, he never sees a difference between Soraya's willful and adult decision to elope and his own childish decision to hide.

Because of this guilt, he fears that Soraya's infertility exists as a judgment on him. He never considers that it may be a result of Soraya's actions or that, furthermore, it could be unrelated. His first feelings of religion surface with his father's illness and continue in his wife's physical struggles to conceive.

# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Chapter 14 returns to the present, just after Amir receives the phone call from Rahim Khan. An aged but beautiful Soraya sits, grading paper from the class she teaches. She questions Amir's agitation after the phone call. He tells her he plans to go to Pakistan to see a very ill Rahim Khan. They have been married for 15 years.

Amir goes for a walk near the Golden Gate Bridge. He sees kites flying in the park and thinks back to his childhood. He realizes that Rahim Khan knows his secret, because he mentioned "a way to be good." That night, he dreams of Hassan.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Chapter fourteen picks up where chapter one left off. The phrase "a way to be good" haunts Amir and draws him back to his homeland. Ironically, Rahim Khan exploits this to draw Amir's help, but then encourages Amir to forgive himself for actions that were beyond his control anyway.

The kites symbolize Amir's childhood. They remind him of the happiest and saddest time of his life, simultaneously. When he sees them, he also realizes that his worst fear occurred, that his secret is out, and has been for some time. Ironically, it seems to be a relief to Amir.

# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

As he lands in Pakistan, he remembers the time he spent there with Baba before leaving for America. Despite what his English professors suggest, Amir finds only clichés properly describe his reunion with Rahim Khan.

As they visit, Rahim Khan describes the rule of the Taliban. He lived for years in Baba's house in Kabul, to which Baba one day hoped to return. In the early 1990s, militant factions divide Kabul into sections. Passage between neighborhoods becomes dangerous. Though people celebrated the Taliban at first, as liberators, they eventually find that the new rule proves worse than any previous. Repeated bombing destroys Baba's orphanage.

Amir offers to take Rahim Khan to America, where he might find better and newer treatments. Rahim Khan refuses, resigned to his fate. He does, however, comment on Amir's acquired optimism from his life in America. Finally, Rahim Khan admits that Hassan lived with him in Kabul for ten years. He offers to tell Amir the story.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

The adult Amir uses a new device, that of humor. He defends his use of clichés in Pakistan in a way that relates to the reader. He uses this device in some of the direst situations he faces in Afghanistan.

Though Amir knows that Rahim Khan does not desire a simple visit for old time's sake, the visit begins this way. Finally, with the offer of a story, the real reason for the visit begins. It seems painful for Amir to listen.

# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Out of loneliness, Rahim Khan seeks Hassan ten years after Baba and Amir fled the country. He finds Hassan in a small, unnamed village, a grown man. There, Rahim Khan meets Farzana, Hassan's wife, who is expecting. Militants killed Ali years prior. The first thing Hassan asks about is Amir. He asks, if he writes a letter, can Rahim Khan mail it for him. At first, Hassan refuses to move back to Kabul, but, after consideration with his wife, he changes his mind.

Though Rahim Khan asks Hassan to move into the main house, Hassan refuses, moving, instead, into the same, old mud hut. Upon learning of Baba's death, he mourns for forty days in the traditional way. Soon after, Farzana delivers a stillborn baby girl. Soon after, Hassan's mother appears at the door, very beaten. She sports the same scars for which she once rejected Hassan. Hassan and Farzana nurse her back to health. When Farzana finally has a baby boy, it is Hassan's mother, Sanaubar, who delivers him. They name the boy Sohrab, after a character in the book of legends Amir used to read to Hassan. He grows up very close to his grandmother. What Sohrab is four years old, Sanaubar dies.

Rahim Khan describes the way Hassan took his son to kite tournaments before the Taliban takes over. After 1996, when the Taliban assumes control, Hazara people are no longer safe. Two weeks after taking the country, the Taliban outlaws many things, including kite fighting.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

The plot takes a twist when Sanaubar reappears. Such a revelation once again reinforces Hassan's decent human nature. Hassan's mourning of Baba does this as well. Amir sees Hassan as a perfect child, where Amir fails in so many ways. The

author never brings out a negative aspect of Hassan's personality.

Sohrab obviously symbolizes the end of Amir's guilt. Sohrab also represents a way for Amir to finally step in and save Hassan if only by proxy. Rahim Khan exploits Amir's guilt to save the child he grew so fond of, though Amir does not realize this yet.

# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

After hearing of Hassan, Amir remembers his childhood, though the mental pictures appear fuzzy. After some time of quiet reflection, Rahim Khan produces a letter, from Hassan. The envelope also includes a picture of Hassan and Sohrab. Amir notices how much Sohrab looks as his father did in childhood.

Hassan offers kind greetings and shares dreams of the future. He describes how Taliban officials beat his wife for speaking too loudly in public. After reading the lengthy letter, Amir asks if Hassan still lives in Kabul. Rahim Khan admits that the letter is six months old. He tells how the Taliban, during a time of ethnic cleansing, drug Hassan and Tarzana into the street in front of Baba's house and shot them. Rahim Khan uses Amir's feelings of guilt to persuade him to travel to Kabul, to retrieve Sohrab from an orphanage there. Rahim Khan describes an American couple in Pakistan that takes in such orphans. Then, Rahim Khan delivers the disturbing fact that Ali was sterile. When Amir demands to know whom Hassan's biological father was, Rahim Khan never states, but leaves Amir to guess. He quickly realizes that Hassan was his half brother.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

The reader wonders to what lengths Amir would go to save Sohrab, if he did not feel such intense guilt. However, Amir keeps this guilt at such a forefront that a different result is hard to picture.

The revelation of Hassan's paternity shows irony at many levels. First, Baba, as Amir points out, went against his own tenet that steal anything is wrong. Also, Amir now sees the reason for much of his father's attitude towards Amir, and it has little to do with Amir's personality. Though Amir assumed Baba was disappointed in his bookish

son, the truth is Baba was disappointed in his own susceptibility.

# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

Amir leaves Rahim Khan's apartment and sits in a neighborhood coffee shop. He thinks back to Baba's attitude towards Hassan and feels betrayed. Given Baba's view of dishonesty, the truth seems impossible to comprehend. However Amir feels responsible for Hassan's life, even though much of the outcome lies beyond his influence. Finally, he decides to go to Kabul. He hopes the selfless action will atone for both his and Baba's sins.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

The novel's theme of personal responsibility appears clearly in Amir's personal thoughts after learning of his relationship to Hassan. Though neither his guilt nor the truth about Hassan's paternity are enough to motivate Amir to risk his life in Afghanistan, the two together prove enough to convince him to go back for Sohrab.

# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

On the drive to Afghanistan, in his disguise of traditional Muslim dress, complete with fake beard, Amir suffers from carsickness again. He leaves Pakistan immediately, though Rahim Khan wanted more time to prepare. Amir fears he will change his mind if he hesitates. He decides not to tell Soraya of the trip, fearing that she will only worry and perhaps will insist on traveling to Pakistan herself.

As he rides through Afghanistan with his guide, Farid, he comments that he feels like a tourist, so changed is the landscape. Farid comments, scathingly, that privileged people always do, because they were outsiders even while living in Afghanistan. They stop in Jalalabad for the night. As Farid's family questions his life in America, out of polite interest, Amir feels ashamed of his writing. It seems trivial in the face of such suffering. Farid remains unfriendly towards Amir. He assumes Amir comes to Afghanistan to sell family property and return to America with the money.

Amir shares with the family the reason for his travels. The family respects such a noble cause, not knowing of Amir's feelings of guilt and the reason for them. Feeling guiltier, in the presence of such a needy family, he gives his wristwatch to Farid's sons, which he notices them admiring. That night he suffers nightmares of Hassan. The next day, as they leave, Amir really sees the family, and their need. He realizes that it was not the watch the boys admired, but the plate of food their mother gave him. In the face of such need, he is glad he hid some money under a mattress in Farid's home.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

The praise of Farid's family causes discomfort to Amir, who admits to Farid that the other man was close to the truth in citing selfish reasons for the trip. Amir sees

nothing heroic in his choice to rescue Sohrab.

The author alludes to earlier in the book, when Amir hid money in Hassan's bed in order to get rid of the guilt-inducing presence of the boy. This time, however the adult Amir hides money in order to help Farid's family, who suffer greatly from the oppressive regime of the Taliban.

# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

On the rest of the drive to Kabul, Farid talks in a friendlier manner with Amir. He describes the current events of Kabul, when Amir comments that he does not even recognize the city of his childhood. He observes begging children and notices the lack of adult men, who often fall as casualties of war. He remembers, aloud, the kite shop, which Farid says is gone. The landscape is also barren of trees, which Farid says the poor citizens burned for firewood. Amir asks Farid to take him to the site of Baba's orphanage, now destroyed. There, he meets Taliban officers for the first time. After "the beard patrol" leaves, Farid warns him not to stare. An old beggar approaches and Amir offers him some money. He learns the man once taught at the university with Amir's mother. Such a coincidence, Amir thinks, never surprises an Afghan.

Amir begs the man to tell of his friendship with Amir's mother. He relishes specific stories of her, which Baba could never share. Though he promises to return to help the man, Amir never sees him again.

At a newer orphanage, Amir seeks for Sohrab. They plead for the boy and, only after Amir describes the boy's affinity for slingshots does the director give them any information. He describes how Taliban officials often come and take one child, usually a young girl, for their own, prurient uses. Farid becomes violently upset for the admission and Amir rescues the orphanage director from Farid's grasp. He admits that an official took Sohrab one month previous and tells Amir how to find the man at a soccer match the following day.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

Though at first Farid seems to be a minor character, his presence proves invaluable to Amir in Afghanistan, in navigating the changed landscape and the changed social

order. He offers warnings and suggestions on dealing with the Taliban and describe the events the led up to the present state of chaos in the city of Kabul.

The author further emphasizes the injustice in Afghanistan when the director of the orphanage admits that he sold Sohrab to a government official, apparently for prurient reasons, to protect the rest of the children. In a case of further irony, the man that molests Sohrab turns out to be the same man the previously raped Sohrab's father.

# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

On their way to the soccer match, the men see a body, left hanging in the street as an example. Raid also points out a crippled man, apparently selling his artificial leg for money. After begging Farid to take him there, Amir visits his father's house, now inhabited by the Taliban. Farid advises Amir to forget, but Amir says he is tired of forgetting. He sees the pomegranate tree, still bearing his and Hassan's names, though now the tree stands quite dead.

That night, Amir pays exorbitant prices for a dirty hotel room with bloodstains on the walls. He realizes that the hotel owner needs the money, to support his family. Farid and Amir talk of growing up, remembering good times. Farid describes fighting against the Shorawi in the jihad. They share traditional Mullah Nasruddin jokes. Farid seeks the truth about Amir's quest, but Amir refuses to share it.

Outside of the soccer stadium the next day, a young boy offers the men some "sexy pictures." Amir notices that they are pictures of a fully dressed couple in an intimate embrace. For this, the boy could be severely punished, if caught. During the match, official patrol, whipping anyone who cheers too loudly. At half time, the Taliban parades an adulterous couple into the arena. A man in sunglasses, the man Amir seeks, stones the couple to death, as a public example. After the match, Amir acquires a three o'clock meeting with the man in the sunglasses.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

The sight he witnesses at the soccer match further encourages Amir to get Sohrab out of the country. Yet, Amir's heart breaks for all of his countrymen that suffer at the hands of such vicious rulers. In keeping with one of the novel's main themes, he feels a familial connection to all other Afghans. Because of this connection, he willingly

overpays for a sub par hotel room, when the manager is obviously in financial need.

The author uses suspense in describing the official with whom Amir needs to meet. Nothing of the description gives away the man's identity. In a way, this plays down the intended suspense, but increases the shock of the reveal.

# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

Amir insists on going to the meeting alone, to Farid's relief. As he approaches the man's house, he fears making Soraya a widow. While he waits, he eats grapes from bowl, his last solid food for months.

The mysterious man appears, wearing the same clothes he wore to the soccer match, still with flecks of the couple's blood. He rips Amir's fake beard away, scoffing at such a disguise. The executions, he explains, exist as an example to the public. IT proves an effective means of public education. The man continues, bragging of the Hazara Massacre in 1998 and calling America a "whore" for her indulgences and support of the Taliban's enemies. Furthermore, he calls leaving Afghanistan during troubled times treason, referring directly to Amir and Baba.

After this speech, the man calls for Sohrab and makes the young boy dance, decked in clothes and makeup much like a geisha. Amir notices, inwardly, that in the Taliban official's home, there is music and television, both things forbidden to the general public. Finally, the man takes off his sunglasses and Amir recognizes Assef.

Such a revelation severely unsettles Amir, but he struggles to remain strong. He offers to pay for Sohrab, but Assef laughs, citing his own wealth. Assef tells of his allegiance to the Taliban, following a beating in jail under the Sohware. Amir finds his courage enough to rebuke Assef for his treatment of his fellow countrymen. Finally, Assef offers Sohrab but, for the boy's freedom, Amir must fight to the death. Assef pulls out his old brass knuckles, which he often threatened Amir and Hassan with in boyhood.

A bloody fight ensues, in which Assef delivers almost all of the blows. Finally, Amir feels some freedom from his guilt and begins laughing. Such a reaction enrages Assef. When it appears he will surely win, Sohrab calls for the fighting to stop. Both men

look up to see Sohrab's slingshot pointed at Assef's eye. Amir recognizes a brass ball from the end table in the pocket of the slingshot. Assef laughs at the boy, but Amir remembers Hassan's letter, which told of Sohrab's accuracy with the slingshot, much like his father. The director of the orphanage, too, talked of his abilities. Sohrab hits Assef, in the left eye, just as Hassan once threatened to do. As Assef rolls on the ground, screaming in pain, Sohrab and Amir flee the house.

## Chapter 22 Analysis

When Amir enters Assef's house, he finally faces the bully that has haunted him since that day in the alley. Though he has no fighting skills against Assef, he willingly agrees, much like the lamb that he that he once compared Hassan to. The reader knows the fight will not go well, because Amir foreshadows that the grape is his last solid food for months.

Once again, the author employs irony in that Sohrab saves Amir from Assef. The irony exists in many parts, in that Sohrab uses a slingshot, just as Hassan often threatened to do. Furthermore, he hits Assef in the same eye Hassan promised to take out years prior, though Sohrab knew nothing of such a threat. He even uses the decorative ball from the table, which Amir first noticed in a coffee shop in Pakistan, just as he decided to go after Sohrab. Finally, Sohrab saves Amir, though it was supposed to be the other way around. Yet, Amir feels free after his beating from Assef, as though it takes away some of the pain that Assef inflicted upon Hassan.

# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

During his recovery, Amir finds his memories of the incident hard to understand. He dreams of Baba fighting a bear. Finally, Amir learns that he suffers from seven broken ribs and a cut on his upper lip, which leaves a scar much like Hassan's cleft palate. Farid and Sohrab visit Amir in the hospital in Pakistan. He learns that Rahim Khan left town, leaving only a note asking Amir not to try to find him. Rahim Khan encourages Amir to forgive himself for his actions during boyhood. He admits that Baba punished Amir for his inability to love Hassan publicly. Amir tries to talk to Sohrab, but the boy remains silent.

Amir's first sight of his face is frightening. Farid warns of pursuing Taliban, and Amir also begins to fear suspicious visitors. Amir plays card with Sohrab, finally finding something they have in common. Farid promises to find the Caldwell's the American family Rahim Khan said would care for Sohrab. Farid even visits the American Consulate and finally learns that no such family ever existed. The three travel to Islamabad, which they hope is safer.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

Amir never seems shocked that the American family in Pakistan was only a ruse. The reader may have already suspected that Sohrab would live with Amir, as they share such close, complicated family ties. Though he represents the son Amir could never have, the journey proves long and difficult before they return to the United States.

Farid sees, in ways, like a reincarnation of Hassan. He sticks with Amir through very dangerous times and helps in above and beyond what he was hired to do. Like Hassan's family, Farid's family lives in poverty. This time, however, Amir gives the man the respect that he deserves, as opposed to the taunts that he threw at Hassan.

# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

Amir sees Islamabad as the successful city Kabul could be, if not for the strife there. In a much nicer hotel, Sohrab watches cartoons in amazement. Amir remembers his promise to buy Hassan a television one day. Amir lays down to rest, still recovering from his injuries. When he awakens, Sohrab is gone. Remembering Sohrab's admiration of a nearby mosque. There he finds the boy, looking quite alone. Sohrab admits he fears punishment for the things he has done, including the murder of Assef and all the actions Assef forced upon him. Amir reassures the boy of his innocence in all those things. Amir invites Sohrab to come with him to America. Sohrab fails to respond.

On a picnic the next day, Amir admits his relationship with Sohrab. The boy questions it, wondering why such a secret was kept from Hassan. Amir reassures the boy of their future and promises his father would be proud of him. One month after leaving America, Amir calls home. He finally tells his wife the whole story of his past. He reacts lovingly and asks Amir to bring Sohrab home. Amir feels much relief after being honest with his wife.

The next day, Amir and Sohrab visit the American Embassy in Islamabad. The man there advises Amir to give up, which Amir refuses to consider. The man refers Amir to a lawyer who might be able to help. ON the way out, Amir learns that the man's daughter recently committed suicide.

Soraya promises to call her brother, who works for INS. Amir meets with Faisel, the lawyer. Faisel suggests putting Sohrab in an orphanage and returning to America, making arrangements from there. At first, Sohrab reacts bravely. He compares the bad news to eating sour apples. He says his mother told him, if he only waited for them to ripen, they would be sweet. However, the prospect of featuring to an orphanage

produces a more panicked response.

That evening, Soraya tells Amir that her brother made arrangements for them to return to America directly, without putting Sohrab in an orphanage. He goes into the hotel room's bathroom to tell Sohrab the news. After opening the door, Amir screams.

### Chapter 24 Analysis

At first, the case for Sohrab's adoption seems hopeless. Yet, now that he faced Assef, Amir feels new courage. He also feels some divine blessing for his adoption of Sohrab. He continues to show the optimism that Rahim Khan credited to his new life in America.

As he frequently does, the author uses a suspenseful ending between this chapter and the next. The reader breathlessly waits to see how the relationship between Amir and Sohrab will end. Not even Amir's screams receive explanation until the opening of the next chapter.

# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

Once again, Amir finds himself in a hospital in Pakistan. This time, he awaits news on Sohrab's condition. As he did after learning of Baba's illness, Amir prays. Sohrab survives his suicide attempt. After three days, the hotelkeeper kicks Amir out, due to the stigma of a suicide on the property. To cheer the despondent Sohrab, Amir brings him the book *Shahnamah*, which contains the story of his namesake.

Sohrab admits he longs for his old life, before the death of his grandmother and parents. Amir begs for forgiveness from Sohrab, because Amir first promised, in the mosque, never to leave the boy, then attempted to temporarily place the boy in an orphanage. Sohrab never verbally grants Amir the desired forgiveness.

Back in America, Amir considers the whole story. He admits that few stories of true life have a truly happy ending. After seven months at home, Sohrab remains silent. The General demands the truth about the boy's background. Amir admits only that Sohrab is his nephew. He demands that they never refer to the boy as "that Hazara."

The silence affects Soraya most, who dreamed of Sohrab as the child they could never have. After attacks on America on September 11, 2001, Amir and Soraya help with various projects of Afghan aid. Military officials in Afghanistan finally call the General home and Jamila plans to soon join him. As Amir promised in the hospital in Pakistan, following Sohrab's suicide attempt, he prays daily.

On New Year's Day, the family attends a large party of Afghans in San Francisco. Sohrab blends into the crowd with his habitual silence. Upon seeing a kite-fighting tournament, Amir tells Sohrab of Hassan's ability as a kite runner. Amir purchases a kite and asks Sohrab to help him fly it. The boy says nothing, but follows Amir into the field. When a kite falls, Amir offers to run it down and sees a slight smile form

Sohrab. He promises, 1,000 times, to get the kite for Sohrab, just as Hassan once promised him.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

Time passes quickly, in sprints, in chapter twenty-five, as the author tries to wrap up many elements of the story in a small space. The reader learns that Sohrab attempts suicide and Amir responds by once again bargaining with God for the boy's life, much as he did after learning of his father's illness. This proves to be a promise that Amir lives up to, throughout the book.

The author also ends without the typical happy ending, neither is it sad. Soraya gains a son, though the boy proves difficult to love, because of his lack of human interactions. Yet, he does gain access to America and lives with Amir and Soraya. The General, now much older and sicker, returns to Afghanistan, with his wife soon to follow. Such a parting is bittersweet.

The novel closes as Amir runs a kite for Sohrab, a complete turnaround from Hassan's kite running days. By way of resolution, he gains from Sohrab only the faintest of smiles. In this way, the author emphasizes that realistic stories are rarely happy or sad, but they are authentic.

# Characters

## Amir

The protagonist of the story, Amir, tells it from a first personal point of view. After a phone call from a friend of his father's Amir recalls his childhood in Kabul, Afghanistan. There, he grew up as the only son of an affluent widower. He shares much of his childhood with the servant's son, Hassan, though Amir never refers to Hassan as a friend, due to their differing social backgrounds.

Throughout boyhood, Amir seeks the elusive respect of his father, Baba. Finally, he feels that if he wins the local kite-fighting tournament and presents his father with the kite of the second place boy, he will insure his father's respect and love. However, when Hassan runs to recover the kite, a neighborhood bully rapes him in the alley. Amir witnesses this from a distance and carries the guilt the rest of his life. His guilt for not aiding Hassan taints the attention from his father and haunts him for much of his adolescent and adult life.

During the beginning of years of political unrest, Amir and Baba flee Afghanistan and eventually move to California. In America, Amir hides from his memories with some success. He meets and marries another native Afghan, Soraya. However, after fifteen years of marriage, Amir receives a call from Baba's business associate, Rahim Khan. When Amir travels to Pakistan to see the ailing man, he learns that the Taliban has killed Hassan. What is more, Hassan was actually Amir's half brother. To atone for his lack of courage the day Hassan was attacked, Amir travels to Kabul to rescue Hassan's son, Sohrab, from an orphanage there.

Finally, Amir finds Sohrab in the custody of a Taliban official, Assef, the same bully that raped Hassan years prior. Just as Hassan often did, Sohrab rescues Amir from Assef. The two flee to Pakistan, then America. Throughout the novel, Amir feels a lack of connection with his father. These feelings cause his mistreatment of Hassan.

However, Amir learns that much of these feelings stem from Baba's guilt about Hassan's paternity. Therefore, the guilt and responsibility Amir feels for much of the novel parallels that felt by his father.

## **Rahim Khan**

Baba's friend and business associate, Rahim Khan, spends much time in Baba's home in Kabul. The nature of their business remains a mystery. Amir often seeks for Baba's approval of his creative writing. In boyhood, he never gains it. However, Rahim Khan reads Amir's stories and encourages him to continue his writing. For his thirteenth birthday, Rahim Khan gives Amir a journal to write his stories in. It is the only gift that Amir keeps.

The entire plot of the novel begins after a phone call from Rahim Khan. He calls Amir in California, tells Amir there is a way to be good again. Amir realizes Rahim Khan knows his past. He goes to Pakistan to visit the ailing man. Rahim Khan tells Amir about his half brother relationship to Hassan and implores him to rescue Sohrab. Rahim Khan promises that an American couple in Pakistan will care for the boy.

Once Amir and Sohrab return to Pakistan, they find Rahim Khan gone. A letter implores Amir to forgive himself and admits that Baba punished Amir for his mistakes concerning Hassan. Rahim Khan begs Amir not to try to find him. Amir and his assistant, Farid, find that the American couple never existed.

## **Hassan**

Hassan is the son of Baba's servant, Ali. He is the same age as Amir; in fact, the two boys nursed from the same breasts. Amir's mother dies in childbirth and Hassan's mother leaves shortly after the birth of her son. Amir remembers Hassan as a beautiful, bollie child, in spite of his cleft palate. In fact, the deformity gave the impression of a perpetual smile, which was in keeping with his kind, humble spirit.

Despite many actions of Amir to demean the illiterate, uneducated boy, Hassan remains fiercely loyal. He promises, 1,000 times, to retrieve the desired kite for Amir. Hassan was the best kite runner in the city. He even refuses to give up the kite, in the face of Assef and his gang. As a result, Assef rapes Hassan while Amir watches from a hiding place, afraid to intervene.

The relationship of the boys never recovers, though Hassan seeks to repair it several times. After the attack by Assef, Amir never sees Hassan smile again. At various milestones, Baba and Amir think of Hassan, such as after Amir's graduation from high school and during Amir's wedding.

When Amir travels to Pakistan to visit Rahim Khan, he learns that Hassan returned to Kabul to live with Rahim Khan for ten years. Hassan wrote a touching letter, six months prior to Amir's arrival in Pakistan. Furthermore, he learns that Taliban officials shot Hassan. Amir finally finds absolution from his guilt by rescuing Sohrab, Hassan's son, from war-torn Afghanistan.

## **Baba**

Amir's father, Baba, appears little in person, for the first part of the novel. His presence, though, invades Amir's every action. However, Baba, a self-made businessman, openly admits his desire for a more masculine son. Amir knows his love of writing and physical inability appear as weaknesses to Baba. Amir also senses that some other factor prevents Baba from fully showing his love for Amir. Amir assumes, in boyhood, that the reason is his mother's death after childbirth. However, when Amir learns of his relationship to Hassan, as brothers, he realizes, and Rahim Khan confirms, that Baba held back because it was socially unacceptable to show love to both boys.

Baba's character is always that of a hard-working and proud man. In Afghanistan, he achieves much success in a variety of business. Rahim Khan acts as his close friend

and business partner. For much of Amir's childhood, Baba appears little outside of his home office, where he smokes a pipe and discusses business with Rahim Khan.

When political strife forces Baba and Amir to move to America, Baba maintains his proud demeanor. He refuses government assistance on several occasions. He demands that Amir finish school and enroll in college. He also remains proud of his heritage and enjoys time around other Afghans at the San Jose Flea Market.

Baba's pride is never more evident than after he learns of his cancer. Not only does he refuse treatment to extend his life, he continues smoking. He also makes Amir promise to tell no one about the illness. Ironically, he collapses one day at the flea market and everyone finds out. In keeping with his popularity in life, his funeral is very well attended.

## **Ali**

Hassan's father, Ali, came to live with Baba's family as a child, after his own parents died in an automobile accident. Though Baba and Ali occupy different social classes, the two became very close. Ali is slightly crippled from childhood tuberculosis. Many of the neighborhood children mock him for his limping gait. For all of Amir's life, Hassan and Ali lived on his father's property, in a simple mud hut. Ali and Hassan seem satisfied with their place in society. They work hard to run Baba's household with much loyalty.

When Amir plants money in the hut and accuses Hassan of theft, Ali learns of Hassan's attack by Assef. Though Baba offers forgiveness, much to Amir's surprise, Ali insists upon leaving anyway. Baba reacts with crying and pleading, but to no avail.

Amir later learns that insurgents kill Ali during an intense time of ethnic cleansing. Furthermore, Amir learns that Ali was sterile and the son from his younger, beautiful wife was actually fathered by Baba, making Hassan Amir's half brother.

## Sanauber

Amir describes Hassan's mother, Sanauber, as a beautiful woman, much younger than Ali. However, Sanauber suffered from a reputation as an easy woman. One day, some soldiers tease Hassan with the fact that they slept with his mother. Amir assures the boy that the soldiers mean someone else.

The beautiful Sanauber rejects her deformed son at birth. She mocks Ali, saying that, though Ali's facial muscles cannot smile, his hair-lipped son always smiles. Days after Hassan's birth, she leaves town.

Many years later, after Hassan returns to live with Rahim Khan in Baba's house, during the reign of the Taliban, Sanauber appears at the door. Taliban soldiers have attacked her, cutting her formerly beautiful face. Hassan, as is his nature, takes her in. He and his wife nurse the woman back to health. Sanauber delivers Hassan's son, Sohrab. She becomes very close to the child and lives with the family until her death four years later.

## Social Factions

In Afghanistan, there live two primary social factions, the Hazara and the Pashtuns. Amir and his father are part of the Pashtuns, Sunni Muslims that enjoy upper class living. They occupy the places of power in society and government.

Hazara, such as Hassan and Ali, are Shi'a Muslims. They usually hold menial jobs, such as servants. They are identified by what the narrator describes as the "mongoloid" features. Throughout the book, Hazara clearly live as lesser citizens. However, during the reign of the Taliban, mass ethnic cleansing wipes out thousands of Hazara throughout the country.

## **Assef**

In Amir's neighborhood, he frequently suffers the ridicule and threats of Assef, a neighborhood bully. Assef belittles Amir for his close relationship with Hassan, a Hazara. The children in the neighborhood fear Assef for his reputation for fighting with his brass knuckles. During one confrontation, Hassan stands up to Assef and threatens to shoot his eye out with his slingshot.

After Amir wins the kite-fighting tournament, Hassan runs to catch the second place kite. Assef corners Hassan in an alley and demands the kite. Ever loyal, Hassan refuses and suffers a brutal rape as a result. No one ever tells on Assef.

Years later, when Amir returns to Afghanistan to rescue Hassan's son, Sohrab, he discovers that the Taliban official that bought Sohrab from the orphanage is none other than Assef. Amir watches as Assef stonewalls an adulterous couple during half time at a soccer match. Assef says Amir can only have Sohrab if he wins a fight to the death; he pulls out his brass knuckles. Immediately, Amir falls and suffers a horrible beating. Finally, a sobbing Sohrab pleads for the fighting to stop. He holds his slingshot for defense. Ultimately, he fires a ball from the end table into the same eye his father threatened to take out years before.

## **Karim**

When political unrest first occurs in Afghanistan, Amir and Baba flee the country with the help of a people smuggler, Karim. However, upon arriving in Jalalabad, they learn that Karim operates a dishonest business. The truck to take them to Pakistan is delayed, which Karim knew before leaving Kabul. Baba nearly kills Karim upon learning of the deceit.

## Soraya Taheri

One day at the San Jose Flea Market, Amir sees another Afghan, young woman. He begins fishing for details, but Baba refuses to repeat gossip. Amir is quickly infatuated with Soraya. He compares the week to a long winter from a fable. Soraya he calls his spring sun.

Amir suffers much from traditional afghan ways, which state that Soraya cannot converse with him alone. Finally, Amir goes to her father and gains a blessing for marriage. Soraya tells Amir the truth about her past, in which she ran away with an American man. Her father forced her to return and the family moved to California. Amir accepts his history, still vowing his love for Soraya. He envies her ability to tell the truth and longs to tell her about Hassan and the attack by Assef.

Both Amir and Soraya enroll in college; Amir majors in English and Soraya in education. Unfortunately, however, their attempts at starting a family fail. Amir even uses the advance from his second book to finance in vitro fertilization. Finally, a doctor mentions adoption. Soraya rejects this idea, and Amir feels the infertility affects their marriage like another lover.

When Amir finally tells Soraya the whole truth, from Pakistan where he stays with Sohrab, Soraya accepts it lovingly. She asks Amir to bring the boy back to America. However, Sohrab's habitual silence proves discouraging for Soraya.

## General Taheri

Amir first sees General Taheri at the San Jose Flea Market, dressed in a grey suit that speaks of his social class in Afghanistan. The General, though, wears the same suit, day after day. He intimidates Amir, especially after Amir falls in love with Soraya. In fact, Amir arranges to meet with Soraya in her father's absence for many weeks. When the General catches them, he expresses his disapproval and reminds Amir of what

such private, personal conversations between a man and woman mean in Afghan culture. The General fears social disgraced.

However, when Amir sends his ailing father to ask for Soraya's hand, General Taheri agrees right away. He welcomes Amir into the family and both of Soraya's parents express relief that a decent, Afghan man expressed interest in their daughter.

After his marriage to Soraya, Amir learns more of The General's personality. He lives solely on government assistance, hoping to soon return to work for the military in Afghanistan. In contrast with Baba, he feels no shame in accepting assistance. He does, however, suffer from depression, retreating to his bedroom for days at a stretch.

After the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, the General returns to Afghanistan, to work for the military.

## **Farzana**

Amir only learns of Farzana, Hassan's wife, after her death. She meets and marries Hassan while he lives in a small, unnamed village outside of Kabul. They return to Kabul to live with Rahim Khan. She gives birth to a stillborn daughter shortly after arriving there. During her second pregnancy, Sanauber, Hassan's mother, returns. Farzana helps nurse the aged woman back to health and Sanauber delivers Sohrab, Hassan's son. After the Taliban comes into power, officials execute Farzana and Hassan on the street in front of Baba's house in Kabul. Those of this social class, the Hazara, were often executed in mass ethnic cleansings.

## **Sohrab**

When Amir returns to Pakistan to visit the ailing Rahim Khan, he learns of Hassan's son, Sohrab. Even in a blurry picture, Amir sees the resemblance to his childhood companion. Rahim Khan mentions to Amir that he might find absolution from

rescuing Sohrab, as he wishes he did Hassan in the alley many years ago. At first, Amir rejects the idea, for the obvious perils it entails. Shortly, however, his guilt motivates him to attempt the rescue, with the assumption that someone else will care for the boy once they return to Pakistan.

In Kabul, Amir is shocked to learn that Assef bought the young boy from an overfull orphanage. When Amir demands the boys' release, Assef insists on the fight to the death. With little choice for another option, Amir suffers from a brutal beating at the hands of Assef. Finally, Sohrab shoots Assef with his slingshot, at which he proves skilled. Sohrab and Amir flee the house amid Assef's agonizing shouts.

Once they return to Pakistan and Amir leaves the hospital, they learn that the promised caregivers never existed. Amir decides to care for Sohrab himself and offers to take the boy back to America. Sohrab expresses interest and begs that he never have to return to an orphanage. However, legal advice in Pakistan advises for a temporary stint in a Pakistani orphanage that Amir could return to the United States and arrange for the boy's transfer. Sohrab, overwhelmed by such a prospect, attempts suicide. Despite Amir's desperate pleas and apologies, the boy remains stoic for years. They return to America together, thanks to Soraya's brother, who works for INS.

Finally, on New Year's Day, 2002, Amir takes Sohrab to a kite-fighting tournament in San Francisco. He describes Hassan's skill of running kites. As Amir runs a kite for Sohrab, he glimpses the boy's first smile.

## **Farid**

Rahim Khan arranges for Farid to drive Amir, in disguise, to Kabul. Farid assumes that selfish reasons motivate Amir's return to Afghanistan. As a result, Farid treats him with disdain. The first night, they stop at Farid's house where Amir describes his business in Kabul. The family proclaims the cause noble and Farid apologizes for his cool attitude. Amir rushes it off.

Also at Farid home, Amir see his sons admiring his watch and he gives it to the boys. The next morning, Amir realizes the boys actually admired he food their mother served Amir. he receives some consolation from the knowledge that he hid money under the mattress the night before.

Once in Kabul, Farid and Amir become close. Farid even offers to go in Assef's house, though he clearly does not want to. Amir declines the company. When Amir awakens in the hospital in Pakistan, Farid is there with Sohrab. The man continues to help Amir and finally calls him a friend. Amir offers Farid a generous payment for all his services, by Afghan standards.

## **Raymond Andrews**

In Islamabad, Pakistan, Amir visits the American Embassy. The man's Les Miserable's poster appears symbolic to Amir, who seeks for asylum for Sohrab in America. The man's seemingly unsympathetic attitude convinces Amir that Andrews must not have children. After leaving Andrews' office, Amir learns that, in fact, Andrews' daughter recently committed suicide.

## **Omar Faisal**

A lawyer in Islamabad, Faisal, advises Amir to place Sohrab in an orphanage an return to America, to make adoption arrangements there. This decision causes Sohrab to attempt suicide. Arrangements by Soraya's brother, who works for INS, ease Sohrab's entrance to America without placing him in an orphanage.

# Objects/Places

## America

After political unrest forces Baba and Amir to flee Kabul, they make their way to America. Though life in America proves hard for Baba, Amir sees it as a final gift from Baba to his son, Amir. Eventually, Amir enjoys much of the success that Baba knew in Afghanistan. From the beginning, Amir appreciates his ability to forget the past in America.

Assef, however, calls America the "whore." He tells Amir that men who flee Afghanistan during the unrest are like traitors. In the end, however, Amir takes Sohrab to America, where the boy begins to heal from the emotional and physical pain of his past.

## Kabul

Amir grows up in his father's house in Kabul, Afghanistan. At that time, the city enjoys moderate prosperity and Baba is among the wealthiest and most powerful. Amir and his servant's son, Hassan, freely run through the streets, enjoying treats from the market and participating in kite fighting tournaments. The only threat to their safety at this time is the neighborhood bully, Assef. Hassan protects them from Assef with his slingshot.

Amir flees Kabul with his father, however, during the first political unrest. When he returns, many years later, he finds a different city. Kabul lies in ruins after decades of unrest. , fighting continues. Amir rescues Sohrab from the war torn city. They flee to Islamabad, a modern city in Pakistan that Amir sees as the way Kabul could have been.

## **Kite**

In childhood, a victory in the winter kite-fighting tournament represents, to Amir, a way to ensure the love and respect of his father. With Hassan's help, he defeats all others, as his father cheers nearby. To complete the victory, Amir desires the kite of the second place boy. Hassan promises to get the kite.

Amir's desire for the kite supersedes his friendship with Hassan and prevents him from telling the truth about Hassan's attack. Guilt about that day immediately taints Amir's victory. Furthermore, it pollutes his happiness for many years.

When Amir finally atones for his perceived sins, by bringing Sohrab to America, he takes the boy to a kite-fighting tournament. After months of enduring Sohrab's guilt producing silence, he sees a glimpse a smile from Sohrab when they fly kites together.

## **Pomogranete Tree**

In childhood, Amir and Hassan escape to the shade of a nearby pomegranate tree. There Amir reads Afghan legends to the illiterate Hassan. Though Hassan enjoys the times, Amir frequently uses Hassan's ignorance to belittle the other boy. However, the boys carve their names into the trunk of the tree.

After Hassan's attack, he begs Amir to join him once again at the tree. There, Amir pelts Hassan with fruit, desiring for Hassan to finally fight back. Hassan responds meekly, as usual, and Amir only feels more guilt.

When he returns to Kabul in adulthood, Amir visits the tree. He finds it, with the names still engraved in the trunk. However, the tree stands dead, symbolizing Hassan's lost life and the injured friendship that Amir never recovered.

## Jeans

In Kabul during Amir's childhood, blue jeans symbolized wealth. Amir and his peers called them cowboy pants, because they saw them on the actors in the westerns they enjoy. When Amir seeks Hassan after the kite tournament, a vendor recognizes Amir as a wealthy boy and wonders why he so desperately seeks the inferior son of his servant.

## Watch

For Amir's thirteenth birthday, he receives, from his father, a bicycle and a watch. Both items are desired of every boy Amir's age. However, Amir feels much guilt about the attack on Hassan. He feels no pleasure in any of his gifts. Furthermore, he feels that his father only lavishes such prizes on him because of the victory at the kite-fighting tournament, which directly relates to Hassan's attack.

When guilt finally becomes too much, Amir hides the expensive watch under Hassan's bed, in an effort to rid the house of the boy's guilt-producing presence. To Amir's shock, Hassan admits to the theft. Further shock occurs when Baba forgives Hassan. Yet, Hassan and Ali leave town. Baba and Amir's relationship never resumes the closeness they enjoyed after the kite tournament.

When Amir returns to Kabul for Sohrab, Hassan's son, years later, he gives another watch to Farid's sons. He also hides money under their mattress, as he did for Hassan. This time, however, he seeks to help the needy family.

## Shahnamah

Throughout boyhood, Amir reads the legends in Shahnamah to Hassan. Both boys especially enjoy the story of the soldier, Sohrab. They read the book until Amir's copy

wears out. Then, for Amir's thirteenth birthday, Ali presents Amir with a hand illustrated copy that represents a considerable cost for someone of Ali's humble means. Amir, due to his feelings of guilt, fails to enjoy the gift.

finally, when Sohrab lies in the hospital, recovering from his suicide attempt, Amir brings him a copy of Shahnamah, and reads to the boy the story of his namesake.

## **San Jose Flea Market**

Amir and his father attempt to make extra money by purchasing used items at yard sales and selling them for a profit at the San Jose Flea Market. Soon, one corner of the market teems with Afghan people and culture. Amir glimpses a little of his childhood in the crowds of vendors there. It is at the market that Amir meets his future wife. After Baba's death, they discontinue their weekly trips to the flea market.

## **Green**

Green is the color of Islam. Copies of the Koran are wrapped in green cloth. In keeping with tradition, Amir wears a green suit on his wedding day. He feels the green also symbolizes the growing that has occurred in his life.

## **Aflatoon**

Amir names his cocker spaniel, a gift from Soraya's father, Aflatoon. In his native language this means Plato, in reference to the Greek philosopher.

## **Pakistan**

Many political refugees from Afghanistan flee to neighboring Pakistan. Amir and his father are among the first waves of fleeing citizens. From there, they travel to

America. Later, Amir travels to Pakistan to visit the ailing Rahim Khan. From there, he goes to Afghanistan, to rescue Sohrab. They return to Pakistan. After much opposition, Amir returns to America with the boy.

## **Jalalabad**

Soon after winning the kite tournament, Amir asks his father to take him to the nearby city of Jalalabad. Amir desires private time with his father, but Baba soon turns the trip into a family event. Sandwiched between younger cousins, Amir exhibits car sickness for the first time. Nonetheless, Baba brags on Amir's victory, which only makes him feel more guilty.

## **Ghazi**

Amir remembers visiting the Ghazi soccer stadium as a boy and watching exciting matches on the lush grass field. When he returns to rescue Sohrab, however, he finds a more dilapidated arena, with no grass. There, Amir watches a man, who turns out to be Assef, stone an adulterous couple to death in front of the crowd during half time.

## **Brass Balls of Table**

After learning from Rahim Khan that Hassan was his half brother, Amir retreats to a neighborhood coffee shop. He absentmindedly notices a loose decorative ball on the table and stoops to tighten it.

Days later, when Sohrab saves him from Assef with his slingshot, Amir recognizes the projectile as the same type of brass ball, which Sohrab removed from the end table in Assef's house.

# Themes

## Ethnic Pride

Baba expresses a great deal of pride and attachment to his culture. As a result, the move to America fills him with a loss of identity. He recovers some of it at the San Jose Flea Market, amid his fellow countrymen once more.

The escape from the culture of his birth realizes Amir, however. Though he enjoyed much of childhood, Hassan's attack in the alley gives the whole of Amir's childhood a bad taste.

Though, in America, he spurns some of his culture, in talking to Soraya privately without her father's blessing, he honors it in asking his dad to go to the General concerning their relationship.

Finally, Amir becomes proud of his blended culture. He never forsakes the better parts of his birth country. He also enjoys many of the more progressive aspects of his new home in America. Though he enjoys visiting Pakistan, and seeing the food and hearing reference to legends of his childhood, he likes the feeling of hope that he gained from America.

## Social Inequality

From boyhood, Amir recognizes the difference in social class between himself and Hassan. As a Pashtun, Amir enjoys a higher social class. As a result, his father works in the upper class, starting his own businesses and living in a large house that he built

Ali, though, who grew up in Baba's father's house, comes from a different background. As a Hazara by birth, he works as a house servant. Though he grew up in the home of a

Pashtun, his appearance gives him away as a Hazara. His birth, not his upbringing decides his class. However, Ali and Hassan seem satisfied with their social class during Amir's childhood.

Hazara, a more mongoloid looking people, by Ami's description, life as servant. They cannot attempt school or hold office Though Amir taunts Hassan with his illiteracy, Soraya shows compassion on her servant girl and teaches her to read.

During the occupation of the Taliban, government officials execute scores of Hazara. Assef proudly aids in such ethnic cleaning, ragging n such massacres to Amir.

When Sohrab returns to America with Amir, General Taheri refers to him as that Hazara boy. This is the first mention of class in America. Ami quickly rebukes the comment.

## **Personal Responsibility**

Many of the actions of the main, male characters stem from their feelings of personal responsibility. Ali comes to live with Baba's family as a child, because Baba's father, a judge, feels responsible for the boy who passes through his courtroom after the death of his parents. Baba takes on this responsibility in adulthood and employs Ali and, later, Hassan, making them part employees and part family. Late, Amir realizes that part of Baba's feeling of responsibility may stem from his guilt over the paternity of Hassan, who is really his son.

Ami feels responsible, in slightly different fashion, for Hassan's life after the attack in the alley. Amir feels that many of the evens after, including Hassan's execution occur because of Ami's lack of courage in the alley. Though many suffer from the Taliban regardless, Amir feels that his guilt, which drives Ali and Hassan from Baba's house, put them in jeopardy later in life.

This feeling of responsibility eventually drives Amir back to Afghanistan, to rescue Sohrab. Rahim Khan puts the thought in his head, the absolution may lie in this action. After Sohrab's rescue, Amir continues to feel responsible for the boy, though in a different way. He feels responsible, as a fellow countryman. Furthermore, he seeks for Sohrab to fill the emptiness in his marriage that results from Soraya's infertility.

## **Identity and Self-discovery**

Throughout the novel, the protagonist struggles to find his true purpose and to forge an identity through noble actions. Amir's failure to stand by his friend at a crucial moment shapes this defining conflict. His endeavor to overcome his own weaknesses appears in his fear of Assef, his hesitation to enter a war-torn country ruled by the repressive Taliban, and even his carsickness while driving with Farid into Afghanistan. Late in the novel, Amir discovers his father's lifelong deception about his half brother Hassan, a revelation that leads to a deeper understanding of who his father was and how he and his father had both betrayed the people who were loyal to them.

## **Family, Fathers, and Fatherhood**

In this novel in which family relationships play a great part, mothers are strikingly absent. Although Soraya is a loving mother to Sohrab, Amir and Hassan grow up without their mothers. Meanwhile, the tension of father-son relationships is exemplified by Baba's treatment of his sons, Amir and Hassan. While Baba is disappointed in Amir's bookish, introverted personality, to protect his social standing, he does not publicly acknowledge his illegitimate son Hassan whose mother is a Hazara. Likewise, General Taheri is a traditional, highly critical father who chafes at his grown daughter's sometimes rebellious attitudes. The theme re-emerges in the marriage of Amir and Soraya, who try unsuccessfully to start a family of their own. Their adoption of the troubled and parentless Sohrab at the end of the novel marks an attempt to recreate a complete family based on relationships of love and honesty.

## Journey and Quest

A novel of immigration and political unrest, *The Kite Runner* is punctuated by Amir's departure from Afghanistan as a teenager and his return to his war-ravaged home country as an adult. At the same time, it is a novel of symbolic quest. Amir makes great sacrifices to pursue his quest to atone for past sins by rescuing his half nephew. Symbolized by the bleeding fingers of kite-fighters who cut their competitors' kites out of the sky with string embedded with glass, sacrifice is an important theme of the novel. Near the beginning of the novel, Amir willingly cut his fingers to impress his father with a kite-fighting victory; at the end he cuts his fingers flying a kite to revive his spiritually wounded nephew from a profound depression. Whereas the young Amir compares Hassan's resignation to his attackers' assault to the resignation of a sacrificed animal, by the end of the novel, Amir is prepared to sacrifice much in order to save Hassan's son from a similar fate.

## Heritage and Ancestry

Before leaving Afghanistan, Baba fills a snuff box with soil from his homeland. As refugees in the United States, Baba and Amir live in an Afghan immigrant community in the San Francisco Bay Area. Even though much of the action takes place in the United States, most of the characters there are Afghan, emphasizing how Amir and Baba thrive in and contribute to an immigrant community that reminds them of home. Although Baba dies without ever seeing his home country again, Amir maintains his ties to the Afghan community in Northern California, partly through his wife's family. Descriptions of Amir and Soraya's courtship and Baba's funeral exemplify such ties to traditional cultural values. The reader is treated to detailed accounts of the *khastegari* tradition in which the groom's father requests permission of the prospective bride's father, and the elaborate traditional ceremony in which Amir and Soraya are married. Although Amir first views living in the United States as a way to forget a painful past, he maintains and revives his ties to Afghan culture and religion. He returns to his country of birth and, after his nephew attempts suicide, re-discovers Islam as a source

of strength. The narration and dialogue welcome

the reader into this ethnic Pashtun and Afghan national identity through running translations of frequently spoken or culturally significant phrases and concepts.

## **Assimilation and Acculturation**

From the early twentieth century to contemporary times, new arrivals to the United States have lived and worked in their new homeland, attempting to lead better lives and simultaneously struggling to adjust to a culture that may or may not accept their traditions. When Amir and Baba arrive in Fremont, California, they, too, must start new lives. While Baba works at a humble job in a service station, Amir attends school, graduating from high school at the age of twenty. While Baba (like General Taheri, a man of his generation) dreams of returning to Afghanistan in better times, Amir who has spent much of his teenage years in the United States, adjusts more readily to his new country. For Amir, as for many in the literature of the American immigrant experience, the United States represents a space for new beginnings and a way to erase a dark, violent past. For Baba, the transition is more difficult, and his new life presents a painful contrast with his former position of power and prestige in Kabul.

## **Political Power/abuse of Power**

The events of the novel occur against the backdrop of political change, culminating in the rise of the tyrannical Taliban government in contemporary Afghanistan. Assef, Hassan's rapist and the bully who becomes a high-ranking Taliban official, embodies the consequences of the abuse of power for power's sake and the violence and repression of the Taliban regime. Assef is a sociopath who thrives in an atmosphere of chaos and subjugation. Interpersonal violence leads to the split between Amir and Hassan; on a national scale, the abuse of power by the Soviet-backed Communist regime in Afghanistan forces Baba and Amir to go into exile. The abuse of political and social power also appears in frequent references to the Hazara people, who are

second-class citizens in the quasi-caste system of Afghanistan. At the beginning of the novel, Hazara characters such as Hassan's father Ali suffer public humiliation for their appearance. When General Taheri demands an explanation for Amir and Soraya's adoption of a Sohrab, "a Hazara boy," he echoes the discrimination against this entire ethnic minority. Likewise, he gives voice to this attitude when he attacks Amir for having a Hazara boy for a playmate. In a sense, even Baba condones systematic discrimination against Hazara people by refusing to acknowledge his son with a Hazara woman, Sanaubar.

# Style

## Point of View

The story appears in first person point of view, as Amir tells the story of his life, especially his childhood. This point of view gives the feeling of a memoir or, more appropriately, a confession. Amir recalls all events honestly and accurately, though the events of childhood still hold the thoughts and emotions of a young boy, rather than an adult man. This point of view works well for the novel, as Amir's main quest is that of absolution from the guilt he feels because of his inaction during Hassan's attack by Assef.

The flashback into Amir's childhood occurs as a mixture of dialogue and narrative. However, Amir looks back at Hassan as simply a servant boy and companion; he does not yet know that Hassan is also his half brother. Dialogue also occurs when the novel returns to the present, though Amir describes many of the occurrences in long, literary narratives. His occupation as a writer lends him to long narratives, sprinkled with metaphors and clichés, though he admits that most writers shun such devices.

## Setting

Briefly, the novel begins in San Francisco, though the narrator, Amir, immediately flashes back to his childhood in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan of his boyhood appears to be a thriving place where, despite social inequality, everyone enjoys a decent lifestyle. The boys, Amir and Hassan, play and grow in the same household and enjoy much of their childhood. They only worry about running into the neighborhood bully, Assef. Early on, talk of politics comes over the radio, but the boys pay little attention to the adult conversations that they do not understand.

War, however, changes Afghanistan and motivates Baba and Amir to move to the United States. His early adult life occurs there, where he graduates from high school, attends college and falls in love. He marries another Afghan refugee, Soraya, in California. A large Afghan population there makes it possible for them to enjoy many of their cultural traditions. However, the freedoms and opportunities of America also allow them to quickly rise above the meager economic status that they first lived in in America.

Rahim Khan calls Amir back, first to Pakistan. The sights and smells of the country quickly remind Amir of his childhood. The memories are bittersweet, as he continues to harbor much guilt over Hassan's attack in the alley. The real shock, though, lies in Afghanistan. After years of fighting, the country lies in ruins. Only those working for the government enjoy any type of wealth. The average citizen lives in poverty. To emphasize this point, Amir describes a beggar he meets near his father's old orphanage; the man turns out to be a former university professor who knew Amir's mother.

Islamabad, in contrast, thrives as a city. Amir sees it as the way Kabul could be, if not for all the fighting. Home, however, lies in America, with his wife. There, they offer Sohrab all manner of material goods. However, only patience and love heal the young boy.

## **Language and Meaning**

the language of the novel is that of a writer. From childhood, literature plays an important part in Amir's life. He enjoys reading with Hassan, though he sometimes uses Hassan's illiteracy to make himself feel more powerful. Early, too, Amir connects with a passion for writing. Though his father never shows interest or approval of such pursuits, Rahim Khan encourages Amir's passion for writing and gives him a journal that he treasures, even after his childhood falls apart.

To communicate the varied and complicated themes of the novel, the author uses a simple language, though he never avoids harder topics, describing them in painful detail without being crude.

## Structure

The author tells the story in twenty-five chapters of roughly equal length. The book is 384 pages. The opening chapters quickly flash back to Amir's childhood in Afghanistan. In chapter eleven, the reader finds Amir in America, in his early twenties now. Seven chapters chronicle his early adulthood in America, including his marriage to Soraya. Finally, the novel returns to the present in chapter fourteen. The remainder of the book occurs in the present, during which time Amir makes amends for the offense he feels he caused to Hassan.

## Flashback and Foreshadowing

Khaled Hosseini frequently uses flashback and foreshadowing. Indeed, most of the novel, which begins in 2001 and ends in 2002, is an elaborate flashback that brings the reader from the narrator's childhood to his young adulthood to his manhood. Within this overarching structure, Hosseini's use of time devices provide the reader and the narrator with information about what has happened outside the action of the novel so far, as in Chapter 16, in which Rahim Khan updates Amir on what has happened to Hassan since Amir and Baba left Kabul, or in Hassan's letter, in which some of the same events are told from a different point of view.

The use of time devices like foreshadowing may also prepare the reader for an imminent event or crisis. For example, during a description of Hassan's face in Chapter 7, the narrator breaks into the description to tell the reader that this was the last time he would see Hassan's smile except in a photograph, an interruption of the forward narrative that warns the reader that something momentous is in the offing. Sometimes the use of these techniques appears to signal moments when the lives of

individuals are changed forever by violence, death, or the consequences of world events. One example occurs in Chapter 22, when Amir, seated in the house of the Taliban official, nervously eats a grape from a bowl on the table. Amir remarks, "The grape was sweet. I popped another one in [my mouth], unaware that it would be the last bit of solid food I would eat for a long time," thus preparing the reader for the violence of the imminent confrontation between Amir and Assef. Foreshadowing also plays a part in Chapter 7 when Amir witnesses the attack on Hassan on the night of his victory in the kite tournament:

I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan—the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past—and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run.

This internal monologue hints that in the future Amir will suffer from a crisis in identity. Later in the novel, his failure to stand up for Hassan in his moment of need becomes a burden he carries for much of his life, and forces Amir to take drastic measures to recover his sense of himself as a good person.

## Diction

The dialogue, or quoted conversation between characters, and the narration use a variety of modes to affect the reader. The diction ranges from detailed description to conversational. One feature of the novel's use of language is its frequent references to Afghan culture and its use of terms from Pashtu and Farsi that denote important concepts in Afghan tradition and in the lives of the Afghan community in the San Francisco Bay Area. Such terms are nearly always translated for non-Pashtu- and non-Farsi-speaking readers in a way that invites the reader to become familiar with Afghan culture while remaining engaged in the flow of action. The writing is peppered with words in Farsi and Dari (which is the version of Farsi commonly spoken in Afghanistan), followed by brief translations set off by commas. In addition to the

oftheard greeting *Salaam Aleikum* and the oath *inshallah*, the reader learns the meanings of such expressions as *ihdiram* (respect); *nazar* (the evil eye); *lotfan* (please); *yateem* (orphans); and *zendagi migzara* (life goes on). For example, when Amir asks his father to ask Soraya's father for permission for Amir and Soraya to marry, in accordance with Afghan tradition, he says, "I want you to go *khastegari*. I want you to ask General Taheri for his daughter's hand." Similarly, when Soraya tells Amir about a secret from her past, he thinks, "I couldn't lie to her and say that my pride, my *iftikhar*, wasn't stung at all."

## Interior Monologue

Interior monologue, or the words a character uses to describe his or her own feelings to him- or herself, is an important technique through which Hosseini enables the reader to become acquainted with the narrator Amir, and through him, the Afghan culture and history that propel much of the action of the story. Internal monologue is a particularly important device in this work because the action is as much propelled by political developments as by the protagonist's psychological development.

## Imagery and Symbolism

The novel invites the reader to view images and symbols in the first part of the novel as mirrored by those at the end. For example, the novel is book-ended by two kite contests. The imagery of kite-fighting dominates the scene that marks the last happy moments Hassan and Amir enjoy together. At the end of the novel, a smaller kite contest between the adult Amir and a young Afghan American boy, as Sohrab looks on, suggests redemption for Amir, who has never forgiven himself for what happened to Hassan on the night of that first kite-fighting contest in Kabul years before. Similarly, Assef's attack on Hassan as the twelve-year-old Amir looks on is echoed in the battle between the adult Amir and Assef late in the novel

# Historical Context

*The Kite Runner*, set in Afghanistan and the United States from the 1970s to 2002, presents a story of intertwined personal conflicts and tragedies against a historical background of national and cultural trauma. The early chapters tell much about the richness of Afghan culture as experienced by the young Amir and Hassan in the Afghan capital, Kabul. The novel's account of the culture of Kabul informs the reader about everything from the melon sellers in the bazaar to the cosmopolitan social and intellectual lives of Kabul elite society during the monarchy, to the traditional pastimes of Afghan children. Detailed descriptions treat the reader to such events as a large extended-family outing to a lake and the annual winter kite tournament of Kabul. Subsequent political developments, however, appear to curtail these relative freedoms, as first the Soviet-backed Communist government, then the Northern Alliance, and finally the Taliban progressively repress the activities of Afghan citizens. The reader learns the effects of the first of these developments through first-person narration; the effects of the Northern Alliance and of Taliban rule emerge in Rahim Khan's, Farid's, and Hassan's accounts of Afghan life in the period between the late 1980s and the early 2000s. Starting in the early chapters of the novel, broad political events such as the revolution that overthrows the monarchy come to form not just a background for the action, but to become prime movers of the plot. The sound of gunfire in Chapter 5, for example, initiates a series of political shake-ups that eventually leads to the Communist takeover of Afghanistan and drives Baba and Amir, along with many of the privileged class, into exile. In addition, it marks an end to a period that was—despite being marred by the iniquities of the caste system—relatively idyllic. As Amir observes, "The generation of Afghan children whose ears would know nothing but the sounds of bombs and gunfire was not yet born." This observation foreshadows the traumatized condition of Amir's nephew Sohrab, born in the midst of violence and orphaned and abused by the Taliban.

*The Kite Runner* is one of the first works of fiction to include the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States within the span of its narrative. In the aftermath of the

September 11 attacks, Afghanistan was portrayed in popular media as a country whose government allowed a terrorist organization to operate within its borders and committed human rights abuses against its own people. Through a detailed personal narrative, the novel re-focuses attention on Afghanistan through a different lens, correcting this narrow view of a country which, despite its problems, has a fascinating history.

Another important historical and cultural context of the novel is the diverse and variegated world of contemporary multicultural America, particularly in California. Hosseini, the son of a diplomat and a teacher, left Afghanistan with his family in 1981, much like Amir. Likewise, Amir's experiences in the Afghan immigrant community of Fremont, California, familiarly known in the San Francisco Bay Area as "Little Kabul," may reflect the author's experiences of the area from arrival in San Jose in the 1980s. Amir's life as a young immigrant in the multicultural space of the Bay Area illustrates the increased mixing of diverse ethnicities in the 1980s and 1990s within U.S. popular culture.

The novel also gives a detailed account of how one ethnic group formed a cultural enclave within American culture so that its members could help one another and preserve Afghan cultural traditions. Detailed descriptions in the middle and late chapters give the reader a window on some cultural practices, both formal and informal, that help define the Afghan community in Fremont. Amir's and Soraya's lives are certainly taken up with the broader American culture. Both attend public schools and (we presume) mix with non-Afghan students; Amir takes creative writing classes in which he must read about the experiences of a diverse group of young writers; and Soraya has a career as a writing instructor at a community college. Still their identities as Afghans or Afghan Americans are defined in part by the ceremonies and practices of their families and their community. The Saturday swap meets, for example, exemplify the well-documented strategy of immigrant groups to adapt already existing institutions in the United States as ways to preserve their cultures of origin.

# Critical Overview

*The Kite Runner* was published in 2003 to nearly unanimous praise. Said to be the first novel written in English by an Afghan, the novel was instantly popular. Its first printing was fifty thousand copies, it has been featured on the reading lists of countless book clubs, and foreign rights to the novel have been sold in at least ten countries.

Reviewers admired the novel for its straightforward storytelling, its convincing character studies, and for its startling account of the human toll of the violence that has accompanied Afghanistan's turbulent political scene in the last thirty years. In his review in *World Literature Today*, Ronny Noor remarks, "This lucidly written and often touching novel gives a vivid picture of not only the Russian atrocities but also those of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban." A brief review in *Publishers Weekly* credited the novel with providing "an incisive, perceptive examination of recent Afghan history and its ramifications in both America and the Middle East," and called it "a complete work of literature that succeeds in exploring the culture of a previously obscure nation that has become a pivot point in the global politics of the new millennium." The novel was noted for its detailed portrayal of a friendship between two boys that tenuously spans class and ethnic lines. In the *New York Times Book Review*, Edward Hower praises the novel for its detailed descriptions of life in Kabul in the 1970s: "Hosseini's depiction of pre-revolutionary Afghanistan is rich in warmth and humor but also tense with the friction of different ethnic groups." Hower also notes how the class distinctions between Amir and Hassan make their relationship all the more vulnerable: "Amir is served breakfast every morning by Hassan; then he is driven to school in a shiny Mustang while his friend stays home to clean the house."

A few noted with misgiving that the novel occasionally strays from the conventions of realism in contemporary fiction. Hower notes, "When Amir meets his old nemesis, now a powerful Taliban official, the book descends into some plot twists better suited to a folk tale than a modern novel." Like Hower, Rebecca Stuhr of the *Library Journal*

focuses on the late chapters in pointing out the novel's "over-reliance on coincidence." In an otherwise glowing review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, James O'Brien points out that "When Hosseini strays from the simple narrative style he prefers, he struggles to retain credibility." Noor argued that the novel gives "a selective, simplistic, even simple-minded picture" of the ongoing Afghan conflict, in particular an overly optimistic view of Hamid Karzai's ability to govern Afghanistan. Overall, reviewers see the novel as a great triumph marred only by rare stylistic flaws.

# Criticism

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# Critical Essay #1

*Maria Elena Caballero-Robb earned her Ph.D. in American Literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz. She works in publishing and teaches courses in U.S. literature and culture and composition. In this essay, Caballero-Robb interprets Hosseini's novel The Kite Runner as a work that intertwines the private and public realms of experience.*

Perhaps what garnered Hosseini's first novel, *The Kite Runner*, so much early praise, aside from the political relevance of its subject matter when the book was published in 2003, is its successful intertwining of the personal and the political. The novel has an ambitious agenda: to sketch the maturation of its protagonist from a callow boy beguiled by mythical stories of heroes and to portray the political situation of contemporary Afghanistan. The novel begins to show how the personal and the political affect one another through the peculiar relationship between Amir and Hassan. Indeed, James O'Brien, in his review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, argues, "this muddled, unbalanced and ultimately tragic relationship" between the privileged Amir and the servant Hassan "lies at the heart of *The Kite Runner* and echoes the betrayals and power shifts that begin to shape the country shortly after the story begins." Through the course of the novel, Amir's personal quest takes him on a decades-long journey from his birth country to the United States and finally back to his country of origin. In passing through this transforming crucible, Amir not only atones for past personal failings but also embraces a hopeful ideal of citizenship capable of upholding principles of liberty and human rights even in the face of repressive, fascist systems.

In the first several chapters, the novel's action revolves around the relationship between Amir and his friend and servant Hassan, and Amir's constant attempts to earn the respect and love of his father, Baba. Amir describes Hassan as a wise innocent, incapable of deceit, yet uncannily perceptive. Hassan's character and unschooled intelligence are apparent in his complete loyalty to Amir and his ability to perceive

things about Amir that not even Amir is aware of: "Hassan couldn't read a first-grade textbook, but he could read me plenty." Indeed, critic Melissa Katsoulis points out in her review in the *Times* (London), "Though Hassan cannot read or write, he loves to hear Amir read aloud and is perfectly capable of pointing out the gaping hole in Amir's first attempt at plotting a story." Hassan is also admired for his physical talents—a faultless aim with a slingshot and the ability to predict where a loose kite will drift "as if he had some sort of inner compass." Baba's unusually high regard for his son's servant makes Amir, who cannot seem to please his father, jealous. When Baba pays for an operation to correct Hassan's harelip and dotes on the boy during his recovery, Amir thinks, "I wished I too had some kind of scar that would beget Baba's sympathy. It wasn't fair. Hassan hadn't done anything to earn Baba's affections; he'd just been born with that stupid harelip." Meanwhile, Amir is acutely aware that there is little understanding between himself and his father: "The least I could have done was to have had the decency to have turned out a little more like him." He senses that his father blames him for his mother's death in childbirth; and to compound matters, he overhears his father remark to Rahim Khan, "If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I'd never believe he's my son."

While the dynamics of these relationships remain central to the story, in later chapters, the political events outside the limits of the family circle propel the story's action. The first hint of this transition occurs when Amir and Hassan have an encounter with a violent older boy named Assef, who wants to persecute Hassan for being a Hazara. Assef, who believes Hitler was an ideal leader, tells Amir that he is betraying his Pashtun heritage by treating a Hazara boy as his close friend. While Assef's bigotry outrages Amir, Amir is unable to think of a response. Ultimately, Hassan stands up to Assef and his lackeys; when Assef and his lackeys threaten to hurt the two younger boys, it is Hassan, not Amir, who saves them both by using his slingshot to drive the bullies away.

The boys's second encounter with Assef is much less victorious. Ironically, the encounter occurs immediately after Amir wins the kite-running tournament, which Amir believes is his chance finally to live up to his father's expectations:

There was no other viable option. I was going to win, and I was going to run that last kite. Then I'd bring it home and show it to Baba. Show him once and for all that his son was worthy. Then maybe my life as a ghost in this house would finally be over. I let myself dream: I imagined conversation and laughter over dinner instead of silence broken only by the clinking of the silverware and the occasional grunt.

The novel's frequent reference to the Afghan heroic tale, the *Shahnamah*, implicitly creates a comparison between Amir's relationship with his father and the larger-than-life interactions between the father-and-son warriors Rostam and Sohrab in the myth. When Amir wins the kite tournament, he begins to think of his anticipated reunion with his father in mythical terms:

In my head, I had it all planned: I'd make a grand entrance, a hero, prized trophy in my bloodied hands. Heads would turn and eyes would lock. Rostam and Sohrab sizing each other up. A dramatic moment of silence. Then the old warrior would walk to the young one, embrace him, acknowledge his worthiness.

The additional stakes of the kite tournament—the need not just to obtain the last fallen kite, but to win his father's love—compound the dilemma Amir faces when he finds Hassan being threatened by Assef and the other bullies in an alley. While Amir chooses to run, out of fear rather than to help his friend, he wonders whether he has actually sacrificed his friend for his own ends. Even as Amir sees that Hassan is in danger, he is also focused on the coveted blue kite: "Hassan was standing at the blind end of the alley in defiant stance.... Behind him, sitting on piles of scrap and rubble, was the blue kite. My key to Baba's heart." Although he is horrified at what happens to Hassan, he allows his friend to become a casualty of his quest to improve his relationship with his father. Amir's actions mirror the ethnic inequalities between Pashtuns and Hazara that are reflected in a dozen daily occurrences in the first several chapters. He uses Hassan as an instrument to achieve a desired end. Amir's failure to treat his playmate as a person marks the fatal character flaw that the adult Amir will

seek to remedy.

The adult Amir moves to remedy this failure by accepting the mission to rescue Hassan's son, Sohrab, from an uncertain end. Amir redeems himself by confronting Assef and assuming responsibility for Hassan's child. The climax of the novel parallels the earlier violent crisis in which Assef rapes Hassan, but offers a victorious outcome. The battle between Amir and Assef presents Amir with the belated opportunity to fight as he believes he should have fought to save Hassan when they were children. By risking his life to save Hassan's child from a sadistic pedophile, Amir begins to atone for his earlier inhumanities.

Throughout the novel, the author uses corresponding symbols and images to emphasize the way that Amir's adult choices are belated remedies of past failures. After the climactic fight with Assef during his rescue of Sohrab, Amir is taken to a hospital in Pakistan with serious injuries. While he recovers, he discovers that his upper lip has been split clear up to the gum line, forming a harelip similar to the one Hassan was born with. Echoing an earlier scene in a hospital, in which the twelve-year-old Hassan recovers from an operation to mend his harelip, the adult Amir must wait for his own split lip to mend and quickly learns that it hurts to smile. This simultaneously reminds the reader of the moment when Amir sees Hassan smile for the last time. The reader may view Amir's injury as a moment of belated sympathy between two brothers now separated not only by geographic distance and differing fortunes, but also by death.

The novel's use of literary techniques contributes to a political statement about the relationship between individuals and systems—or the capacities of individuals to combat broad injustice in political systems. *The Kite Runner* turns on more than one astounding coincidence: when Amir returns to Kabul, he meets a beggar who turns out to have known Amir's mother; and, most startling, Assef, the childhood bully, turns out to be the prominent Taliban official who has kidnapped and brutalized Hassan's son Sohrab. While Rebecca Stuhr of the *Library Journal* finds fault with the novel's "over-reliance on coincidence," Hosseini's use of the device shows how even personal

conflicts like Amir's lifelong struggle with his own guilt are intertwined with world events. This narrative twist also emphasizes the interplay between the present and the past—"the past claws its way out"—by showcasing the way that the deeds of childhood cast their shadows into adulthood. (In a similar vein, the author's use of foreshadowing sometimes signals to the reader that an imminent event will have lasting consequences, as when Amir plants money in Hassan's room in order to implicate him in a theft.)

That Amir's former nemesis turns out to be the Taliban official from whom he must rescue Sohrab lends an allegorical and mythical dimension to the battle between the two men. As a young boy, Assef is already described as "a sociopath;" an admirer of Hitler, Assef displays fascist tendencies and openly advocates removing the Hazara population from Afghanistan. Amir, on the other hand, who is by and large a good boy, is self-interested and lacks conviction. If the grown Assef appears to be a nearly cartoonish embodiment of sadism and the desire for absolute power, Amir's struggle to defeat him and save the young Sohrab appears to be an allegory for a broader struggle for Afghanistan. Whereas Amir had been able to escape the daily violence of contemporary Afghanistan as a result of his relative privilege, his Hazara friend Hassan had no choice but to raise his son among a generation of Afghan children, born into a turbulent society, who "know nothing but the sound of bombs and gunfire."

Interestingly, when Amir, a successful writer, tries to use his privilege to rescue Sohrab by offering Assef money, he is rebuffed; instead he must put his life at risk in order to complete his mission. Amir's decision to return to Afghanistan to save the son of his forsaken friend represents a choice for the exiled to return to his birth country to confront the problems that drove him away. *The Kite Runner* focuses more on interpersonal dramas than on political ones; it is a matter of interpretation whether Amir feels responsible for the future of his birth country in the same way that he feels accountable for his nephew's fate. Still, through Assef's embodiment of the evil of fascism and Amir's willingness to fight him for a good cause the reader is presented with a stark contrast between a theocratic regime that starves and crushes the freedoms of its people, and a reluctant but ultimately courageous citizen willing to risk his life

for what he believes in.

Remarkably, the novel does not allude to the enormous controversy that accompanied the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, including the bombing of Afghanistan in retaliation for the Taliban's harboring of terrorist camps. If one can discern an author's view of politics from his fiction, Hosseini views developments in Afghan national politics of 2001 and 2002 with some optimism. In the last two chapters, the narrator speaks warmly of the ousting of the Taliban and the emergence of Hamid Karzai as the new leader of Afghanistan, and describes the hope with which the imminent *Loya jirga*, the exiled king's return to Afghanistan, is anticipated by Afghans and Afghan Americans alike. This optimistic attitude toward contemporaneous developments in Amir's home country parallels the novel's final flicker of hope regarding Sohrab. Afghanistan, the novel seems to argue, so recently brutalized and repressed, may yet survive.

**Source:** Maria Elena Caballero-Robb, Critical Essay on *The Kite Runner*, in *Literary Newsmakers for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

## Critical Essay #2

*In the following review, O'Brien discusses the author's use of voice, and how the two main characters reflect the character of Afghanistan itself.*

Rare is the exiled author whose remembrances of home resist becoming rose-tinted as the years pass. Given the ravages visited on Afghanistan since the young Khaled Hosseini and his family sought political asylum in the United States in 1980, the foremost of many triumphs in this startling first novel must be that its consideration of cultural, religious and deeply personal upheavals remains cool and considered throughout. Hosseini's own profession—he is a doctor—perhaps provides a more convincing explanation of his narrator's unemotional tone than the fictional claim that he has become an English-language author of some repute.

Amir is twelve when the novel begins in 1975, but the seeds of his story were sown much earlier. He "killed" his mother in childbirth and, a bookish, somewhat sickly child, has done little since to earn either affection or respect from his father. Amir's only solace is Hassan, his hare-lipped servant and best friend. It is this muddled, unbalanced and ultimately tragic relationship that lies at the heart of *The Kite Runner* and echoes the betrayals and power shifts which begins to shape the country shortly after the story begins.

The two boys suckled at the same breast—it belonged to a wet nurse; Hassan's mother quit her humdrum existence in search of glamour shortly after Amir's quit this life altogether—and so forged a bond which Afghans believe to be unbreakable. Their early life was idyllic, with only the uncaring shadow of Amir's Baba blighting their days of storytelling, fruit-gathering and kite-running. In Kabul, the kite strings are laced with glass to slice all-comers from the skies until just one remains aloft. Hassan is the finest kite-runner in Kabul, with an unerring ability to predict the progress of these wind-borne tissue creations. It is a gift which proves of little use when Amir, confused, embittered and convinced of his servant's elevated status in Baba's

affections, sets about severing ties of a different kind.

The exposure of Amir's myriad failings is brought starkly home in a scene of breathtaking brutality when he is too cowardly to stop the punishment inflicted on Hassan. This constitutes one of the book's few flaws. When Hosseini strays from the simple narrative style he prefers, he struggles to retain credibility and, on occasion, leaves Amir sounding like Kabul's half-baked answer to Holden Caulfield: "That was the thing with Hassan. He was so goddamn pure, you always felt like a phony around him". These lapses are rare, and for the most part the story of Amir's grand betrayal of Hassan and his painful search for redemption across generations is told in a cool, detached voice that provides a counterpoint to the growing sense of tension which is frequently stretched to breaking point as the story unfolds.

From exile in America to a clandestine return to Kabul in the grip of the Taleban, the narrative ranges freely across the globe engaging the reader's emotions. Amir is a difficult hero, largely unlovable but utterly sympathetic, while the plight of blameless Hassan reflects the fate of his country. There are history lessons here; among the deepest of Afghanistan's wounds is the fact that its past has been largely obscured by its bloody present. There are also questions. Is any bond truly unbreakable? Can sons atone for the sins of fathers?

**Source:** James O'Brien, "The Sins of the Father," in *Times Literary Supplement*, October 10, 2003, p. 25.

# Critical Essay #3

*In the following essay, Noor reviews The Kite Runner as a novel about sin and redemption, but contends that it fails to give a complete picture of the Afghan conflict.*

*The Kite Runner* is Khaled Hosseini's best-selling first novel. It is the very first novel in English by an Afghan, in which a thirty-eight-year-old writer named Amir recounts the odyssey of his life from Kabul to San Francisco via Peshwar, Pakistan. The protagonist was born into a wealthy family in Kabul. Raised by his father, his mother having passed away during his birth, Amir lives a relatively happy life until the Soviet tanks roll into Afghanistan. Then he and his family flee to Pakistan and end up in America. In the United States, his father becomes a gas-station manager, selling junk on weekends with his son at the San Jose flea market. Amir meets Soraya, the daughter of a former Afghan general, and soon ties the knot with her.

For fifteen years the young couple tries in vain to have children. Then Amir receives a call from Rahim Khan, a friend and former business partner of his now-deceased father. Amir flies to Peshwar to meet with him. Rahim Khan reveals that Hassan, Amir's childhood friend, the presumed son of the family servant Ali, was in reality Amir's half-brother, his father's illegitimate son with Ali's wife. Hassan and his wife were killed by the Taliban. Rahim Khan wants Amir to go to Kabul and bring Hassan's son to Peshwar. After much hesitation, Amir goes to Kabul and frees his nephew from the clutches of an unscrupulous child molester. Later he brings the child to America for adoption.

This lucidly written and often touching novel gives a vivid picture of not only the Russian atrocities but also those of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. It is rightly a "soaring debut," as the *Boston Globe* claims, but only if we consider it a novel of sin and redemption, a son trying to redeem his father's sin. As far as the Afghan conflict is concerned, we get a selective, simplistic, even simple-minded picture. Hosseini tells us, for example, that "Arabs, Chechens, Pakistanis" were behind the Taliban. He does

not mention the CIA or Zbigniew Brzezinski, the national security advisor to President Carter, "whose stated aim," according to Pankaj Mishra in the spring 2002 issue of *Granta*, "was to 'sow [s—t] in the Soviet backyard.'"

Hosseini also intimates that the current leader handpicked by foreign powers, Hamid Karzai—whose "caracul hat and green *chapan* became famous"—will put Afghanistan back in order. Unfortunately, that is all Karzai is famous for—his fashion, Hollywood style. His government does not control all of Afghanistan, which is torn between warlords as in the feudal days. Farmers are producing more opium than ever before for survival. And the occupying forces, according to human-rights groups, are routinely trampling on innocent Afghans. There is no Hollywood-style solution to such grave problems of a nation steeped in the Middle Ages, is there?

**Source:** Ronny Noor, "Afghanistan: *The Kite Runner*," in *World Literature Today*, Vol. 78, No. 3-4, September-December 2004, p. 148.

# Critical Essay #4

*In the following excerpt, Hosseini discusses how being a physician gives him a compassionate insight to humanity and makes him a better writer.*

# Critical Essay #5

A blinking little red light. Another voice mail. Didn't I just go through them? I sat down. I never delay listening to voice mails; call it a compulsion, a personal quirk.

I put down Mrs CR's chart and dialed my answering machine. It was my father-in-law, telling me he had loved my short story, *The Kite Runner*, but wished it had been longer. At some point between the instant I put down the receiver and the moment I knocked on the door to tell Mrs CR about her diabetic nephropathy, a seed planted itself in my mind: I was going to turn *The Kite Runner* into a novel.

And so it began. For the next 15 months, I tapped away at the keyboard. I created a troubled, 12-year-old boy named Amir, the privileged son of a wealthy Pashtun merchant living in Kabul, Afghanistan, circa 1975, and his angelic friend Hassan, a minority Hazara and the son of Amir's crippled servant. I developed a deep and unusual friendship between the boys, only to make Amir betray Hassan in an unspeakable way. I shattered the boy's lives. I watched the brutalised Hassan pay the price for his guileless devotion to Amir, and watched Amir grow into a brooding, haunted, guilt-ridden man in the USA. Then I sent Amir back to Kabul, now ruled by the Taliban, on one last desperate quest for redemption. In June, 2002, *The Kite Runner* was completed. A year later, while on a US book tour to promote the novel, two of the most common questions people asked me were: how do you find time to write as a doctor; and did being a doctor help you writing?

My day at work ranges from busy to frantic. Between prescription refills, referrals, meetings, laboratory reviews, voice mails, and seeing patients, I have developed an appreciation for the concept of free time. And when I go home, I have my wife and two children, not to mention an extended Afghan family life. That leaves the early morning. My free time. And if there is one thing we doctors have been trained for, it's getting by with less than ideal hours of sleep. So for 15 months, I woke up at 0500 h, drank cupfuls of black coffee, and created the world of Amir and Hassan. Luckily for

me, the soulful early morning hours coincided with my creative time.

As for the second question, the answer, surprisingly, is yes. A writer, like a doctor, has to be a good listener and observer. Whereas a doctor listens to learn about his or her patient, a writer listens and observes to learn about nuances of dialogue, body language, and the peculiar verbal and non-verbal ways in which people express themselves. My medical practice provides me with ample opportunity for this sort of observation, since in a typical working day, I sit and listen to some 20 stories, all told in unique voices. I listen to them as a doctor and observe them as a writer.

Furthermore, it's essential in both crafts to develop some insight into human nature. Writers and physicians need to understand to some extent the motivations behind behaviour and appreciate how such things as a person's upbringing, their culture, their biases, shape that person, whether it be a patient or a character in a story. Writers say the more you understand your characters, the better you can write them. Similarly, the more doctors understand their patients, the better they can help them.

While on tour, one person raised what seemed a far more important question: did writing help you become a better doctor? It did. I firmly believe that. The medical profession offers satisfying rewards, but for some the challenges of today's medicine can prove exhausting, or worse—we have all crossed paths with jaded colleagues who have long lost sight of the rewards of healing in the rigorous frenzy of daily practice. Writing, by contrast, is creative. For me, starting the day with an act of creation is therapeutic. It brings me closer to my emotional state and, as a result, I go to see my patients with a positive frame of mind. To be sure, that's good for me, but far more importantly, it's good for my patients.

**Source:** Khaled Hosseini, "Khaled Hosseini: Physician writers," in *Lancet*, Vol. 362, No. 9388, September 20, 2003, p. 1003.

# Quotes

Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years. p. 1

Hassan and I fed from the same breasts. We took our first steps on the same lawn in the same yard. And, under the same roof, we spoke our first words. Mine was Baba. His was Amir. My name. Looking back on it now, I think the foundation for what happened in the inter of 1975--and all ha followed-- was already laid in those first words. p. 11

"Now, no matter what the mullah teaches, there is only one sin, only one. And that is theft. Every other sin is a variation of theft. Do you understands that?" p. 17

By the following winter, it was only a faint scar. Which was ironic. Because that was the winter that Hassan stopped smiling. p. 47

In the end, I ran. I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. p. 77

We'd actually deceived ourselves into thinking that a toy made of tissue paper, glue, and bamboo could somehow close the chasm between us. p. 87

In one of those brief bursts of light, I saw something I'll never forget: Hassan serving drinks to Assef and Wali from a silver platter. p. 100

"I am moftakhir, Amir," he said. Proud. His eyes gleamed when he said that and I liked being on the receiving end of that look. p. 131

Soraya. Swap Meet Princess. he morning sun to my yelda. p. 144

I suspected there were many ways in which Soraya Taheri was a better person than me. Courage was just one of them. p. 165

And I remember wondering if Hassan to a married. And if so, whose face he had seen in he mirror under the veil? Whose henna-painted hands had he held? p. 171

My whole life, I had been "Baba's son." No he was gone. Baba couldn't show me the way anymore; I'd have to find it on my own. The thought of it terrified me. p. 174

Soraya had hers, the General his, and I had mine: that perhaps something, someone, somewhere, had decided to deny me fatherhood for the sins I had done. Maybe this was my punishment, and perhaps justly so. p. 188

And now, fifteen years after I'd buried him, I was learning that Baba had been a thief. And a thief of the worst kind, because the things he'd stolen had been sacred :from me the right to know I had a brother, from Hassan his identity, and from Ali his honor. p. 225

I understood now why the boys hadn't shown any interest in the watch. Thy hadn't been staring at the watch at all They'd been staring a my food. p. 241

Forgive your father if you can. Forgive me if you wish. But, more important, forgive yourself. p. 302

Rahim Khan on the phone, telling me there was a way to be good again. A way to e good again... p. 310

Sitting on the edge of the bed, I called Soraya. I glanced at the thin line of light under the bathroom door. Do you feel clean yet, Sohrab? p. 333

If someone were to ask me today whether the story of Hassan, Sohrab, and me ends with Happiness, I wouldn't know what to say. Does anybody's? p. 357

It would be erroneous to say Sohrab was quiet. Quiet is peace. Tranquility. Quiet is turning down the volume knob on life. Silence is pushing the off button. p. 361

"Do you want me to run that kite for you?" His Adam's apple rose and fell as he swallowed. The wind lifted his hair. I thought I saw him nod. "For you, a thousand times over, " heard myself say. p. 371

I ran with the wind blowing in my face and a smile as wide as the Valley of Panjsher on my lips. I ran. p. 371

# Media Adaptations

- Simon and Schuster released the audio book version of *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini in 2003. The author reads the audio book version. In audio form, the novel runs twelve hours and spans eight cassette tapes or eleven CDs.

# What Do I Read Next?

- Farah Ahmed's memoir *The Story of My Life: An Afghan Girl on the Other Side of the Sky* (2003) also recounts a childhood in Kabul. Ahmed, a high school student in Illinois at the time her book was published, won the opportunity to have her life story published in book form by winning an essay contest sponsored by the television program *Good Morning America*. Ahmed's account of growing up in Kabul in the 1990s offers a nonfiction version of life in 1970s Kabul sketched in *The Kite Runner*. Before coming to the United States, Ahmed lost her leg to a land mine and lost family members to a Taliban rocket strike on her home.
- Jessica Hagedorn's novel *Dogeaters* (1990), though very different from *The Kite Runner*, tells the story of a young person's experiences immigrating from the Philippines to the United States. In *Dogeaters* the characters struggle to adjust to U.S. culture while maintaining, at times, uneasy ties to Filipino culture and the turbulent contemporary history of the Philippines.
- Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez: An Autobiography* (1982) recounts the author's experiences as a child in a Mexican immigrant family. Rodriguez's account of his attempts to bridge the gaps between his adapted culture and language, and his family's values and language, resonate with the experiences of Amir in *The Kite Runner*.
- Henri J. Barkey's "The United States and Afghanistan: From Marginality to Global Concern" gives an account of the post-September 11 relations between the United States and Afghanistan and how the United States' foreign policy affected twenty-first-century political developments there. Barkey's article can be found in *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment* (2003), edited by David W. Lesch.

# Topics for Discussion

Discuss the symbolism of Kites in this novel.

How does the writer use irony?

Is Hassan's paternity logical within the background of the novel?

What causes the bulk of Amir's guilt?

Without guilt towards Hassan, would Amir seek to find Sohrab? To what extent?

What impact does September 11 have on the success of such a novel?

What response does the author hope to gain from the reader?

Explain the author's depiction of a lack of childhood in Afghanistan.

Is Soraya's infertility a punishment on Amir? Explain.

When is Baba happiest?

How does social class appear in this novel?

What role does religion play in the plot of the novel?

How would Amir be different if his mother lived?

Discuss the responsibilities of a father in the context of the novel. Who performs these duties for Amir?

Compare and contrast Assef and Amir. How do the similarities make Amir feel?

# Further Reading

Lipson, J. G., and P. A. Omidian, "Afghan Refugee Issues in the U.S. Social Environment" in *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, Vol. 19, No. 1, February 1997, pp. 110-26.

The article focuses on the physical and mental health challenges faced by Afghan refugees since they began to arrive in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980s. Based on an ethnographic study and using quotations from interviews with these newcomers, the article examines stresses caused by the new social contexts within which Afghan refugees find themselves and how they perceive their interactions with American citizens and institutions.

Ondaatje, Michael, *Anil's Ghost*, Vintage Books, 2000.

In Ondaatje's fifth novel, the protagonist Anil Tessera is a Sri Lankan forensic anthropologist educated in England and the United States, who returns to work in Sri Lanka. In the course of uncovering gruesome evidence of violence wrought by the civil war there, she re-connects with centuries of Sri Lankan tradition and is confronted with the senseless destruction brought about by interethnic conflict in the country of her birth.

Payant, Katherine B., and Toby Rose, eds., *The Immigrant Experience in North American Literature: Carving Out a Niche*, 2003.

This book contains a collection of essays by various scholars who discuss the ways that North American literature has represented the experiences of immigrant groups entering and becoming acculturated to the United States. Essays include discussions of such authors as Anzia Yezierska to

Jamaica Kincaid.

Rashid, Ahmed, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, Yale University Press, 2000.

Ahmed, a journalist in Afghanistan for over twenty years, sketches the Taliban's rise to power between 1994 to 1999, as well as other countries' attempts to gain control over the development of Afghanistan. His account discusses the Taliban's ideological foundations, its well-known repression of women, and its ties to the heroin trade.

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Hosseini, Khaled, *The Kite Runner*, Riverhead Books, 2003.

Hower, Edward, "The Servant," in the *New York Times Book Review*, August 3, 2003, p. 4.

Katsoulis, Melissa, "Kites of Passage" in the *Times* (London), August 30, 2003, Features section, p. 17.

Noor, Ronny, Review of *The Kite Runner*, in *World Literature Today*, Vol. 78, Nos. 3-4, September-December 2004, p. 148.

O'Brien, James, "The Sins of the Father," in the *Times Literary Supplement*, October 10, 2003, p. 25.

Review of *The Kite Runner*, in *Publishers Weekly*, Vol. 250, No. 19, May 12, 2003, p. 43.

Stuhr, Rebecca, Review of *The Kite Runner*, in *Library Journal*, April 15, 2003, p. 122.

Hosseini, Khaled, *Dreaming in Titanic City*, Riverhead Books.

This follow-up to Hosseini's extremely successful first novel is set to be published in 2006.

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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of *Novels for Students (NfS)* is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to

information about the work. Part of Gale's For Students Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on classic novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

## Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of classic novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.

- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first

received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.

- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).
- **Sources:** an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- **Further Reading:** an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- **Media Adaptations:** a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- **Topics for Further Study:** a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- **Compare and Contrast Box:** an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- **What Do I Read Next?:** a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures,

and eras.

## Other Features

NfS includes *The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature*, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how *Novels for Students* can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

## Citing *Novels for Students*

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of *Novels for Students* may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

Night. *Novels for Students*. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. "Critical Essay on Winesburg, Ohio." *Novels for Students*. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Dystopian Tradition." *Canadian Literature* No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in *Novels for Students*, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: *Wearing the Mask*," in *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in *Novels for Students*, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

## We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of *Novels for Students* welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: [ForStudentsEditors@gale.com](mailto:ForStudentsEditors@gale.com). Or write to the editor at:

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