

BOOK CLUB To Go!

The Kite Runner

By Khaled Hosseini

Introduction

Khaled Hosseini's stunning debut novel *The Kite Runner* follows a young boy, Amir, as he faces the challenges that confront him on the path to manhood—testing friendships, finding love, cheating death, accepting faults, and gaining understanding. Living in Afghanistan in the 1960s, Amir enjoys a life of privilege that is shaped by his brotherly friendship with Hassan, his servant's son. Amir lives in constant want of his father's attention, feeling that he is a failure in his father's eyes. Hassan, on the other hand, seems to be able to do no wrong. Their friendship is a complex tapestry of love, loss, privilege, and shame.

Striving to be the son his father always wanted, Amir takes on the weight of living up to unrealistic expectations and places the fate of his relationship with his father on the outcome of a kite running tournament, a popular challenge in which participants must cut down the kites of others with their own kite. Amir wins the tournament. Yet just as he begins to feel that all will be right in the world, a tragedy occurs with his friend Hassan in a back alley on the very streets where the boys once played. This moment marks a turning point in Amir's life—one whose memory he seeks to bury by moving to America. There he realizes his dream of becoming a writer and marries for love but the memory of that fateful day will prove too strong to forget. Eventually it draws Amir back to Afghanistan to right the wrongs that began that day in the alley and continued in the days, months, and years that followed.

(Manitowoc Public Library)

About the Author

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965. His father was a diplomat with the Afghan Foreign Ministry and his mother taught Farsi and History at a large high school in Kabul. In 1976, the Afghan Foreign Ministry relocated the Hosseini family to Paris. They were ready to return to Kabul in 1980, but by then Afghanistan had already witnessed a bloody communist coup and the invasion of the Soviet army. The Hosseinis sought and were granted political asylum in the United States. In September of 1980, Hosseini's family moved to San Jose, California. Hosseini graduated from high school in 1984 and enrolled at Santa Clara University where he earned a bachelor's degree in Biology in 1988. The following year, he entered the University of California-San Diego's

School of Medicine, where he earned a Medical Degree in 1993. He completed his residency at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. Hosseini was a practicing internist between 1996 and 2004.

While in medical practice, Hosseini began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, in March of 2001. In 2003, *The Kite Runner*, was published and has since become an international bestseller, published in 48 countries. In 2006 he was named a goodwill envoy to UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency. His second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was published in May of 2007. Currently, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is published in 25 countries. He lives in northern California.

(www.khaledhosseini.com)

Reviews

“Current events will garner interest for this novel; the quality of Hosseini’s writing and the emotional impact of the story will guarantee its longevity...” – *Booklist Reviews*

“It is rare that a book is at once so timely and of such high literary quality.” -- *Publishers Weekly*

“Rather than settle for a coming-of-age or travails-of-immigrants story, Hosseini has folded them both into this searing spectacle of hard-won personal salvation. All this, and a rich slice of Afghan culture too: irresistible.” – *Kirkus Review*

Further Reading

House of Sand and Fog by Andre Dubus III

The Swallows of Kabul by Yasmina Khadra

Crescent by Diana Abu-Jaber

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Possible Discussion Questions

1. The novel begins and ends with scenes of kite running. Why do you think the author chooses to frame the novel with these scenes? Why is the following passage significant? “Afghans like to say: Life goes on unmindful of beginning, end... crisis or catharsis, moving forward like a slow, dusty caravan of nomads?”
2. “America had no ghosts, no memories, and no sins.” What significance does this quote have for Amir? For his father?
3. Compare and contrast the relationships of Sohrab and Amir with their fathers.
4. Discuss how the ever-changing politics of Afghanistan affects each of the characters in the novel.
5. The majority of the novel is about the relationship between Amir and Hassan. Why does Amir continue to test Hassan’s loyalty? Why does he resent Hassan? When does their “friendship” change and why?
6. As Amir remembers an Afghan celebration in which sheep must be sacrificed, he talks about seeing the sheep’s eyes moments before its death. Amir recalls this image when he witnesses what happens to Hassan and when he sees Sohrab in the home of the Taliban leader. Why is this image important?
7. Discuss the significance of Amir’s statement, “We actually deceived ourselves into thinking that a toy made of tissue paper, glue, and bamboo could somehow close the chasm between us?” How does his relationship with Baba change?
8. Why is Baba disappointed in Amir’s decision to become a writer? During their argument about his career path, Amir thinks to himself: “I would stand my ground, I decided. I didn’t want to sacrifice for Baba anymore. The last time I had done that, I had damned myself.” What has Amir sacrificed for Baba? How has Amir “damned” himself?

9. Baba and Amir are very different people. Often it disappoints both of them that Amir is not the son that Baba had hoped for. When Amir finds out that Baba has lied to him about Hassan, he realizes that “as it turned out, Baba and I were more alike than I had ever known.” How does this make Amir feel about his father? How is this both a positive and negative realization?
10. Discuss the differences between Baba and Ali, and, Amir and Hassan? How are their actions influenced by the master/servant relationship? Could they be different?

(Manitowoc Public Library)