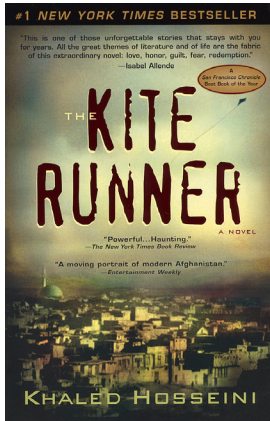




# THE Kite Runner

## A Background Resource for Readers



UT Arlington chose *The Kite Runner* as its first OneBook selection because it poses complex, thought-provoking questions about a wide range of issues. One of these issues is power and power relations—between fathers and sons, men and women, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, Pashtun and Hazara, weak countries and powerful countries, immigrants and Americans.

We have chosen “power” as the focus of UT Arlington Conversations, a year-long, campus-wide program of activities and events that explores power from many points of view. As you read *The Kite Runner*, think about the ways in which power or the lack of it impacts both individuals and larger groups—tribes, cities, even nations.

We hope that you will discuss the novel with others, join the online blog discussion, and attend some of the many Conversations events. Happy reading!

### Biography of the Author

Khaled Hosseini was born in 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan. He is the oldest of five children.

Hosseini's father's diplomatic career took the family to Tehran and Paris. After the Communist takeover of Afghanistan and the subsequent Soviet invasion in 1979, the U.S. granted the Hosseini family political asylum. The family settled in San Jose, CA, in 1980.

Hosseini attended Santa Clara University and graduated from UC San Diego School of Medicine. He has been in practice as an internist since 1996.

He is married and has two children. *The Kite Runner* is his first novel.

### Translations

**agha:** Great lord, nobleman, commander. Signifies respect.

**jan:** A word of endearment.

**Khan:** Used like “mister” when placed after the name of a person.

**namoos:** Reputation, fame, renown, esteem, honor; dignity.

**nang:** Honor, reputation, estimation.

**sahib:** A friend; courtesy title like “sir.”

More translations are available on the OneBook web site.

### Characters

#### Ali (AH-lee)

Hassan's father; servant to Baba and Amir.

#### Amir (AH-meer)

Main character and narrator of *The Kite Runner*.

#### Assef (AH-sef)

Childhood tormentor of Amir and Hassan.

#### Baba (baw-baw)

Amir's father.

#### General Taheri (TAH-hair-REE)

Soraya's father.

#### Hassan (HA-sahn)

Servant and friend to Amir.

#### Khala Jamila (ha-lah jah-MEE-la)

Soraya's mother.

#### Rahim Khan (RAW-heem HON)

Baba's friend and business partner; mentor to Amir.

#### Sohrab (so-RAWB)

Hassan's son.

#### Soraya (so-raw-YAH)

Amir's wife.

Visit the OneBook web site for more information, a calendar of events, and the online blog discussion.

[www.uta.edu/onebook](http://www.uta.edu/onebook)

### Timeline of Afghan History

**1919–1929** King Amanullah introduces reforms meant to modernize Afghanistan. Conservative religious groups revolt against the government.

**Jan. 14, 1929** Amanullah abdicates.

**Oct. 17, 1929** Nadir Shah, former general and minister of war, becomes king.

**Nov. 8, 1933** Nadir Shah assassinated. His son, Zahir Shah, succeeds to the throne.

**Sept. 6, 1953** King Zahir Shah asks his cousin, Muhammad Daoud Kahn, to become Prime Minister.

**Mar. 10, 1963** Prime Minister Daoud resigns.

**July 1973** Former Prime Minister Daoud deposes King Zahir Shah and proclaims Afghanistan a republic. Daoud is proclaimed president.

**1978** Daoud executed by members of the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a party founded on Marxism.

**Dec. 21, 1979** The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan, partly to support the Marxists.

**1980** The United States and other countries begin sending arms to Afghan resistance groups fighting the Soviets.

**1981** Five Afghan resistance groups form an alliance known as mujahedin.

**1981–1989** The mujahedin battle the Soviet troops stationed in Afghanistan.

**May 1988** Soviet troops begin to withdraw from Afghanistan, finishing in Feb. 1989.

**1989–1992** The mujahedin fight the Afghan government led by PDPA member Najibullah.

**1992** Najibullah resigns. The mujahedin elect Rabbani president.

**1992–1996** With the Communists gone, suppressed ethnic rivalries resurface, leading to civil war.

**1994** The Taliban, made up largely of Pashtuns, begin to gather followers in southern Afghanistan.

**Sept. 27, 1996** The Taliban take Kabul.

**1997** Led by Ahmad Massoud, non-Pashtun ethnic groups of Afghanistan unite as the Northern Alliance to fight the Taliban.

**July 1998** The Taliban attack Mazar-i-Sharif, killing about 6,000 Hazaras.

**1998–2001** The Taliban fight the Northern Alliance.

**Sept. 11, 2001** Supported by the Taliban, Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda attack the United States.

**Oct. 7, 2001** The United States begins bombing Afghanistan after the Taliban refuse to hand over Osama bin Laden.

**2002–2006** International coalition forces fight remnants of the Taliban. Afghans work to create a constitution and hold free democratic elections.

**Dec. 7, 2004** Hamid Karzai becomes the first democratically elected president in Afghanistan's history.

## Think About...

### Power

- Notice how material circumstances (class, gender, nationality, age) contribute to—perhaps even determine—access to power. Track shifts of power that occur in the novel—for Baba, Amir, Hassan, Soraya, Assef.
- In what ways does Hassan have power over Amir, though Amir's position is one of wealth and privilege?
- At a key point in the story, Hassan refuses to defend himself. Can his decision be seen as an exercise of power? To what extent is his choice culturally determined? How does being an American reader shape your reaction to his choice?

### Identity and self-determination

Amir says, "That Hassan would grow up illiterate like Ali and most Hazaras had been decided the minute he had been born" (28). In what ways are our lives scripted for us? How does Amir make choices that violate the "script" he's been given by his ethnicity, class, and/or gender?

### Friendship

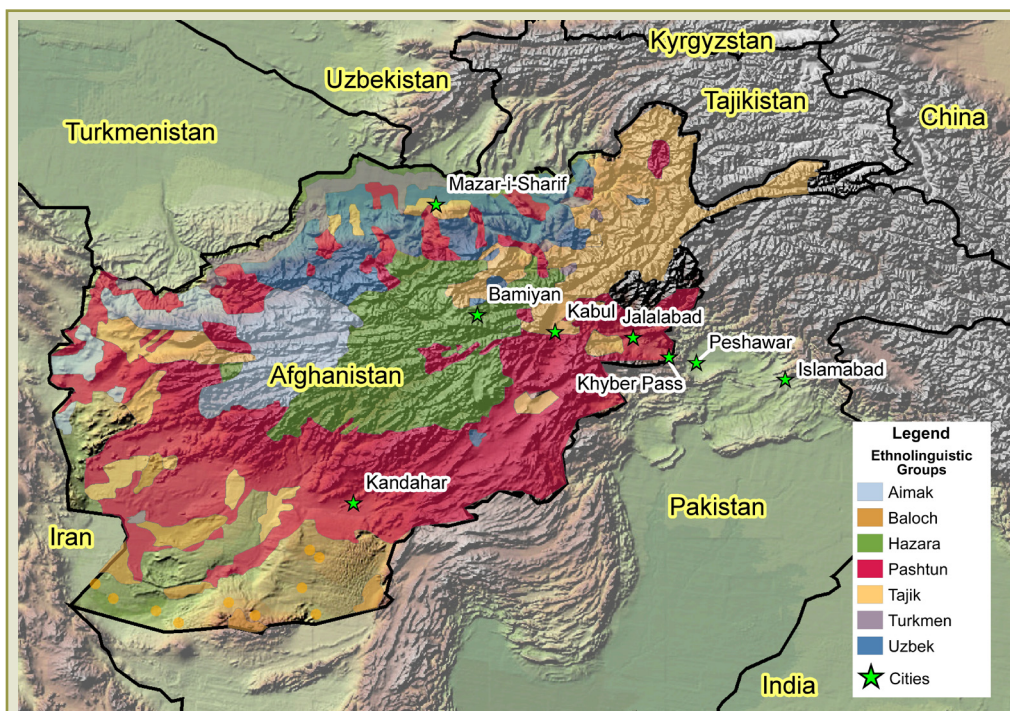
When Hassan says, "Amir agha and I are friends," Assef laughs and calls him a "pathetic fool" (72). Can people of unequal class and status ever be true friends? Does Amir ever become a true friend to Hassan and if so, when and how?

### Guilt

*The Kite Runner* can be read as a journey from guilt to redemption. Think about the nature of the various "sins" Amir commits in regards to Hassan. Of what is Amir guilty? (Avoid the easy answers here.)

### The immigrant experience and the American dream

Amir says, "Baba loved the idea of America. It was living in America that gave him an ulcer" (125). What elements of the American dream does the novel challenge? How does seeing America through Baba and Amir's eyes change your own ideas about the United States?



## Afghanistan and Texas

	Afghanistan	Texas
<i>Size:</i>	647,500 sq km	691,030 sq km
<i>Population:</i>	31,056,997	22,270,165
<i>Life expectancy:</i>	Total: 43.3 years	Total: 77.2 years
<i>Infant mortality rate:</i>	160.23 deaths/1,000 live births	6.6 deaths/1,000 live births
<i>Ethnic groups:</i>	Pashtun 42%; Tajik 27%; Hazara 9%; Uzbek 9%; Aimak 4%; Turkmen 3%; Baloch 2%	white 72%; Hispanic 14.5%; black 11%; Asian 3%
<i>Languages:</i>	Afghan Persian or Dari 50%; Pashtu 35%; Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen) 11%; much bilingualism	English only 66%; Spanish 29%; Asian and Pacific Islander 2%
<i>Literacy (age 15+ can read and write):</i> Male: Female:	Total population: 36% 51% 21%	Total U.S. population: 99% 99% 99%
<i>Telephones:</i>	0.1 telephone lines per 10 people	6.6 telephone lines per 10 people
<i>Television broadcast stations:</i>	At least 10 for entire country	31 in the Dallas-Fort Worth area alone
<i>Airports:</i>	46 (paved and unpaved runways)	392 (public airports only)
<i>Paved roadways:</i>	Total: 5,114.5 miles	Total: 79,000 miles of farm-to-market, ranch-to-market, state, U.S. and interstate highways

### Redemption

- After his brutal fight with Assef, Amir says, "My body was broken . . . but I felt healed. Healed at last" (289). Explain that in both psychological and spiritual terms.
- At age 12 Amir assumes a burden of guilt that haunts him throughout his life. What enables him to be free of guilt at last? Consider the passage on p. 359 that begins, "I wondered if that was how forgiveness budded..."

Sources for information in this handout can be found at [www.uta.edu/onebook](http://www.uta.edu/onebook).

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