

# **The Kite Runner Study Guide**

## **The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini**

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# Plot Summary

As the story opens, Amir is a young boy living with his widowed father and their servants, Ali and Hassan. Hassan and Amir are the same age and have been raised together from birth, both without their mothers. Amir desperately wants his father's approval and affection and is jealous of the attention his father pays to Hassan. It's not until he's an adult and his father is dead that Amir learns that Hassan is actually his half-brother. Amir recalls his father teaching him a person who lies is worse than any thief because it robs a person of the right to know the truth. When Amir learns the truth about Hassan's birth, he feels even more betrayed because he had believed that his father was above such deceit.

Amir and Hassan are close friends though Hassan is always aware of the limitations because of his station in life. When Amir has other friends available, Hassan is not invited to play. When Amir is preparing for school, Hassan prepares Amir's breakfast and school clothes. When Amir wins a kite tournament, Hassan runs to the place he knows the kite will land. Known for his ability to predict the precise landing spot, Amir knows Hassan will return with the kite. Having that kite is a great honor in Amir's culture and he knows he will earn his father's praise for having won the tournament. Amir follows Hassan and discovers that Hassan is in an alley, surrounded by a group of neighborhood bullies, including a boy named Assef. Amir doesn't intervene but watches as the boys hold Hassan down while Assef rapes him. Amir waits some time and lies about the situation, pretending he hadn't seen anything. Over the coming weeks, Amir's inner turmoil grows and he tells his father that Hassan stole a watch. Hassan and Ali leave the household.

War threatens the country and Amir and his father manage to escape to America. Their lives are difficult but they survive. Eventually, Amir marries and his father dies of cancer. Then Amir hears from his father's old friend, Rahim Khan, who is very ill. Amir travels overseas to see him and learns the truth about his biological relationship to Hassan. He also learns that Hassan and his wife were murdered by soldiers. Their son, Sohrab, is living in an orphanage and Rahim Khan tells Amir he has to get the boy out of the country. Having never overcome the guilt of his failure to run to Hassan's aid, Amir heads back to his childhood home.

There he finds that Sohrab has been taken captive by a cruel soldier. Amir finds the man and learns that it's Assef. Assef agrees that he and Amir will fight with the winner taking Sohrab. Assef beats Amir to a bloody pulp but Sohrab intervenes, hitting Assef in the eye with a brass ball fired from a slingshot. While Assef is writhing in agony, Sohrab and Amir escape. Amir begins trying to figure out a way to get Sohrab into the United States and comes to the conclusion that Sohrab will have to spend some time in an orphanage before he can make the trip. Sohrab is so fearful of returning to the orphanage that he tries to kill himself.

Meanwhile, Amir's wife has called in some favors with the immigration services and Sohrab is allowed to travel to the United States. Months pass and he remains fearful of



trusting the new situation or his adoptive parents. One day Amir buys a kite and tells Sohrab that his father, Hassan, had been the most talented kite runner of all times, earning a smile that Amir hopes will be the beginning of a new life for Sohrab.



# Chapters 1 - 3

## Summary

### Chapter 1

This chapter begins in December of 2001. Amir recalls the exact moment that was to forever shape his destiny. He says he was twelve and crouched in an alley, and that he has never been able to fully bury that day in his past. He now lives in San Francisco and he ends a phone call and takes a walk, noting the kites in the air at Golden Gate Park. Amir sits and thinks back on his past and the day that made him into the man he is now.

### Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, Amir and Hassan are children together. They spend time playing as young boys did in this time in their Afghanistan home of Kabul. Hassan has a harelip and is teased unmercifully by the other children. Hassan's father, Ali, chastises the boys when he catches them at mischief and Hassan never reveals that the mischief is always Amir's idea. Amir and his father, who he calls Baba, live in a nice house in a wealthy neighborhood. Hassan and Ali, servants of the household, live in mud huts in the back. Baba's best friend and business partner is Rahim Khan. Hassan is one year younger than Amir. Amir's mother died in childbirth. Hassan's mother, Sanaubar, ran away a week after his birth. Hassan never mentions his mother but a midwife said Sanaubar had taken one look at Hassan's cleft lip and declared him an idiot to match Ali.

### Chapter 3

Amir says his father had once wrestled a black bear. He says the story might have been put down to the tendency of the Afghan people to exaggerate but the fact that it was Baba means the story is true. In the late 1960s, Baba builds an orphanage, financing and overseeing the entire project.

One day Amir comes home from school after having been told by a teacher that drinking is a horrible sin. He relates that to his father who is having a glass of whisky. Baba tells Amir that there is only one serious sin – theft. He says there are versions of that sin, such a lying because that robs someone of the truth, and murder because that robs someone of life. Baba says the teachers are “bearded monkeys” and that Amir will not get a true education from them. Baba then says that “if there's a God out there,” He has better things to do than to worry about someone who drinks liquor.

Amir says he knows his father is disappointed in him. Baba often ignores Amir's conversations. Once Amir says he has cancer and Baba tells him to get a soda. Amir believes Baba hates him on some level because Baba's beautiful wife died in childbirth giving life to Amir. Amir says he is nothing like his father and prefers the written word to the pursuits Baba enjoys, such as hunting. One day, Amir hears Baba talking with Rahim Khan. Baba says there's “something missing” in Amir. Rahim Khan says Baba



doesn't get to make Amir into what he want and that there's nothing wrong with Amir. He says all that's missing in Amir is "a mean streak." Baba says doesn't stand up for himself when the neighborhood boys pick on him, letting Hassan defend him. Baba predicts Amir will become "a man who can't stand up to anything." The following morning, Hassan is preparing Amir's breakfast and asks what's wrong. Amir snaps at Hassan and realizes he's being mean, though Rahim Khan had said Amir doesn't have what it takes to be mean.

## Analysis

The time flow is chronological except for the first chapter. This chapter takes place in 2001 and the author then drops back in time to the 1970s and the story moves forward from there to 2001. There is a great deal of foreshadowing in this first chapter, which is very brief. Several characters are mentioned though it will be several chapters before the reader meets some of them. It should be noted that the story is written entirely in first person from Amir's perspective which means the reader may get some skewed information. Amir seems to judge himself harshly in some situations though the reader learns that it's because Amir failed to stand up for Hassan in a moment that was vital to both of them. From Amir's perspective looking back almost three decades, he judges himself based on that failure though that failure hasn't even yet happened as Chapter 2 opens.

Rahim Khan is introduced only briefly in Chapter 2, but his importance as a character is hinted even in this brief introduction. Amir describes many aspects of the house including a photograph of Amir as a baby with his father and Rahim Khan. Amir says that his father is holding him "but" Amir is clutching Rahim's finger.

There is some discussion of Sanaubar and Ali and how their marriage happened. Sanaubar is a beautiful young woman. Ali had polio as a child and he has a "twisted, atrophied" leg that makes his walk a subject for unkind people to ridicule. Apparently, even Sanaubar joined in the tormenting. Ali is a kind man who withstands the taunts without obviously reacting. Some people believe that Ali agreed to marry Sanaubar because her family lack respect and it was hoped that he, as an honorable man, might help in that regard. Sanaubar attracts a great deal of male attention. It's only much later that this information takes on another level of interest. Amir eventually learns that he and Hassan are half brothers. There's no indication how Baba and Sanaubar came together or whether Ali knows, but it seems possible that Ali is impotent because of the polio. There's also no indication why Sanaubar leaves but it may have been that she's unhappy living in the little hut in the back while her lover and the father of her son is living in a mansion.

There is a deep connection between the two boys from birth. They are fed by the same wet nurse and Amir says his father reminded him often that a bond of that kind cannot be ignored or broken. Amir also says that his first word was "Baba," referring to his father. Hassan's first word was "Amir."



Amir's relationship with Baba is also described in the opening pages. He desperately wants Baba's love and attention. On the rare moments when they connect, Amir is elated though it always ends badly, at least in his opinion. It's also noteworthy that Amir is jealous of his father's time. He occasionally lies, saying Hassan can't join them on an outing so that he'll have his father to himself.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What is the moment Amir says defines the rest of his life?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What are Amir's and Hassan's first words? What does this indicate about the boys' devotion to each other?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What happened to Amir's mother? What happened to Hassan's mother?

## **Vocabulary**

Chiseled, appendage, unatoned, affluent, unscrupulous, sallow, congenital, garrulous, veracity, opportune, atrophied, havoc.



# Chapters 4 - 7

## Summary

### Chapter 4

Amir recounts the story of how Ali came to be a member of the household. Amir's grandfather was a judge in 1933, the year Baba was born. A pair of men had struck and killed a couple leaving their five-year-old son an orphan. That boy was Ali and Amir's grandfather had taken the boy into his house. Amir says Baba has many stories about the mischief he and Ali caused as children. Ali says Baba came up with the ideas and he merely carried out Baba's plans.

Each day during the school year, Hassan does chores while Baba drives Amir to school in his black Ford Mustang. After school, Amir and Hassan head to an abandoned cemetery where they eat pomegranates from a tree and Amir reads to Hassan. One day Amir stops reading the story in the book and begins making up a story instead. When he's finished, Hassan applauds, saying he liked the story very much. Amir is amazed at the discovery and that night he writes a short story about a man who learns that if he cries into a magic cup the tears turn to pearls. In an effort to make himself cry, he goes to extremes, eventually killing his wife. Amir takes the story to his father's study where Baba isn't interested but Rahim Khan asks to read it. When Rahim Khan returns the story, he's written a note of encouragement, saying Amir has talent. Then he and Baba leave for the evening. When Amir reads it to Hassan, he echoes the praise, predicting Amir will someday become a famous writer. Then Hassan points out that the man might have simply smelled an onion and Amir notes that he learned about the "plot hole" from Hassan, who couldn't even read. Moments later, "Afghanistan changed forever."

### Chapter 5

There are bombs exploding and the sound of gunfire. Ali appears and says someone is duck hunting. Amir notes that the generation of Afghani children who are familiar with constant gunfire has not yet been born. Baba doesn't return until the following morning. Hassan and Amir remain inside all morning but eventually head out to play. They encounter a neighborhood bully named Assef and his friends, Kamal and Wali. Assef talks about the new order of things in Afghanistan since the coup of the previous night and predicts there is no room in the country for Amir's race. The situation turns violent but Hassan pulls out a slingshot and threatens to put Assef's left eye out. Assef and his friends leave.

A couple of years pass. One year, Baba buys the surgery to fix Hassan's cleft lip as a birthday gift. The surgery is a success and Hassan is soon able to smile normally. As the chapter comes to a close, Amir notes that this is the year Amir stops smiling.

### Chapter 6





Winter arrives. Every youngster in Kabul loves winter because school is closed for the season and it's time for kite flying along with the annual kite-fighting tournament. Amir and Hassan make their own kites, but there are always flaws with the designs. Baba begins buying their kites from a shoemaker who is famous for his kites. Amir says a new kid in the neighborhood talks about the rules for the tournaments in the Hindu culture. Amir says the Afghanistan people hate rules and there are no rules for the tournament. The goal is to cut the strings of all the other kites without having your string cut. When a kite string is cut, the kite runners rush to retrieve it. Hassan is the best of all the runners, seldom looking up to see where the kite is headed but always knowing where it will come down.

The day of the tournament draws near and Baba predicts Amir might win this year. Amir doesn't know how to react to the praise but becomes determined to win. He says Baba wins at everything and has the right to expect Amir to win at this.

## Chapter 7

Amir is worried and almost decides not to fly his kite in the tournament at all but Hassan convinces him to go ahead. Soon there are only two kites remaining – Amir's and a blue kite flown by someone he doesn't know. When Amir makes the final cut, setting the blue kite free from its string, the crowd goes wild. Hassan pledges to go retrieve the blue kite. Amir drags his kite in and Ali congratulates him. Amir doesn't yet go to his father, but imagines what the moment of congratulations will be. He believes this victory will change his relationship with his father and they will now live "happily ever after."

Amir goes in search of Hassan and an old man says he saw Hassan being chased by some boys. When Amir catches up, Hassan is trapped at the end of an alley. Assef is there with some friends, including a boy named Kamal. Assef says he forgives Hassan for the threats during their previous meeting but the forgiveness comes with a price. He suggests Hassan hand over the blue kite. Hassan refuses and Assef says Amir would not make the same sacrifice for Hassan. Hassan argues that he and Amir are friends but Assef says Hassan is nothing more to Amir than a servant. He then says Hassan can keep the kite because that will remind him always of "what I'm about to do." Assef then rapes Hassan while the other two boys hold Hassan down.

Amir steps back from the entrance of the alley. He knows that he has one final chance to stand up for Hassan, but he slips away without revealing his presence. Amir says that, perhaps, this is the price he has to pay to win Baba's favor and that it might be a fair price. Amir waits for awhile then heads to the alley. He says he'd been looking for Hassan and their eyes don't meet. Amir pretends he doesn't see the "tiny drops that fell from between his legs and stained the snow black," or that he's limping. When they reach home, Baba is thrilled with Amir's victory.



## Analysis

Amir says his relationship with Hassan mirrors that of Baba and Ali, at least to some degree. Baba tells stories of the mischief and he Ali caused when they were children. There is good-natured teasing between the two men but Amir notes that his father doesn't refer to Ali as his friend. Amir says he and Hassan aren't friends either, but that the bond between them is something that can't be ignored. The class separation is obvious. Amir gets ready to go to school every morning and Hassan prepares Amir's clothes and breakfast, serving Amir's needs. This doesn't seem at all strange until later when the reader learns that Hassan is actually Amir's half brother.

Amir is sometimes mean when it comes to Hassan though it could be put down to something akin to sibling rivalry. For example, Hassan loves the stories Amir reads and they spend hours with Amir reading aloud to Hassan at the old cemetery. Sometimes Hassan stops Amir, asking for the meaning of a particular word. One day he asks what "imbecile" means. Amir says it means "smart," and gives an example of the word in a sentence, saying "Hassan is an imbecile." Amir says he later feels bad about it and sometimes gives Hassan an "old shirt or a broken toy" to make amends for what he tells himself is a "harmless prank."

One of the books Amir reads to Hassan is about ancient Persia. Hassan's favorite story from this book is about Rostam and Sohrab. In the story, Sohrab is mortally wounded by Rostam and as he is dying they discover that Sohrab is Rostam's son. Sohrab's dying words indicate that Rostam's obstinacy denied him his rightful place as son. Hassan is incredibly moved by the story and sometimes cries. He later names his own son Sohrab. This could be a mere foreshadowing of the fact that Baba and Hassan are father and son and that Baba's own pride and obstinacy are to blame for his refusal to publicly acknowledge Hassan. It may also be a hint that Hassan knows of the biological bond and that it will never be acknowledged. It's obvious that Amir is jealous of Hassan. He notes that Baba buys kites for each of them each year for the flying season. If Amir asks for a larger kite, Baba complies with the request but then he buys the exact same kite for Hassan as well. Amir says he wishes he could – at least sometimes – be Baba's favorite. It's important for the reader to remember that Amir doesn't yet know Baba is also Hassan's father. One day he asks Hassan how far his loyalty goes. He asks if Hassan would eat dirt if Amir told him to. Hassan admits that he would but asks why Amir would possibly ask him to go to such an extreme. Hassan is not educated but he is very smart. He is also very unassuming and doesn't seem to ask for anything from either Amir or Baba in return for his unwavering devotion to them.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe the scene in the alley when Hassan is attacked. What does Amir do when he realizes Hassan is being attacked?



## Discussion Question 2

What does Amir believe will happen to his relationship with his father after he wins the tournament?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Amir sometimes feel jealousy toward Hassan?

## Vocabulary

Impeccable, obstinacy, indecipherable, fascinating, humiliated, trepidation, magnificent, conveyed, coup, ironic, spheres, apparent, horses, abhor, austere, coveted.



# Chapters 8 - 9

## Summary

### Chapter 8

Hassan and Amir barely see each other for the next week. One day Ali asks Amir why Hassan is acting strangely. Amir says he doesn't know. A few days later, Amir goes on an outing with Baba and a group of friends and relatives. Amir says he finally has Baba's attention but now he simply feels empty. Amir and Hassan stop spending time playing together and Amir rebuffs Hassan's attempts. One day Amir and Baba are planting tulips in the garden and Amir asks if Baba had ever considered hiring someone else as the household servants. Baba is furious, citing his forty-year relationship with Ali. He says he's ashamed of Amir's comments and that Hassan is not leaving.

School starts and Amir spends a great deal of time in his room. One day Amir asks Hassan to accompany him to their favorite reading spot. Amir is about to read, then stops and throws a pomegranate at Hassan. It strikes him and splatters. Amir screams at Hassan to hit him back, but Hassan refuses.

Baba throws an elaborate birthday party for Amir when he turns thirteen. Amir notes that his relationship with his father is already regressing with distance between them again. While the party is for Amir's birthday, he knows that his father is the star of the show and the reason most of the people show up. Assef shows up with a book about Hitler as his gift to Amir. Amir is standing alone away from the party when Rahim Khan seeks him out. He presents Amir with a journal for his stories. Rahim says he'd almost married a girl once but she was a servant and his parents would never have accepted her. He reminds Amir that he's open to anything Amir wants to talk about and Amir almost tells him about Hassan's attack and his own reaction to it, but the moment passes as fireworks begin. During one blast that lights up the yard, Amir sees Hassan serving drinks to Assef and his friend.

### Chapter 9

Baba's two gifts are a red bicycle that would have been welcomed a few months earlier and a fancy wristwatch. The only gift Amir treasures is the journal from Rahim Khan. Amir becomes convinced that things would be better for Hassan if he were not in the house so that he would be far removed from Assef. But Amir also admits his life will be better without Hassan's presence. The next day Amir hides some money and the watch under Hassan's mattress. He tells his father that the watch is missing and hints that Hassan might have taken it. Baba summons Hassan, Amir, and Ali to his office. Hassan admits to stealing the watch and Amir realizes this is Hassan's way of protecting Amir one final time. Baba says he forgives Hassan but Ali says life is no longer tolerable for them and that they are leaving. Baba rants but Ali stands firm in the decision and they leave the following day for Ali's cousin's house in Hazarajat.



## Analysis

The incident with the pomegranates is an effort on Amir's part to find forgiveness. He says he wishes Hassan would hit him back, even hurt him. Amir is hoping that if he is punished for his inaction the day of Hassan's rape, he might be about to find some semblance of peace and rekindle his relationship with Hassan. For all the insistence that Hassan is not his friend, Amir is now seeking the forgiveness one would seek from a friend.

Hassan's station in life creates a chasm between the two that cannot be easily bridged though Amir has the power to make that gulf less formidable. Amir doesn't make that effort and seems puzzled that Hassan doesn't either. One day when the boys are talking, Amir promises he'll someday be so rich that he can afford to buy two televisions – one for himself and one for Hassan. Hassan pledges that he'll put his in the little hut where he and Ali live. This surprises Amir because he can't imagine that Hassan would be happy to spend his life there with no hope of making a change. Another example of this attitude is seen when Amir sees Hassan serving the guests at the birthday party. Hassan is serving Assef and one of Assef's friends though it seems too much to expect of him.

Assef is obviously unhinged even at this young age. When he and his parents show up at Amir's birthday party, Assef does all the talking though it would have been normal for the parents to speak and Assef to only politely answer when directly addressed. Amir notes that it seems as if Assef's parents might actually be afraid of their son. The gift – a book about Hitler – is a foreshadowing of what's to come for Assef when he becomes a soldier himself.

Amir is hurting with the knowledge that he watched the attack on Hassan and did nothing, but he is unable to confess the situation to any of the adults in his life. Rahim Khan seems an obvious choice considering that Baba would never have been able to understand. Amir feels that it is his fault. Yet, some of the situation is beyond his control. After all, he is just a little boy. Some of the blame can be traced back to Baba who has been willing to let his son work as a servant in his household for all these years and is now willing to let him leave rather than confess the truth and take responsibility.

Ali and Hassan have obviously been crying when they enter Baba's study to discuss the missing watch. Amir realizes that Hassan has told Ali the entire story – his attack, Amir's inaction, and that Amir wants him to leave the household at all costs. Amir says he's glad that someone else finally sees him for what he really is. He seems to still be seeking punishment for his decision and is unable to forgive himself without that.

## Discussion Question 1

What kind of person is Assef? What does Amir observe about Assef's relationship with his parents?



## Discussion Question 2

Describe Amir's party.

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Amir hit Hassan with a pomegranate? What does he wish Hassan would do in return?

## Vocabulary

Periphery, unwavering, envious, muster, momentum, harried, anonymity, interlude, teeming, trudged, unconvincingly, feeble, throng, amid, rickety.



# Chapters 10 - 11

## Summary

### Chapter 10

This chapter takes place in March of 1981. Amir and Baba are in the back of a truck with several other people fleeing Afghanistan. They left the house behind with almost all their possessions, telling only Rahim that they were fleeing for America. They are stopped at a checkpoint and a soldier demands time along with a young mother in the truck as “payment” for passage. Baba intercedes though Amir knows he’s putting them all in danger by standing up for the young woman. A superior officer intervenes and the situation passes. The trip takes weeks with days hidden in basements along the way. Amir encounters Kamal, one of Assef’s friends who had held Hassan during the attack. Amir overhears Kamal’s father saying that Kamal had been raped. He now reacts and responds to nothing. They make part of their journey in a tanker, and Kamal dies on the way. When his father realizes that Kamal is dead, he grabs a gun and kills himself as well.

Chapter 11 takes place in Fremont, California, in the 1980s. Baba is working at a gas station. He is having trouble identifying with American customs and rules. Amir is studying. One day Amir suggests that they return to Peshawar because it was more like Afghanistan and Baba was happier during their time there. Baba says he came to America for Amir and they are staying. The day Amir graduates high school – at the age of 20 – Baba gives him a navy blue Grand Torino. Amir announces his plan to study creative writing. Baba isn’t happy with the choice, wishing for a stable career instead.

In 1983, Baba sells his old car and buys a beat up Volkswagen bus. They begin hitting yard sales whenever there was extra time and selling the items at a regular Saturday flea market for a modest profit. There are lots of Afghanistan refugees at the flea market and Baba loves to roam the stalls, visiting and sharing gossip. Many of the other sellers are former professionals, ranging from teachers to surgeons. One day Baba introduces Amir to “General Sahib, Mr. Iqbal Taheri,” a former member of the Ministry of Defense. Baba brags that Amir is “going to be a great writer” and that he’s a straight A-student. He soon meets the General’s wife and their daughter, Soraya.

Later, Amir asks Baba about Soraya. He says there is gossip that she was involved with a young man and that the situation ended badly, but that she’s “hardworking and kind.” Baba points out that life may be unfair toward women, but that her indiscretion means there are no now suitors looking for her hand in marriage.

## Analysis

The statement that Baba “loved the idea of America.” Like many people in bad situations, Baba has come to believe that living in America will be wonderful and that all



his troubles will be ended. The reality is seldom as wonderful as the idea and this is true in Baba's case as well. Amir says Baba loved the idea but the reality "gave him an ulcer." One of the incidents Amir describes happens when Baba arrives at a small market where he shops regularly. On this particular day he doesn't have cash for his small purchase and when he writes a check the owner wants to see his identification. This infuriates Baba and the owners threaten to call the police after he throws a fit.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How do Amir and Baba escape to America?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Describe the scene at the checkpoint during which Baba stands up for a young woman. Why is Amir angry at his father over the situation?

## **Discussion Question 3**

How does Amir meet Soraya? What is her history?

## **Vocabulary**

Mutually, negate, encapsulated, morsel, barren, staccatos, acrid, pungent, sauntered, divert.





# Chapters 12 - 13

## Summary

### Chapter 12

Amir lives for the Sundays at the flea market, but he has trouble working up the nerve to actually talk to Soraya. Baba warns Amir to be careful not to harm Soraya's honor or that of her father. Amir soon learns that Soraya wants to be a teacher though her father wishes for her to have a more lucrative career.

Baba becomes ill, and a doctor discovers a spot on his lung that is later diagnosed as Oat Cell Carcinoma. The cancer is advanced and inoperable. Baba insists that no one learn of his illness. One day he collapses at the flea market with a seizure and is hospitalized. Two days later, he's released from the hospital. It's obvious that he has only a little time left. Amir asks Baba to speak to Soraya's father, asking for permission for them to marry.

Soraya telephones Amir that evening. She says her father has given his permission, but she needs to tell him something first. She and a young man had lived together for a short while. She fears that this fact will mean Amir won't want to marry her after all. Though he's hurt by the fact that she has already been to bed with another man, he knows that he can't hold her past against her. He says he wants to marry her anyway.

### Chapter 13

The traditions related to the upcoming marriage continue. The ceremonies would normally have lasted several months, but everyone can see that Baba isn't likely to live that long. So, the event is hastened. Soraya becomes Baba's chief caregiver, and he is almost completely bedridden in their apartment. One day Amir arrives home to find the two of them looking guilty as Soraya tries to hide something. He discovers it's the journal given to him by Rahim Khan. Soraya says she hadn't realized the depth of his talent. Baba says he "put her up to it." That night, Baba says he is in no pain for the first time in a long time. He declines the pain medication and dies that night.

Amir begins to learn about his in-laws. The General is a tyrant who rules with anger. Khala Jamila – Soraya's mother – is kind and gentle with a beautiful singing voice, though the General refuses to allow her sing in public. Amir and Soraya move to a one-bedroom apartment near her parents. They stop going to the flea market and focus on their studies. Amir spends more time writing and sells a book.

They try to have a child. after a year, a doctor tells them Soraya will never be able to conceive. They discuss adoption, but Amir can tell Soraya's heart isn't in it and drops the idea. They use the money from Amir's second book to put a down payment on a house. Their lives settle into a routine, but Amir can feel the absence of a child in their lives. He compares it to a presence "settling between us ... like a newborn child."



## Analysis

Interestingly, when Soraya confides her past to Amir he doesn't reciprocate with the secret that has eaten at him for more than a decade. He says he can't possibly chastise her for her past when his own is far from clean. He does say that she's very brave for confiding in him and that, in his mind, makes her a better person than he.

At Baba's funeral, many of the mourners share their memories of Baba. They talk about the things he did for them. Some of them mention money he gave them or loaned to them. Others talk about Baba's willingness to help when no one else was willing. With this in mind, the reader may find a little more sympathy for Baba's situation the last few years of his life. He'd been a wealthy man in Afghanistan, well-respected, and beloved. In America, he became a poor man who worked at a gas station just to get by. However, he retained his pride. Amir notes that they were eligible for government assistance when they arrived. However, Baba had refused, saying all he wanted was a job so he could earn his way. As a contrast, the General never worked except for making the small amount of money he could from the flea market. Other than that, he depended on government assistance because he wasn't willing to lower himself to work at some menial job so much below his station in Afghanistan.

Amir notes that his mother-in-law loves him completely and unconditionally. This is likely because Soraya had become blemished in the eyes of the community and her mother had come to doubt Soraya would ever marry. The fact that Amir looks past Soraya's indiscretion makes him a hero in the eyes of his mother-in-law.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do Soraya and Amir marry more quickly than would be traditionally acceptable. What are their living conditions during their first few months of marriage?

## Discussion Question 2

Describe Soraya's parents.

## Discussion Question 3

What do the mourners say about Baba at his funeral?

## Vocabulary

Reticence, furtive, demeanor, complimentary, metastasized, conversant, reverberated, posh, ambivalent.



# Chapters 14 - 17

## Summary

### Chapter 14

This chapter begins in June of 2001. Amir has a phone call from Rahim Khan who is in Pakistan. Rahim says that he is very ill. Amir plans to leave for Pakistan immediately. Amir says that Rahim Khan had said during their phone call that “there is a way to be good again.” Amir knows this means Rahim has always known about Hassan’s attack, Amir’s lack of action, and Amir’s lies that forced Hassan out of his home. Time has changed many things in their lives. The General is no longer critical of Soraya’s chosen profession and sometimes sits in on her classes.

### Chapter 15

Amir arrives and is surprised at Rahim Khan’s gaunt appearance. Rahim says in keeping with an agreement with Baba, he’d moved into their house once Amir and Baba left Afghanistan. Rahim says he couldn’t bring himself to leave his home even when things were bad. He then says he has a story he needs to tell Amir.

### Chapter 16

Rahim Kahn says he was traveling one day when he encountered Hassan. Hassan was married by then. At first, he and his wife were reluctant to leave the home they had created for themselves. However, Rahim convinced them, and they moved in with him. They took care of the house and Rahim. Hassan’s wife, Farzana, gave birth to a stillborn daughter. She was pregnant again when a strange woman appeared. She was near death, and they began to nurse her back to health before discovering she was Hassan’s mother, Sanaubar. She was there when Farzana gave birth to a son they named Sohrab. When Sohrab was four, Sanaubar died.

### Chapter 17

Rahim Khan continues the story but first he gives Amir a faded photo of Hassan as an adult with a little boy, Sohrab. There is also a letter from Hassan. He explains that Rahim Khan is ill and that the situation in his country is degrading quickly. He reminisces, updates Amir on his life, and says that if Amir ever returns to his home in Afghanistan, he’ll find Hassan waiting faithfully. Rahim Khan says the letter was written six months earlier. He says one day a group of Taliban soldiers arrived at the house and demanded Hassan and his family leave. Hassan protested and the soldiers executed him in the street. When Farzana ran toward her dead husband, the soldiers killed her as well. Rahim Khan says the Taliban soldiers now live in the house and that Sohrab has been taken an orphanage. Rahim says a local couple will take Sohrab in if Amir can get him into Pakistan. Amir offers to pay for someone else to go but Rahim Khan explodes, telling Amir that it’s time for him to stand up as a man and do what’s right.



He then goes on to tell the rest of his story. He says Ali was married to another woman before Sanaubar. They had no children but when she left Ali she had three daughters. Rahim Khan says Ali was not able to father children. Amir initially argues but then gives in and asks for the identity of Hassan's father. Rahim Khan says Amir knows if he will just think on the matter. Amir doesn't want to accept it, but he realizes Baba is also Hassan's father and that he and Hassan are half-brothers, making Sohrab his nephew.

## Analysis

The letter Hassan writes Amir is a testament of Hassan's determination which seems in contrast to his earlier acceptance that he would spend his life in a mud hut as a servant. Perhaps because Amir introduced Hassan to the written word by reading to him, Hassan spends the time and effort to learn to read. Not only that, he teaches Sohrab to read and write as well.

The revelation that Amir and Hassan are half-brothers isn't a surprise to the reader of this study guide but probably is a surprise to the reader of the book. There are some hints to this effect. Baba never misses Hassan's birthday. When he buys a specific kite for Amir, he buys the same kite for Hassan. When he believes Hassan stole from Amir, he immediately offered up forgiveness though it went against everything Amir expected. In addition, there are some hints that Amir senses the likeness between his father and Hassan when Hassan is a youngster, though he doesn't quite grasp it. Amir says that he sees something in Hassan's face but that it disappears before he can figure out what it is.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Amir learn that he and Hassan are half-brothers? What is Amir's reaction?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Hassan die?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Rahim Khan say about Amir's hesitation to rescue Sohrab?

## Vocabulary

Protracted, soliloquies, incessant, averting, spewing, mode, lavish, garrulous, intricately, pragmatic.



# Chapters 18 - 21

## Summary

### Chapter 18

Amir spends some time wishing Rahim Khan hadn't called him and that he'd continued his life in America without knowing what happened to Hassan. But he announces he will go find Sohrab and instructs Rahim Khan to call the Caldwells, the couple who have agreed to accept Sohrab once he's out of Afghanistan.

### Chapter 19

Amir is paired up with a man named Farid who will provide transportation and guidance on his quest to find Sohrab. They spend a night at Farid's house and Amir eats a meal. Farid's sons stare at him and he gives them his watch only to discover later that there hadn't been enough food in the house for his meal and for the children. He leaves money under a mattress, knowing they would not accept it from him otherwise.

### Chapter 20

They arrive in Amir's neighborhood and he's appalled at the devastation. In a chance encounter, Amir meets a former teacher who is now a homeless beggar. The man remembers Amir's mother and says she'd confided in him that she was "profoundly happy," so much so that she was afraid something would be taken from her. Amir has to leave but realizes this old man has given him more information about his mother than his father ever did.

They arrive at an orphanage where they believe Sohrab is living. At first, the director claims to know nothing about Sohrab but eventually admits that he's been taken captive by a Taliban soldier who periodically demands a child as "payment" for the safety of the orphanage as a whole. Sohrab has been gone for a month. He tells them how to find the man who took Sohrab.

### Chapter 21

Amir asks Farid to drive through his old neighborhood, and they stop at his house. He stays until Farid reminds him they are in danger by being there. Then, he goes to a hotel where he rents a room for an incredibly high price. He starts to argue but realizes the man isn't being greedy – he's simply trying to feed his family. They go the next day to the soccer game where the orphanage director tells them they'll find the man who took Sohrab. The soldier, who Amir later discovers is Assef, appears at halftime and stones a man and woman to death. Farid tells one of the Taliban soldiers that he and Amir want a meeting with the soldier in charge of the stoning. Amir is surprised when he's told where to go at three o'clock that same day.



## Analysis

Hassan spends a great deal of time berating himself for not realizing there was more to the connection between Baba and Hassan than mere affection. He recalls all the hints that might have led him to the right conclusion but he doesn't seem to consider that Baba wouldn't have likely admitted to the kinship even if Amir had confronted him about it.

Hassan doesn't want to go to Afghanistan to retrieve Sohrab and it seems to be mostly guilt that drives him to it. He admits that if he hadn't driven Hassan from their home when they were young, Baba might have taken Hassan and Ali with them when they fled for America. If that had happened, Hassan might have had an opportunity for a full life rather than being killed in the streets for trying to protect the property of a father who wouldn't even publicly claim him.

The relationship between Farid and Amir is off to a rocky start and it's obvious Farid has no use for Amir. Farid actually thinks Amir is a spoiled tourist and he's somewhat embarrassed when he discovers Amir is searching for a boy. Farid seems like a tough man but he obviously has a soft spot for the children in his life.

The man who runs the orphanage indicates that he willingly gives the soldier one child each time the soldier demands it. This makes Amir furious and he jumps on the man, apparently intending to do bodily harm. When the scuffle is over, the man says he has given up his life, his money, and his chance to leave the country to work at this orphanage. He says there is no financial support, which means there is no way to feed the children. The soldier who takes a child is not making a request, but issuing a demand. If the director refuses, the man takes as many children as he wants. If the director gives in, the soldier gives him money. The director says he then takes the money to the market and buys food for the children who remain. While he's obviously upset about the situation, he says he's made his peace with his god and that he's ready to stand in judgment for his decision.

## Discussion Question 1

What does Amir learn about his mother from the beggar on the street? How does that compare to the memories his father has shared about Amir's mother?

## Discussion Question 2

Chapter 21 ends with the knowledge that Amir is to see the military man the following day. Is this a good use of foreshadowing? Are there other examples of foreshadowing in the text?



## Discussion Question 3

What is Amir's reaction to the information he receives from Rahim Khan? Why do you believe he reacts in this manner?

## Vocabulary

Sultry, cranny, disoriented, smothers, swathed, oblivion, impregnated, morosely, commodity, succulent.



# Chapters 22 - 23

## Summary

### Chapter 22

They arrive at the big house where the meeting is to be held and Amir says he doesn't expect Farid to go inside with him. He immediately notices that Assef hasn't changed clothes since the execution that day and that needle marks on his forearms identify him as a drug user. Assef begins to taunt Amir, asks why he left Afghanistan for America rather than staying to fight for his country. Assef calls in Sohrab who is wearing bells that jingle when he walks. He is forced to dance and he does so in something like a trance, apparently knowing he'll be punished otherwise. Amir is amazed at the resemblance to Hassan. After Sohrab's dance, Amir realizes the soldier holding him captive is Assef. Amir offers to pay for him but Assef refuses money. He says he'll fight Amir with the winner taking Sohrab. Amir agrees. Assef tells the other soldiers to leave the room and that they aren't to enter, no matter what they hear. He says if Amir walks out of the room with Sohrab, they are to allow him to leave unharmed.

Amir says, looking back on the fight, he's certain he didn't give Assef a good run because he'd never been in a fight before. While he's being severely beaten, he suddenly feels cleansed of all the guilt and he begins to laugh. Sohrab intervenes, telling Assef to stop. He has a small brass ball taken from the base of a table in the slingshot aimed at Assef. Assef releases Amir and lunges for Sohrab, who fires, striking Assef in the left eye so hard that his eye is displaced and blood begins to run. Sohrab and Amir leave the room and the soldiers, remembering the orders, allow them to go. Farid is waiting outside.

### Chapter 23

Amir wakes briefly in a hospital, then passes out again. He wakes several more times, each time with brief impressions. When he finally is coherent, he learns he had his spleen removed, his lung was punctured, and his jaw is wired shut. He learns that Farid has been taking care of Sohrab. He later discovers that the Caldwells don't actually exist. Rahim Khan has left a letter for Amir and disappeared. Two important aspects of the letter are that he has always known about Amir's failure to help Hassan and that he has always known about Baba's failure to claim Hassan as his biological son. Rahim Khan goes into details about both, saying Amir has always been too hard on himself for that mistake and that Baba treated Amir badly because he was never able to openly claim both his sons. The letter goes on to say that Rahim has left most of the money to Amir to help with expenses related to getting out of the country with Sohrab. The letter ends with a plea for Amir to forgive Rahim Khan, forgive his father, and forgive himself.

Amir continues to heal slowly and Farid says he isn't sure how long Amir will be safe from the Taliban in this location. Amir and Sohrab begin spending more time together as





Amir considers his options. Farid drives Amir and Sohrab when they leave the hospital and head to Islamabad. Amir sleeps most of the way but considers Rahim's words, that "there is a way to be good again."

## Analysis

On the way into the house for his meeting with Assef, Amir considers where he is and what he's about to do. He knows that he might die in this attempt to rescue a boy who might already be dead. He considers that his actions in the next few minutes might leave Soraya a widow. He also considers that walking away might be the act of a coward, but Amir says that he's never lied to himself about his weakness on this point. He also says that it's not really cowardice if a person is merely acting a certain way for self-preservation. He refers to it as being "prudent."

There's a note of foreshadowing that's rather interesting soon after Amir's arrival in Assef's office. He says he eats a grape without realizing it's the last piece of solid food he'll eat "for a long time."

Assef tells the story of how he came to be a soldier. He says he was held captive with many others. All of them were periodically beaten. One day he was suffering with a kidney stone, and the beating he took dislodged the stone so that he was suddenly relieved of that pain. He says he began to laugh, which made his captors furious. He knew that God had kept him alive to perform "ethnic cleansing." He says that's why he killed so many, including Hassan.

Rahim Khan's letter to Amir indicates that he does know that Hassan was raped while Amir stood by. He says Hassan told him the story. Rahim Khan goes on to say something that Amir has not been able to understand or accept in all these years. He says Amir himself was just a "troubled little boy" and that his decision wasn't right, but it was also the decision of a child. Rahim Khan says Amir has always been too hard on himself for that mistake. He points out that if Amir were truly a bad person he would never have suffered over that decision. Rahim then goes into some detail about Baba's lies regarding Hassan's parentage. He says that Baba also suffered over that situation and that he denied himself a close relationship with Amir as punishment for having fathered Hassan and not claiming him. The result of that remorse on Baba's part, according to Rahim, is that Baba helped everyone he encountered. His guilt over Hassan probably prompted him to build the orphanage, lend money to anyone in need, and feed the hungry and the poor. Baba was lauded for these things at his funeral, but Rahim realizes that Baba did most of it not because he was a good man, but because he was trying to make amends for his own failures. Again, a man without a conscience wouldn't have cared.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you believe Assef fights Amir? Why does Amir agree to fight?



## Discussion Question 2

Why does Rahim Khan leave a letter urging Amir to forgive Rahim Khan, Baba, and himself? What does Amir have to forgive in each?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Baba deny himself a close relationship with Hassan? Who suffered for Baba's lies?

## Vocabulary

Sallow, morbidly, epiphany, bourgeoisie, flogging, massacring, ethnic, impunity, yearned, snippets.



# Chapter 24

## Summary

They arrive in Islamabad and get a hotel room. Farid leaves them, saying he needs to return to his family. Amir spends the night wondering when his physical injuries will be healed and wondering what he'll do with Sohrab, though he admits that he already knows he'll take him to America. Amir sleeps and when he wakes Sohrab is gone. He recalls that Sohrab had been enthralled with a mosque a short distance away and finds him there. Sohrab is struggling with the fact that he injured Assef. He says Hassan taught him that it's always wrong to hurt someone because even a bad person can change. Amir says that Hassan had saved Amir when they were children and Assef threatened to harm Amir. He says Assef later hurt Hassan. Sohrab asks if Hassan would be disappointed in Sohrab for hurting Assef. Amir assures him Hassan would be proud of Sohrab for saving Amir's life.

They talk about San Francisco and Sohrab begins to seem excited about the prospect of moving to America. One night Sohrab asks what will happen to him in America if Amir becomes tired of him or Soraya doesn't like him. Amir promises neither of those things will happen.

Amir calls Soraya who has been frantic with worry. He relates the story of Sohrab and says he wants to adopt the boy. Soraya hesitates only a moment before saying Amir should bring Sohrab home with him. Amir goes to the American Embassy where he meets a man named Raymond Andrews. Raymond explains that the biggest hurdle is to prove that Sohrab's parents are truly dead. Without death certificates or some proof that Amir is now Sohrab's legal guardian, the adoption won't be approved. He says Sohrab will not likely be allowed to leave the country.

Amir calls Soraya with the news. She has been working with a friend who promises to help through INS channels. Meanwhile, Amir reaches out to a local attorney who says the best option is to leave Amir in an orphanage in the country while the details are worked out. The attorney says the options include seeking political asylum for Sohrab but it would require proving that Sohrab is being persecuted. Amir could also live in Pakistan for two years while the local adoption is approved. The attorney says the best option is for Sohrab to remain in a Pakistan orphanage while Amir returns home to begin the adoption process from there.

Amir begins to talk with Sohrab, telling him that the best option for the adoption to take place seems to be that Sohrab will remain in Pakistan in an orphanage for a short time. Sohrab begins to cry, pleading with Amir not to leave him in another orphanage. Sohrab has developed a habit of taking a long bath each night and Soraya calls while he's in the tub. She says their friend has a plan, getting Sohrab into the country on a visitation visa and making the adoption official while he's there. After the call, Amir goes to the



bathroom to tell Sohrab the good news. Sohrab has slashed his wrists with a razor blade and the Amir is “still screaming when the ambulance arrives.”

## Analysis

Rahim Khan’s actions are somewhat devious, but he seems to have done it all with the best interests of Amir and Sohrab in mind. He is bound to know that he’s putting Amir in terrible danger by sending him back to his home country, but he also is one of the few people who knows how much Amir has suffered for his failure to stand up for Hassan all those years ago.

It’s obvious Sohrab is struggling with the acts he was forced to perform while in Assef’s captivity. He refers to himself as “dirty,” and Amir assures him he isn’t. Sohrab cries, and Amir decides the moment is right to ask if Sohrab wants to go with him to America. Amir also tells Sohrab about their biological kinship. Sohrab asks if Hassan’s father had loved Hassan as much as he loved Amir. Amir says his father loved them “differently.” Sohrab asks if Baba had not claimed Hassan because he was ashamed of Hassan. Amir says Baba didn’t claim Hassan as his son because he was ashamed of himself. Sohrab and Amir begin bonding, but it’s obvious by Sohrab’s attempted suicide that he still doesn’t fully trust that Amir will take care of him. The reader has to remember that Sohrab saw his parents murdered and has been abused brutally since their deaths.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Sohrab react so violently to the news that he may not be going to America immediately?

## Discussion Question 2

What are the roadblocks Amir encounters with his efforts to take Sohrab to America?

## Discussion Question 3

What are the ultimate motives of Rahim Khan's decision to send Amir back into his own country?

## Vocabulary

Curtly, mosque, obligatory, reckless, cackling, wincing, ascertain, furrowed, heritage, milieu.



# Chapter 25

## Summary

Amir can see the doctors working on Sohrab but they won't allow him in the room. For five hours he waits for news. He falls asleep and a medical official wakes him. Amir learns Sohrab has a transfusion and was revived twice, but is alive and stable. Amir remains at Sohrab's bedside almost every minute after that. When Sohrab is released from the Intensive Care Unit, Amir rushes to the motel to get clean clothes. The owner tells him he has to leave because the situation is "bad for business." Amir says he understands and takes his things. At the hospital, Sohrab is on suicide watch. When Sohrab is awake, Amir talks to him, promising that Sohrab will go with him to America and that he's safe. Amir begins to read with him and one day Sohrab interrupts, saying he's tired. Amir says it's to be expected but Sohrab says he's "tired of everything." He says he wants his "old life back," including his parents, and that he wishes he had died. Amir stays with Sohrab and has no clue at that moment that Sohrab won't say another word for almost a year.

Amir asks Sohrab to go with him to America. Sohrab simply doesn't respond one way or the other and Amir makes the travel arrangements. Soraya greets Sohrab with affection but he remains indifferent. She has made a guest room into a bedroom for him. Soraya's mother presents him a sweater she knitted. He is silent through it all. Soraya's father says people will want to know why Sohrab is here. Amir says he will tell people Sohrab is his nephew.

Sohrab withdraws completely. Every action is done automatically, in silence, and without enthusiasm. Soraya and Amir had discussed their plans for Sohrab prior to his arrival. Soraya wanted to enroll him in soccer and swimming. The reality is that Sohrab sleeps most of the time and seems to care nothing at all about life. Then the Twin Towers are targeted and Afghanistan is bombed. While Sohrab shows no interest, Amir and Soraya become active in relief efforts for the Afghanistan victims of land mines and other casualties of the fighting there. Another year arrives. Soraya and Amir are in their living room quietly watching TV, while Sohrab is silent upstairs.

As time passes, people become less interested in Sohrab and stop talking about the "poor mute boy" whenever they are in gatherings. In March of 2002, Soraya and Amir are at a gathering of Afghan people at Lake Elizabeth Park in Fremont. By now, the General has returned to Afghanistan to hold a ministry position and Soraya's mother, Khala Jamila, is staying with Amir and Soraya in his absence. It's a rainy day early but the rain slacks off by mid-day and Amir spots a man selling a kite. He buys one and asks Sohrab to join him in flying it. Sohrab is silent. Amir says that Sohrab's father had been the best kite runner in all of Afghanistan when they were children. Amir says it appears he'll have to fly this particular kite alone and he gets it airborne. When he stops running, he realizes Sohrab is beside him. He hands Sohrab the kite string and they are soon joined by another kite and Amir knows there's going to be a battle. Sohrab gives



control of the kite back to Amir and Amir talks, telling Sohrab about Hassan's favorite tactic in a kite tournament. At the right time, Amir makes the move and cuts the string of the other kite. People in the park begin to cheer and Sohrab is smiling slightly. Amir asks Sohrab if he should "run the kite." He believes he sees Sohrab nod. Amir takes off among the group of children. He knows the actions of Sohrab that day are not a huge step in the right direction, but he believes they are a step. He accepts that.

## Analysis

Amir's faith is rekindled when Sohrab is in the hospital, but it begins with Amir trying to make a deal for Sohrab's recovery. He says that his hands are "stained with Hassan's blood," and he prays that "God doesn't let them get stained with the blood of this boy too."

The General – Soraya's father – is acutely aware of what people say about him and his family. It's one reason he didn't want Soraya and Amir to adopt a child. He pointed out that you can't be sure what kind of child you'd get or what his background might be. It's not often that Amir stands up to him but when he questions Sohrab's presence, Amir does, saying that Sohrab is his nephew. Amir is bound to know that people are going to gossip about that piece of information but he doesn't care. At this point, he's become more interested in doing what's right.

There's a phrase used by Hassan near the beginning of the story that's repeated at the end as a conclusion. When Hassan heads off to find the kite during the kite tournament in Afghanistan when the boys were youngsters, Amir yells out to him, urging him to bring back the trophy kite. Hassan says, "For you, a thousand times over." The words indicate his devotion to Amir and that he would run for the trophy kite this time and a thousand times more. When Amir asks Sohrab if he should run the kite in the park in Freemont as the book comes to a close, he believes Sohrab nods approval. As Amir takes off, he says, "For you, a thousand times over." The indication is that he has that same devotion to Sohrab.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the initial reaction of family and friends when Amir returns to the United States with Sohrab?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Sohrab stop talking?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the words, "For you, a thousand times over."?

## Vocabulary

Sweltering, pilgrimage, protocol, replete, catharsis, eccentric, empathy, pendulum, swarm, profoundly, worthiness, ruefully.



# Characters

## Amir

Amir is the son of a wealthy but stern man living in Kabul as a child. The family moves to America when Amir is still fairly young and it's there he grows into a man, marries, and makes a home and career for himself. As a child, Amir believes Hassan is nothing more to him than the son of a family servant who also works for Amir's family and who serves the role of playmate. Amir's father is adamant that telling a lie is the worst possible betrayal. It's not until they are adults that Amir learns the truth about his relationship to Hassan and he feels doubly betrayed by the information, knowing his father had lived a lie for Amir's entire life by not acknowledging Hassan as his son. Amir desperately wants his father's approval but doesn't know how to achieve that. Amir takes things very seriously and he is brutally honest about his own shortcomings. When Hassan is assaulted, Amir doesn't step in to try to save his friend. He hides and waits for the attack to be over before returning to the scene. However, he hates himself for his cowardice and denies himself the comfort of his relationship with Hassan after that. Years later, when Amir is faced with the danger of trying to get Hassan's son from a pedophile, he takes a beating and refuses to back down. As a child, Amir realizes he has a natural talent for storytelling and he follows the dream of becoming a novelist as an adult though it's not a popular track with the people of his country, including his father.

## Hassan

Hassan is the boy who is raised as a servant in Amir's house but who is really Amir's half-brother, the illegitimate son of Amir's father. Hassan is a solemn child and takes his duties as a servant in the household seriously. He is always happy to play with Amir but is always somewhat subservient. When Amir pushes Hassan, trying to make him angry, Hassan refuses to rise to the bait though he is still a youngster who could have been expected to return anger for anger. However, when a neighborhood bully is about to beat up Amir, Hassan stands up to the boy, threatening him with a slingshot. Hassan remains at home when Amir goes to school, and he receives no formal education. However, he eventually learns to read on his own, indicating his determination and self-discipline. He also ensures that his son Sohrab learns to read as a child. Hassan is known for his ability as a kite runner. He can tell where a kite is going to come down without even watching the sky like other runners. When Amir wins a kite tournament, Hassan runs off to get the kite and it's during his efforts to keep the kite that he is raped by a neighborhood bully. Hassan seems to recover from the ordeal and is more hurt by the fact that Amir's attitude changes than by the assault. Hassan never learns that he is Amir's half-brother. He is murdered by soldiers in the street in front of Amir's home when Sohrab is very young.





## Baba

Amir's father is called "Baba" throughout the story by Amir. He is a wealthy man who spends a great deal of money helping others. He builds an orphanage near Amir's childhood home and often gives or lends money to people who are having a tough time. He preaches ideals and is almost killed at one point for refusing to allow a soldier to rape a young woman. However, he never acknowledges Hassan as his son though he apparently feels guilty for not doing so. He seems hard on Amir but is apparently secretly proud of his accomplishments, including his writing.

## Rahim Khan

Rahim Khan is a well educated friend of Amir's father. He is the first adult Amir considers a friend. He readily reads Amir's stories and buys Amir a notebook for his birthday, an encouragement for Amir to follow his talent on this front. Rahim Khan is the person to reveal that Amir and Hassan are half-brothers when he tells Amir about Hassan's son. He is living in captivity in Afghanistan.

## Ali

Ali is the man who raises Hassan as his son. He is the faithful servant of Amir's family and was raised with Amir's father. Ali is crippled, the result of a bout with polio, and is often harassed by the young boys of the neighborhood.

## Sanaubar

Sanaubar is Hassan's mother. She runs away when Hassan is a baby and doesn't return until he is an adult with a child of his own. When she returns, she is in near death and he nurses her back to health, earning her devotion until she dies several years later.

## Soraya

Soraya is the daughter of a former military general, she is considered spoiled by the people of her culture because she'd made the mistake of going off with a young man before she was married. She is, however, a faithful wife to Amir and helps him care for his father during the days leading up to Baba's death. She is heart broken when she cannot have children of her own and accepts Sohrab into her home without question.

## Sohrab

Sohrab is the son of Hassan. He is left an orphan when Hassan and his wife are murdered by soldiers. He is then held captive by a cruel soldier until Amir's arrival in the



country. He is terrified of being put back in an orphanage. He tries to commit suicide when he learns that Amir is going to return to the United States without him. Even after he is taken to America, he is incapable of trusting his new situation and it takes a great deal of time and patience before he begins to open up to Amir and Soraya.

## **The General**

The General is Soraya's father. He is a stern man who believes he will someday return to a position of importance in Afghanistan. He would rather accept welfare in America than to perform some job that he believes is beneath him.

## **Khalia Jamila**

Khalia Jamila is Soraya's mother. She is immediately fond of Amir, at least partly because he falls in love with Soraya. She is a kind woman and her greatest fault seems to be her tendency to go on about her health. When her husband falls ill, she turns her attention to his medical condition.

## **Assef**

Assef is a young boy who is nothing more than a neighborhood thug when Amir and Hassan are youngsters. He is the leader of the group that assaults Hassan and the one who rapes him. Assef is also the soldier who is holding Sohrab captive and who almost beats Amir to death.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Orphanage

The charity built by Amir's father. It is destroyed during the invasion and the war.

## Notebook

The gift given to Amir by Rahim Khan for his birthday. It's an acknowledgement of his talent as a young writer.

## Watch

Amir claims that Hassan stole this gift. It is Amir's way of getting Hassan out of the house.

## Slingshot

The weapon used by Hassan and Sohrab.

## Brass Ball

The item Sohrab uses to shoot Assef when Assef is beating Amir.

## Flea Market

Where Amir often encounters the woman who will become his wife.

## Kite Runner

The person who chases the kite that has been downed during a kite tournament.

## Writer

Amir's profession as an adult.

## Car

The gift Baba gives Amir upon his graduation from college.

## Teacher

Soraya's profession as an adult.



# Settings

## Afghanistan

This is the overall setting in which a great deal of the action takes place. The country is real and the descriptions of the war-torn neighborhoods seem accurate and believable. The most important settings in this country are the neighborhood where Amir and Hassan live as children, San Francisco where Amir lives with his father and later as a husband, and several towns in the Middle East during Amir's efforts to take Sohrab to the United States. The main house is large and somewhat elaborate, exhibiting the wealth of Amir's father. Hassan lives in a small hut in the back yard, exhibiting the status of Hassan and Ali.

## Peshawar

This is where Amir reunites with Rahim Khan when Rahim Khan reveals the truth of Hassan's parentage. When Amir arrives in Peshawar, he compares the city to Kabul, saying the streets are clean and "lined with rows of hibiscus and flame trees."

## The Second Hospital

This is where Sohrab is taken after his suicide attempt, Amir describes the scene down to some small details. He says there is a white sheet that "spills over the side of the gurney and brushes against grimy checkered tiles." These details add a level of realism to the novel that might not otherwise exist.

## San Francisco

This is the city where Amir, Baba, and Soraya live in the United States. There is a small apartment Amir shares with his father is described as is the larger house he and Soraya buy after their marriage. The flea market where Amir, his father, and other immigrants gather on weekends to earn some money is another of the specific settings in the United States. The park where Amir and Sohrab fly a kite as the story closes is also described. The overall settings are real though the specific settings are probably not. The settings are appropriate to the story. The time setting ranges from the 1970s through 2001. The technology, means of travel, and other details support the time setting.

## Golden Gate Park

This is the location of Amir, Soraya, and Sohrab as the story comes to a close. This is the place where Amir flies a kite and gets a little interaction from Sohrab.



# Themes and Motifs

## Living with Guilt

Amir is rescued by some neighborhood bullies by Hassan, a boy who holds the role of servant in his household. Later, when Hassan is being attacked by these same bullies, Amir stands by and allows it to happen. That moment drives the guilt he lives with the rest of his life but also expands the guilt he feels for other actions before and after this event. Amir says that Hassan's devotion to him is complete and unwavering but that he only plays with Hassan when the wealthy children of his father's friends aren't available. It seems that Amir looks back at his childhood through a haze of guilt that actually stems from Amir's decision to stand by while Hassan is attacked. Amir might have lived with this guilt for the rest of his life if not for Rahim Khan who realized that Amir needed desperately to find a way to atone for that guilt in order to find peace. Amir reluctantly sets out on the journey to find Sohrab but when Assef is beating him with the intention of killing him, Amir finds that peace. He seems to have spent his life seeking some kind of punishment for his inaction on Hassan's behalf. Enduring that beating helps him come to terms with himself and his guilt. Amir is not the only example of this theme. Baba spends his life hiding the fact that Hassan is his biological son. He allows Hassan to leave his household in shame rather than admitting to the relationship and putting Hassan in his rightful place. Hassan is left behind in America where he eventually dies. It's Rahim Khan who suggests that Baba spends a great deal of time, money, and energy helping others as a means of trying to live with his guilt over Hassan.

## Doing What's Right

Amir and Hassan spend almost all their time together. One day a neighborhood bully threatens them and Hassan stands up to him, threatening back with his slingshot so that the bully leaves without beating them up. Later, Amir finds Hassan surrounded by this same bully and his friends. Amir doesn't stand up to them but stands by as Hassan is beaten and raped. Amir pretends he didn't see what happened and lies about it when Ali asks about Hassan's mental state following the attack. Amir hates himself for his failure to do what's right but then compounds it by creating a lie around Hassan so that he and Ali eventually leave the household. Amir is taught from an early age that telling the truth and doing what's right is important. This makes him even harder on himself than he might otherwise have been. Baba preaches to Amir that secrets and lies are unacceptable but Baba himself lies about the biological bond he has with Hassan. Had Baba stood up to that situation, claiming Hassan as his son and giving him his rightful place in the household, the fate of both boys might have been different. When Baba and Amir flee the country, Hassan remains and is later executed by members of the Taliban. Ironically, Baba refuses to do what's right in that case but when a young girl is threatened by soldiers, Baba stands up to them though it almost costs him his life. When Amir is an adult and learns that Sohrab is in danger, he offers to pay a friend to get the boy out of the country. He's urged to do what's right in this case and he travels



into Afghanistan where he's beaten almost to death when he does stand up for the rights of Sohrab.

## Devotion and Friendship

Amir, Hassan, Baba, Ali, and Sohrab are all examples of this theme but each relationship has different levels of devotion. Amir and Hassan grow up together, and they are devoted to each other but not in the traditional manner. Amir depends heavily on Hassan for companionship, but he is also jealous of him, especially Hassan's relationship with Baba. Amir admits that he and Hassan aren't friends. He says he plays with Hassan when there's no other option. Hassan, however, is completely devoted to Amir and depends entirely on him for friendship and companionship. Ali is also completely devoted to Baba but that devotion is based on the servant-master relationship rather than friendship. Ali is similarly devoted to Amir. Baba is devoted to Ali but that devotion is probably at least partly because Ali is raising Baba's son as his own. Baba's devotion to Hassan is different. It appears early on as if the devotion is only as a master to a beloved servant. It's only much later that Amir learns that Baba's devotion is that of a father to a son. The relationship between Amir and Baba is complicated and changes over time. Amir is devoted to his father though he sometimes hates the treatment he receives from his father. Over time, Amir's devotion deepens and he takes care of his father right to the end of his life. Baba's devotion to Amir is subtle and he seems unable to express his love for his son except when Amir accomplishes something great, as in the weeks after the kite tournament. Amir is surprised when it turns out his father is proud of his abilities as a writer.



# Styles

## Point of View

The story is presented in first person from the limited perspective of Amir. Amir is a very serious and introspective young man who grows into a similarly serious adult. He is angry at himself as a youngster because he was afraid to intervene when Hassan was attacked. Amir labels himself a coward and Hassan's very presence reminds Amir of his cowardice. He takes inappropriate action in his efforts to deal with his guilt. He believes that Hassan's absence would make the situation easier to bear and he tells a lie, labeling Hassan a thief, in an effort to accomplish that. He then hates himself for that as well. While the first-person perspective is typically slanted in favor of the person telling the story, that is not the case in this story. In fact, it seems that Amir is brutally honest. He talks about his fear of facing the bullies as Hassan is being assaulted. Then, when he does meet up with Hassan, he quickly looks at the kite he'd retrieved and was relieved to see that it had not been damaged.

The reader must guess many of the thoughts and emotions of the other characters, though there are some clues in the dialogue and the narrative. For example, Amir distances himself from Hassan as a means of dealing with his guilt. Hassan asks if he's done something to make Amir angry and apologizes, saying that he wants them to return to their former friendship. Amir knows that his father is not particularly pleased when Amir sets out to become a writer. However, he overhears his father bragging about his talent, a sign that his father is proud of him nonetheless.

## Language and Meaning

The story is written in English though there are some occasional words and terms in another language. The casual reader may have difficulty keeping track of the places, people, and events because the names and other terms are not typical American English names. The names and terms – including Assef, Sohrab, agha, and others – may be somewhat confusing. The use of the foreign names and terms is necessary for the integrity of the book. The terms are generally defined or explained through the context of the story. For example, at one point Assef and his friends are bullying Amir and Hassan. Hassan stands up to him but refers to him as "Agha." The word "agha" is never fully defined but Amir makes note of the term and wonders "what it must be like to live with such an ingrained sense of one's place in a hierarchy." Considering the context, the reader can assume the word is a reference of respect. Though not every word and term is explained, most readers will discern enough of the meanings so that the story makes sense. The overall tone of the story is one of hope though there are undercurrents of darkness and despair. Though Sohrab is brutalized and tries to commit suicide, the author seems to hint that the story will have a happy ending. The reader who expects the story to come to a complete conclusion will be disappointed. Amir





points out a moment that indicates healing will eventually take place but the story ends before that healing occurs.

## Structure

The story is divided into twenty-five chapters of varying lengths. The first chapter is a foreshadowing of the rest of the events. The story is divided between dialogue and narrative. Both are acceptable to the story. The majority of the story is presented in past tense but there are a few exceptions. These present tense segments seem to be the author's attempt to make the action more immediate and intense and in this, he is successful. An example is seen in Chapter 25. Amir is at the hospital after Sohrab's suicide attempt. The previous chapter ends in past tense with Amir finding Sohrab in the bathtub but chapter twenty-five opens in present tense as he is watching the doctors and nurses work on Sohrab. The story shifts back to past tense as soon as Amir learns that Sohrab is going to survive. The first nine chapters of the book take place when Amir and Hassan are children. Chapter 10 jumps ahead several years to the day Amir and his father are leaving the country, beginning their journey to America. In Chapter 11, they have arrived in the United States. In chapters twelve and thirteen, Amir settles in to life in America, meets his future wife, and Baba dies. In Chapter 14, Amir begins his trip back to his own country to seek out Sohrab. In Chapter 21, Amir returns to his old neighborhood. In Chapter 22, Amir is united with Sohrab and they begin their journey toward safety. In Chapter 25, Amir takes Sohrab back to the United States where the boy begins the slow process of healing. Foreshadowing is an important part of the story. Many times, the foreshadowing takes place at the end of the chapter as is the case with the end of chapter twenty-four when Amir finds Sohrab after his suicide attempt. In other cases, the foreshadowing occurs in other places. Chapter 11, for example, begins with the statement that "Baba loved the idea of America" but life in America "gave him an ulcer." From this, the reader knows that everything is not smooth for Amir and his father.



## Quotes

That was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out.

-- Amir (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Amir is referring to the fact that he watched Hassan attacked and raped, and did nothing to stand up for him. This scars Amir, possibly more than Hassan, and he is never able to forgive himself for what he sees as an act of cowardice.

While my mother hemorrhaged to death during childbirth, Hassan lost his less than a week after he was born. Lost her to a fate most Afghans considered far worse than death: She ran off with a clan of traveling singers and dancers.

-- Amir (Chapter 2 paragraph 13)

**Importance:** Amir and Hassan are constantly compared, and this is one of many instances in which Hassan's life is considered worse than Amir's. However, Hassan's mother does return to him later in the story while Amir's mother is forever lost to him.

Lore has it my father once wrestled a black bear in Baluchistan with his bare hands. If the story had been about anyone else, it would have been dismissed as laaf, that Afghan tendency to exaggerate - sadly, almost a national affliction; if someone bragged that his son was a doctor, chances were the kid had once passed a biology test in high school.

-- Amir (Chapter 3 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Amir's father is, in many ways, a greater-than-life character. He does everything bigger and better than everyone else, and everyone loves him.

The generation of Afghan children whose ears would know nothing but the sounds of bombs and gunfire was not yet born.

-- Amir (Chapter 5 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This scene begins with gunfire rattling the house as the sounds of warfare are heard in Amir's neighborhood for the first time. The fighting will eventually send Amir and Baba to the United States. They will leave Hassan behind. It's also the war that will cause Hassan's death and eventually prompt Amir to return to his old neighborhood.

If I changed my mind and asked for a bigger and fancier kite, Baba would buy it for me - but then he'd buy it for Hassan too. Sometimes I wished he wouldn't do that. Wished he'd let me be the favorite.

-- Amir (Chapter 6 paragraph 9)

**Importance:** Amir is jealous of Baba's interest in Hassan. At this point in the story, it seems that Amir's jealousy is justified. His relationship with his father is not strong, and



Amir wants his father to pay more attention to him. However, it's later revealed that Baba is Hassan's biological father. This changes the situation in the eyes of the reader.

Hassan was standing at the blind end of the alley in a defiant stance: fists curled, legs slightly apart. Behind him, sitting on piles of scrap and rubble, was the blue kite. My key to Baba's heart.

-- Amir (Chapter 7 paragraph 92)

**Importance:** Amir wants that kite more than anything in the world. He has come to believe that winning the tournament will garner his father's favor in a way that he can't seem to accomplish. While he watches, Hassan is attacked and raped by the boys. Amir doesn't step in to fight for Hassan, and he will always feel ashamed of that.

Baba loved the idea of America. It was living in America that gave him an ulcer.

-- Amir (Chapter 11 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Baba wants to go to America, and he goes through great difficulty to get there. However, once they are in America, he has trouble adjusting to the customs. Like many of the Afghan refugees, he wants to hold to his heritage and traditions.

And now, this woman, this mother, with her heart breaking, eager, crooked smile and the barely veiled hope in her eyes. I cringed a little at the position of power I'd been granted, and all because I had won at the genetic lottery that had determined my sex.

-- Amir (Chapter 12 paragraph 51)

**Importance:** Amir has just worked up the courage to talk to Soraya. Soraya's mother has just about given up hope that Soraya will wed. Soraya ran off with a man and stayed away for a short while. This transgression from tradition has prompted shame on Soraya and her family. Amir realizes that paying attention to Soraya has caused her mother renewed hope. He also realizes that he has that power simply because he's a man.

And why you? I think we both know why it has to be you, don't we?

-- Rahim Khan (Chapter 17 paragraph 35)

**Importance:** Rahim Khan's statement reveals that he knows that Amir had stood by and watched as Hassan was attacked. Amir had done nothing about it.

Earlier that morning, when I was certain no one was looking, I did something I had done twenty-six years earlier: I planted a fistful of crumpled money under a mattress.

-- Amir (Chapter 19 paragraph 130)

**Importance:** Amir had hidden money under Hassan's mattress as a child and lied, telling Baba that Hassan had stolen the money. He'd done it in an effort to make Baba force Hassan to leave. Baba had instead forgiven Hassan. There's a lot a play in this situation. Amir is ashamed of having stood by while Hassan was attacked. Hassan's presence is a constant reminder of his failure. Hassan realizes what Amir has done but



doesn't tell the truth. He confesses to the theft and leaves, though Baba doesn't want him to. This time, when Amir puts the money under the mattress, it's because he realizes Farid's family is in dire need of money for food.

Forgive your father if you can. Forgive me if you wish. But most important, forgive yourself.

-- Rahim Khan (Chapter 23 paragraph 68)

**Importance:** Rahim Khan realizes that Amir has never stopped feeling guilty for standing by as Hassan was attacked. He also realizes that Amir is angry with his father for lying about Hassan's birth all these years and that Amir is likely to be angry at Rahim Khan for having revealed the truth of Hassan's birth and sending Amir back into Afghanistan. However, Rahim Khan knows that Amir is never going to find peace unless he manages to forgive.

For you, a thousand times over,' I heard myself say.

-- Amir (Chapter 25 paragraph 163)

**Importance:** Amir says this as he's running the kite for Sohrab. The importance of this quote is that it's what Hassan says to Amir when Amir wins the tournament in Afghanistan as a child. This conclusion is a tidy literary tool, bringing the reader full circle from Amir's moment of greatest shame to a moment of hope that Sohrab is finally coming out of his self-imposed silence.