

# The Kite Runner

## Study Guide Addendum

Student Outreach for Shelters (SOS) Program

### Overview

The intent of this addendum is to provide educators with additional options and activities when planning instruction associated with *The Kite Runner* (TKR) and the Student Outreach for Shelter (SOS) program. The questions listed here explore some questions from the original study guide in more depth, and also explore the themes of silence, shame and courage.

### Activities to Provide a Political, Cultural and Historical Overview

- **United Nations information review** – Include a review of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) site -- <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home> -- in an overview of the geography, history and culture of Afghanistan. See also resources included in TKHF Additional Resources.
- **Novel timeline** – Use an online timeline maker (e.g. [www.dipity.com](http://www.dipity.com) or [xtimeline.com](http://xtimeline.com)) or attach a long piece of butcher paper to one wall of the classroom. Have students create a timeline of events of recent Afghan and US history. As students read the novel, have them add events to the timeline. How do the timeline events compare / contrast?

**Note:** It may be helpful to divide *TKR* into three parts, in terms of setting and theme. (In the first section, Hosseini recreates a nostalgic childhood during the last days of Zahir Shah. The second part explores Afghan emigration during the Soviet occupation. The final section explores the Taliban's Afghanistan.) Students can add a fourth section on the timeline that takes place after the novel ends. (In 2002 Amir and Sohrab fly the kite; in Oct 2001 US-commences bombing of Taliban.) Students can view an interactive timeline of the US involvement in Afghanistan at [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33210358/ns/world\\_news-south\\_and\\_central\\_asia/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33210358/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/) (See TKHF Lesson: Introduction to Afghanistan for a detailed timeline lesson.)

- **Ethnic diversity analysis** – Have students learn about the ethnic diversity in Afghanistan by researching online or by visiting these links (Library of Congress 2008 study) <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles.html> and (PBS lesson) <http://to.pbs.org/e4PHzK>. What languages are spoken? What issues could arise due to the existence of the different ethnic groups? How is this different or similar to the caste system in India, i.e. are there economic or power hierarchies among the ethnic groups? Are there equivalents in the United States? See also resources listed in TKHF Additional Resources. (See TKHF Lesson: Introduction to Afghanistan for a greater exploration of this topic.)
- **Landmines analysis** – Have students review information from the International Campaign to Ban Landmines -- <http://www.icbl.org/index.php> -- and also locate additional articles on web to check landmine statistics. In addition to understanding how the landmine problem would impact the citizens of Afghanistan, have students explore how the prevalence of landmines would impact refugees returning home. Would they be impacted differently? Have students add landmines to a map of Afghanistan to show the prevalence in different regions and incorporate into their presentation. Have students prepare a PowerPoint presentation, blog post or wiki page on the information learned.

## Before Reading Activities

- **Discussion** – Ask students to share what they already know about Afghanistan from the news, Internet, or other sources.
- **Brainstorm Activity** – Have students brainstorm words they associate with Afghanistan. Write these words on the board. Where do these impressions come from?
- **Prediction** - Have students predict what the novel will be about, based on the title. What role will kite running play in the novel? (If students are unfamiliar with “kite running,” provide them with a background [http://afghanmagazine.com/2004\\_06/articles/hsadat.shtml](http://afghanmagazine.com/2004_06/articles/hsadat.shtml).)
- **Vocabulary Cards** - *The Kite Runner* includes a rich English vocabulary as well an introduction to select words in Dari and Pashtu. Give students index cards to use to develop an understanding of the vocabulary words listed in the original study guide, as well as Dari or Pashtu words they come across. Model this activity before reading, and have students complete the following as they come across new vocabulary in their reading:

On front of card:

- Write the word on the front of the card. Underline the root (if applicable)
- Find the meaning (dictionary, context, friend) NOTE: for Dari or Pashtu words, context clues will be the primary source, although this online Dari dictionary <http://estragon.100megsfree5.com/dic.htm> may be of some use.
- Sketch an illustration explaining what it means.
- Write words they know associated with the root word.

On back of card:

- 4. Write how author uses the word
- 5. Dictionary definition & part of speech

Post cards on wall in classroom. Have students grab 3-5 cards each week and quiz a partner. Re-post on wall.

## During Reading Activities

### I. Chapters 1-5 (pp. 1-47) Reader Response Questions

- Why does Hassan choose not to tell on Amir when they are accused of mischief with mirrors and slingshots? What does this reveal about their relationship?
- Neither Hassan nor Amir talk about their mothers. What purpose does their silence serve?
- Baba says “There is only one sin, only one. And that is theft. Every other sin is a variation of theft.” (p. 17). If this is so, what is Amir’s sin in remaining silent about what happened to Hassan? What theft is being committed?
- Why does Baba struggle to understand Amir? Do you empathize with him, or with Amir, or both? Why?
- Amir discovers that storytelling can be a powerful force. How does he use the power of storytelling in his relationship with Hassan? Does he use it to entertain, inform, manipulate?
- How do history, religion and ethnicity affect the relationships between characters in this book?
- Complete vocabulary cards and timeline, using words and events from the novel.

## II. Chapters 6-9 (pp.-48-109) Reader Response Questions

- Why is having Baba's approval so crucial to Amir?
- How did you respond to the scene where Hassan is attacked? Do you understand why Amir did not take action? What does Amir feel is at stake if he speaks out? (NOTE: Students may be uncomfortable with the graphic nature of the attack. You may wish to spend extra time processing their reactions to this scene).
- In the midst of the powerful scene where Hassan is attacked, Hosseini breaks into the main narrative to present two memories and a dream. Why do you think the author chose to do this? What is the effect?
- Amir labels himself a coward (p.77). Do you agree? What is your opinion of Amir's "cowardice"? What does he believe is the "price" he had to pay?
- On p. 99, Amir has another opportunity to speak up and tell the truth, but he chooses not to. Explain his choice.
- What do you make of Hassan's silence about the watch and the money? Is his refusing to tell on Amir an act of courage or cowardice? What are his options? What power relationships are at work here?
- Ali is also silent about the truth regarding Hassan's so-called "theft." Is this an act of revenge, in light of what we find out later? Is it an act of self-empowerment?
- Complete vocabulary cards and timeline, using words and events from the novel.

## III. Chapters 10-14 (pp. 110-194) Reader Response Questions

- What does Baba's challenging the officer reveal about his character? Why does he speak up when others are silent?
- What is significant about the conversation between Baba and Amir on p. 134? Does this mark an important milestone for Amir?
- Amir sees America as a place to forget the past. Discuss.
- Is Soraya's sharing of her story on p. 165 an act of courage? How does she deal with the "shame" that she has experienced? Do you agree that her situation should be viewed as bringing shame upon her family?
- What is the significance of learning that Khanum Taheri no longer sang after her marriage? What does this reveal about Afghan attitudes about women and marriage?
- On p. 178, Amir reflects that "Every woman needed a husband. Even if he did silence the song in her." Discuss this quote in light of the Taheri's marriage and of Amir and Soraya's marriage.
- Amir notes that emptiness can take on a life of its own and become "a living, breathing entity" (p. 189). How does this relate both to his marriage and to the secret from his past?
- Complete vocabulary cards and timeline, using words and events from the novel.

## IV. Chapters 15-20 (pp. 195-258) Reader Response Questions

- Is Rahim Khan's story entirely truthful? If he lies, what is his motivation?
- Was it wrong of Baba, Ali, and Rahim to keep Hassan's true identity a secret? Do you feel family honor is enough justification for maintaining this secret? How might their lives have been different if the truth had been told earlier?
- What are the consequences of Baba's lie? Do you empathize with Amir's reaction to Rahim's revelation? Why or why not?
- Based on the events of this section, do you think Hosseini is critiquing shame and silence in Afghan culture, or does he present a defense of these qualities?

- Complete vocabulary cards and timeline, using words and events from the novel.

#### V. Chapters 21-25 (pp. 259-371) Reader Response Questions

- What is the significance of the Talib’s speech on p. 270? How does it relate to the key themes of the novel?
- Is Amir a coward (as he claims) in the scene where he confronts Assef? Is this a turning point for him? What is Amir’s greatest act of courage in this book?
- Amir says “Some things mattered more than the truth.” Is this statement convincing? Do you agree?
- In a key moment, Amir is honest with Sohrab about his past. Is this courageous on his part?
- Sohrab expresses his shame about what happened to him. How does Amir reassure him? Why do you think Sohrab is not fully comforted?
- What happens when Amir finally tells Soraya the truth about his family and his past? (p. 325) How does she react?
- Did it surprise you when Amir tells General Taheri the truth about Sohrab?
- Sohrab is silent and passive when Amir takes him to the United States. What accounts for this? Does he have any choice in the matter? Did he want to go?
- In the final scene of the book, Amir runs a kite for Sohrab. What do you think of the ending? Is it effective? Hopeful?
- Complete vocabulary cards and timeline, using words and events from the novel.

### After Reading Activities

- **Fish Bowl Discussion** - Pre-select or have students pre-select a question they would like to ask. Set up “fish bowl” -- set up 5 chairs in the center of the classroom. Ask groups of four to enter the “fish bowl” to discuss a pre-selected question. Any remaining member of the class can enter into the conversation by taking a set in the fifth chair provided.

In addition to the questions here and in the original study guide, the back of *The Kite Runner* book lists discussion questions. A link to those questions can be found here [http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/kite\\_runner.html](http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/kite_runner.html).

- As damaging as shame can be, does it serve any positive functions? Can you think of any social purposes that shame might serve? What is missing in those characters (such as Assef) who cannot feel shame?
- Many of the characters in *The Kite Runner* display resilience and are able to endure and bounce back after difficult things have happened to them personally and to their country. Describe the ways in which the main characters in the novel exhibit this theme of the resilience of the human spirit? What obstacles do they face and overcome? How do the Afghan people in general exhibit resilience in the face of their country’s difficulties?
- Does this book effectively portray the roots of or context for the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan? (e.g., socioeconomic, tribal, and religious factors) From Hosseini’s portrayal, do you understand why the Taliban came to power? What else would you like to know about the Taliban?
- When the Taliban came into power, they banned movies, music, and art on the grounds that they were “un-Islamic”. How did people resist this ban? What would you have done?
- Farid, at first, is not sympathetic to Amir when he returns to Afghanistan. How do you think Farid would react to Afghans who return to Afghanistan to live, rather than just to visit? What would his advice be? What challenges would the returnees face? Would you return to visit or live – why or why not?