



# Year 12 Literature

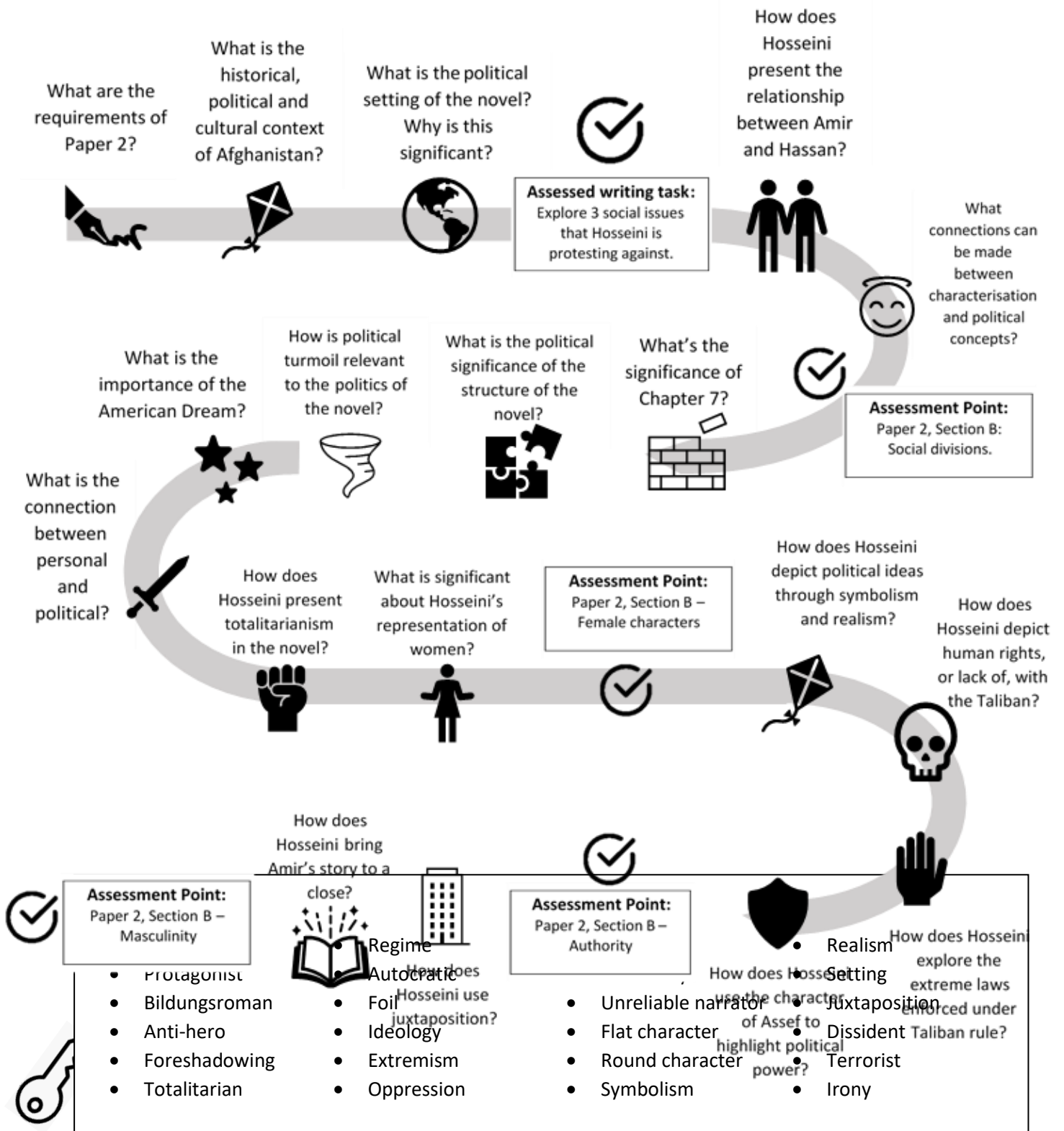
## *The Kite Runner*

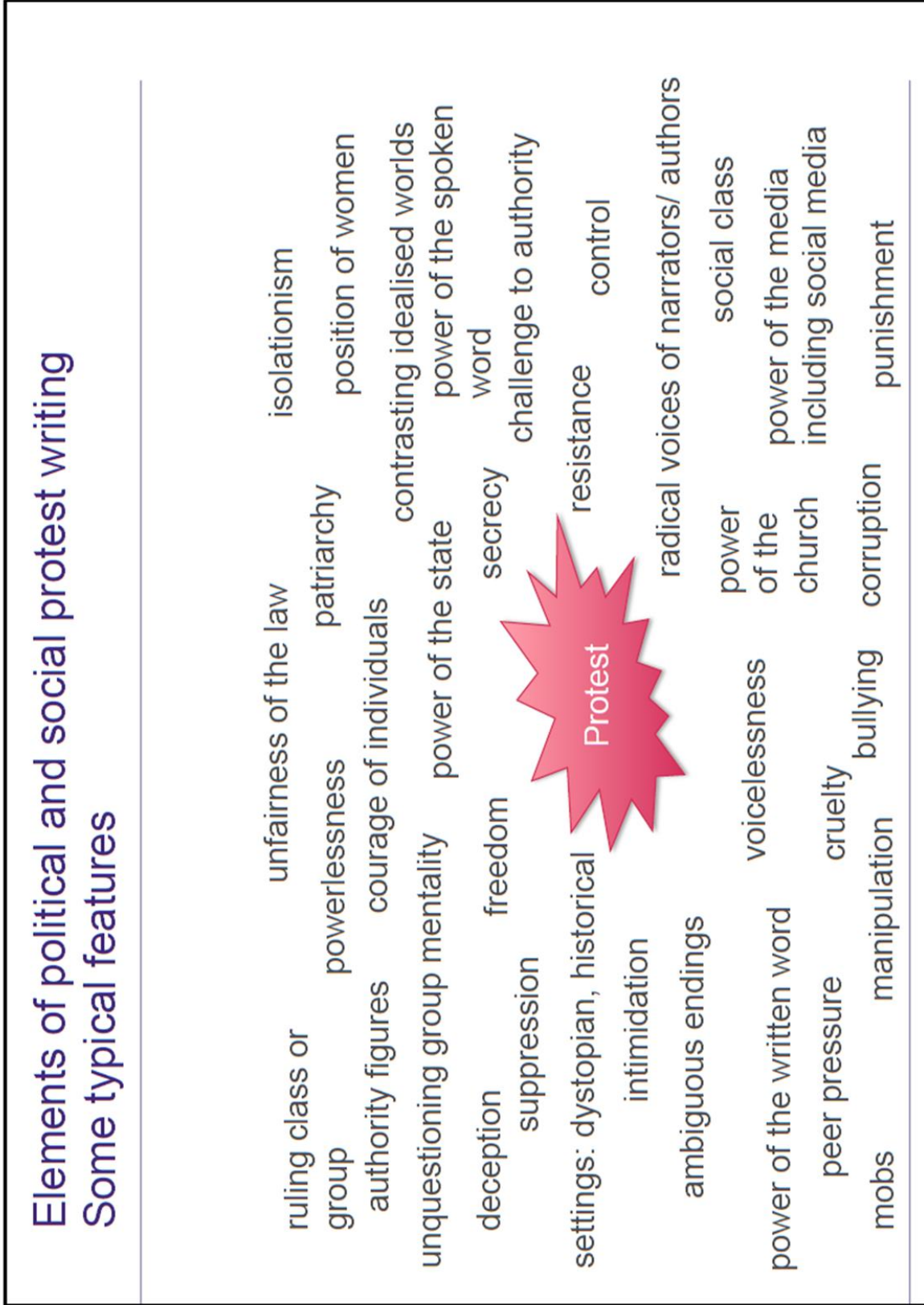
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## Contents

<i>The Kite Runner</i> Learning Journey .....	3
AQA Elements of Political and Social Protest Mind Map.....	4
AQA Text Summary <i>The Kite Runner</i> .....	5
Overview.....	5
Issues of power and ethnicity .....	6
Settings.....	6
Gender politics.....	7
Power of nations.....	7
Power of organised religion .....	8
<i>The Kite Runner</i> Knowledge Organiser .....	9
<i>The Kite Runner</i> Knowledge Organiser .....	10
<i>The Kite Runner</i> RAG-RATED Quiz - Chapters 1-5 .....	11
The Kite Runner RAG-RATED Quiz - Chapters 6-10.....	12
The Kite Runner RAG-RATED Quiz – Chapters 11-15.....	13

# The Kite Runner Learning Journey





## AQA Text Summary *The Kite Runner*

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/as-and-a-level/english-literature-b/teach/protest-c-text-overview-kite-runner#:~:text=The%20narrative%20spans%20a%20time,by%20the%20mujahedeen%2C%20the%20Taliban>

## Overview

The political context of Hosseini's story of two brothers is of fundamental importance to the events which unfold and those events which have happened in the backstory. Hosseini incorporates into his narrative the late 20th century and early 21st century politics of both Afghanistan and the western world. The story shows how the lives of ordinary people are affected by domestic and international power politics. In writing *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini had a clear political intent: to humanise a region, for western readers, which is either remote or clouded by negative media coverage. Significantly Hosseini chooses to make his narrator a writer who himself has a political and personal mission – a mission to tell the truth about himself and his country.

Central to Hosseini's post-modern novel is the division between the two factions of Afghan society: the politically and financially superior Sunni Pashtuns and the oppressed Shi'a Hazaras. The two protagonists, Amir and Hassan, represent the two different ethnic groups and the different lives lived by those with and those without political power. This inequality is initially foregrounded through the characters' homes, (Amir's 'mansion' and Hassan's 'mud hut'), but is also present in the representation of everyday life for Afghan people in the early chapters of the novel. The 'school text books' Amir reads barely mention the history of the Hazaras showing how seriously they are marginalised, invisible to an extent. Hazaras are also subjected to terrible insults such as 'mice-eating, flat-nosed, load carrying donkeys' which is aimed at Hassan in the streets of Kabul and reflects the oppressive attitudes of many Afghan Pashtuns. Indeed, the divisions are so deep that even after the Soviet invasion the Hazaras are still scorned by their compatriots, and after the rise of the Taliban the divisions are intensified because the Taliban are largely Pashtuns. Late in the novel when Amir returns to Afghanistan to try to atone for his sins, the otherwise positively characterised Farid asks why Amir 'came all the way from America for...a Shi'a?'

Other power struggles and political tensions are also important in the narrative. The Soviet invasion, the rise of the Taliban, Amir's feelings of inadequacy with regards to his father, Soraya's rebellion against her parents (because of her having lost 'the genetic lottery') and Amir's physical fight with Assef for Sohrab, are all examples of conflicts between those with power and those without. In this way, Hosseini comments on gender politics, class and ethnicity by his representation of contemporary Afghan society.

## Issues of power and ethnicity

The central event of the novel is the rape of Hassan, an atrocity that results from his loyalty to his Pashtun friend Amir (Assef calls Hassan a 'loyal dog'). This event which Amir witnesses and about which he does nothing haunts him for life. Assef's brutal actions on a domestic scale reflect the later, historically grounded, 'massacre of the Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif'. As a child, Amir knows he is complicit in the obscene bullying of Hassan, his friend, but at first refuses to acknowledge his guilt, instead compounding Hassan's misery by heaping on him further cruelty. As he moves into adulthood, carrying the burden of his sins, Amir realises he can only gain redemption by recognising his abuse of power, atoning for his wrongdoing and by rescuing and loving Hassan's son Sohrab as a person in his own right, distinct from his ethnicity. Amir's learning – and courage perhaps – is reflected in his angry outburst to General Taheri at the end of the novel: 'you will never again refer to him as Hazara boy in my presence. He has a name and it's Sohrab'.

## Settings

The domestic and personal story of *The Kite Runner* is sharpened by the backdrop of political turmoil. The narrative spans a time period of about forty years and is set against the tumultuous recent history of Afghanistan: the 1960s, when the country was at the end of a forty year rule by Zahir Shah, the 1973 'bloodless coup' by his cousin, the Soviet invasion, the guerrilla war fought by the mujahedeen, the Taliban rule and the events following 9/11 in the USA. It is important to note, however, that the history that Hosseini represents is somewhat revisionist (there is little sense given, for example, of the support supplied to the mujahedeen and the Taliban by the USA to oust the Soviets and Hosseini's representation of the peaceful days of the monarchy tends to gloss over the ethnic and religious tensions that divided the country). In the light of the turbulent history and its impact on its people, the historical details incorporated into the novel could be seen to present Afghanistan itself as a victim. As a result of the Soviet invasion Kabul becomes a city of secrets and suspicions and is described as being 'split into two groups: those who eavesdropped and those who didn't' and the very face of the country is physically devastated by war. The once beautiful landscape is strewn with the 'burned carcasses of old Soviet tanks' and Kabul is personified as an old friend who has become 'homeless and destitute' as a direct result of the ongoing political conflict.

Under Taliban rule (1996 -2001), the country becomes a terrifying and 'hopeless place'. Scenes such as the execution in the Ghazi stadium and the 'young man' who 'dangled from the end of a rope' after his public hanging explicitly highlight the political crisis Afghanistan undergoes at the end of the 20th century. Assef's readiness to become an active member of the Taliban is significant, showing how Afghanistan is partly responsible for its own terror and hopelessness.

Assef, as a representation of a Sunni Pashtun, in a sense is a product of the ethnic divisions that are historical. Hosseini's setting the early story in



a peaceful Afghanistan carries with it some ambiguity. He said he wanted to 'remind people that ...the history of the Afghans in the twentieth century has been largely peaceful and harmonious' and to a great extent Amir's childhood memories are pastorally blissful. Amir remembers an Afghanistan with its ancient charms free from external conflict, with long summers, storytelling under the pomegranate tree and kite flying in winter. Even the servants seem to enjoy serving and the rich employers largely keep them safe. However, this vision is from Amir's perspective. Hassan and Ali do not have personal voices in the early part of the text and readers are left to imagine life from their point of view. It is also relevant to think about how uncomfortable many readers feel thinking of the servitude of Hassan and Ali and of the treatment of Sanaubar. The story suggests perhaps that the attitudes of the ruling Pashtun elite towards the Hazaras in part make Afghanistan the author of its own misery. Baba's status as a 'towering Pashtun specimen' for example means he is able to abuse his position, fathering Hassan despite his mother's marriage to Baba's Hazara servant, Ali. After the Taliban takes control, Assef easily gains a ruling position within the regime and this gives him the ability to abuse and murder with impunity, almost as if his early upbringing prepares him for his later violent behaviour.

## Gender politics

Soraya's discussion of double standards highlights the gender inequalities within Afghan society. While men who father children out of wedlock are 'just having fun', after her affair Soraya is viewed as damaged goods. This negative reaction to female sexuality is seen more overtly in the depiction of Hassan's mother Sanaubar who had tempted 'countless men into sin' and is seemingly punished for her beauty when 'someone had taken a knife to her face' leaving her looking 'grotesque'. Similarly, Soraya's mother is silenced by her marriage to General Taheri. Khala Jamila, Amir reports, had been famous in Kabul for her singing voice but 'that she never sing again in public had been one of the General's conditions when they married'.

## Power of nations

Afghanistan is seen to be at the mercy of both the Soviets and the Americans at key points in Amir's story. Its people are abused and dispossessed. The Soviet invasion is represented on a domestic level through the attempted rape of a young Afghan woman by a Russian soldier, as a 'price' for letting the lorry Amir is travelling in pass. Amir's and Baba's hurried leaving of Afghanistan for America, to secure their safety and ideals, shows how the larger political world impacts on the personal and domestic.

Towards the novel's close, when the time frame moves to post 9/11, Hosseini shows how Afghanistan's misery increases with the American bombing. Cities that the narrative had previously heralded as holiday destinations for a young Amir, are now described as the battle ground 'for the Taliban's last stronghold in the North' as America attacks. America is presented somewhat ambiguously, both as a saviour in destroying the

Taliban but also a destroyer. Hosseini includes the initial presentation of these cities, as 'the cities of (Amir's) childhood', to encourage readers to consider these destinations as real and human, not merely as an unrecognisable feature of a news report and therefore to see their destruction in human terms too.

## Power of organised religion

At the opening of the novel, Baba derides religious power stating 'God help us all if Afghanistan ever falls into' the hands of the mullahs. This is foreboding. Later there is evidence that religious power is corrupt when the cleric present at the Ghazi stadium execution, who justifies the woman's death, claims 'God says that every sinner must be punished'. Furthermore Assef's claim that God wants him to 'live for a reason' can be seen as signifying the arrogance of those with power who think that their actions are sanctioned by a God who is on their side.

The novel shows the horrors of religious extremism through the attitudes and behaviour of the Taliban. Although Hosseini acknowledges that the Taliban brought an end to the fighting of the tribes (who had made Kabul a 'proverbial hell on earth' after the Soviet withdrawal), he also shows that they were responsible for massacring Shiites and enacting fundamentalist supremacist laws – banning dance, music and kite flying and restricting women's rights. They replaced the secular laws of Afghanistan with Islamic Shari'ah law (illustrated in the novel by the punishment of two adulterers) with the intention of keeping the people as far away as possible from the enlightened lifestyle that the west claims to hold.

Perhaps, in the light of this, it is clear why Hosseini chooses for his narrator to be an emergent writer. In the story, Amir is encouraged to write a book about the miserable fate of his people: 'May be you should write about Afghanistan. Tell the rest of the world what the Taliban are doing to our country'. In this respect Amir's (and Hosseini's) novel is a political and social protest text, demonstrating perhaps the strength of the pen as a tool of protest



## The Kite Runner Knowledge Organiser



<b>The Kite Runner</b>			
<b>Key Concepts</b>	<b>AO3: Context</b>	<b>Key characters:</b>	<b>PSPW Terminology</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethnic Cleansing</li> <li>Rape as a weapon</li> <li>Sunni and Shi'a Islamic groups</li> <li>Caste</li> <li>Gender Politics</li> <li>Guilt and the Freudian response</li> <li>Bildungsroman as a literary form</li> <li>The Other</li> <li>Islamic <u>Shari'ah</u> law</li> <li>Sacrifice</li> <li>Redemption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>The changing political situation in Afghanistan</b> – from being a cosmopolitan and relatively liberal society, various political insurrections and coups lead to the rise of The Taliban.</li> <li><b>The different religious and ethnic groups living in Afghanistan</b> – the Pashtuns and Hazaras; the Sunni Muslims (the larger group) and the Shi'a Muslims</li> <li><b>Religious fundamentalism of The Taliban and its impact on society</b></li> <li><b>The mistreatment of religious and ethnic groups</b> – the novel focuses on the Hazaras, and references are made to the massacre of Mazar-i-Sharif.</li> <li><b>Afghan culture</b> – the importance of kite-flying <u>tournaments</u>, stories and writing</li> <li><b>The West's War on Terror following 9/11</b> - particularly America's role in shaping international perspectives on Afghanistan.</li> <li><b>The Immigrant experience</b> – the sense of leaving one's homeland and settling in an 'alien' culture</li> <li><b>The vulnerability of women, <u>children</u> and ethnic minorities in conflict</b> – the use of rape, stoning, physical maiming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Amir</b> – the narrator. He grows up in Afghanistan before moving to America where he becomes a writer.</li> <li><b>Hassan</b> – the son of Baba's servant, Ali. It is revealed later that he is Baba's illegitimate son.</li> <li><b>Baba</b> – a strong and dynamic <u>business man</u> in 1970s Kabul, and Amir's father.</li> <li><b>Ali</b> – the Hazara servant of Baba. Like their sons, Baba and Ali grew up together.</li> <li><b>Assef</b> – a schoolboy bully who goes on to become a member of the Taliban.</li> <li><b>Rahim Kahn</b> – Baba's best friend and business partner. He calls Amir back to help save Sohrab.</li> <li><b>Sohrab</b> – the orphaned son of Hassan and Farzana</li> <li><b>Soraya Taheri</b> – Amir's wife</li> <li><b>General Iqbal Taheri and Jamila Taheri</b> – Soraya's parents</li> <li><b>Farid</b> – the driver who accompanies Amir back into Afghanistan</li> </ul>	<p>Theocracy Totalitarian Ideology Repression Theology Religious oppression Patriarchy Tyranny Institution The Other</p>
<p><b>AO2 Formal and Structural Features</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-conscious narrator</li> <li>Unreliable narrator</li> <li>Allegory</li> <li>Symbolism</li> <li>Flashback/Analepsis</li> <li>Prolepsis</li> <li>Motif</li> <li>Paradox</li> <li>Non-linear narrative</li> <li>Narrative pairings</li> <li>Allusion</li> <li>Irony</li> <li>Foreshadowing</li> </ul>			<p><b>Glossary</b></p> <p><b>Agha:</b> Mister; great lord.  <b>Farsi:</b> Modern Iranian language of Iran and western Afghanistan  <b>Genghis Khan:</b> The founder of the Mongols and ruler of the largest contiguous empire in history.  <b>Inshallah:</b> "God willing."  <b>Jan:</b> a word of endearment  <b>Khan:</b> Title of tribal chief; now used like "mister" when placed after someone's name  <b>Khanum:</b> Lady; Mrs  <b>Mullah:</b> Title of respect for a person learned in sacred law.  <u><b>Tashakor:</b></u> Thank you</p>

## The Kite Runner Knowledge Organiser

Plot summary	Suggested further reading
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The novel begins in December 2001. The narrator, Amir, tells us that, the previous summer, he had received a call from his father's best friend, Rahim Kahn. The call had reminded him of a key event which made him 'what I am today.' It is clear that Amir feels immense guilt about an event and that he is compelled to visit Rahim Kahn who has told him, 'There is a way to be good again.'</li><li>• The novel then moves back in time to Amir's childhood in 1970s Afghanistan. He lives with his father, Baba, and their servants Ali and Ali's son, Hassan. Amir and Hassan are the same age and have grown up together.</li><li>• Amir and Hassan are confronted by the local schoolboy bully, Assef, and two of his friends. Hassan protects Amir by threatening to use his slingshot on Assef.</li><li>• Amir resolves to win the local kite flying tournament. This he manages to do, and Hassan promises to collect the blue kite that Amir has beaten. He finds it but is cornered by Assef and his friends. Amir arrives in time to see Hassan being raped by Assef – he runs away. This decision shapes the rest of Amir's childhood behaviour.</li><li>• Amir, unable to cope with his guilt and seeing Hassan daily, takes it out on his loyal friend. Matters reach a climax when Amir tries to frame Hassan for theft in the hope that his father will dismiss Ali and his son. Ali and Hassan choose to leave instead.</li><li>• The story then moves to March 1981. Political unrest has led to Baba and Hassan fleeing their home. Baba risks his life to prevent the rape of a young woman by a Russian soldier.</li><li>• We next see Baba and Amir starting a new life in America. Baba struggles to adjust, but Amir is relieved to start afresh, seeing America as 'a place to bury my memories.'</li><li>• Amir falls in love with Soraya Taheri. Soraya's reputation has been sullied in the ex-pat Afghan community because she had lived briefly with a man without being married. This does not phase Amir and the two marry. Baba has been diagnosed with cancer and dies shortly after they wed.</li><li>• Amir and Soraya try to start a family but have no success. It is at this point that Amir receives the call from Rahim Kahn, and he goes back to Pakistan.</li><li>• He learns that Hassan married and had a son. Hassan and his wife, Farzana, had been killed in the street, leaving their son, Sohrab, an orphan. Amir agrees to return to Kabul to find the boy. He also learns that Hassan was Baba's illegitimate child.</li><li>• Amir visits an orphanage where he learns that Sohrab has been taken by a Taliban official. This turns out to be Assef, who is abusing the children.</li><li>• Amir challenges Assef at his home. They fight; Amir is ultimately saved by Sohrab shooting Assef in the eye with his slingshot.</li><li>• After sending time in hospital, Amir realises he must take Sohrab home with him to America. It looks as though it is going to be impossible to do, leading to Sohrab trying to commit suicide, but the story ends with a traumatised Sohrab living with Amir and Soraya in the US. There is a note of optimism at the end, and it finishes with Amir racing to catch a kite for his nephew.</li></ul>	<p>Articles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>From Harelip to Split Lip</b> – Sarah A. Smith, The Guardian (4/10/03)</li><li>• <b>A Journey of Self-Actualisation of Amir in The Kite Runner</b> – Juan Du (Aug 2017) <a href="https://www.researchgate.net">https://www.researchgate.net</a></li><li>• <b>The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini</b> - Aamer Hussein, The Independent (20/09/2003)</li><li>• <b>Khaled Hosseini: 'If I could go back now, I'd take The Kite Runner apart</b> – Interview with Hermione Hoby, The Guardian (<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2007/06/13/kite-runner">1/06/13</a>)</li><li>• <b>'Kite Runner' Author On His Childhood, His Writing, And The Plight Of Afghan Refugees</b> – An interview with RFE/RL(21/06/12) <a href="https://www.rferl.org/a/interview-kite-runner-afghan-emigre-writer-khaled-hosseini/24621078.html">https://www.rferl.org/a/interview-kite-runner-afghan-emigre-writer-khaled-hosseini/24621078.html</a></li><li>• <b>Life Under the Taliban in Afghanistan</b> - BBC Outlook <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03kbss0">https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03kbss0</a></li><li>• <b>The Taliban Take Kabul</b> – BBC Witness History <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00ygg07">https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00ygg07</a></li><li>• <b>The "Kite Runner" controversy</b> <a href="http://www.salon.com/control/2007/12/09/hosseini/">www.salon.com/control/2007/12/09/hosseini/</a></li></ul> <p>Revision guides:</p> <p><b>Cliff Notes on The Kite Runner</b> (<a href="https://www.cliffsnotes.com/">https://www.cliffsnotes.com/</a>) <b>LitCharts site on The Kite Runner</b> (<a href="https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-kite-runner">https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-kite-runner</a>)</p> <p>If you love <i>The Kite Runner</i>, you will probably enjoy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress</b> – Dai Sijie</li><li>• <b>Chinese Cinderella</b> – Adeline Yen Mah</li><li>• <b>Wild Swans</b> – Jung Chang</li><li>• <b>The Alchemist</b> – Paulo Coelho</li><li>• <b>Memoirs of a Geisha</b> – Arthur Golden</li><li>• <b>Persepolis</b> - Marjane Satrapi</li><li>• <b>1984</b> – George Orwell</li><li>• <b>The Lowland</b> – Jhumpa Lahari</li><li>• <b>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</b> – John Boyne</li></ul>

## *The Kite Runner* RAG-RATED Quiz - Chapters 1-5

	<b>Your answer?</b>	<b>RAG rate your answer – how confident are you that you are correct?</b>	<b>Actual answer?</b>
1. When does Amir start telling his story?			
2. What phrase does Amir remember Hassan saying to him as a child?			
3. What did Ali say about mirrors?			
4. What does the history book Amir finds say about the Hazaras?			
5. What were the first words Amir and Hassan spoke?			
6. What is Amir's father said to have wrestled with his bare hands?			
7. How does Baba feel about the religious leader of Afghanistan?			
8. What does Baba believe is the only sin?			
9. How did Ali come to grow up in Baba's family?			
10. What are the two key differences between Amir and Hassan outlined in Chapter 4?			
11. What does Hassan inadvertently teach Amir about writing stories?			
12. On what date does Afghanistan become a republic?			
13. Who does Assef call a 'great leader'?			
14. How does Hassan protect Amir in Chapter 5?			
15. What is Baba's birthday present to Hassan in 1974?			

## The Kite Runner RAG-RATED Quiz - Chapters 6-10

	<b>Your answer?</b>	<b>RAG rate your answer – how confident are you that you are correct?</b>	<b>Actual answer?</b>
1.What are the kite strings coated in?			
2.Who are the kite runners?			
3.Why does winning the 1975 Kite Tournament become so important to Amir?			
4.What does Amir promise to buy Hassan one day?			
5.In Chapter 7, what does Hassan say he has dreamed about?			
6.When Amir spots the blue kite behind Hassan in the alleyway, how does he describe its importance?			
7.What animal is killed in the memory that Amir links to the memory of Hassan being raped?			
8.How does Amir respond to Hassan in the weeks after the rape?			
9.What does Amir say that angers Baba later that spring?			
10.Why does Amir hit Hassan with the pomegranates?			
11.What does Rahim Khan buy Amir for his 13 <sup>th</sup> birthday?			
12.What does Amir put under Hassan's mattress?			
13. When is Chapter 10 set?			
14. What does Baba do that is of particular note whilst the occupants of the lorry are fleeing Afghanistan?			
15.What does Amir learn has happened to Kamal?			

## The Kite Runner RAG-RATED Quiz – Chapters 11-15

	<b>Your answer?</b>	<b>RAG rate your answer – how confident are you that you are correct?</b>	<b>Actual answer?</b>
1. Which countries does Baba describe as the 'only three real men'?			
2. What's different about the way Baba and Amir view their new life in America?			
3. What does Baba give to his eligibility officer at the welfare office in order to make himself feel better?			
4. How old is Amir when he graduates from high school?			
5. Where does Amir first meet General Taheri?			
6. What is the gossip about Taheri's daughter, Soraya?			
7. Which book is Soraya reading when Amir first plucks up the courage to talk to her?			
8. Why won't Baba let Dr. Schneider examine him?			
9. What colour do Amir and Soraya wear for their <i>nika</i> , their wedding ceremony?			
10. Why does Soraya's mother not sing in public anymore, despite being very talented?			
11. Amir finishes his first novel in the summer of 1988 – what is it about?			
12. Why does the General advise against adoption for Amir and Soraya?			
13. What key phrase does Rahim Khan use with Amir when he calls him in June 2001?			
14. Who is now in charge of Afghanistan?			
15. How does Rahim Kahn say he first reacted to the arrival of the Taliban?			

