

The Kite Runner

Khaled Hosseini

Reviewed by: Udayan Vashisth, 17

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Even though the reader may know nothing about Afghanistan, Khaled Hosseini weaves a tale that is seductive and provides a glimpse of an unknown world. The evolution of the novel's protagonist may surprise the reader – as he shifts from villain to hero. The dive into Afghan culture provides the reader information about not only the base for the way the story will unfold, but also how many people in that area experience life today and how it differs from life in America.

Betrayal and redemption come alive through the relationship between Amir, the protagonist and narrator and Hassan, his family servant and best friend. Hosseini begins the novel by portraying Amir as repeatedly mistreating his loyal and protective friend, Hassan, who is identified as Hazara, an ethnic group that is lower on the class hierarchy in traditional Afghan society. Despite showing nothing but loyalty to Amir, Hassan is abused by Amir, who even frames him for stealing his birthday presents. That accusation enrages Amir's father, Baba, who considers Hassan not as a Hazara servant, but as family. At one point, Hassan tries retrieving Amir's kite from Assef, a neighborhood bully. Amid the attempt, Hassan is raped by Assef. Amir witnesses the assault but fails to intervene out of fear. Amir's multiple acts of betrayal towards Hassan turn the readers against him.

The novel jumps from Amir's childhood to his adulthood, where he leaves his wife behind in California to journey to his homeland, the now Taliban-controlled Afghanistan to redeem himself for his past wrongdoings. He rescues Hassan's son as a way to atone towards his now-deceased father. As Amir endures a brutal beating from Hassan's son's captors, he realizes that the man hurting him is Assef—the new Taliban leader and also the same individual who he witnessed rape Hassan as a boy. This is a notable point in the novel for the readers, who now empathize with Amir. Amir's initial actions in Kabul, Afghanistan as a boy embody the theme of betrayal. However, at this point, he sheds his villainous identity and redeems himself by saving Hassan's son. It is revealed at this time that Hassan's son is actually Amir's half nephew and that Amir and Hassan were actually half brothers.

Despite the novel's powerful themes, one criticism of the novel is its structure. Akin to a wobbly time machine, *The Kite Runner* fast-forwards and rewinds just as the text divulges pivotal plot events. The reader may feel puzzled, as scenes in the narrator's life appear disoriented. The separate events lack a strong, clear connection.

Ages recommended: 15-17

Other recommended books for readers:

Lord of the Flies by William Golding

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee

