

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“The Kite Runner”

Text guide by: Fran Bernardi

CONTENTS

Areas of Study	Chapter	Topics Covered
Area of Study 1- Reading and Responding	Chapter 1- Genre	-
	Chapter 2- Structure	-
	Chapter 3- Historical Issues	3.1 Afghanistan's Political History 3.2 Ethnicity and Religion in Afghanistan
	Chapter 4- Style	-
	Chapter 5- Background Notes	-
	Chapter 6- Chapter Summaries	-
	Chapter 7- Character Profiles	7.1 Amir 7.2 Hassan 7.3 Baba 7.4 Rahim Khan
	Chapter 8- Themes and Issues	8.1 Relationships 8.2 Atonement
	Chapter 9- Sample Essay Topics	-
	Chapter 10- Final Exam Tips	-

AREA 1:

READING & RESPONDING:

THE KITE RUNNER

Chapter 1

GENRE

The Kite Runner is an important literary work because it is the first novel written in English by an Afghan writer. It belongs to the *bildungsroman* genre, which deals with a person's early life and development into adulthood. Typically, the protagonist experiences a life-changing crisis, which shapes their personality. Amir is forced to face the guilt of betraying Hassan and "atone not just for (his) sins but for Baba's too". Another characteristic of this genre is that the protagonist develops their artistic abilities. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir becomes a successful novelist.

The Kite Runner incorporates some elements of the fable genre. The concept of a hero is repeated and the narrative raises questions of morality. Baba is depicted as a large, heroic man while Assef is clearly presented as a villain, who does not change his evil ways. Hassan and Amir's favourite childhood story of Rostam and Sohrab is referred to numerous times and Sohrab, Hassan's son justly fits his hero's name when he defends the life of Amir.

Chapter 2

STRUCTURE

The Kite Runner consists of twenty-five untitled chapters, which are essentially separated into three parts. In Chapter One, Rahim Khan's phone call, which is the initiation of Amir's turning point, provides the impetus for his reflection on his childhood in Afghanistan, which fills the following eight chapters. In Chapter 10, the second section of the novel describes Amir and Baba's journey as refugees and their life in America. The same phone call from Rahim Khan is referred to again in Chapter 14, in which Amir begins his narration of the subsequent life-changing events. Each of the three sections corresponds to significant parts of Amir's life. The early introduction of Amir's challenging crisis evokes suspense and curiosity regarding the plot and main characters. Also, the shift in time and location, from America to Afghanistan and back to America forces contemplation of the values of two inherently different cultures, which are juxtaposed.

Chapter 3

HISTORICAL ISSUES

3.1 Afghanistan's Political History

Afghanistan enjoyed peace under the reign of the monarchy, led by King Zahir Shah, until the 1970s, when the Russian Communist Party and Islamic Mujahedin began fighting for governmental power. The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan was formed from 1978 to 1992 and was ruled by a government that supported the Soviet presence. When the Russian army invaded Afghanistan in order to prevent the Islamic army from winning, the USA sent in support for the Mujahedin. The USA opposed communism in any form, thus they provided weapons to assist with the removal of the Soviet troops, who finally left in 1989. During this period of Soviet rule, refugees started to flee Afghanistan. After 1992, Afghanistan was plagued by civil wars between ethnic groups in the Mujahedin for four years. This led to increased support for the Taliban.

By 1997, the Taliban, a fundamentalist, extremist Islamic faction, had gained control of Afghanistan. Though, it was hoped that peace would return to the country, Afghani citizens experienced brutal punishment for disobeying strict, conservative social rules that were intended to ensure complete obedience to Islamic tenets that now formed the basis of government.

In September, 2001, the Twin Towers in New York were destroyed by terrorist suicide bombers. America, with support from England and other nations, retaliated by destroying the Taliban government by November, 2001. In 2004, Hamid Karzai was elected president of Afghanistan.

3.2 Ethnicity and Religion in Afghanistan

The vast majority of Afghans are Muslim and belong to two Muslim sects: Sunni Muslims and Shi'a Muslims. More than three quarters of people belong to the former sect. Most Shi'a Muslims are also of Hazara ethnicity, thus their obvious distinction and minority is a source of discrimination by the larger Sunni Muslim population. In *The Kite Runner*, Ali and Hassan are Hazara Shi'a Muslims, while Baba and Amir are Sunni Muslims of the Pashtun ethnic group. Their ethnicity relegates them to different levels in the social hierarchy. Hazaras are traditionally rural people, who found work as servants in cities. Pashtun culture rests on a culture based on honour.

Khaled Hosseini argues against the fundamentalist Muslim practices of the Taliban. Though *The Kite Runner* demonstrates great support and honour for Islam, especially when Amir becomes a devout, practicing Muslim by the end of the novel, it presents the notion that the Taliban's atrocities falsely honour the Islamic spirit.