

2015 specification
first exams in 2017 (2016 for AS)



Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

Comprehensive Guide for AS & A Level

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Teacher's Introduction

This guide has been designed as a resource to support independent learning. It covers the needs of students in meeting the Assessment Objectives required for the study of post-2000 English Language specifications. These objectives have been indicated overleaf.

The Kite Runner is a prescribed text for AQA B Literature and AQA Language and Literature and a suitable text for the Edexcel Language and Literature coursework unit Creating a Response. This guide will provide support for those studying the text as part of the **AQA B Literature** course and for those studying the text for the non-exam assessment for other boards. There are also resources to support the study of the text for the Language and Literature qualifications.

In the Chapter by Chapter Analysis, detailed notes are provided for each chapter covering characterisation, form, structure and language. Active learning tasks have been included to support reading. Useful terms relating to stylistic features and aspects of form are provided. Context, themes, symbols and the writer's techniques are also included.

This resource has been revised and updated to reflect the changes in the English Language specification and beyond. The guide provides a detailed focus on the political and social context of the text, the development of critical and academic responses and meeting the requirements of the specification.

All page references in this reading guide refer to the Bloomsbury edition of the text: Hosseini, K. (2007) *The Kite Runner*: London, Bloomsbury, ISBN 978-0-7475-9000-0

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Specification Information

For **AQA B Literature Unit 2B: Elements of Political and Social Protest Writing**, is part of a genre-based assessment of poetry and prose. Exemplar materials indicate the elements required to evaluate how elements of political and social protest writing may or may not influence the structure and style of the text.

Given that the examination will be open book, candidates will be required to select and evaluate a specific interpretation of the text.

If used for Section B, the text will be explored in relation to a statement concerning the text. If used for Section C, its presentation of ideas will be analysed in connection with the text. This resource may only be used in response to one section of the examination.

This resource has been written to meet the new 2015 GCE Literature specifications, which meet the English Literature Assessment Objectives, which are the same across all specifications and all exam boards:

- AO1:** Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using appropriate terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.
- AO2:** Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.
- AO3:** Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.
- AO4:** Explore connections across literary texts.
- AO5:** Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations.

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Background on the Text

Khaled Hosseini's debut novel *The Kite Runner* has become an international bestseller since its publication in 2003. The novel presents a powerful narrative exploring betrayal and guilt, sin and atonement, and the nature of friendship. It was lauded as the first novel to explicitly deal with modern Afghan conflicts in English.

The story spans four decades; the action moves from the Communist uprising in Afghanistan in the 1970s, following key characters as they flee to Pakistan, then California in the 1980s and 1990s, before the search for redemption leads the protagonist back to Pakistan and Talib-controlled Kabul in 2001.



Critical Reception

Later in the guide, you will be asked to consider the elements of political and social context in *The Kite Runner*. In doing so, you will be engaging with a number of historical, political and cultural perspectives. Likewise, the Literary Approaches section will examine some of the critical perspectives of readers of this text. In this short section, we will consider the popular critical reception of the novel. As the examination is UK-based, sources given are from the British press. Be aware that you can find a wide range of global responses on the Internet.

Below are extracts from press reviews of the novel when it was first published:

'A devastating, masterful and painfully honest story of a life crippled by an act of cruelty... although The Kite Runner is told with simplicity and poise, it is a novel of wisdom, like a timeless Eastern tale. It speaks the most harrowing truth about the political, and intoxicates, like a high-flying kite, with the power of hope' – Daily Mail

'As Hosseini's narrative gathers pace, his sparkling descriptions of people, places and events show Hosseini is a truly gifted teller of tales – he knows that his story is an old one, but he tells it as if it were new, and he's not afraid to pull every string in your heart to make it sing' – The Guardian

'Written with the intimate, inside knowledge of Afghan society the handling of the story is true with tenderness and truth. But it is Hassan's silent, sacrificial love that will move you' – Daily Mail

Available online at <http://www.lovereading.co.uk/book/1413/The-Kite-Runner>

The above extracts come from reviews of the text printed in the British popular press for a wide range of audiences – the *Daily Mail* addresses a 'broadcast' audience. That is, it is written for a wide range of genders and socio-economic backgrounds. It would be assumed that the readers are interested in the political contexts but are more interested in the idea of story or characters. The press often takes a reactionary perspective. There is an element of this in the extract from the review of the novel: the focus on individuals in the story: the father-son relationship and the sacrifices made by Hassan. There is also reference to the author's 'intimate, inside knowledge'.

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While still regarded as a broadsheet newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph* has in recent years changed its appearance to tabloid format. A number of traditional broadsheet publications have been published in both formats in an attempt to attract 'mid-market' readers and bolsheviks. It is assumed to be relatively well read and aware of some of the political and literary issues. This is reflected in the way the reviewer highlights the theme of 'evil' and praises the novel as a 'timeless Eastern tale'. The review draws attention to Hosseini's use of simple language and its appeal for the reader as they follow the narrator from desperation to hope.

The review from *The Times* was part of the weekend arts supplement, which is devoted to literature, music and theatre. It evaluates Hosseini's skill as a writer and the praise it gives, but also the suggestion that the material may be 'old' or predictable in some ways. It does not deny the recognition of his gift as a storyteller.

Active Pre-Reading: Critical Reception Task

Using the extracts above, compose a 'pre-reading' response to the text. In this response, summarise your expectations regarding characters, plot and narrative.

- What do you expect from a 'timeless Eastern tale'?
- What might the 'old' story be?
- What is the 'truth' about the power of evil?

You can keep a copy of this response and compare it with your evaluation of the text. You can also compare it with the evaluation of the text you studied its literary and thematic features.

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Plot Summary

This section considers events within the narrative. Features relating to plot structure and Form and Structure section of the guide.

The novel opens in 2001 with the narrator, Amir, reflecting on an as yet unspecified childhood in Afghanistan in 1975. He claims that this event has shaped the way

Amir recalls a comfortable childhood as a Pashtun in Kabul. His memories often feature a family servant, who is of the minority Hazara tribe. The novel resembles a memoir and kite-fighting tournaments.

In these memories, Hassan is Amir's loyal 'kite runner': his job is to chase the kite fight to help Amir win the contest. The narrative takes an unexpected turn when Amir is alone in an alleyway. There he finds Hassan being raped by a group of older boys who had been brutal to Assef. Amir struggles to react, and runs away. He then keeps quiet about the incident. Out of guilt about his complicity, he compounds Hassan's suffering by framing him for a crime (Amir's father) will send Hassan and his father away. It is a testament to Hassan that Amir admits to a crime he did not commit.

The narrative then moves to 1981, and Baba and Amir's situation has drastically changed. They make a dreadful journey to Pakistan in a converted truck to escape the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. In Fremont, California, where Baba works in a petrol station while Amir belatedly comes to socialise at the flea market and, through Baba's acquaintance General Taheri, Amir meets Soraya. Amir falls for her and seeks the General's consent to marry her. The marriage is then brought to an end by Baba's terminal lung cancer. Amir and Soraya have a respectful relationship and Amir pursues a writing career. The couple are struggling to have children.

Amir then returns the reader to an exchange that was mentioned in the first chapter. Baba's who stayed in Afghanistan during the occupation, wants Amir to meet him in Pakistan. He tells Amir about Hassan, whom he found and took back to Amir's childhood home in Kabul. While Rahim Khan was in a hospital in Pakistan, the Taliban entered the home and left their son Sohrab in an orphanage. Rahim asks Amir to go to Kabul and find Sohrab with a Pakistani couple. Amir is reluctant, at which point Rahim Khan reveals that the man is the servant Ali's wife and that Hassan is in fact Amir's half-brother. Amir agrees to the plan.

Amir makes his way to the Kabul orphanage to find that Sohrab has been 'taken' and is now in a stadium where he watches this official stone a man and woman to find a cleric who arranges a meeting with this cleric.

At the headquarters, Amir explains his search and the cleric sends for Sohrab. His behaviour around the Talib leaders suggest that the men have been abusing him. Amir realises that the chief cleric is Assef. Far from being repentant for his earlier actions, Assef sees Amir as a challenge and begins to beat him to death, breaking Amir's ribs, splintering his nose and throwing blows from a brass knuckleduster. Sohrab steps forward and uses his slingshot to distract Assef. Amir and Sohrab to make their escape.

Amir recovers slowly from his encounter. As time passes, he discovers that the man who was with Sohrab was a fiction created by Rahim Khan. Amir asks Sohrab if he would like to come to the States. Sohrab accepts. With the legalities of the adoption proving difficult, Amir prepares Sohrab to go back to an orphanage. On hearing this, Sohrab attempts suicide. Amir prevents Sohrab from being damaged and refuses to speak.

Amir eventually brings Sohrab to live with him and Soraya. He remains mute and withdrawn. In a close, Amir has coaxed Sohrab to the park, where they watch people flying kites. Amir encourages Sohrab to win a 'kite fight' while evoking memories of Hassan. Sohrab begins to smile and Amir is reminded of the kite runner, as he chases the kite for his adoptive son. The possibility of hope

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- **Bold type** has been used to indicate stylistic features of the text.
- Quotations are presented in *italics*, with page references to the Bloomsbury edition.

Chapter One - December 2001

'I became what I am today at the age of twelve' (p. 1).

The novel opens with this enigmatic reference by the **first person** narrator to an opening blends the conventions of fictional biography with elements of mystery. The reader's curiosity is immediately aroused, as few clues are given as to why the events in the past have shaped and shape a life.

The narrator recollects a phone call received from a friend in Pakistan. Although the physical distance will not provide the narrator with an escape from his '*past*' the language used suggests that the narrator feels guilt about his past. There is a contrast between the meditations and the idyllic setting of a sunny afternoon in the park. A pair of kites is seen, '*the harelippped kite runner'* (p. 1). The **eponymous** reference presages Hassan's character. The narrator lists the people and places of his past, potential embedded narratives are suggested. He thinks again of Hassan and the reader's **inferences** regarding his relationship to the past. He is directly linked to the winter of 1975, a time which '*changed everything'* (p. 1).

Active Reading

What techniques does Hosseini use to introduce the narrative in Chapter One to help you.

- What are your **first impressions** of Amir as narrator?
- Describe the **atmosphere** created in this first chapter.
- The book begins with a **flashback**. Is this an effective narrative device? What about the narrator's grasp of the significance of the events of 1975?

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Chapter Two

The **retrospective** narrative creates a **dual perspective**, as the narrative voice shares Ali's and his childhood perceptions and observations. There are features of the '*Bildungsroman*' as the narrator anticipates the exposition of significant events which have served to shape the narrator. He has not yet identified himself to the reader, instead focusing on his relationship with Hassan.

The physical description of Hassan is simultaneously arresting and surprising. The narrator's features are somewhat flawed, describing '*tiny low-set ears and that pointed stubble*' (p. 3), yet the extended metaphor likening him to a doll suggests a certain fragility, a slip of the doll-maker's tool.

The narrator explains that Hassan '*never denied me anything*' (p. 4) and '*never took part in* caught shining mirrors and firing walnuts into the neighbours' gardens, pranks the part in.

The narrator's description of his father's house, agreed to be '*the most beautiful* contrasts with the repeated references to the servants' quarters that Hassan and *shack*' (p. 5) and '*modest little mud hut*' (p. 5). Whilst materially wealthy, the narrator lives with his father, and wondered '*why it was always grown-ups' time with him*' (p. 5). He is held by his father '*but it is Rahim Khan's [a family friend's] pinky my fingers*

The boys are linked through the loss of their mothers; the narrator's mother died young, his mother, Sanuubar, abandoned him within a week of his birth. The narrator is curious about the loss of his mother as deeply as he does. He discovers that this is the case in an incident involving ethnic prejudices against Hazaras. Soldiers recognise Hassan as a Hazara and in a conversation they make disrespectful comments about his mother. The narrator relates this story which is carried along by his thought processes, as he considers the local gossip relating to the incident leads him to contrast Ali's paralysis with Sanuubar's vivacity. The narrator recalls how Hassan mimicked Ali's walk on the way to the market. There is some realisation of his position as he recalls '*He didn't say anything. Not then, not ever*' (p. 7). This comment also foreshadows Hassan is betrayed later in the novel.

The narrator's **digressions** serve to provide information about ethnic and political tensions and the unequal treatment of Shi'a Hazaras by the more powerful Sunni Pashtun majority. The narrator is **didactic** by presenting the information from the young boy's **point of view**, as he shares his experience of Hazara people in his mother's textbook. His teacher dismisses the book, and reveals to him that Shi'a '*like it was some kind of disease*' (p. 8). As with the soldiers, the narrator's curiosity leads him to judge those in national institutions without overtly criticising their behaviour.

He then returns to stories of Sanuubar's derision of her husband and son, events which are of first-hand experience of, as he was one when she left. From the moment of birth, the narrator's goodness, as '*Out he came smiling*' (p. 9). While the boys shared a nurse, providing a sense of '*could break*' (p. 10), the boys' first words suggest that they are fated. The narrator's experience while Hassan learns 'Amir', the name of his dearest friend and the tale's narrator.

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Active Reading: Relationships

1) What does this extract reveal about Amir's relationship with Hassan?

I can still see Hassan up on that tree, sunlight flickering through the leaves on his almost perfectly round face, a face like a Chinese doll chiseled from hardwood: his flat, narrow eyes like bamboo leaves, eyes that looked, depending on the light, gold, green, even sapphire. I can still see his tiny low-set ears and that pointed stub of a nose that looked like it was added as a mere afterthought. And the cleft lip, just left of midline, where the Chinese doll maker's instrument may have slipped, or perhaps he had slipped.

Sometimes, up in those trees, I talked Hassan into firing walnuts with his one-eyed German shepherd. Hassan never wanted to, but if I asked, really asked, he wouldn't deny me. Hassan never denied me anything. And he was deadly with his slingshot, used to catch us and get mad, or as mad as someone as gentle as Ali could be. He would take the mirror and wave us down from the tree. He would take the mirror and told him, that the devil shone mirrors too, shone them to distract Muslim women. 'Yes, Father,' he always added, scowling at his son.

'Yes, Father,' Hassan would mumble, looking down at his feet. But he never told on me. Never told that the mirror, like shooting walnuts at the neighbor's dog, was always my idea.

2) Copy and complete the table below to evaluate the impact of language used in the extract. An example is provided.

Textual Evidence	Reader's Response
<i>sunlight flickering through the leaves on his almost perfectly round face, a face like a Chinese doll</i>	The detail of the 'sunlight flickering' creates a romanticised image of the observation through the leaves on his round face. The simile of a Chinese doll not only alludes to the traditional Chinese doll maker, but also suggests that Hassan is Amir's idealized image.
<i>slanting, narrow eyes like bamboo leaves, eyes that looked, depending on the light, gold, green, even sapphire</i>	
<i>the cleft lip, just left of midline, where the Chinese doll maker's instrument may have slipped</i>	
<i>Sometimes, up in those trees, I talked Hassan into firing walnuts</i>	
<i>Hassan never wanted to, but if I asked, really asked, he wouldn't deny me. Hassan never denied me anything.</i>	
<i>'Yes, Father,' Hassan would mumble, looking down at his feet.</i>	
<i>But he never told on me. Never told that the mirror, like shooting walnuts at the neighbor's dog, was always my idea.</i>	

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Chapter Three

The chapter opens with a story about Baba wrestling a bear. Amir introduces the concept of '*laaf*', or exaggeration, but stresses that the physical power of his father makes it a level of irony in that Amir, as narrator, has introduced '*laaf*' with affection but also of his own culpability for exaggeration, as demonstrated in his idealised recount in the previous chapter.

Baba's friend Rahim calls him Toophan Agha, or Mr Hurricane, reinforcing the image of an implacable force. Baba is linked to powerful natural images – he has '*thundered*' to draw their attention to him '*like sunflowers turning to the sun*' (p. 11).

Amir's talents at poetry are not recognised by his father, as '*marrying a poet was who preferred burying his face in poetry books to hunting*' (p. 17) was quite another thing – '*boys – played soccer*' (p. 18). Part of Amir's confusion is that he feels he is a dissonant '*exception*' to his father's '*black-and-white*' world (p. 14). He loves and fears his father, and admits to himself that he feels '*hated a little*' (p. 14).

Amir craves his father's attention. The reader may be shocked by his attempts to gain a response from his father, such as his declaration that he has cancer when having a picnic by the lake, and his frank admission to the reader that he occasionally wished the orphans had '*all died along with their parents*' (p. 16) so his father would not devote so much time to the orphanage. At the same time, he is proud of his father and his business achievements. He learns about his father from others, and this continues to be the case in his adult life.

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In one of their few conversations, Baba attempts to provide a liberal moral education based on a number of Islamic traditions; in private, he drinks alcohol and warns Amir that the '*monkeys*' (p. 15) and '*bearded idiots*' (p. 15) who will destroy the country if allowed to carry out a bombastic attack proves **prescient** in light of the Taliban's regime. Baba believes that the chief sin, and that all transgressions can be regarded as a form of theft. This is what transpires that he has taken Ali's honour and in hiding his paternity, has robbed Amir of the opportunity to be brothers. His personal belief system does serve to illustrate the dominant beliefs in Afghanistan in the 1970s.

Questions

How is the relationship between Amir and his father characterised in his early years?



As an adult, Amir tries to imagine his father's behaviours. He recounts crying at a funeral when his father is trampled to death and remembers the details of his reaction. He supports his interpretation of the relationship between Baba and Rahim Khan that he has seen when his father declares that '*there is something wrong with you*' while Rahim suggests that Baba should have been kinder. Baba then states his belief that:

'A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who won't stand up for his friends.'

This statement resonates through the novel as Amir allows it to become a self-imposed challenge by Rahim Khan in the final chapters.

Baba's criticisms evoke sympathy for Amir's experiences as a child, but Amir as a man does not grant this sympathy for any length of time, as he reveals that his response was to acknowledge with childish triumph that '*Rahim Khan had been wrong about the*

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Reader Response Activity: Characterisation of Baba

Objective: To select and evaluate relevant textual detail to illustrate and

Reread the opening 10 paragraphs of Chapter 3. What do Amir's descriptions of Baba's character? Copy and complete the table below.

Textual Evidence	Reader
<p><i>Lore has it my father once wrestled a black bear in Baluchistan with his bare hands... I have imagined Baba's wrestling match countless times, even dreamed about it. And in those dreams, I can never tell Baba from the bear.</i></p>	
<p><i>My father was a force of nature, a towering Pashtun specimen with a thick beard, a wayward crop of curly brown hair as unruly as the man himself, hands that looked capable of uprooting a willow tree, and a black glare that would 'drop the devil to his knees begging for mercy, as Rahim Khan used to say'.</i></p>	
<p><i>At parties, when all six-foot-five of him thundered into the room, attention shifted to him like sunflowers turning to the sun.</i></p>	
<p><i>He told me Baba had drawn the blueprints himself despite the fact that he'd had no architectural experience at all.</i></p>	
<p><i>He motioned to me to hold his hat for him and I was glad to, because then everyone would see that he was my father, my Baba... I was so proud of Baba, of us.</i></p>	
<p><i>With me as the glaring exception, my father molded the world around him to his liking. The problem, of course, was that Baba saw the world in black and white. And he got to decide what was black and what was white. You can't love a person who lives that way without fearing him too. Maybe even hating him a little.</i></p>	

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Chapter Four

An interesting parallel is drawn between Amir's treatment of Hassan and Baba's childhood adventures with Ali with great affection but Amir notes that *'in none of Ali as his friend'* (p. 22). Amir recognises similarities between their relationship but seems to be unable to provide a rational explanation:

'The curious thing was, I never thought of Hassan and me as friends either'

There are some attempts by the adult to justify his treatment of Hassan by reminding him of *'easy to overcome'* (p. 22).

Amir then recalls the games and trips to the bazaar. His recollections use 'we', in the joy of the experiences. However, the **contrasts** between their daily routines between their social experiences as master and servant:

'While I ate and complained about homework, Hassan made my bed, polished my outfit for the day, packed my books and pencils' (p. 23).

The hilltop cemetery with the pomegranate tree provides a **setting** where social hierarchy is here that Amir carves an inscription of friendship and equality, proclaiming both. Away from the neighbourhood, Amir and Hassan are less constrained by public expectations but the setting still affects the experience. Hassan is illiterate, which Amir regards as a *'fact of life'*. He does little to support Hassan, who shows a joyous pleasure in the stories Amir tells. In contrast to Hassan, Amir chooses to *'tease him, expose his ignorance'* (p. 24). Amir tries to appear *'harmless'*, yet reveals his guilt in the gifts he later gives to Hassan. It is here that the theme of **guilt** is introduced. The tale of the warrior who unwittingly kills his long-lost son moves to Amir's own son Sohrab. For Amir, it represents the animosity between fathers and sons. The pomegranate tree **represents** the thwarted friendship.

Hassan's praise for a tale improvised by Amir persuades him to write his first story. He is disappointed in his father's subdued reaction but is heartened by Rahim Khan's written review, which praises his use of irony. Amir is buoyed up by this praise and wakes Hassan to seek his approval. Hassan likes the story but questions why the tragic man did not save his wife and generate tears and riches by smelling an onion. This incident neatly contrasts Hassan's practicality with Amir's lack of foresight.

As an adult, Amir reflects on the **irony** that Hassan could not read or write but was a **plot hole**. As a child, his anger was expressed in subconscious pejorative thoughts that he is superior to Hassan. The reader is not given the opportunity to judge Amir at the end of the book *'Afghanistan changed forever'* (p. 30).

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Chapter Five

The **dynamic** opening of the chapter brings the reader into the action, providing pace of the narrator's earlier recollections. It is significant that Baba is away on his protector in the time of crisis. Amir's desperate desire for his father's affections is feeling '*envious of Hassan*' (p. 31) because Ali is comforting him.

The reader is provided with a wider **historical context**, as the narrator reveals the *sounds to us then. The generation of Afghan children whose ears would know no and gunfire was not yet born*' (p. 32). He explains that the event unfolding was the long-serving Zahir Shah with Daoud Khan. The national calm immediately following the republic is in direct contrast to the aggression displayed by the youths on the street gang when they meet and threaten Amir and Hassan.

Assef has elements of the **archetypal** villain in his taunts towards Ali, his signature savagery. His admiration of Hitler, coupled with his belief in Pashtun supremacy, makes him an unsympathetic character. The adult Amir can recognise Assef as a '*sociopath*'. His blond hair and blue eyes are often seen as **metonymic signifiers** of the hero, which separate him from his peers and may even provide motivation for his actions, as well as a Pashtun and a Sunni Muslim.

This encounter with Assef will have tragic consequences, as Hassan's intervention with the slingshot has publicly embarrassed Assef in front of his peers. While Amir would have been paralysed by fear, the adult narrator evaluates the situation retrospectively, noting that Hassan still addresses Assef with the formal title 'Agha', a sign of his ingrained sense of the social hierarchy.

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Some years pass and the narrator brings us to 1974, when Baba arranges for Hassan to alter his lip. Some readers may suspect the nature of Baba's relationship to Hassan's gift. It is also indicative of Baba's belief in the importance of public appearances and his obvious fear about the pain. He is not asked if he wants the surgery. His expression of his generous nature. Amir describes how the success of the surgery on Hassan's lip was '*the winter that Hassan stopped smiling*' (p. 41). Tension is built as the reader anticipates Hassan's innocence due to the events of 1975.

Chapter Six

The winter setting links to the previous chapter and serves to maintain suspense. The **present continuous tense** displaces the reader, as they are uncertain whether they are at this time. The use of colloquial language, listing and short, simple sentences in the writing composition, as the narrative is presented from the perspective of the young Amir, '*Of course*' (p. 42) links with the title and the anticipated **turning point** of the story.

The kite works as a symbol on a number of levels. Often seen as epitomising freedom, they also represent the independence and rebellious spirit of the nation:

'Afghans are an independent people. Afghans cherish custom but abhor rule. They fly. The rules were simple. No rules. Fly your kite. Cut your opponents.'

The kite tournament provides a healthy arena for competitiveness and rivalry. It was banned kite-flying in an attempt to quell these qualities, yet during the period of internecine warfare was rife.

Hassan may be a servant but in the kite-flying tournaments, he was the undisputed champion, frequently claiming the '*trophy of honour*' (p. 46) that the last kite represented. Amir's skills he persists in teasing him. He cannot explain his cruelty and likens it to an ant – '*Except now, he was the ant and I was holding the magnifying glass*' (p. 46) conveys the magnitude of Amir's power over Hassan.

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Hassan's power lies in his integrity. When challenged to eat dirt by Amir, he responds as an adult, Amir recognises that his challenge to Hassan's loyalty exposed his own discomfort when scrutinised by the gaze of *'people like Hassan, people who mean'*. This incident leads the reader to question the sincerity of the adult narrator. Can you identify any other events?

The narrative now reaches the winter of 1975 and events are set in motion by Baba's desire to win the kite tournament. Amir explains Baba's belief that *'winners won and losers lost'*. Amir sees this as an opportunity to *'show him once and for all that his son was worth'* (p. 49) in his father's house. The reader gains insight into Amir's perspective as he *'finally be pardoned for killing my mother'* (p. 50). Amir's search for parental approval while establishing the quest which will somehow be related to the life-changing events of the opening chapter.

Suspense is maintained by the return to benign memories of winters spent playing in the snow. Amir again taunts Hassan, but shows immediate regret by promising to buy him a television. Amir shows empathy in feeling *'sad for who Hassan was, where he lived'* (p. 51), yet still feels a sense of pride. He cannot appreciate Hassan's pride when he gently reminds Amir *'It's my home, Amir. It's my home'*. Amir's religious belief confuse and anger the young Amir: *'He was so goddamn pure, you know, Amir'* (p. 51). Throughout the passage, 'killed' is repeatedly used as slang in the context of tragic reverberations as friendships and innocence die later in the story.

Active Reading: Pathetic Fallacy in Chapter 6

Read the extracts from the opening of Chapter 6 below.

- How does the narrator use language to convey his love of winter?
- In what ways does the extract juxtapose childhood memories of winter with the relationship between Amir and his father?
- How does the use of metaphor in the second extract reveal the relationship between Amir and his father?

Extract 1

Winter.

Here is what I do on the first day of snowfall every year: I step out of the house in my pajamas, hugging my arms against the chill. I find the driveway, my feet crunching on the snow, the trees, the rooftops, and the hills buried under a foot of snow. I smile. The snow is so white my eyes burn. I shovel a handful of the fresh snow into my mouth. The stillness broken only by the cawing of crows. I walk down the front steps, but I don't come out and see.

Winter was every kid's favorite season in Kabul, at least those whose fathers had an iron stove. The reason was simple: They shut down school for the icy season, a long division and naming the capital of Bulgaria, and the start of three more hours of school with Hassan, free Russian movies on Tuesday mornings at Cinema Park, and for lunch after a morning of building snowmen.

And kites, of course. Flying kites. And running them.

For a few unfortunate kids, winter did not spell the end of the school year. They had to go to voluntary winter courses. No kid I knew ever volunteered to go to these classes, but I volunteered for the volunteering for them.

Fortunately for me, Baba was not one of them...

Extract 2

I loved wintertime in Kabul. I loved it for the soft pattering of snow against my boots, the way fresh snow crunched under my black rubber boots, for the warmth of the sun on my face, the wind screeched through the yards, the streets. But mostly because, as the trees were bare, the roads, the chill between Baba and me thawed a little. And the reason for this was that Baba and I lived in the same house, but in different spheres of existence. Kites were the intersection between those spheres.

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Chapter Seven

The chapter opens with Hassan's dream. Dreams provide another form of story. In the dream, Amir swims in the lake to prove there are no monsters. Hassan joins him. Having proved the lake is free from monsters, the boys are celebrated and *and Hassan, the sultans of Kabul'* (p. 53). Hassan takes it as a good omen for the interpretation of the dream. Amir nervously snaps at him and remembers that he 'almost

The setting for the kite tournament belongs to a fairy tale paradise:

'The streets glistened with fresh snow and the sky was a blameless blue' (p. 54).

The description of groups of boys *'flinging snowballs', 'squabbling, chasing', 'giggling'* conveys the excitement and joy of the occasion. Amir's fear of *'failure on a grand scale'* contrasts to the carefree attitudes of those around him. He looks to Hassan for reassurance. Hassan is Amir's 'book' to his lifelong companion. Hassan's pride in his role as Amir's runner is contrasted to *'an Olympic athlete showing his gold medal'* (p. 55).

The passage describing the kites is dense in figurative language. The airborne kites *'flapping its wings'* (p. 55), while cut kites *'fell from the sky like shooting stars'* (p. 55) circling *'like paper sharks roaming for prey'* (p. 55) reminds the reader of the fierce and ominous foreshadowing of the gang cornering Hassan.

The narrative provides an interior monologue of Amir's thoughts and wishes as he watches the tournament. He sees parallels between the crowd's instructions to *'Cut him!'* (p. 58) in the gladiatorial arena. In his moment of triumph he shouts *'We won!'* (p. 58) to Hassan, breaking their shared bond. Hassan leaves to run the kite, uttering the traditional blessing *'For the runner'* (p. 59). We have read these words at the start of the novel and sense a crisis. The reference to seeing that smile once again in a photograph 26 years later. Hassan's fate is his doom as he sets off on his ill-fated mission to retrieve the kite.

At this point, Amir's attention is directed towards his father. Likening their relationship to that of a gladiator, he utters the words *'Salvation. Redemption'* (p. 59) like a mantra. The narrator uses this as the narrative structure when he questions the likelihood of the *'happily ever after'*.

The sun is setting as Amir begins his search for Hassan in the streets of Wazir Akbar Khan. He has sacrificed his prayers to run the kite, unaware that he is about to make a mistake. A merchant shows contempt for Amir when he enquires about Hassan, revealing that the kite being flown by richer boys is a common occurrence. Amir is still fixated on the kite, the *'key to his happiness'* is blinkered by this when he encounters Hassan. He remains paralysed by fear, even though he *'the boy I'd grown up with'* (p. 63). Amir's fear is grounded, given that he is outnervous by Hassan's fearsome reputation.

The reader is not surprised when Assef demands the kite as a reward. He taunts Hassan (p. 63) and tells him that he is merely Amir's *'ugly pet'* (p. 64). Hassan is prepared to die for Amir and friendship. There is horror for the reader and Amir as Assef's intentions become clear. Amir rationalises his inaction at that moment: *'I opened my mouth, almost said something, but I might have turned out differently if I had'* (p. 64). He reiterates his paralysis, perhaps as a form of response to the situation.

The narrative becomes fragmented, as Amir presents the memories and dreams. It is not clear whether these were the thoughts that entered the head of the 12 year old Amir, or those that flood the mind of the adult narrator as he recalls the traumatic event. The first memory reminds him of his bond with Hassan, the second of sacrifice, while the third looks to a future where Hassan will save Amir from becoming lost.

Reader Reflection
What is the significance of the fragments of memory that Amir recalls from the scene in the marketplace?

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The reader is then returned to the traumatised observer. Amir notes small details he is witnessing. This serves to extend the horror, as the reader is forced to re-live the assault. Amir compares the look in Hassan's eyes to the *'look of acceptance'* (p. 67) before ritual slaughter. Amir has a final chance to act, but chooses to run. He prefers to be a coward than to face the realisation that he had never treated Hassan as an equal. *'It was that Assef was right'* (p. 68).

The young Amir becomes implicit in Hassan's fate as he struggles to understand his role.

'Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it. He was just a boy.' (p. 68).

Amir has accepted the victimisation of Hassan and has subverted the incident into a game that has 'cost' him Hassan. The adult narrator presents his behaviour with startling honesty. When he finds the kite, he confesses: *'I can't lie now and say my eyes didn't scan it for rips'* (p. 68).

There is temporary relief from the horror and tension, for both the reader and Amir, as he receives glowing approval. It is with a child's relief that the narrator closes the chapter:

'In his arms, I forgot what I'd done. And that was good' (p. 69).

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Chapter Eight

Hassan, clearly traumatised by the attack, avoids meeting with Amir. He comple Ali directly asks Amir if he knows what is wrong. It is an indication of the power and Pashtuns that Amir feels no discomfort in snapping at Ali and ordering him to

Amir still harbours jealousy towards Hassan and resents his father's concern about trip to Jalalabad to celebrate Amir's success and although Baba is spending time Even in his moment of triumph, his travel sickness is seen as a sign of weakness but attempts to 'confess', but as he waits until the others are asleep it is a futile act. 'monster' in Hassan's life.

Amir soon realises the insignificance of the kite and its inability to heal the divide

'We'd actually deceived ourselves into thinking that a toy made of tissue paper could somehow close the chasm between us' (p. 76).

He recounts his 'dismay' when Hassan attempts to rekindle their friendship. Amir pomegranate tree with Hassan and no longer reads to him. He punishes Hassan and begs to know what he can do to rectify things, Amir coldly declares *'I want you to Hassan's 'goddamn unwavering loyalty'* (p. 78) is further evidence of his guilty con

In this chapter, Amir serves as an anti-hero in his increasingly callous attempts to rid himself of his guilt by ostracising Hassan. He pounds him with pomegranates and challenges him to fight back, while Hassan responds *'with surprise and pain'*, *'dazed like a man dragged into the ocean with a riptide'* (p. 79). Amir provokes Baba's anger when he suggests they replace Hassan and Ali with new servants. Baba's vehement response provides further clues of his ties to Hassan, as well as contrasting the moral codes of father and son. Baba withdraws his affection and Amir returns to his stories.

Interpretation

- Amir's regard
- What is troubling
- Why do we have a

The narrator places the events of 1976 on an international political canvas as he *'summer of peace and anonymity'* (p. 81). Amir's 13th birthday party is an event *'of the show'* (p. 82) as he attempts to present a successful public face. This includes Assef and his family. Even in a polite social context, Assef manages to intimidate his parents seem to be slightly afraid of him.

Baba has a different impression of Assef, who is confident and charming in his presence *'glimpse of the madness hiding beneath'* (p. 84) when Assef invites Amir and Hassan quickly disposes of Assef's present, a biography of Hitler. Whilst avoiding his own Rahim Khan. Rahim shares the story of his doomed love affair with a Hazara woman sadness that he remarks *'In the end, the world always wins. That's just the way of suspects that Rahim knows something of Amir's predicament when he invites him to his mind.*

The chapter ends with a final reminder of Amir's 'sin'. He sees Assef pushing Hassan *'mercifully, darkness'* (p. 87). The reader is left to consider their response to Amir

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Chapter Nine

Amir opens the birthday presents from the previous evening. He sees these as re-gifts (p. 88), as the party was Baba's response to Amir's success in the kite competition given by Baba and is unenthusiastic about Baba's present of a red bike, which also retains the leather notebook bought by Rahim Khan.

He shares his thoughts with the reader, explaining the logic that Hassan will suffer to predict what course of action he will take, as Ali and Hassan present their gift. Amir's 'Shahnamah' which they have given has obviously cost them a great deal. He is unworthy, yet in the next section his enquiry to Baba about the whereabouts of the book falsely accuses Hassan of theft, a sin that Baba cannot condone. The placement of Hassan's mattress seems a cold and calculating move. Amir remembers that he *last in a long line of shameful lies*' (p. 91).

Amir is surprised that Hassan does not protest his innocence. Hassan's final sacrifice is to make a false confession and spare Amir the shame of admitting to his plot. Amir suddenly realises that Hassan has known all along that he has seen the events in the alleyway. He judges himself as a sinner:

Debatable
Is Amir's confession a just result of his actions?

'I wasn't worthy of this sacrifice; I was a liar, a cheat, and a thief' (p. 92).

He is equally surprised when Baba expresses forgiveness and begs Ali and Hassan to leave with him. Amir is in despair as he observes *'the depth of the pain and the grief I had brought'* (p. 93).

There is an element of **dramatic irony** for any reader who has identified Baba's reaction as being able to interpret the pain and fear in Baba's voice as he begs Ali and Hassan to leave.

The departure takes place on a stifling summer's day. The setting is perhaps indicative of moral aridity. The rainstorm provides another element of **pathetic fallacy**, reflecting the grief experienced by the characters.

Hassan has abandoned his toys in the servants' hut, providing another signifier of his innocence, literally 'put away childish things'. Amir has also developed an adult appreciation of the world. He will not chase Hassan to beg forgiveness and so the car disappears in the rain. This is an apt metaphor as it conveys the loss of something precious.

Chapter Ten - March 1981

Kabul is occupied territory. It is now a city of rubble and curfews. Baba and Amir's narrative charts their journey towards Peshawar. The abandonment of possessions is a re-enactment of the hardships faced by Hassan and Ali when they had to leave Kabul. Amir cannot see this.

Ali's loyalty as a servant is thrown into relief when Amir records that the seven soldiers who accompanied the departure were all potential spies reporting on anti-communist sentiment. The tension of the war. On the roadside, thoughts turn to the 'MiGs', 'APCs', 'Kalashnikovs' and 'Rudovs'. Amir wonders what has become of Hassan.

He recalls his father's bravery in challenging a Russian soldier who demands time for a bribe to allow the truck full of fleeing Afghanis through the checkpoint. Amir is amazed to wish him to risk his life being a hero. Baba is driven by a code of honour and is convinced that he is asking *'Have I not taught you anything?'* (p. 101).

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On arrival in Jalalabad, it is clear that Karim the truck driver has cheated the passengers for a journey in a vehicle which has broken down, forcing them to join other evacuees owned by a relative. Again, Baba is seen to defend the rights of the group when he

In the cellar, they encounter Kamal and his father. Kamal had assisted Assef in a past assault, which reveals that Kamal was victim of a similar assault at the hands of soldiers. It is one of the similarities between the experiences of characters from differing backgrounds which highlights the

The group are eventually smuggled across the border to Pakistan in a fuel tank. The similes and metaphors listing are used to convey Amir's struggle for breath in the dark space. Amir fights for his life during his flying days with Hassan. On arrival in Pakistan, his thoughts turn to his father,

'After everything he'd built, planned, fought for, fretted over, dreamed of, lived, he had lost his life, one disappointing son and two suitcases' (p. 108).

Amir realises that outside forces can completely change a life, regardless of how carefully you plan. The insignificance of material wealth is thrown into sharp relief when Amir's thoughts are interrupted. He realises *'someone was screaming'* (p. 108) and turns to see that Kamal has died of suffocation in the tank. Kamal's father is distraught, having lost his wife in Kabul. He lunges at Karim, armed with a gun, before shooting himself. The final **tableau** of dead son and father is at odds with the promise of peace in Pakistan.

Reader

- How does the text develop the theme of Peshawar?
- Why is the reintroduction of the

Active Reading: Making Thematic Links

For each of the extracts below, try to explain how Hosseini is making links that you may wish to consider:

- the relevance of Hassan appearing in Amir's happy memory
- what is revealed about life in Kabul at this time
- representations of powerful and powerless people

Copy and complete the table below.

Textual Evidence	Evaluation
<p><i>'Think of something good,' Baba said in my ear. 'Something happy.'</i></p> <p><i>Something good. Something happy. I let my mind wander. I let it come:</i></p> <p><i>Friday afternoon in Paghman. An open field of grass speckled with mulberry trees in blossom. Hassan and I stand ankle-deep in untamed grass, I am tugging on the line, the spool spinning in Hassan's calloused hands, our eyes turned up to the kite in the sky.</i></p>	
<p><i>You couldn't trust anyone in Kabul any more – for a fee or under threat, people told on each other, neighbor on neighbor, child on parent, brother on brother, servant on master, friend on friend.</i></p>	
<p><i>As if on cue, a MiG [Soviet fighter plane] suddenly screamed past overhead. Karim tossed his cigarette and produced a handgun from his waist. Pointing it to the sky and making shooting gestures, he spat and cursed at the MiG.</i></p>	

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Chapter Eleven - Fremont, California, 19

The sub-heading of the chapter announces a new and distant location for the act. Amir has preconceptions of California based on media representations. The California is not carefree, although it provides a welcome relief from the destruction of war.

Amir recognises the discrepancy between ideal and reality for his father. He is called *America that gave him an ulcer* (p109). Baba develops various political stances – due to Reagan's views on the Russian involvement in Afghanistan, and praising Islam, considering pro-Jewish sentiment to be anti-Islam. Amir is sensitive to the fact that the war has created hardships for their neighbours. Baba's conservatism extends to his refusal to take welfare lessons. He also struggles to adapt to cultural differences. His anger at being refused without identification at the local shop leads to the owners threatening police action if he refuses food and welfare stamps, which he regards as charity.

Amir senses his father is mourning for his old life and suggests they return to Peshawar. Baba reveals that his move to the United States was motivated by a hope that it would improve Amir's future chances. Amir graduates high school at the age of 20 and Baba shows his pride by taking him for drinks and presenting him with a second-hand car. Amir is overcome with happiness and gratitude, but becomes frozen when Baba wishes Hassan could share the day with them.

Reflection

- Amir's aspirations
- What he has achieved
- How he has achieved it

Tensions return when Amir wishes to enrol on a writing course. Baba expected him to be a doctor and refuses to compromise or make a sacrifice for Baba, explaining *'The last time I had a dream, I was myself'* (p. 117).

Amir escapes the tension through driving. He finds driving liberating and American. He finds it *'unmindful of the past'* (p. 119), describing the country as *'Someplace with no sins'* (p. 119). It is driving that serves to unite father and son. In 1984, Baba buys a car which allows them to spend their weekends picking up bargains at car boot sales and a local flea market.

It is at the flea market that Baba meets 'General' Taheri, a man of high standing from Afghanistan. He now lives in California but continues to dress in a formal suit in his former post. Amir sees similarities between Baba and Mr Taheri, particularly in their honour and pride. The general's daughter helps her father set up the stall for the marked interest in her.

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Chapter Twelve

The language and style shifts as an infatuated Amir conveys his yearning for Soraya. Soraya highlights the hope she represents, as he explains how she is *'the morning sun to me'*. Her language reflects a person who feels everything intensely. It could be regarded as a concentration of minor sentences as he tries to observe as much as he can in his

The narrator uses a concentration of Afghani terms used in the passages relating to Soraya. This may be seen to indicate that women are still evaluated in traditional terms in the new setting of Fremont. It is interesting that it is in this context that Amir infers the values underlying Afghan culture:

'Nang. Namoos. Honor and pride. The tenets of Pashtun men' (p. 127).

This will serve to explain General Taheri's sensitivity about his daughter, whose past has led young Afghan men to flee *'like startled birds'* (p. 130). Amir's discussion of *khastegari*, or suitors, presages his later pursuit of marriage. His father reminds him to remember the honour code.

As Amir learns more about Soraya, he finds shameful comparisons to his own past. Where she had helped a servant to become literate, Amir had exposed Hassan's lack of knowledge for his own entertainment.

As the narrator is providing a retrospective, the reader senses the ominous tone of Amir's memory of Baba catching a cold. The lexis used reflects the cold, clinical language of the face of rational science, Amir takes a surprising course of action:

'I recited half-forgotten verses...asked for kindness from a God I wasn't sure of'

Baba retains his pride and wishes no sympathy or pity for his cancer. He loses his emotional and asks what he is to do without him:

'All those years, that's what I was trying to teach you, how to never have to ask for anything'

Amir's measured writing style is disrupted as he allows colloquial forms to convey an indication of the influence of American culture when he compares the doctor's *'mugshots of the killer to the victim's family'* (p. 139). He fails to find figurative language in *'ball shaped gray things'* (p. 139) that form the cancerous cells.

It is an indication of the solidarity of the Afghan community that the Taheris visit for their support. Baba is no longer an intimidating bear of a man, as he grows thin *'like a bird's wing under my fingers'* (p. 141).

When Baba asks for Soraya's hand on behalf of Amir, Amir and Soraya have their first conversation. Amir confesses to her past. Amir accepts it but reveals that his pride, or *iftikhar*, has been his problem with her previous lover. He recognises her courage but still cannot confess to his betrayal.

Reader Responses

- How does Soraya's strength of character come across closely at the end of the novel?
- Baba is described as a tragic figure in America. Why?

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Chapter Thirteen

Amir provides a detailed account of the preparations for a Pashtun *Awroussi*, or observations at the formal gathering are presented in an objective fashion, perhaps detachment from the scene. He reveals that the couple must be chaperoned, as engagement ceremony.

His wedding is also recalled as a series of images. He does wish that Rahim was Hassan's fate. Soraya provides support in offering to take care of Baba. She reads indicating that despite Baba's reservations about Amir's career, he is secretly proud of Baba's joy that his son has found love:

'I could see his internal smile, as wide as the skies of Kabul' (p. 151).

Baba passes away shortly afterwards and it is significant that Amir's final memory is of Afghanistan, as this is where Amir is fated to return to.

Soraya tells Amir about her family. She criticises her father's pettiness and reveals that he takes welfare stamps and refuses to work due to his migraines. Her frustration also stems from her thoughts to the unequal treatment of men and women in Afghan culture. She reveals that she has to have fun and pursue women as if *'looking for meat'* (p. 156). In contrast, a woman who is seduced and become labelled for the rest of her life.

Soraya wonders how Amir can be so different to the other Afghan men she has met. She asks a question and decides that his views have been formed by a number of factors. The environment of his house or immediate society when he was growing up and so he was unaware of the world. In addition, Baba had been unusual as an Afghan, *'a liberal who had lived by his own rules'*. He had imposed opinions about women's place in society. Finally, Amir had personal reasons, *'knew all about regret'* (p. 157).

Amir cannot bear to continue work at the flea market without Baba. When Soraya wishes to be a teacher, he is dismissive. Soraya takes his criticisms but continues to be an independent woman but knows that she must uphold certain values out of respect for her father that she doesn't drink in her father's company.

As the narrative reaches 1998, Afghanistan is alluded to. Amir discovers his book of memories, a moment of happiness, he thinks of Hassan and feels that he does not deserve such happiness for his previous sins.

References are made to the Shorawi withdrawal in 1989. The Soviet army may have been defeated but the government they have installed are engaged in fighting with the Mujahedin and Amir comments on events as a distant reporter might. Afghanistan becomes for Amir a distant memory. The Berlin wall comes down and attention turns to other events.

Amir and Soraya find they have fertility problems. A series of tests ensue. Amir's tone is laced with irony as he informs us that he *'passed with flying colours'* (p. 161). There are detailed references to the various procedures, perhaps drawn from the writer's medical background. However, as in the episodes dealing with Baba's cancer, Amir seems to have an **ambivalent** and sometimes hostile response to the doctors that he meets. As a writer who lives life through his emotions, he seems to mistrust the rational truth, and interprets the doctor's sympathy as condescension.

Interpretation

- Do you think Amir's attitude towards Taheris is one of power or fear?
- How does Amir's attitude towards fertility change throughout the chapter?

When Amir and Soraya share their situation with the Taheris, the General warns that blood and tradition are key. Amir is more accepting of their situation than his wife. He is based on a belief that he has been meted a punishment and makes a fine distinction between the two, *'Or, maybe, it was meant not to be'* (p. 164). The chapter ends with a note of tension between the couple had become a presence, *'sleeping between us like a*

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Chapter Fourteen

Structure

What is the significance of the author returning to the scene described in the opening chapter at this point?

?

We are returned to the more recent past of **recapitulation** of the description of the kites in the opening chapter. There are some variations in thoughts directly to the reader. He has had a realization. He realises that Rahim had always known what he must do. He knows that he must visit Rahim in Pakistan, on his journey towards redemption, 'a way to be good'. The chapter ends, Amir dreams of Hassan.

Chapter Fifteen

The setting of Peshawar is vividly evoked through a bombardment of sensory images. In Kabul he had known in childhood.

In one of the examples of framing and metafiction, Amir refers to the process of the expression to explain the mounting tension as he is reunited with Rahim Khan. Soraya only serves to throw his unease into relief.

Rahim recounts events experienced in Afghanistan from 1981 to the present. This provides the reader with some sense of political and historical contexts. The incident involving Rahim, where he experiences a physical punishment by a Talib who believed he cheered at a football match, foreshadows the horrific stoning Amir will later witness.

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In the early 1990s, the Northern Alliance tried to control Kabul. The tribal wars rendered parts of the city dangerous and Amir learns that Baba's orphanage was destroyed.

Rahim explains that the Taliban were initially greeted as heroes, as people hoped for the return of national pride. He does not present further details at this point.

Amir learns that Rahim Khan is dying. Rahim is stoical in the face of death. He chooses to be 'melancholic' and 'wallow' in 'self-pity' (p. 176). The reader may feel these traits of Amir's character.

It is soon after this that Rahim mentions Hassan. Amir finds his name affects him (p. 176). Amir seems to feel no control over the past, and tries to convey his sense to the reader. His painful memories come flooding back, 'as if speaking his name had begun to torment me anew' (p. 176).

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Chapter Sixteen

The first person narration shifts perspective as Rahim Khan tells his story. He describes Hassan near Bamiyan in 1986, in order that he would return to Kabul and keep his promise. There is a sense of foreboding when Rahim interposes his reflection with '*Allah forgive me*' (p. 178). This reflection will not be a positive one.

Rahim is directed towards Hassan's house, which is '*not much more than a glorified shack*' at this time and has a wife. Rahim comments on how she looks at Hassan as though he has not retained his religious belief and observes prayer throughout Rahim's stay. Rahim's land mine, which he wryly remarks is a most Afghan way to die.

Extended Response: Narrative Perspective

How does Rahim Khan's 'storytelling' style in Chapter 16 compare and contrast with that of Amir?

You should comment on:

- vocabulary
- sentence structure
- tone
- use of figurative language

Chapter Seventeen

Having heard Rahim's story, Amir returns as the narrator. He describes his initial reaction to what he has heard.

Hassan's voice is heard through a letter that he had given Rahim, in the hope that Hassan's language is infused with grace, respect and sincerity. He powerfully conveys his grief as he laments that '*kindness has gone from the land*' (p. 189). He provides an example of a good woman when he describes how his wife was beaten in the market place. The letter has been a good father to Sohrab. On one outing, they rediscover the pomegranate trees 'years' (p. 190). This could be seen as a symbol of the stunted friendship with Amir. Amir's perspective on Rahim Khan's illness, as Hassan recounts its severity.

The letter presages news of Hassan's execution. The reader has suspected that Hassan is no longer alive, but Amir seems resolute and almost childlike in his belief that Hassan must survive. He cannot accept the death, and the reader must question whether his repeated cries of '*No!*' are motivated by grief for Hassan or a realisation that he cannot atone for his past behaviour. Amir's thoughts return once again to 1974, as he imagines the moment of Hassan's death, '*his life of unrequited loyalty drifting from him like the windblown kites he used to chase*' (p. 192).

Reflection

- How does this affect your characterisation of Amir?
- Does his reaction to the theft of the pomegranate seeds indicate anything about his character?

Rahim quickly presents Amir with a chance of redemption, explaining that Hassan was an orphan, and must be brought to Pakistan to have a chance at a better life. Amir's understanding of the traditional honour code. He is quick to admit cowardice, and suggests he would be willing to pay for someone to find Sohrab.

Rahim throws down the gauntlet to Amir. Having defended him against his father, Amir reiterates Baba's fear that Amir is '*a man who can't stand up to anything*' (p. 194) and does not seem willing to become the hero of the narrative.

The emotional onslaught continues as Rahim feels forced to reveal that Amir is Hassan's real father. Amir cannot cope with this information, as he feels his wife's '*good life*' (p. 195) in America as a thing of the past.

Amir becomes verbally aggressive as he denounces the deceit as '*shit*' and calls for revenge (p. 195). These invectives convey his anger, as he swears at a dying man he once respected. Amir's misplaced sense of honour, as he felt a lie was better than exposing his betrayal of Sohrab and decides to go to Kabul.

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Active Reading: Form – Letters in the Narrative

Below is Hassan's letter that prompts Amir to examine his conscience. Read it and produce an extended response.

How effective is Hassan's letter in supporting characterisation and themes?

You should consider:

- how the language and register compare to those used by Amir
- how the letter enhances the narrative
- other effects upon the reader

In the name of Allah the most beneficent, the most merciful, Amir agha, with my dearest regards to Sohrab, and I pray that this latest letter finds you in good health and in the light of day. I offer my warmest thanks to Rahim Khan sahib for carrying it to you. I am hopeful that you will find your letters in my hands and read of your life in America. Perhaps a photograph of me will have told much about you to Farzana jan and Sohrab, about us growing up together in the streets. They laugh at the stories of all the mischief you and I used to cause!

Amir agha,

Alas the Afghanistan of our youth is long dead. Kindness is gone from the land and always there are the killings. In Kabul, fear is everywhere, in the streets, in the stadium, in the markets, here, Amir agha. The savages who rule our watan don't care about human decency. I went to Farzana jan to the bazaar to buy some potatoes and _naan_. She asked the vendor for a loaf but he did not hear her, I think he had a deaf ear. So she asked louder and suddenly he came on the thighs with his wooden stick. He struck her so hard she fell down. He was saying the Ministry of Vice and Virtue does not allow women to speak loudly. She lay on her leg for days but what could I do except stand and watch my wife get beaten? If I had a gun, I surely put a bullet in me, and gladly! Then what would happen to my Sohrab? The streets are full of hungry orphans and every day I thank Allah that I am alive, not because I fear death but because my husband and my son is not an orphan.

I wish you could see Sohrab. He is a good boy. Rahim Khan sahib and I have taught him to read and does not grow up stupid like his father. And can he shoot with that slingshot! I take him to the market and buy him candy. There is still a monkey man in Shar-e Nau and if we run into him he will dance for Sohrab. You should see how he laughs! The two of us often walk up to the hill and remember how we used to sit under the pomegranate tree there and read from the book. The leaves have dried the hill and the tree hasn't borne fruit in years, but Sohrab and I still sit under the tree from the _Shahnamah_. It is not necessary to tell you that his favorite part is the story of the blind men and a elephant. Sohrab. Soon he will be able to read from the book himself. I am a very proud agha.

Amir agha,

Rahim Khan sahib is quite ill. He coughs all day and I see blood on his sleeve when he coughs. He has much weight and I wish he would eat a little of the shorwa and rice that Farzana jan brings. I eat a bite or two and even that I think is out of courtesy to Farzana jan. I am so worried about him every day. He is leaving for Pakistan in a few days to consult some doctors there. I hope he will come with good news. But in my heart I fear for him. Farzana jan and I have told little about him. It is going to be well. What can we do? He is only ten and he adores Rahim Khan sahib.

They have grown so close to each other. Rahim Khan sahib used to take him to the market but he is too weak for that now.

I have been dreaming a lot lately, Amir agha. Some of them are nightmares, like the fields with bloodred grass. I wake up from those short of breath and sweaty. Most of the time, I dream things, and praise Allah for that. I dream that Rahim Khan sahib will be well. I dream that I will be a good person, a free person, and an important person. I dream that lawla flowers will bloom again and rubab music will play in the samovar houses and kites will fly in the skies. I dream that you will return to Kabul to revisit the land of our childhood. If you do, you will find an agha.

May Allah be with you always.

-Hassan

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Chapter Eighteen

As a writer, Amir thinks in metaphors. He compares his current situation to being furniture rearranged. He mulls over Baba's secret. He cannot believe that Baba betrayed Ali and became 'a thief of the worst kind' (p. 197). He preached 'nang' to honourable behaviour.

He cannot reconcile the new information with his happier memories of Baba in Kabul who went to ask for Soraya's hand in marriage. His anger is slowly replaced by a love for his father than he initially thought, as they 'had both betrayed the people who were their fathers' (p. 197). He feels he must rescue Sohrab to redeem both sins.

Amir considers whether actions in the past can have an impact on the fate of another person and whether he may be responsible for Hassan's death, as he imagines an alternative world where Sohrab would have travelled to America.

Despite his growing unease and sense of guilt, Amir is a reluctant hero. He now knows that he can see no good in life, which he regards as 'a cycle of lies, betrayals and secrets'. He must indulge in a betrayal of his own to enter Afghanistan due to the dangers. Sohrab may be Amir's chance to enter a world where he and Hassan are made to leave under a 'bloodred sky' (p. 199).

Task

Copy and complete the table below to compare and contrast the nature of the betrayals committed by Baba and Amir.

	Baba	Amir
Betrayal of family		
Betrayal of friends		
Betrayal of principles		

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Chapter Nineteen

The chapter begins *in medias res*, in the middle of a course of action. Again, Amir's lack of strength. He is being taken into Afghanistan by Farid, a driver hired by Amir is conveyed in a number of ways. His 'cold glance' towards Amir as he is sick looks at Amir dismissively and 'with a hint of barely suppressed animosity' (p. 200) 'the surly' (p. 201). His life has aged him more than his 29 years. Amir has learnt to be a teenage rebel fighter. He saw his father die whilst fighting and lost children to the war.

Amir tries his best to be civil, accepting a lemon for his sickness, knowing that 'as to be miserable than rude' (p. 201). He recognises the irony that he has donned the traditional Afghan clothing in Afghanistan, yet never wore these garments as a child in Kabul.

Once again, his thoughts turn to the 'great, big river' (p. 202) of America. Amir has a nostalgia for American culture, but now also recognises its lack of stability. He looks at the toys of the children in the village as 'discarded toys' (p. 203). He is unaccustomed to the sights of rural poverty, looking like a tourist. Farid responds with the rejoinder that Amir has 'always been a tourist' and that the life described by Amir in the opening chapters was far from the typical American life.

The men stay with Farid's brother, who shows great hospitality despite his obvious poverty. His wife and mother-in-law are present but remain on the margins, appearing only to serve food and drink. Amir does not fully appreciate the extent of the family's needs. When he sees the young boys staring at him he assumes they are interested in his watch and presents it as a gift, despite their father's protestations. He later realises they were watching him eat as they had been deprived of a meal to provide the guests with food.

Reflection

- How has Amir's perception of Afghanistan changed in Afghanistan?
- In what ways does Farid's brother's hospitality contrast with Amir's journey?

Amir reveals the reason for his trip and Farid adjusts his initial preconceptions. It was due to a belief that Amir had returned, like many emigrants, to secure a profitable business he had left behind. That night, Amir is troubled by a dream in which he sees himself and Hassan. He begins to feel a bond with his homeland, which he describes as a 'kind of mythology as he thinks of Kabul.

On leaving the house, he hides a large sum of money under the boys' mattress. This is done for atonement for a parallel action which betrayed Hassan.

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Chapter Twenty

Chapter 20 charts the return to Kabul. Farid is sincere when he warns Amir that to which Kabul has changed. Amir notes that there are beggars everywhere. The children, as many men have been lost in the years of tribal disputes and wars. The *'giant sandcastle'* (p. 215) is arresting. The trees have disappeared a long time ago. Beggars, Amir likens his shock at the city's degradation to the discovery that an orphan is *'destitute'* (p. 216).

His first sighting of the Taliban unnerves him. He hopes that his false beard will camouflage him as an outsider. He notes that the men are young and aimless in their violence, brandishing their weapons in confrontation. A nearby beggar joins Farid in chastising Amir for staring at the Taliban. The beggar used to be a professor who knew Amir's mother. The narrator predicts the reader will find this chance encounter and explains that it is common for people to discover they are linked in Afghanistan. This chance encounter with a beggar can provide him with more concrete details of his past over the last two decades.

Farid and Amir manage to trace the relocated orphans and gain entry to the orphanage when Amir makes reference to Sohrab's skill with the slingshot. Zaman, the director of the orphanage, reveals the horrifying truth. The Taliban have been taking children from the orphanage and have had Sohrab for some time. Farid's response is to launch a physical attack on Zaman. Amir intervenes as he realises the children are watching. Zaman explains that he has had to turn a blind eye to the trafficking in order to save the remaining orphans. The incident illuminates how conventional moral codes are compromised in times of conflict as individuals must make decisions regarding the lesser of two evils. Zaman provides information which will allow Amir to arrange a meeting with a chief Taliban regarding the fate of Sohrab.

Recall
The story of the orphanage is a key moment in Amir's life. Amir's reaction to the lot of the orphans is a lot of sympathy but it is not enough to read the story of Zaman's

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Chapter Twenty-one

Amir observes a bloated corpse hanging in the sun and two men haggling over a body cloaked with a haze of dust. The physical rot can be seen to reflect the moral and political rot of the Taliban's regime.

Amir's apprehension becomes apparent as he bolsters himself with childhood memories of Hassan. As he approaches his childhood home, he realises the house is smaller than he remembers, *'the picture of fallen splendour'* (p. 229). Farid is anxious that they leave the Wazir Khan area as soon as possible, as the Taliban have claimed the affluent area for their own use and to provide housing for their supporters. Amir requests a little more time to allow a visit to the pomegranate tree (p. 230), with no hope of regeneration. This reduces Amir's hope in finding a respite from the violence.

Amir and Farid find a squalid hotel to stay in before they seek out the Taliban. Amir is annoyed and charged for the substandard accommodation, as he now realises the desperation of living as the country continues its economic decline. The men try to generate humour with Nasruddin jokes. This does little to assuage Amir's feeling that Kabul has become a place of despair.

The following day Farid and Amir make their way to the Ghazi stadium to see if they can find the cleric Sohrab. Amir remembers the peddlers and general bustle, but is unprepared for the atmosphere of whips, ready to strike any spectator who offends Allah by daring to cheer. The reality is witnessed with horror as the nature of the half-time display unfolds. As the third truck approaches, they witness two people being stoned to death. It is ironic that the Taliban, who orchestrate the display of figures of peace. The leader's arms are spread *'like those of Jesus on the cross'* (p. 235). He wears glasses. He also seems to relish the attention of the crowds, despite purporting to practice humility in all actions.

As the time is set for Amir to meet with this chief Taliban, the reader recognises that this is a climax to the narrative which will shape the resolution of Amir's lifelong remorse.

Extended Essay

What techniques does the writer employ to convey the horror and violence of the scene at the Ghazi stadium to the reader?

Your response should include:

- consideration of the symbolism of the wilted pomegranate tree he sees
- Amir's initial reaction to violence as a spectacle as the man and woman are killed
- examination of the cleric's interpretation of Allah's law
- the cleric's persuasive and charismatic appeal to the crowd
- the violence and aggression shown by the cleric in the act of killing

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Chapter Twenty-two

Tension mounts as Amir makes his way to the *rendezvous*. He wishes his father would die, though he still harbours anger about Hassan. The hypocrisy and corruption of the Taliban, the relief when Amir describes the grand mansion they have claimed as headquarters, the entertainment have been banned, the leaders are in possession of a wide-screen television, and themselves while meting out public punishments. Amir's observation of the Taliban using the table to distract himself, while presaging Sohrab's improvised intervention.

The Talib leader is presented as an evil and amoral figure. Some readers may draw the amorality of Assef and may guess the leader's identity before he reveals it to Amir by showing the leader's skin and beard, but does not make the connection. The description of the practice of al-Sharif as a joyful practice of 'God's work' reveals a flawed fundamentalism.

It is worth noting that in moments of fear, Amir draws his strength from happy memories of Soraya. While women are marginal figures in the narrative, they are often sources of strength.

The reader shares Amir's discomfort as Sohrab is presented and made to dance and do Assef's bidding. It is at this point that he reveals himself to Amir in his reference to Babalu. In order to 'suspend disbelief' for the readers, the narrator voices incredulity, as he too finds it 'absurd' and 'unpleasant' that Assef should now be in a position of ultimate power. Amir recalls the aphorism of the 'bad penny' as Assef relates his history with the Taliban.

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Amir shows naivety in offering Assef a bribe. The reader is not surprised that Assef has a capitalist and liberal lifestyle, as his dedication to the Taliban is motivated by a lack of sincere belief. Assef has been tortured and degraded, yet the reader is not invited to sympathise with his suffering. His epiphany and belief in God takes place in a moment of violence, when he passes a painful kidney stone, causing him to laugh in the face of death. The lack of Assef's 'faith' could be seen as a comment on all fundamental believers. This is supported by Amir's retort, which exposes the hypocrisy of those who regard the Taliban as 'God's work'.

As Assef attacks Amir, Amir's drifting consciousness recalls the day that Hassan was killed. Sentences and fragments are used to reflect Amir's disjointed memories of the fight. It is now Amir who laughs as Assef unleashes violence. The pain 'heals' Amir, as he reflects on the devastating impact of his earlier cowardice. Past and present intertwine as a smile returns to Amir's face. This time it is Sohrab with a slingshot. The adult Assef is a formidable foe and Sohrab's death is a tragedy. The chapter ends with a gruesome tableau of Assef clutching the socket of Sohrab's eye.

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Chapter Twenty-three

The narrative becomes fragmented and disjointed as Amir drifts in and out of consciousness. The dream of Baba wrestling the bear is recapitulated. This time, Amir becomes conscious and recovers physically, so his mind starts to heal. Amir experiences a sensation of joy as he realises he will not have a permanent lip injury. His physical appearance will now remind him of Hassan.

Rahim Khan's letter provides some aspect of plot **resolution**, as he confirms that Hassan is his son. Rahim Khan's interpretation of Baba's behaviour is one the reader may believe that Baba saw his own privileged life reflected in Amir and so was unduly harsh. Amir was able to feel closer to Amir as their altered circumstances brought them closer together. Hassan may have faced as servants. As Amir reads, he realises that at least his father did good and charitable works. He mournfully considers his own inaction in the face of the tragedy. As Amir reads, he realises that at least his father did good and charitable works. He mournfully considers his own inaction in the face of the tragedy. As Amir reads, he realises that at least his father did good and charitable works. He mournfully considers his own inaction in the face of the tragedy.

The reader is left to wonder why Rahim would lie about the existence of the Calcutta challenge that has been presented and considers how he may atone for his sins. Amir's dreams of his wife combine, allowing the reader to predict his course of action.

Active Reading: Making Thematic Links

- How are form and style used to convey Amir's mental and physical state?
- What is the symbolic significance of the scar which will remain on Amir's face?
- What function does Rahim Khan's letter serve within the narrative?

Chapter Twenty-four

The setting is now Islamabad. There is sadness as Amir recognises that the city's name that Kabul has been denied. There is tension and fear as Amir loses Sohrab while at the mosque. The mosque causes Sohrab pain as he reveals he feels sinful in the face of the tragedy. Sohrab is in the hands of Assef. His innocent reverence is in stark **contrast** to the corrupted world. Amir cannot comprehend why others want to hurt him and has been taught by Hassan to 'educate' him and presents a cynical reality where the ability to stand up to people is not that he did not treat Hassan as he deserved to be treated.

Amir presents Sohrab with a photograph of his parents and a bond is formed. Amir would like to live in America, having explained how they are related. This impulse leads him to confess all his past wrongs to her. Soraya is again seen as a strong and forgiving woman. Her love leads her to accept Sohrab into their lives.

The narrative seeks a positive resolution but further obstacles emerge. A visit to the embassy reveals that it is highly unlikely that the adoption will be approved. The tragedy is revealed when it emerges that little can be done without official paperwork, which is impossible as the parents have been murdered on the street. Amir is warned of the dangers of making a child. In anger, Amir challenges Raymond Andrews, regarding him as unfeeling and lacking in fatherhood. Amir is later subdued when the secretary reveals that Mr Andrews committed suicide. Even with his new found compassion for Sohrab, Amir still lacks understanding of the complexity of the experiences of others.

After further meetings, Amir experiences more political red tape and broaches the possibility of Sohrab returning to an orphanage for a short time. A phone call from Soraya reveals that adoption is possible if Sohrab is brought to America. Joy and horror collide as Amir seeks to share the news with Sohrab. Sohrab's fear of the orphanage is so great that he has attempted to take his own life. Amir realises he is culpable as he fell asleep after presenting the traumatic news. The scene is not described but the reader infers events from the narrator screaming and the wail of ambulances.

Reader

- How does Amir's shifting perspective affect the reader's understanding of the story?
- Do you think Amir's actions are justified in the face of his irresponsibility towards a friend?

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Chapter Twenty-five

Amir's horror is sustained as he has no control of events during Sohrab's operation. A series of sensory descriptions – the smell of iodine and peroxide, the sheet spilled and pushed. Amir designs a makeshift prayer mat, desperately seeking solace and hope previously rejected. As he looks around him, he notices that the hospital is 'the r

The stark **realism** of Amir's observations that the doctor had Sohrab's blood on his hand. A comparison of the doctor's skin tone to 'Swiss chocolate'. In the depths of tragedy, Amir's notes details as if preparing for a creative writing assignment.

Amir keeps a vigil at Sohrab's bedside and is heartbroken when the young boy wakes up 'tired of everything' (p. 308). He is bereft of the simple joys of his old life with his father. The enormity of the setback, as the glimmer of hope which had appeared 'like a timid light'. Sohrab prepares to go to America but seems to agree in 'a quiet surrender' (p. 311) to Amir's personal desire. Amir begins to appreciate Sohrab's anxiety, as he has come from a life of war to face the 'turmoil of uncertainty' (p. 311).

Amir as narrator draws the reader's attention to the **narrative frame** as he discusses the store, when he unwittingly spoiled an experience by revealing the ending of 'The Kite Runner' to a customer. He reveals that to an Afghan 'the ending was all that mattered' (p. 311) and is being guided to the final resolution. Amir reveals he is an **unreliable narrator**, who does not know what to say' if asked to reveal the outcome of the story.

The ending will not be perfect, as 'After all, life is not a Hindi movie' (p. 312). Amir is being cautious as he warns against sentimentality 'despite the matter of last Sunday'.

The reader's curiosity is not satisfied, as the time shifts to a scene from seven months earlier. Amir prepared the house for Sohrab. Amir recognises that Baba may have thought of Sohrab's arrival. It is a sign of Amir's newfound peace that this creates 'no sting' (p. 313). He considers the process and wonders if it is a gradual process, recognised not as a 'fanfare of epiphany, but a quiet packing up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of the night' (p. 313). Amir's awareness. Amir stands up to General Taheri when he refers to Sohrab as a Hazar

Life is far from perfect. Sohrab's silence is compared to having an 'OFF button' on a remote control forgotten by the Afghan community as their nation becomes public news in the world on the 11th, 2001.

The final episode moves us forwards to March 2002. General Taheri has resumed power in the Afghan government. An Afghan celebration in San Francisco gives Amir an opportunity to fly a kite. For one instant, Sohrab's eyes become 'Awake. Alive' (p. 322). Amir realises that this was akin to 'a leaf in the woods, shaking in the wake of a startled bird'. Amir recognises the potential for healing as he adopts a seasonal metaphor to explain

'maybe I just witnessed the first flakes melting' (p. 324).

Amir is now the kite runner, realising that he must give love without question if Sohrab is to find happiness.

Extended Response

- There are a number of time shifts and disjointed references to the novel in the closing chapter. How does the writer use these and other stylistic features to support the argument that 'after all, life is not a Hindi movie'?
- Do you feel Amir had redeemed himself?
- How does the ending relate to the title of the novel?

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Characters

Amir

Amir is the **protagonist** and **focaliser** (first-person narrator) who guides the reader through the story over several decades. There is a sense that Amir may be an **unreliable narrator**, as he often justifies his inaction as a child. Amir's adult perspective provides the gift of hindsight, as he reflects on how he was attacked and tries to elucidate why he failed to act.

Throughout the narrative, Amir is self-critical and filled with remorse – it is a testament to his own failings that some of the most powerful revelations are presented through Amir's 'voice' of the dead Hassan transmitted through his letter. Amir is sharing this information with the reader, knowing that they will judge his years of inaction all the more severely in light of the truth.

Baba (Amir's father)

Despite the reference to Hassan in the title of the book, much of the early narrative focuses on Amir's attempts to gain his father's recognition. The language used to describe Baba reflects his power. He has an important role to play in the novel's inciting incident, as it is in his presence that Amir chooses to keep the attack on Hassan a secret.

Baba's voice is clear throughout the novel, both in **dialogue** and in **reported speech**. He is a man whose life is governed by the tenets of *nang* and *namoos*, honour and pride, yet is later revealed to have been corrupted by sleeping with his wife and fathering Hassan. The fact that he keeps this a secret from Hassan and Amir.

Hassan

Amir's servant and childhood friend is the 'kite runner' of the title (to be replaced by Amir). He is believed to be the son of Ali, Baba's main servant, until Baba is revealed to be Hassan's father. It comes years after Hassan is killed by the brutal Taliban regime. Hassan is the **cat** in Amir's life. He endures a brutal sexual assault at the hands of Assef, and his suffering is then compounded when Amir accuses him as a thief in a guilt-ridden and successful attempt to turn him out of the house.

Despite this, he remains a loyal friend across the years and great distances. He returns to Amir's house, with Rahim Khan's assent, and is callously murdered by the local Taliban leader, Assef. His son Sohrab is sent to an orphanage, before being taken by Assef and fleeing to America.

Assef

Assef is the **archetypal** villain of the narrative. As a boy he is presented as a swarthy, racist jibes against Hassan. His hatred culminates in a vicious rape of Hassan during the Taliban regime. The next time we hear of Assef is through a recount given by his former friend Kamal, who was sexually assaulted by him in an attempt to claim dominion over the neighbourhood. The reader is not surprised when Amir returns to Kabul to find Assef fulfilling his violent role as local Taliban cleric and leader. The narrator notes several times that Assef has a distinctive fair-haired and light-eyed complexion. Given that he is German on the surface, it is not surprising that he is encouraged to link his beliefs with the bigotry of Aryan supremacy during the Soviet occupation.

Sohrab

Sohrab is Hassan's young son, who has experienced the deprivation of an orphanage and the abuse at the hands of Assef, who has assumed local command of the Taliban. He has experienced the suffering he has had, but shows a natural bravery and stoicism when he intervenes to save Amir. When his father once threatened to do, he blinds Assef in one eye with a slingshot. Sohrab's intervention. Just when he feels a glimmer of hope relating to his potential adoption, he overheard Amir's conversation about the possibility that he may have to return to an orphanage because of bureaucracy so he attempts suicide. Amir discovers him and they return to America. Sohrab has decided to stay in America but has withdrawn into himself. Amir is deeply concerned about his rehabilitation. Amir's decision to buy and run a kite, having coaxed Sohrab into going to the park, provokes the high point of the novel with the hope that Sohrab will find peace. He also serves as a source of resolution for the kite runner's son. There is a way to be good again.

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Women in the Narrative

Soraya

Women seem to be at the margins of the text. Soraya, as Amir's wife, is a positive Afghan woman. Her marriage with Amir is one of equals. She has experienced life with him. She is not afraid to voice her dissatisfaction with the hypocritical standards of traditional Afghan communities in the United States. There is optimism at the end as they heal Sohrab in a nurturing family environment.

Sofia

Amir's mother is mentioned briefly at the start of the novel. She is remembered for telling that she would seem to have been in a liberal marriage with Baba. She was a modern woman, and it is suggested that she did not have to remain at home. However, after childbirth and the revelation that Baba cheated with Ali's wife, Sanaubar. On one side, she was a wife; on the other, he disrespected her.

Sanaubar

Hassan's mother is known to have run away shortly after he was born. She is referred to as a 'notoriously unscrupulous woman' (p. 7). The comments she is reported to have made are: 'We later discover that she committed adultery with Baba. The character is somewhat complex as she returned to Hassan as an adult and helped raise Sohrab for a time.'

Farzana

We learn relatively little about Farzana, Hassan's wife, although there is a sense of a strong and caring woman.

Minor Characters (in order of appearance)

Rahim Khan

Rahim Khan may be minor in terms of relative presence in the narrative, but he has a key function in being an agent for change and prompting Amir to take action.

He is Baba's business partner who is introduced early in the narrative as an avuncular figure in his creative writing. Amir values his approval but does not consider him for a narrative role. Rahim Khan summons Amir to return to Afghanistan. He is the moral compass that prompts Amir. It may be argued that he has had more of an impact on Amir's life than Baba has.

Ali

Ali is a relatively 'flat' character in that there is little detail provided in the description of him. He is Baba's servant since boyhood. He has a structural importance for the plot in that the echoes between Amir's treatment of Hassan and Baba's earlier treatment of Ali, and *namoos* in abusing his position as Ali's superior and in taking advantage of his position.

Kamal

Kamal is one of the older boys in Amir's neighbourhood and is part of Assef's gang. In the tournament, he stands by and watches while Assef attacks Hassan. There is an incident where he restrains Hassan. Later, he is transformed into a pitiful victim, as it is revealed that he was the one who attacked him. His father ultimately reports his death, directly linking it to the psychological trauma of Amir.

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General Taheri

General Taheri is the voice of tradition, which is sustained even in the diaspora. He is on the verge of disowning his own daughter for bringing 'shame' to the family and, although Amir and Soraya, his comments in the closing pages of the novel, disparaging Solh, he notes that some ethnic prejudices are so deeply ingrained that they have persisted in return. He notes that the General and his wife return to Afghanistan, where he resumes a role that highlights his reactionary nature.

Farid

Farid is Amir's driver in Afghanistan and is important in that he voices the reservations of those who have fled the conflict and lived elsewhere. He is gently mocking towards Amir, but offers support and understanding.

Zaman

Zaman, as the director of the orphanage that Sohrab had been sent to, provides a sense of frustration that forms part of daily life in Taliban-controlled areas. He is well aware of the children who are removed, but feels powerless to act because he is worried for himself and his own future.

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Contexts of Time and Place

Afghanistan

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a landlocked, mountainous country. Earth's country, particularly in the Hindu Kush region. It has limited fresh water supplies. topography, the country experiences hot summers and cold winters. There are a which have yet to be exploited. The south-east has seams of precious metals, w lapis (with its distinctive indigo blue shade) and emerald are found in the north-e valuable energy reserves including petroleum, gas, uranium and coal, which rem economic instability created by decades of conflict and invasions. In much of *The only the backdrop for the action but a character in itself. The ravaged and deple nation's suffering.*

Just as Amir changes and develops throughout the course of the narrative, Afgha conflicts and shifting political alliances of those in power. Afghanistan's instability intervention stretching back as far as the middle of the nineteenth century. For assessment, we will focus on the political changes since the 1970s, as these are c narrative.

Afghanistan - 1970s and 1980s

Afghanistan has been subject to numerous invasions and conquests over the cen tried to gain control of the country's natural resources and strategic geographica that Afghanistan regained autonomy from the British intervention which took pla Afghan wars. Disputes still lingered due to the separation of Pashtun territories particularly the area which became the new state of Pakistan. A long period of s 1973, when the country reunited under King Zahir Shah.

In the novel, Amir presents his childhood memories of the 1973 coup, which saw Mohammed Daoud Khan install himself as President. His republic was then over communists of a rival Pashtun faction. Daoud Khan and his family were murdered start of many years of bloodshed.

In 1979, the United States intervened by covertly training Mujahidin forces in Pa overthrowing the 1978 government. The Soviet Union responded by invading an Communist Afghans. The occupation was to continue until 1989, when Soviet w involving Afghan Communists (made up largely of minorities such as Uzbeks and and Mujahideen factions. Amir feels the impact of Soviet occupation, and the in to flee the country.

Estimates for casualties in the decade of Soviet occupation range between 600,0 civilians. Much of this violence was perpetrated by fellow Afghans. On its depar government continued to support the governing president, Najibullah. The Unit country, despite its role in past events. Amir would have had an ambivalent rela partially because he would see his own abandonment of his homeland reflected Afghanistan. The response of the United States mirrored his own detachment.

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Afghanistan - 1990s

The civil war continued as the Northern Alliance (a military group that formed in the control of Kabul) sought to control Kabul from 1992 to 1996. In the novel, Amir and Afghans fleeing the occupation to the safety of Pakistan. Many of the liberal and moderate mujahideen continued to fight as rival factions, killing more than 10,000 people. The Taliban would emerge as a totalitarian and militant Islamist faction.

During this time, the Taliban was gaining power as a political and religious force, leading to the fighting. The Taliban seized Kabul in 1996 and by 2000 controlled 95% of the country. The United States conducted air strikes against the militant leader Osama bin Laden. This was the case in Mazar-i-Sharif and Sheberghan, where the Taliban killed almost 3,000 Hazaras. The novel highlights the atrocities after the event, as Rahim Khan reveals the contents of Hassan's letter and Amir's experiences.

Afghanistan - 2001 onwards

The Taliban proved tyrannical in their seven-year rule. They curbed a number of human rights, particularly those of women, who were forbidden to attend school or work in any form of public employment at this time. The Taliban encouraged an extreme form of Islam and endorsed atrocities such as public executions and amputations as punishments for crimes. In the novel, Amir highlights both the hypocrisy and violence of the Talibs who govern the country.

As the narrative draws to a close, there is some call for optimism. Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States set out to eradicate all al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. The Taliban government for refusing to extradite Osama bin Laden galvanised the formation of the Northern Alliance. In October 2001, the Northern Alliance entered Kabul and December 2001 saw a plan for a new democratic government with Hamid Karzai as Chairman and then President of the interim government.

Since the book's publication, Karzai was re-elected as the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The National Assembly has been elected. Work continues on rebuilding the country's economy and ending the opium trade. Since 2007, threats of insurgency and a Taliban uprising have led to the presence of American troops in the country. As recently as 2011, the Taliban was continuing to influence Afghan politics through calculated attacks and massacres targeting Shi'a shrines and mosques. In 2014, the Taliban was defeated and Hamid Karzai was re-elected President.

A simple and clear timeline of key historical events in Afghanistan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be found on the BBC News website at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12024253>

More detailed information on war and conflict in Afghanistan since 2001 can be found at:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/the_war_in_afghanistan/

Fremont, California - 1980s

When Amir and Baba arrive in California in the 1980s, they experience the cultural shock of the country. The irony is that as Amir notes that the ostentatious wealth on display in the grand houses that the 'mansion' look like a servant's hut.

California is a place of contrasts, where wealth and poverty co-exist. Having abandoned Kabul, Baba and Amir now experience economic hardships. Baba is forced to take a job in a garage, as he finds his employment opportunities restricted due to his lack of English. Amir leads him to reject social benefits and refuse to take language lessons. He does not fit in with the Pashtun community in Fremont and San Jose. Baba's conservative political views are a result of the situation. He supports Reagan due to his approach to Afghan issues, despite the economic policies proved crippling to manual workers, including Baba.

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Amir finds the freedoms afforded to him by America liberating. He embraces the freedoms presented to him. His enthusiasm for English and literature guide him in his career to become a writer. While Baba encourages Amir to continue with his education, he also urges him to 'better' himself by pursuing a medical degree. This aspect of the novel reflects Hosseini's own experience – having watched his mother go from being a vice-principal in Afghanistan to being a waitress in the United States, Hosseini dedicated his time at school to ensure financial stability.

The 'flea market' in the novel serves both economic and social purposes, as it provides income whilst providing an arena for meeting fellow Afghans. It is in this environment that the treatment of men and women is thrown into relief, as Amir learns of Soraya Taher and cautiously seeks her approval, whilst adhering to the Pashtunwali code of honour.

San Francisco - 2001

Amir has spent his adult life in America, as has his wife Soraya. Soraya has had success pursuing a successful career as a teacher. Conflicts have arisen with her father regarding her lifestyle, which he sees as being un-traditional and un-Islamic. Soraya respects her father's wishes in public. She drinks alcohol, but never in her father's presence. More traumatic is the fact that the couple have fertility problems. Her father is adamant that they do not conform to the *Pashtunwali* code, which is based on honouring blood ties. He tells Amir to reject Sohrab on the grounds that he is Hazara. Amir asserts his own beliefs and rejects his father's wishes. Soraya and Amir establish their own code, which respects and honours aspects of both cultures by accepting individual differences.

The wider cultural contexts referred to in the novel reveal an increased public awareness of Afghanistan, this is attributed to American foreign policy following September 11th and media coverage of the surprise of hearing the names of cities of his homeland on the streets of San Francisco. Amir still thriving and Amir and Soraya take part in events which celebrate their ethnic heritage. Amir introducing Sohrab to the art of kite-flying. San Francisco provides a multicultural environment where Amir forges future identities based on social, cultural and religious practices.

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Genre

The opening blends the conventions of fictional biography with elements of mystery. Curiosity is immediately aroused, as few clues are given as to the events of 1975. This is maintained for several chapters, as Amir gradually reveals his betrayal of Hassan.

Much of the novel is concerned with Amir's recollections of his childhood in Kabul and California. As Amir's main concern seems to be with how one moment can shape a life, the novel could be regarded as a form of *Bildungsroman*.

The passages relating Amir's final confrontation with Assef in the Taliban headquarters follow the conventions of the **adventure** story, as tension is built through detailed descriptions. The quest to secure a safe future for Sohrab has elements of the **thriller** genre, as he is pursued by Amir and Sohrab, who find themselves thwarted by bureaucracy at every turn.

Text as Bildungsroman

The novel reflects many of the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*, or 'coming-of-age' literary tradition of texts such as *Jane Eyre*, in which a first-person narrator guides the reader through social, moral and spiritual development. This idea is supported by comparing Amir to a similar age in the novel. Both Hassan and Assef, although integral to the story, are representing extremes of good and evil respectively. Amir, in comparison, is a dynamic character.

The *Bildungsroman* can be seen as a personal narrative built on the subjective experience of the protagonist. Hosseini also presents a political message.

It is telling that Amir's childhood is not what the reader might expect. His father, a mullah, openly drinks alcohol and encourages Amir to develop a critical and secular perspective. The repeated emphasis on the American or westernised elements of Amir's youth, from Coca-Cola, playing 'cops and robbers' and watching westerns. His liberal upbringing in the United States relatively smooth, in spite of the poverty that he and Baba face.

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Forgiveness and Redemption

The narrative is driven by Amir's inability to forgive himself for his past actions. In guiding Amir towards redemption, revealing that *'there is a way to be good again'* through communication with Amir, he assures him that *'in the end, God will forgive'* (p. 3). A key element of seeking redemption, which is that the person seeking atonement must

Certain incidents are mirrored as Amir sets out to redeem his ill treatment of Hassan. When Hassan's forgiveness directly, he performs actions which should achieve positive results: the mattress of Farid's nephew, and eventually becoming a kite runner for Sohrab.

Identity

Amir's sense of guilt pervades every aspect of his life, as he tells the reader *'I became a coward of twelve'* (p. 1). He defines himself by his failure to act and his failure to live up to his own standards. The narrative is driven by Amir's journey towards becoming a man who will 'stand up for what is right'.

From an early age, Amir recognises that he has been privileged and has enjoyed a life of comfort. He responds to Assef using the formal 'Agha', even though Assef has just insulted him. This shows that the identity of others can be determined by their role or ethnicity:

'I wondered briefly what it must be like to live with such an ingrained sense of hierarchy' (p. 37).

General Taheri defines himself by his previous role and insists on wearing the suit of a government official. Both General Taheri and Baba find solace in fostering a strong Pashtun identity in California. Amir values aspects of his Afghan upbringing but wishes to forge a new identity. He struggled to accept the traditional gender role assigned to her by tradition.

Identity is revealed as being a complex construct influenced by ethnicity, gender and social class.

Religion and spirituality

Ali is a sincere believer in his faith and encourages his son to live as a good and sincere Muslim. When Hassan and Amir annoy the neighbours with mirrors he warns them that *'the devil likes to distract Muslims during prayer'* (p. 4). Ali's warning aligns Amir, the innocent, with the devil. While this incident involves innocent and childish play, it presages the later events involving Hassan. Hassan, like his father Ali, is a true and devout believer, even in the face of adversity. He is religious and fears God's rejection due to the 'sins' he committed whilst under Amir's influence. Amir explains how bad things can happen to good people, but assures Sohrab that God will forgive him.

Baba's morality is guided by the belief that *'Every other sin is a variation of theft'*. When Baba is revealed to be Hassan's real father. His actions have robbed Ali of his father and a mother, as she left in disgrace.

Baba observes aspects of his faith in public ceremonies but drinks alcohol in private. He is a local mullah's son. His words shock Amir as he blasphemes:

'Piss on the beards of all those self-righteous monkeys...God help us all if Allah ever catches their hands' (p. 15).

He is sceptical about the mullahs' strict adherence to doctrine regardless of context. He is accurate when the Taliban rise to power. The Talibs are exposed as hypocrites in the name of Allah, yet commit abuse and live in material wealth.

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Amir remembers memorising verses of the Koran at school. He explains that his fear that the Mullah would beat him if he made an error. Despite his liberal upbringing seeking solace in God at two critical moments in his life, after the discovery of his Sohrab is in surgery following his suicide attempt. Amir designs a makeshift prayer for solace and hope in the religion that he has previously rejected. As he looks around the hospital is *'the real house of God'* (p. 301). He has begun to realise that faith and society as well, and allows himself to practise a personal spirituality. Some critics have highlighted that as the narrative progresses, Amir transforms from a secularist to what may be regarded as a more devout Muslim.

Family

Hosseini himself regards the narrative as a tale of fathers and sons. Amir yearns to find himself envious of the bond that Hassan and Ali share. Early in the narrative and how *'He'd close the door, leave me to wonder why it was always grown-ups'* hears the tale of his father wrestling a bear, Amir dreams of the event and puzzles *'from the bear'* (p. 11). Amir finds himself the 'glaring exception' to his father's view of Baba's secret, Amir finds that he is more like his father than he realised. This is noted that they have both caused pain to others.

The relationship between Baba and Amir changes significantly upon arrival in America in his son's academic achievements, although he remains disappointed that Amir lacks a qualification. The hardships they endure as they work to support themselves in America and son closer together.

Soraya provides an insight into life in an Afghan family from a female perspective and father's views but ultimately respects and loves him. This love is reciprocated as she prides in her career and attends her lessons. She assists Baba in discovering Amir and father and son together in Baba's final months.

As the novel draws to a close, Amir, Soraya and Sohrab are beginning life as a family and will continue to love and support each other.

Violence and aggression

Amir prefers literary pursuits to football and is shocked when a rider is trampled at a tournament that he attends with his father. Amir often disappoints his father due to his masculine pursuits and his inability to defend himself. Baba firmly believes that *'himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything'* (p. 22). Baba is renowned for his presence and uses it to defend the honour of the woman at the checkpoint, and the fleeing refugees. He is angered at Amir's attempts to pacify him. Pashtunwali is a defence of honour and Baba feels that Amir dishonours this tradition in his refusal to fight Amir and it is in fulfilling this role that he is attacked, as he refuses to let Assef harm Amir. Amir rationalises his inaction on witnessing the attack as characteristic of a coward. It may be argued that violence breeds violence, as Hassan had previously threatened Amir, he attempted to bully Amir, and Assef has been waiting to deliver his revenge.

In order to gain redemption and bring Sohrab to safety, Amir has to enter into a world of violence. As a Talib leader, Assef is now the epitome of violence and aggression. He sees Amir's faith and his use of violence, seeing his participation in the stoning to death of a woman for adultery as fulfilling the will of God. He describes the liberation felt in massacring the Taliban at Mazar-i-Sharif, as he *'let the bullets fly, free of guilt and remorse'* (p. 242). Despite this, Amir finds himself 'healed'. He now understands Hassan's refusal to fight back when he was attacked.

The only character who seems uncomfortable with violence is Sohrab, who believes that wounding Assef. There is irony that when Sohrab feels Amir has betrayed him by not fighting back, he commits an act of violence upon himself, attempting suicide by slitting his own wrists.

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Sacrifice

Amir recalls an Afghan ceremony which requires a sheep to be sacrificed. He has the sheep's eyes just before its death. Despite the fact that the slaughter leaves continues to watch, drawn by *'the look of acceptance in the animal's eyes'* (p. 67) understands and reasons that *'the animal sees its imminent demise is for a higher purpose'* (p. 67). Amir returns to him when he is a witness to Hassan's attack, and again when Sohrab is killed. Sohrab and Amir are 'lambs to the slaughter' as their innocence is stolen from them.

Storytelling

There are many examples of storytelling in the novel. Amir reveals that the Afghan tradition of stories and myths. Amir and Hassan were nursed to sleep with songs and stories. Boys entertain themselves with the epic *Shahnamah* and its tales of Persian heroic stories, while Hassan's illiteracy does not prevent him from inventing a dream to kite-flying tournament approaches. A number of characters are given opportunities within the narrative – Soraya reveals her troubled past, Rahim Khan reveals the past of Hassan when he reunites with Amir.

The entire narrative is framed as a meta-fiction, as Amir reveals that he is a writer of events is guided by his awareness of style and genre, as he recognises Soraya's *'good books'* (p. 128).

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Social and cultural contexts

Pashtuns and Pashtunwali

Pashtuns are culturally defined as Muslims of Eastern Iranian descent who live in Pakistan, with large migrant communities in Europe and North America. This pre-population form the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. Pashtun and Afghan were terms until the advent of the modern Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Pashtuns are a diverse people, with light hair and eye colour common in mountain tribes. They are also known for their dialects and adherence to Pashtunwali, the pre-Islamic honour code that governs their behaviour. Pashtunwali is based on *nang*, or honour. Pashtuns following this code offer assistance to all those seeking help, and are expected to protect women, goods and property. For revenge for injustice, they also believe in Nanawati, the humble admission of guilt and automatic forgiveness.

In the novel, Amir is a Pashtun, and as such experiences some of the privileges of Pashtuns. Pashtuns have a rich performing arts culture, and dance and song form an integral part of celebrations in the novel. The love of literature and poetry that Amir has inherited from his father highlight the rich literary culture of the Pashtun people. Despite relatively low literacy rates, and tales of history survive through a rich oral tradition. Amir becomes a modern writer through his writing.

Given the rich literary and cultural heritage of the Pashtuns, it is ironic that they are oppressed by the Taliban, with its bans on 'unholy' literature, music and communicative media.

Hazaras

Hazaras form the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, mainly living in the Herat region of Afghanistan. The name 'Hazara' derives from the Persian word 'hazar', meaning thousand, and is used to refer to units of the Mongolian army. One theory is that Hazaras are of Indian descent. They have similarities in culture, language and physical attributes. Hazaras are predominant in the minority in a country adhering to the Sharia law of Sunni denominations.

In the novel, Ali and Hassan face a number of hardships due to their ethnicity as Hazaras. Ali came to Baba's household as a result of being orphaned by a drink-driving incident. Those who were responsible were given a year's national service, which was seen as a punishment. Amir tells Amir of his escapades with Ali, Amir notices that *'in none of the stories did Baba mention Hassan'* (p. 22). He realises that he has never thought of Hassan as a friend either. Amir writes to the reader:

'Because history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion. In the end, I was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change.'

Women

Women occupy the margins of the narrative. Amir describes his deceased mother as a beautiful woman, whose passion for literature he seems to have inherited. Hassan's mother is also described as attractive, but her beauty is described in a derogatory fashion, casting her as a woman who is like the circus on a fickle and cruel whim. Some critics suggest in this way Baba is excited about the adulterous affair that produces Hassan, as she is portrayed as lustful and immoral. Later in the story she is old and frail. There is sympathy for her and she shows a great deal of love for Amir and Sohrab.

Soraya provides a positive representation of the modern Afghan-American woman. She has a successful and happy marriage to a man who treats her as an equal. She expresses her frustration regarding the behaviour of single men and women in Afghan culture. She is honest and open to Amir. He derives his strength from her. It is worth considering to what extent Amir's relationship with Soraya as Soraya's mother, Jhala Kamila, shares many of her qualities of strength, yet has been forbidden to sing even at her daughter's wedding.

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Use of Language

You should consider how the writer's linguistic and literary techniques enhance characterisation, and how they contribute to the overall narrative style.

Narrative voice

The novel opens with the declaration: 'I became what I am today at the age of twelve'. The narration is predominantly **retrospective**, as Amir recounts the events leading to the betrayal that has shaped his subsequent experiences. The writer avoids being **didactic**, providing information from the young boy's **point of view**. At climactic points in the narrative, such as Assef's attack on Hassan, a **dual perspective** emerges, as the narrative voice merges from the perspective of the young Amir with adult reflections seeking to rationalise the events.

At times, the **fragmentary** nature of memory is presented through the use of **stream of consciousness** and **indirect** style, as Amir's thoughts and dreams are conveyed to the reader. Aspects of the reader shares in the protagonist's thought processes. A number of the narrative details, such as information about ethnic and political tensions, in particular the unequal treatment of the powerful Sunni Pashtun majority.

Narrative style

The narrative uses a range of stylistic techniques to convey the character of the narrator. The novel combines standard forms with some **colloquial** language, creating the impression of a child's writing. In other passages employ sensory and **figurative** language to convey setting and atmosphere.

The narrative is predominantly written in the **past tense**, as the adult Amir recalls events. The shift to **present continuous tense** as Amir recalls the kite-flying tournament in 1975, is uncertain whether the events of 1975 will be revealed at this time. The use of **colloquial** and **short, simple sentences** remind the reader of a child's writing composition, as the narrative is told from the perspective of the young Amir. The afterthought 'And kites. Of course' (p. 42) line is an anticipated **turning point** of the narrative.

As a writer, Amir thinks in metaphors. The narrator's aspirations as a writer are to convey his emotional responses to the world around him. When an infatuated Amir meets Soraya, he uses a **metaphor** based on traditional tales to explain how she is 'the girl' (p. 126). His language reflects a person who feels everything intensely. **Minor sentences** are used to observe as much as he can in his encounters with Soraya.

Hosseini has agreed with critics who have highlighted the **spare style** of language used in the descriptions of places and events. Throughout much of the narrative, plot details are conveyed over literary or figurative methods, although these are still used for specific effects. The language is simple but never simplistic. At times, it creates the impression that the narrator is naive when Amir travels to Afghanistan and sees the impact of Taliban governance on the country.

The descriptions of what characters see and experience often mimic camera movements. Many have described Hosseini's style as cinematic: the language used in Amir's confrontations with Assef, the rapid cuts and edits of action sequences in blockbuster films, while the lingering shot of Amir as he witnesses the attack on Hassan amplifies the horror and graphic nature of the violence.

The text incorporates references to Hollywood cinema, and westerns in particular, such as the American lifestyle to the young Amir, and may also indicate a desire for moral clarity, such as the villains and the 'good guy' saving the day. There are times when the narrative style seems to influence the style of the text, as when Assef cruelly supervises the story of Amir's childhood. The relish he exhibits resembles that of a typical Bond villain. While some readers find the style too simplistic, others find it an effective marriage of style and content.

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It is worth remarking on the range of **tones** employed throughout the narrative. The tone of the novel is described with sensitivity and tenderness, such as the rescue of Sohrab and the ending. This sharply contrasts with the objective and at times unwavering tone of the human carnage and destruction of warfare. In the brutal description of Hassan through the perspective of the twelve-year-old Amir, a similar tone is used. This, although the tone seems indifferent, it may in fact mask the abject horror experienced with atrocity.

In one of the examples of **framing** and **metafiction**, Amir refers to the process of the expression to explain the mounting tension as he is reunited with Rahim Khan. The meeting with Soraya only serves to throw his unease into relief.

Throughout the novel, **semantic** and **lexical** choices reflect content and thematic concerns. Recalling Amir and Baba's flight from Afghanistan, the text is peppered with the lexicon of war. As the thoughts turn to the 'MiGs', 'APCs', 'Kalashnikovs' and 'Russian patrols'. The narrative uses Afghani terms in the passages relating his burgeoning relationship with Soraya. The women are still evaluated in traditional and conservative terms, even in the new culture adopted has pervaded his thinking, as is evident in his comparison of his taste in television.

Dialogue is used to some effect within the novel. Hassan's speech, in particular, conveys his openness as a person. Amir's speech is presented in a range of **registers**, with some moments of crisis or tension. This is most marked when Rahim reveals the truth. Amir's use of invectives and repeated swearing convey not only the depth of his anger but also his lack of western culture. Amir is at a loss to describe his anger and so resorts to language from his new home.

Use of irony

There is a significant degree of irony employed throughout the story. There is the irony of his friend and illegitimate son despite his insistence on the importance of *namus*. Amir's scar which bonds him physically to Hassan and his blood ties to the friend are also ironic elements.

A number of ironic **parallels** are drawn throughout the novel. Hassan may be illiterate but he can identify the 'plot hole' in Amir's short story; Baba and Amir realise that wealth is not what they need to arrive in California and see houses that make their Kabul mansion look like a servant's quarters. Amir, the kite runner and take Hassan's role if he is going to earn Sohrab's trust. The overall narrative emphasises the universality of human experience, as fortunes and roles are reversed.

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The 'Kite Runner'

The kite runner supports the champion and claims the final prize of the opponent the glory of others, as the attention is fixed on those flying the kites. The runner order to predict the kite's path when flying loose in the wind.

Note that the novel is called *The Kite Runner*, not *The Kite Fighter*. This makes Hassan which is seen to be true as Hassan haunts Amir and drives his desire for redemption should be remembered that Amir, in turn, becomes the kite runner for Sohrab in acceptance of this supporting and nurturing role that suggests a positive outcome.

Kites and kite-fighting

The kite is simultaneously a thing of beauty and aggression, with origins on the boy associated with feelings of freedom and liberation. It is significant that the Taliban tournaments, not only as a form of decadent entertainment, but also because the competitiveness displayed in such tournaments would encourage rebellious factors symbol throughout – it is innocence and freedom, but it is also the loss of innocence on Hassan during the kite-fighting tournament. The competition kite reflects this soars as an expression of freedom, but the glass on the string, used to cut down the violence humans continuously enact.

The Pomegranate Tree

The tree symbolises the friendship that Hassan and Ali share. Away from the social Wazir Akar Khan, the boys are equals and share power as '*the sultans of Kabul*' (in the tree trunk, declaring his allegiance to Hassan. It is under the same tree that he is punishing him with pomegranates. Later in the narrative, Amir receives a letter for a trip he makes to the tree with his son Sohrab. He reveals that '*the tree hasn't been cut*' Amir has made no attempts to make amends with Hassan.

The tale of Rostam and Sohrab

Rostam unwittingly kills his son Sohrab, just as Amir unwittingly harms his brother perhaps because he has no knowledge of his own mother. There is further irony that he did not know his biological father either.

The use of the story of Rostam and Sohrab is laced with irony. In the original tale of a long-lost son. There are some parallels in Amir's betrayal and abandonment of Hassan in the story and reads it as an allegory for his own lack of awareness of familial bonds. It is ironic that he rescues the real-life Sohrab from certain death. What he fails to see is that for Hassan, who never knew who his father was and died defending the old family name that Baba committed the greatest sin, abandoning the child he knew to be his flesh and blood in conflict.

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Dreams

Dreams serve a number of functions in the narrative. They provide another form of narrative. The recurring dream about Baba wrestling the bear not only emphasises his strength but also serves as a metaphor for the struggles with his guilty conscience. This is the recurring dream that Amir has while recovering from Assef's attack, when he finds that he is gradually realising that he and his father are alike, and that there are difficult choices to be made.

Fragments of text suggest subconscious or barely conscious thoughts. Amir dreams of sheep's eyes and recalls this when witnessing the attack on Hassan. Hassan's 'dream' of a monster in the lake, an invention to reassure Amir, shows that there is no 'monster' in the lake and that the 'monster' is 'the sultans of Kabul' (p. 53). As Amir stands in the alleyway and fails to act, he realises that he is more like Assef. Later in the novel, Amir envisages the moment when Hassan and his wife were murdered. In that moment, that in the dream, he is the one pulling the trigger. He fears he is more like Assef than he would like to admit.

Amir's dreams serve to expose his fundamental flaws and to present him with truths that he must acknowledge. They often encourage him to act, so they serve as a moral guide. The following are possible interpretations of the various dream sequences.

Faces

In the novel, descriptions of faces are used as an indication of morality and, in turn, as a reflection of Amir's attitude towards a character. There is a similarity to Dickens (who presented the public school system in his caricatures of Mr Gradgrind in *Hard Times* and Mr Squodrigram in *David Copperfield*) when Baba criticises the narrow-minded understanding of Islam taught to Amir and Amir's father. There are references to the mullah's 'ugly face' (p. 17). Other faces mentioned in passing include the 'puffy blue' face of the woman (p. 290) when she reads about the Taliban massacres in 1996 and the 'puffy blue' face of the woman Amir sees near the cafe in Kabul.

Amir makes repeated reference to the doll-like nature of Hassan's face. The details of Hassan's face, young Amir's fascination with their physical differences and serves to individualise Hassan. Hosseini argued that the emphasis on the similarity to a doll suggests he is crafted or indistinguishable from the rest of the group, and thus not considered an individual at all. Hosseini presents Hassan as a childlike figure from childhood, and as such he evokes a desire in others to protect him. Amir recognises Hassan's face by his face. Much of Amir's guilt stems from seeing Hassan's resigned expression and the recognition that he is a lamb to the slaughter.

Later, Sohrab's face is described in terms that recall his father's, encouraging Amir to act and accept Amir's intervention as an attempt to atone for his earlier betrayal of Hassan.

Conversely, Assef's face is a dehumanised representation of evil. Amir repeatedly refers to Assef's blue eyes. The physical traits that Assef has inherited from his German mother are those that he supports. Hosseini reinforces this with references to Assef's admiration for his physical appearance is different from other members of his ethnic group, he is a man who brutally oppresses and attacks Hazaras. His face is always described with a focus on a sneer, which reinforces the sense of him being an inhuman creature of pure evil. Some are critical of the dehumanisation of this antagonist, as it provides an over-simplified view of the political will of the Taliban, who did have some support and were in fact recognised by Saudi Arabia as legitimate leaders of Afghanistan. By demonising Assef, it has been argued that it has undermined the message of redemption. In the examination, it is valid to consider the significance of elements in a text and it may be argued that, as a character, Assef is static and flat.

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Form and Structure

Narrative structure

The novel opens and closes in a San Francisco park. The opening is mainly the **in** plagued with guilt due to an event in his past. **Allusions** are made to the event a memories **hook** the reader's curiosity. The man's remembrances are triggered by breeze, as he recalls '*Hassan the harelippped kite runner*' (p. 2). At the end of the rather than thinking. He has become the 'kite runner', as he encourages Hassan's rebuild a trusting relationship with a young boy scarred by his past. While the se cyclical nature of life, Amir has taken several journeys, both physical and psychol encourage the reader to consider what has endured and what has changed in the

Letters are used with some poignancy. The adult Hassan is briefly given a posthu Rahim Khan presents to Amir. Having acquired literacy in adulthood, Hassan's pr Amir, the professional writer. His written words convey his sincerity and honesty also receives a letter from the now absent Rahim Khan. This allows Rahim's inte forcing Amir to reach a decision regarding Sohrab's fate without further support

The novel presents a series of **time shifts**, as Amir looks back on his life in Afghan and a half decades. There are several examples of **foreshadowing**, beginning with 'kite runner', who, we anticipate, will have a central role in the narrative. A num made.

In Chapter 16, Rahim Khan recounts what has happened in Afghanistan since Am in narrative voice is supported by narrative **framing**, as the previous chapter clos Rahim's tale.

As the novel draws to a close, Amir as narrator continues to draw the reader's at Recounting an altercation in a video store when he gave away the ending of a fil reveals that to an Afghan '*the ending was all that mattered*' (p. 311). The reader to the final resolution. Amir confesses that he is an **unreliable narrator**, when he *what to say*' (p. 311) if asked to reveal the outcome of the story.

The ending of the novel provides an attempt to rewrite the past. As Amir takes S memories of Kabul naturally surface. They are bittersweet – he cannot forget be glimmer of hope that the kite can now symbolise freedom once again. Sohrab's slight, but provide a possibility of redemption. Amir has tried to make amends by For Amir, there is a sense that Sohrab has become a proxy for Hassan; and for So There is ambiguity at the end, as there are still challenges ahead as the character their own terms.

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Contextual Analysis

When approaching a text at A level, students must consider the contexts of reception. Contexts which may prove relevant to the study of the novel are outlined below.

- context of writing
- context of reading
- contexts of time and place
- social and cultural contexts

Social and cultural contexts, and contexts of time and place, have been discussed and explored further in the examination of political and social protest. This section of the guide discusses contexts of production and reception.

Context of writing: Production

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul in 1965. His family was granted political asylum in California in 1980. He wrote *The Kite Runner* while on sabbatical from his position as a doctor. A reader must take care not to confuse the views and experiences of the fictional narrator with those of the author. Some aspects of the writer's background which have had some influence on the content of the novel are:

Hosseini has set much of the action in Kabul, his childhood home. Hosseini is Tajik and his family did have Hazara servants. While the treatment of Ali and Hassan is fictional, the novel is based on inequalities that he perceived between ethnic groups.

The sections of the narrative set in Fremont, San Jose and San Francisco draw on the author's knowledge of these areas. Hosseini trained as a doctor whilst maintaining a personal interest in medicine. Amir's meta-fictional references to the process of writing may be informed by this, and medical lexis presented in the passages dealing with Baba's cancer, Amir and Hassan's relationship, Amir's reconstructive surgery and Sohrab's lifesaving treatment reflect an extensive knowledge of medicine.

Amir is a fictional creation, yet there is a suggestion that Hosseini is being self-critical, having 'always' been a 'tourist' (p. 204) in Afghanistan. As Amir considers how he has coped with the hardships Farid and his family have endured, parallels can be made with the son of a diplomat, who had the opportunity to escape the violence and start a new life. One aspect of the narrative highlights the struggle for identity experienced by many Afghans who experience guilt for abandoning their homeland.

When considering the political dimension influencing Hosseini's writing, it should be noted that the novel was written and published in the years following the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center orchestrated by the al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. The attack killed nearly 3,000 people. The United States took military action against those believed to be responsible, attention turned to the plight of those under Taliban rule.

In the years following the military intervention in Afghanistan the political rhetoric supported a new Afghanistan based on Western models of democracy, liberty and human rights. Two elements to intervention: humanitarian defence for those suffering because of law and justice; and military action to discipline and punish those who commit crimes. On a personal level in Amir's treatment of Sohrab and Assef – he must rescue the monster.

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Context of reading: Reception

Much of the narrative is written with the assumption that reader is Western and or *Pashtunwali*. This is indicated by the author's use of definitions to clarify the Pashtun terms presented in the text. The writer also provides brief explanations of contexts before presenting the main action of the narrative.

Some shared cultural knowledge is required. References to Hitler and the attack on September 11th, 2001 are presented as allusions to events that the reader should know.

It is worth considering how readers from a non-Western perspective may respond. The recent film adaptation have led to a number of protests in Afghanistan and other countries. The assault on Hassan, in particular, is seen as offensive to Islam. Those Afghans who lived through the Soviet invasion, the internecine fighting and Taliban rule may object to the representation, particularly if they dispute the writer's authority on such events, as he had limited knowledge. The males of the Afghan communities in California may feel they have been unfairly represented.

As readers, we should always be aware that individual factors such as age, gender and culture influence the response to the text.

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Elements of Political and Social Protest

What is 'Political' Literature?

A central debate in literary criticism is the idea that all literature can be seen to be shaped by the view of the world that the writer has. Writers may not feel that their writing style, but their views on aspects of identity such as religion, race, and class, all reflect the political concerns at a given time. Before exploring the elements of political writing present in *The Kite Runner*, we need to consider what the term 'political' means.

One of the issues is that what is seen as 'political' – the issues considered important – changes over time and is shaped by the interventions of others, such as political movements. We will return to this when considering contexts of production and reception.

When we hear the word 'political' it often conjures up images linked to its narrowest sense: politics, leaders, elections and national governments. Considered in its more general sense, it refers to the relationship between the individual and the state or the people of a given society. The two are inextricably linked – national and local politics shape the environment in which we live, work, learn and socialise, which in turn shapes the way we think and govern or control ourselves. We are all political because we are all part of society.

Tracing the Ancient Greek roots of 'political' as the 'polis' or city state, it is interesting to see that classical theories would often incorporate the importance of the soul of the individual citizen. A good city can only be created through the collective efforts of virtuous individuals.

Irving Howe (1987) defined political fiction as '*a novel in which political ideas play a central role and the political milieu is the dominant setting*' (*Politics and the Novel*, New York: New American Library).

Social protest writing, which has also been referred to as the 'social problem' novel, is a form of political writing that places a firm emphasis on social change. It is defined as '*work of fiction in which a prevailing social problem, such as gender, race or class, is the central focus and its effect on the characters of a novel*' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, Academic Edition).

As a genre, political writing uses narrative to provide commentary on political events. Works of political fiction often explicitly criticise the existing conditions and strive for change. This section of the guide will consider a range of ways in which *The Kite Runner* contains elements of social protest writing.

The Kite Runner can be seen to explore both senses of political – the violence and oppression of Afghanistan is due to the power struggles of successive corrupt governments and the way the narrative is driven forward by the protagonist's personal guilt and his desire for redemption from his past behaviour and gain redemption.

While we can define all texts as political at some level, there are additional aspects of *The Kite Runner* which suggest Hosseini has employed elements of political and social protest literature. These include:

- consideration of human organisation in public and private settings
- explorations of power and powerlessness
- representation of oppression and warfare
- representation of political and ruling classes
- considerations of gender, ethnicity and social class

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Human Organisation in Public and Private Settings in *The Kite Runner*

When responding to the political and social protest aspects of a text, it is important to consider the author's production and reception throughout. Social protest texts examine how power is often linked to social class and this is the case with *The Kite Runner*. The text has a focus on how that social hierarchies are determined by religious and ethnic differences.

The Afghanistan that Amir is born into in 1963 and remembers from early childhood is a place of relative peace and outlook. Amir begins in a position of relative power. Amir and his father (Baba) live in the Khan district of Kabul. Baba drives an American Ford Mustang and they watch war which portrays the relative peace of life in Afghanistan until the mid 1970s. Afghanistan's history parallels the loss of Amir and Hassan's innocence. In the early stages of his narrative, how entrenched social divisions are in Kabul. Marxist readings of the text would suggest that it can be examined as the struggle between the powerful and the powerless.

Hosseini's examination of the ways in which humans are organised in public and private settings and descriptions of physical settings, consistently link the public and the private. In Chapter 5, Amir has vivid memories of being '*huddled together in the dining room*' and he indicates their lack of awareness '*that a way of life had ended*'. ***Our way of life*** is italicised by the writer, clearly highlighting the impact of war on the private sphere. We can recognise that the streets the tanks roll down are '*the very same streets where Hosseini*'. Hosseini clearly indicates his political polemic – we need to recognise the impact of war on the political invasion of the private sphere.

This is a pitiful feature of Shorawi-occupied Kabul – with a civilian population seeing their lives, even home was no longer a safe location. Betrayals took place '*child on parent, servant on master, friend on friend*' (Chapter 10). These betrayals are echoed in the loss of identity. Baba has deceived and betrayed his children, his wife and his trusted servants. We do not criticise this behaviour, but portrays it as a sad consequence of occupation.

The complexities of the political situation and the ongoing hardships for those who survive their personal lives in spite of civil strife are emphasised in the accounts given to Amir about the rule of the Northern Alliance. People could have embraced freedom and liberation, but instead the fighting between factions turns cities such as Kabul into '*as close as you can get to hell on earth*' (Chapter 16). Kabul becomes a nightmarish city of the dead, where '*out of piles of rubble*' (Chapter 16) is commonplace.

Descriptions of public settings emphasise the destruction of both the actual and the symbolic. From the narrative perspective is interesting. As someone who has relocated to another country, Amir's homeland are a combination of memory, imagination and representations on television. The route back between Jalalabad and Kabul, he deems the route '*a relic now, a relic of two worlds*'. The use of language here reflects the distance between Amir's new life and what he sees in Afghanistan, the city reduced to '*rubble and beggars*'. The beggars are mainly children, '*rare commodity in Afghanistan*'. Many events in the narrative unfold in public spaces, more concerned with public institutions and government, and more concerned with the private. The dramas are played out on the public stage. This is what holds the reader's interest. Amir is involved politically. The institutions that people had faith in and that provided hope have been destroyed. The large commercial avenue of Jadeh Maywand '*had turned into a wasteland*' (Chapter 20). There is a sense that the American influence and intervention could not be seen in the bullet-ridden sign proclaiming '*DRINK COCA CO--*'.

The influence of war is profound. The orphanage is a grim place, '*a flat, barracks*' where children become a conflict zone for the children being exploited there. The Taliban's total eradication of technology and outside influence. Rusty cars and '*a TV set with no screen*' are reminders of Kabul's earlier prosperity. Before the reader forgets that there is a sense of loss, Amir notes that '*a young man dangled from the end of a rope tied to a beam*' (Chapter 20). We notice him and the reader is carried along with them, desensitised to the horror. In the end, the reader is forced to participate.

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On his return to the United States, Amir is disorientated by hearing people in que *my childhood*'. He struggles to connect the public interest in the country he grew up in to escape the errors of his past. The continual merging of public sphere and private and social message to the reader about the ways in which we connect with each other in terms with his identity and struggles to feel at home throughout the novel. Even the tentative hope of resolution. The reader joins him in this struggle. He is an unremittingly questioning Amir's thoughts and actions, is encouraged to question his or her own actions in other countries.

Human Organisation: Institutionalised Religion

Amir and his father are presented as liberal Muslims who have a personal spirituality system. It is an interesting facet of the text that when faced with the discovery of his deteriorating health, Amir discovers the comfort of his faith and mumbles 'half-fail' attempt to hold on to a loved one. Up to this point, references to religion had been limited to remarks about the clerics and mullahs and their limited teachings. His scepticism and dispute between the mullah and a mourner at his father's funeral, sparked by a passage selected for prayer. There is a sense that the narrator and the writer share the divisiveness of religion.

Afghanistan under Taliban rule provides examples of the dangers of conflating religion and power. Assef as a cleric 'officiates' at the public stoning of a woman accused of adultery, appropriate under historic versions of Sharia law. Assef seems drunk on the power and position he holds in his group and seems to derive pleasure from his theatrical performance in front of crowds. He commits violence in God's name, deriving a perverse enjoyment from destroying innocence and is the epitome of political abuse of power.

Assef as a public figure is very much a dictator and his presentation of his person confirms his psychopathology. He recounts his arrest to Amir and details the 'littered' Soviet officers. Here his faith in Allah was galvanised when the soldier's kick relieved him. Assef hysterically proclaimed 'Allah-u akbar' as the beating continued. His philosophy in this moment. As a representative of his faith, Assef proves that those who come to God are no followers of Islam. Hosseini would seem to be making a social point.

What then does the reader make of Amir's pragmatic lie in Chapter 24, when he lies to his father as a Muslim in order to secure the adoption of Sohrab? Is this a forgivable sin given that faith may be an unconscious part of Amir's identity? Amir's lie becomes truth for Amir prays that Allah will forgive him but still proposes a rejection of the organisation of America and Afghanistan. He creates his own relationship with his Creator, judging himself 'the house of God'. It is still a recognition of the power of Islam, as he notes that 'they pray effortlessly'. Religion may have been corrupted but prayer is, for him, still a pure act. This could be read as an indication that he has reconciled himself with his past.

As a reader, you must evaluate to what extent the narrator is asking you to share his faith. There is a suggestion that personal faith will survive institutionalised religion and that people look out for each other as individuals, regardless of race or creed. Political writing that suggests traditional forms of religion yet suggesting that a progressive, individual approach is possible is typical of political writing that Hosseini's portrayal of Amir's personal spirituality aspired to.

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Power and Powerlessness in *The Kite Runner*

Political and social protest texts often seek to provide a voice for the powerless in society. Innocence is often equated with innocence, while power resides with those who practise violence. In Afghan and American settings, the nature of dispossession and destruction of a way of life is central.

Hosseini employs foreshadowing to prepare the reader for the impending tragedy. Memories of playing with Hassan by the pomegranate tree, the horseplay of the 'squirting water' at the animals prefigures the brutality of Assef's gang and the punishment of committing adultery. When Amir contemplates the kite-fighting tournament, he 'felt like a soldier trying to sleep in the trenches the night before a major battle' – a description of a young boy's nervous excitement before a competition. Soon, he

Hassan as Assef's victim is the epitome of powerlessness and innocence. Amir is powerless and submits to the attack – 'It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb as it recall his father slaughtering a lamb. The symbolism is clear. Amir sacrifices Hassan by then abandoning him to an uncertain fate. There are other power relationships in the novel. Amir's betrayal was fuelled by his desire to please his father and win the kite tournament. Assef's power and may be considered to sacrifice Amir by limiting love and making it conditional. Hassan, his illegitimate son, to his fate and makes no attempt to trace him when

Minor and unnamed characters are also able to exert power because of their social position. In the exodus from Afghanistan in Chapter 10, the Russian soldier at the checkpoint clings to a wedding song under his breath while selecting a woman to rape. This event also highlights the mentality, a key theme in political writing. Here, the soldier is protected from moral judgement by the anonymity afforded him by his uniform and this situation is all too typical of war.

Baba offers an alternative to Amir's inaction when he stands up to the Russian soldier who is threatened. In the same chapter, Assef's old associate Kamal, who was present at the wedding, is traumatised. His father reveals that Assef and a group of others turned on him in the same way during tribal infighting. The horror of the violence meted out at a personal level has taken place on a wider scale across the country. There has been a pervasiveness of innocence.

Yet there is still hope that innocence can be preserved amid the horror. Despite the violence he endured, he has worked to support his family and has taught himself to read and write. 'His handwriting was almost childlike' (Chapter 17). This suggests that Hassan retains a childlike innocence, although his life was cut short, again emphasising the powerlessness of his fate. Amir sees an echo of this naive innocence in the hawkker who touts for his services (Chapter 21) of fully clothed actresses.

Powerlessness, Gender and Sexual Violence

One aspect of political reading is to consider the social constructs which are present in the text to highlight the silences and relative marginalisation of women in the text. There is a focus on masculinity in the novel, which suggests that gender as a social construct is a core theme.

Sexual violence features prominently in the narrative. The weaker men and young boys are sodomised in an attempt to remove their power and dignity. The corrupt leaders of the Taliban wear women's clothes and apply make-up in an attempt to make a travesty of gender and sexual identity. Draconian edicts restricting the freedom and power of women.

Women are conspicuous by their relative absence and positions on the margins of the narrative. The scene of childbirth, which in part motivates Baba's ambivalence towards his son. The women are faceless. Hassan's wife is a minor character, while his mother has been adulterous and is on the loose. She has some redemption when she returns to support Sohrab, but she is

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The one exception in the text is Soraya. Through this character, Hosseini explores Afghan women. Soraya draws her strength from her apparent flaws: her modern traditional views espoused by her father, General Taheri. The Afghan community, her past relationship and others have shunned her, but Amir, who considers him a companion.

Soraya is an equal in the relationship and is comfortable discussing and critiquing relating to gender. Afghan men may have sex, go clubbing, drink and have children *having fun!* She made a rash decision to follow her heart and is angry that her father's lifetime (Chapter 13). The reader thinks of Baba, whose adultery resulted in a child with his reputation intact.

She appreciates the fact that Amir does not operate with the hypocritical double standard. In Chapter 13, he reflects upon why he seems more tolerant than others. *'Maybe it's by men,'* he thinks – the lack of female presence in his upbringing meant that he witnessed the hypocrisy of men who claimed to honour and respect women yet restricted and controlled women in various ways.

The politics of gender encountered by Soraya are bound to the ethical and traditional values of the Afghan community both in Afghanistan and abroad. Amir struggles to navigate the relationship with Soraya but he is surprised that she knows he is a writer, as tradition would dictate that he should not discuss a man with her father unless the man had been accepted as a *khastegar*, a guest.

When discussing the politics of the novel, it is important to consider the political context as Hosseini is keen to demonstrate the devastating consequences of the hypocrisy propagated by the Taliban.

Power and Moral Imperative in *The Kite Runner*

The text provides many harrowing examples of the abuses and mistreatment of people of their age, ethnicity, social class or gender. It also provides a political message regarding responsibility and moral duty to others.

When Rahim Khan contacts Amir, begging him to rescue Sohrab from Kabul, he has done this many times. Rahim has served as a father figure in the past, when encouraging the young Amir. Here he may have a similar role. A man of his social position has the money and power but he understands that this journey is one that Amir must make to find redemption and be good again, and understands that it may finally enable Amir to stand up for what is right and atone for his treatment of Hassan. When Amir is still reluctant, Rahim's despondent disappointment. Rahim reflects on Baba's concern that Amir's inability to stand up for others will lead to him not being able to stand up for others: *'I wonder, is that what you've been doing?'* This question which provokes Amir's shame and causes him to finally recognise what he must do.

The reader's sympathy and partial redemption for Baba are only achieved when Amir is reduced to one of powerlessness. Having escaped war-torn Afghanistan to find himself rejected by the West, he rejects food stamps and welfare and works to the point of exhaustion at a gas station. He has admiration for his father's hard-working spirit in the face of adversity, and there is a poignant portrayal of his ageing father with his *'face drawn and pale'* and *'his eyes watering'*. This admiration would seem short-lived – there is a subtle shift in power as Amir is seen in the crowds at his high-school graduation ceremony and asks himself, *'hadn't he been there?'* (Chapter 11). He now receives the admiring looks from his father that he desired.

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The next chapter provides an evaluation of people with power who fail to recognise and support the vulnerable. Amir misses his father and is sad about his death, but is angry about his father's deception. He feels that his father abused his power and privilege by being a *'thief of the worst kind'* (Chapter 18). He stole Amir's chance to know the truth about his father and he stole Ali's honour and pride. He committed all the sins he claimed to despise, but of the same magnitude as Assef, but his dominance of the home and the sustained identity, even at the cost of not being able to protect him from war and conflict, makes him a tyrant. Baba is a complex example of the ways in which the personal and political are intertwined.

The allegorical reading of the text also emphasises Amir's symbolic function as the catalyst for the reading is imposed, Hosseini is suggesting a call to action and intervention in distant lands as a humanitarian response. Amir eventually answers the call to be good. As readers, we are encouraged to do the same.

Oppression, Warfare and Politics: Corruption, Conspiracy and Control

One of Amir's least admirable moments is in Chapter 4, when he uses Hassan's lack of power over him. Amir's acceptance of the inequalities in educational opportunities as a Pashtun. As the son of Ali and a poor Hazara, Hassan was destined to be illiterate. *'servant have for the written word?'* Amir's desire for control is clear when he is trying to solve riddles quickly and when he says: *'Words were secret doorways and I held the keys.'* In his adult narrative suggests that the novel serves as a confession to Hassan. What the reader is that the articulation of these thoughts reveals an ingrained sense of pride and social position. In responding to a question on abuse of power, it is worth examining Amir's abuse of power in his childhood interactions and the abuse of power which he experiences in the narrative. Amir's bullying could be seen as a microcosm of social oppression.

Those who have power and control can conspire against the weak. Traditionally, those in positions of power and public authority. As Sunni Muslims, they were also part of the ruling class in Afghanistan. Early in the novel, Amir is made aware of the potential for a ruling class to use historical fact to suit its own purposes. In a history book which belonged to his father, he learned of a conspiracy committed against Shi'a Muslims by Sunnis in the recent past. This contradicts what he has learned from Amir confronts his teacher, who dismisses it as fantasy but reveals his contempt for the *'Shi'a like it was some kind of disease'*. This illustrates the institutional conspiracy reflected in how Amir attempts to write the mistreated Hassan out of his history. As readers, we must ask ourselves to what extent Amir also practises discrimination and rejection of the mullahs in Chapter 3 as *'bearded idiots'*. While appearing to be a rationalist, is this a way of rationalising his fondness of scotch?

The embodiment of corruption, conspiracy and control is Assef. He is the figure who epitomises all that is corrupt and hypocritical about the regime. In a country governed by a regime so shocking to see normally 'good' citizens conspire through fear, as when those he meets who are blind eye to the abuses and exploitation of the vulnerable by the local Taliban leader who indulges in many activities banned under Taliban interpretation of Sharia law. His abuse of young boys. His desire for control has led him to turn on childhood friends to maintain his dominant position in the Taliban hierarchy. He has corrupted religion and scripture. As a young man, he sought to create mechanisms to corrupt and control others. He uses language invoking ideals of racial purity. He urged Amir to spurn Hassan, insisting *'homeland... They dirty our blood.'* The reader is relieved when Amir demonstrates the thought to recognise Assef's blatant attempt to control and recruit weaker boys.

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Political and Social Protest Writing: Elements of Representation

The personal as political

Earlier it was noted that the text could be categorised as a *Bildungsroman*, as it covers the journey from childhood to adulthood. The novel is somewhat unusual in that it continues to follow Amir into his forties. This can be explained by the fact that Amir not only needs to mature but also to provide for his father, and that in the absence of Hassan he must secure a future for himself.

Amir's relative immaturity can be traced back to the alley where he witnesses the murder of Hassan. To avoid responsibility he can be seen to delay adolescence, a time of mental and physical growth, and to delay the conventional stages of coming of age. It is noted that he is 20 when he returns to Afghanistan, surprising given the traumatic upheaval of being displaced and having to start a new life in a new home, but it serves as a reminder to the reader that Amir will not truly grow up until he receives approval from Baba and forms his own views of the world.

In what ways does Amir's personal narrative reflect aspects of political protest writing?

A political reading makes the personal political – while family life and being grounded, it is clear that Amir represents the international community. He is aware of the injustice and he knows this is wrong. He could be seen to provide justification for the 'right thing to do' to enter Kabul and save Sohrab, so it is right that the nations should enter Afghanistan to support the removal of the Taliban.

Representations of Difference

It could be argued that discourses of difference underpin the narrative structure of the novel, particularly between Amir and Hassan. Ethnic and religious divides are compounded in the novel by the fact that the Pashtun community being Sunni Muslims while the less affluent Hazaras are Shi'a. Amir and his family characters hold dominant social positions in relation to the Hazaras, and as such they seek to maintain the status quo. To what extent is Amir's role as narrator another example of this? On the other hand, a genuine attempt to effect change?

As a child, Amir is aware of the differences between his circumstances and Hassan's. A telling fact that his father had never referred to Ali as a friend, despite having been raised in the same household, is surprisingly frank in his own admission – '*I never thought of Hassan and me as friends*' (Chapter 3).

Despite attempting to fight his unconscious prejudice, he tries to rationalise his actions. '*He was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara. I was Sunni and he was Shi'a and nothing was going to change that*' (Chapter 4). In the aftermath of Hassan's attack, he shares his unspoken thoughts: '*Why did he do that to me? Why did he do that to me? Why did he do that to me?*' (Chapter 7). This degree of passive acceptance and compliance with the social order is echoed in Rahim Khan's resigned explanation for a failed relationship with a Hazara: '*He is a Hazara. The world always wins. That's just the way of things.*' (Chapter 8). In placing these facts and thoughts of the Pashtun characters, the writer is inviting us to judge their behaviour as questionable.

Even seemingly positive comments on ethnicity and social groups may be interrogated. In the local community in the United States in Chapter 12, Baba enthuses to Amir about the strength and stubbornness, '*there's no one you'd rather have at your side than a Pashtun*' (Chapter 12). What are the implications. Is it suggesting that Hazaras and other Afghan groups are not deserving of respect for their ethnicity?

The dangers of identifying solely with prescribed ethnic groups are clear from the novel. Amir participates in what is euphemistically termed 'ethnic cleansing', killing Taliban in the quest for power. His blinkered religious views have allowed him to convince himself that he is doing '*God's work*' (Chapter 22). As well as committing atrocities, he preaches the language of metaphors of cleansing and improvement to describe the killings: '*Afghanistan is a garbage dump with garbage, and someone has to take out the garbage.*' (Chapter 22).

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Amir is disgusted with Assef and his followers but feels most shame when trying to atone for his role in the rape of Hassan. He is unaware of how he was related to Hassan. He struggles to articulate and defend himself. He mentions that *'we weren't supposed to be brothers'*. The reader is saddened by this because it is due to Hassan being a Hazara. It has taken Amir this long to appreciate the ethnic divides and he is quick to turn on his father-in-law when General Taheri accuses him of *'the community's perception of our family'* (Chapter 25).

Physical Differences

A number of characters have scars or marks of difference. These include Ali's limp, Hassan's birthmark, Assef's eye and Amir's scar. Some of these characteristics serve to even out another way in which discrimination can be encountered. In the case of Assef's eye, he is blind long before his physical injury, while Amir's scar is part of the healing process and a reminder of Hassan in his own reflection.

Gender Differences: Representations of Masculinity

Much of the conflict between Amir and Baba arises because Amir does not conform to the expectations of his father. To the young Amir, Baba is the archetypal Afghan man. In making his father a *'towering Pashtun specimen'*, he creates an unattainable ideal that he will continue to strive for. In the novel, achievements in literature are belittled and he internalises the criticisms he overheard from the tone of his father: *'Real men didn't read poetry – and God forbid they should even cry'*.

He feels that his father dislikes him for failing to excel in 'masculine' pursuits. As in the novel, power and masculinity are linked to the theme of violence. Baba struggles and cries in reaction to a buzkashi player being trampled by a horse when trying to win. This sense of masculinity may have provoked Amir's seemingly callous response to the attack on Hassan.

When Baba permits Amir to accompany him, images of traditional masculinity are reinforced. Numerous references to American westerns and models of masculinity begin in Chapter 10. Baba's manhood is based on the strong and silent hero. His fondness for Ronald Reagan is highlighted as being *'a hard man'* (Chapter 11). It is no coincidence that Reagan was also a cinematic hero.

Masculine models permeate politics as well. In a later political discussion, Baba compares the United States and Israel to *'three real men'* while other countries fail to act and are *'like gossip'*. There is a degree of irony in the fact that Baba's masculinity is severely diminished upon the Soviet invasion which precipitated his ruin was a practical example of the manly ideal he admired.

Amir is so intent on winning his father's affection that he keeps silent about Hassan's rape without question. He does not recognise that in keeping silent he has broken the *namoos*, honour and pride.

In what ways do representations of difference reflect elements of political protest writing?

This element of the text reminds the readers that there is a long way to go in society. Individual villains such as Assef can be confronted, but the societal structures such as those articulated by General Taheri are insidious and harder to dismantle. The ending suggests that continuing to categorise by differences will increase the suffering that will remain. The novel encourages social responsibility – it is only when Amir is alleviating the suffering of others that he finds a way to atone for his early sins.

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The Kite Runner: Some Literary Ap

Structuralist Readings: *The Kite Runner* and Use of Allegory

Structuralists believe that **narrative** is a means of making sense of a series of real events by attributing causal connections to them. For a structuralist, language constructs reality. *The Kite Runner* considers the allegorical function of the various symbols in the text and leads to a political reading of the novel.

With political allegory, the writer moves beyond using literary devices to simply entertain the reader, and instead seeks to deliver a political message about the world they live in. In *The Kite Runner*, a political allegory then the character of Amir can represent various things. He is a man slowly healing after years of warfare and civil disturbance. This relates to Amir's way of life, the novel is 'writing home' to Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora around the world.

However, it may be too simplistic to consider Amir a simple symbol of the nation and does not live in his homeland, so he has an ambivalent and contradictory position. It can be argued that he has chosen to stay away and that even in his formative years in a westernised lifestyle promoted by Baba in the cosmopolitan Kabul of the early 1970s.

Some critics read Amir as a representation not of Afghanistan but of the international community that stood by and did nothing while Hassan was raped, so the world remained detached from the events when Afghanistan was invaded by Soviet forces in the 1970s and then ravaged by civil war in the 1990s. Through Amir, Hosseini poses questions about our responsibility towards the world and the need for humanitarianism and global ethics. The use of Amir as first-person narrator joins him inside the story as he tries to heal himself, instead of being stuck on the outside looking in. The values and considering the Afghani characters to be strange and exotic.

As an A level student, you must be prepared to read critically and contextually. *The Kite Runner* was produced for an English-speaking market. Despite the focus on ethno-religious tensions between Pashtun and Hazara communities, there are indications within the novel that it was written for the American market: for example, Amir's language is suggestive of 'self-help' literature. Critics have praised the text for transcending national boundaries to evoke a transnational humanism. The therapeutic language employed by Amir as he seeks '*to be good again*' and the descriptions of passages set in Afghanistan portray characters and places as exotic and 'other'. Such a reading provides information with the diligence of a travel guide'. In this reading, the descriptions of religious practices are used merely to provide a backdrop to a universal tale of sin and redemption.

Others would argue that the overlapping and sometimes contradictory use of allusions to the tensions and challenges of trying to create global responsibility.

One interesting example of this is the narrative arc of Amir's life – in his emigrating to America and his desire to have a family by any means necessary, he seems to conform to Western values and contentment. As such, he suffers from a nagging guilt that he has abandoned his roots. He has already achieved happiness and love through marriage and Sohrab, only to have it all snatched away as a result of warfare. The writer may have made these comparisons to show that fleeting happiness can be and to make them conscious of their good fortune in a world shaped by war. Such awareness should hopefully prompt global responsibility.

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The Kite Runner as Postcolonial Text

Postcolonial readings foreground questions of difference and diversity and develop and examines states of marginality and perceived 'Otherness'. These states are seen and, as such, form a key element of social protest writing.

There are several issues with categorising the text in this way, as Hosseini is writing to a Western audience and is not 'writing back' as much as 'writing to' Western audiences in a culture and politics for a wider audience (most postcolonial texts, such as Jean Rhys, challenge existing literary representations of those who had little or no power during the colonial period). There has been controversy surrounding the views of some literary theorists such as Edward Said that all international literature in English provides allegories of nation. This has been challenged by those who argue that a national allegory is not necessarily a reductive or simplistic narrative. The social and personal divisions caused in establishing nationhood and cultural identity, and any failures of imagery or presentation, it is simply because it accurately reflects the experience of those who find a voice.

The Kite Runner has been praised for its ethnographic value – that is, its success in helping readers to understand aspects of the history and culture of Afghanistan. The didactic nature of the text, the frequent translation of Farsi dialect and other terms relating to religious and cultural practices, and the dialogue, characters will 'auto-translate' these italicised terms. At times, this is done in a way that addresses the reader that they are being addressed by the author. There is an interesting comparison to the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie here. Of Nigerian heritage, Adichie has lived and worked in the West, educated in English throughout her academic career. Like Hosseini, she is a highly educated writer who frequently incorporates dialect and idiom from her heritage culture, but she chooses to do so in a way that allows context to illuminate the meaning. This serves to illustrate the difference between 'writing to' mentioned above. This is not to say that Hosseini's style is ineffective or that his style could serve as evidence of his political aims, as he seeks to break down cultural barriers and promote understanding.

The success of the text in familiarising readers with elements of the political and cultural context of Afghanistan is partially due to the use of Amir as **focaliser**, providing a general perspective on personal redemption which moves beyond national boundaries. This reading in the context of postcolonial concerns, as critics in this area highlight that literature addressing these issues is often evaluated as effective when it is seen to express universal themes.

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Further Reading

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Key Terms Glossary

Action	Any event represented in a work of literature. This may be the telling of a story within the narrative or an action.
Allegory	A literary technique which presents abstract ideas and concepts through characters, figures and events.
Alliteration	The repetition of the same or similar sounds at the beginning of the syllables of a phrase. This is often indicated by a repeat of the letter. Always the case.
Allusion	An indirect reference to a person, place or event. This is often used to add depth to a text.
Ambiguity	Language can convey more than one meaning. Ambiguity is a feature of literary text that may be open to numerous concurrent interpretations.
Antagonist	This is the name given to the character or force that is opposed to the protagonist. They are seen as opposing the protagonist's goals.
Anti-hero	An anti-hero is a protagonist who is in some way lacking the qualities of a traditional hero. Amir may be seen as an anti-hero due to his initial reluctance to act.
Archaic	Old-fashioned; no longer in everyday use.
Archetype/archetypal	Typical of a type of person or thing. An archetype is a character or situation within a plot that can be seen as a recurrent feature in literature. Many of these are recognised across cultures.
Bildungsroman	This type of novel charts the protagonist's development from youth to adulthood. The character is a product of experience, education and other factors. The word itself is the German for 'education novel'.
Character	A fictional person who acts, is shown or is referred to by other characters.
Cliché	A predictable or unoriginal phrase or idea.
Colloquial	Informal language used in normal or everyday conversation.
Connotation	An idea or feeling which a word suggests to a reader in addition to its literal meaning.
Declarative	A sentence taking the form of a simple statement.
Ellipsis	The exclusion from speech or writing of a word or words that are understood from the context of the remaining text.
Epilogue	A section that serves as a comment or conclusion relating to the events of the story.
Fairy tale/fable	A fable is a short story, often with animals as characters. A fairy tale is a magical or idealised story.
Figurative language	This uses rhetorical figures of speech or other literary devices to create a specific effect.

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Flashback	A structural device presenting a scene from the fiction in the past or present.
Focalisation	This refers to the narrative perspective. It is seen as important when thoughts and feelings of a particular character are foregrounded. It is when events and actions are presented from the outside.
Foreshadowing	An element serving as a warning or caution for a future event.
Genre	A way of categorising works that share similar formal characteristics.
Idiom	An expression where meaning cannot be deduced from the individual words. <i>raining cats and dogs</i> .
Imagery	Visually descriptive language.
Imperative	An authoritative command.
Inciting incident	This is an event or action that disrupts and sets the plot in motion. In <i>The Kite Runner</i> , it is the assault on Hassan during the kite-fighting tournament.
Irony	This is formed when there is a significant difference between what is expected and what actually happens. Verbal irony occurs when a phrase uses the opposite meaning of what it first seems to suggest. Situational irony occurs when the expected and actual outcomes are different. Dramatic irony is when the audience knows more than the character about the wider context.
Juxtaposition	A device where two contrasting elements are placed together.
Lexis	Words in a language. In analysis, this refers to vocabulary.
Listing	The use of a list for emphasis or effect.
Metaphor/extended metaphor	A device whereby one thing is used to represent or symbolise another. An extended metaphor is one which is developed over a long period of text.
Microcosm	A place or situation which reflects the characteristics of a larger system.
Narrative	This is the fictional or true story presented by the narrator. The story within a story – this is known as a narrative frame .
Narrator	This is the person who presents the narrative. An internal narrator is one who is part of the story. They usually refer to themselves with first-person narrative. Less often they will address the reader with second-person narrative. Second-person narrative is when the narrator addresses the 'you' and this is known as second-person narration.

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External	External narrators are those outside the story. These are person pronouns such as 'he', 'she', 'they' and 'it'. They are 'knowing' and are able to reveal the thoughts and feelings within the text. A variation on this is the limited narrator, who shows the perceptions of a specific character. Modernist techniques use stream of consciousness narrators, recognised through a detached style. This type of narrator reports events and speech but does not evaluate or comment. Another type is the unreliable narrator . This is a narrator whose judgement is questionable to the reader. Amir may be considered as a potentially unreliable narrator due to his own failings until it is almost too late.
Onomatopoeia	A word formed from the sound associated with what it represents.
Palimpsest	Something altered or recycled that still retains visible traces of its original form.
Pathetic fallacy	Pathetic fallacy is a literary device used in descriptive writing where human characteristics are attributed to the natural world. It can be used to reflect a character or foreshadow events.
Personification	Giving a non-human animal or object a personal nature, such as representing abstract qualities in human form, e.g. Faithless in <i>The Kite Runner</i> .
Plosive	Consonant sound made by stopping then suddenly releasing the air.
Plot	This refers to how the action is presented. The narrative structure of plot includes exposition, inciting incident, climax, falling action and resolution.
Post-modification	Additional information provided after the noun.
Proper noun	Name used for an individual place, person or organisation.
Register	Also referred to as diction . This term refers to the writer's choice of vocabulary which suggests the tone of the narrative. There can be both formal and informal elements.
Repetition	Words or sounds used several times for deliberate effect.
Setting	The place or time in which the action takes place.
Simile	Comparing one thing to another, using 'like' or 'as', to create a metaphorical image.
Symbol	Something used to represent a larger idea or concept.
Syntax	Arrangement of words or phrases within a sentence.
Theme	An idea examined within the literary work.
Tone	The general attitude of a piece of writing; the sense of mood or feeling.
Verb	A word describing an action or state.

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Throughout this guide, the active reading questions have been designed as checkpoints. Literature encourages readers to present their own interpretations, supported by an example of analysis has been provided for the Chapter Six Active Reading task, in 'There are then sample questions in the same style as the examination, with indica

Critical Reception: Active Pre-Reading

This activity is essentially a personal response. It asks you to consider what you think 'The Eastern tale' to mean. You may engage with the idea of a 'timeless' text and the concept of 'Eastern' should be addressed in terms of what it means to you – what you imagine here? The other prompts ask you to discuss what an 'old' story might should portray the truth about the power of evil.

Chapter One: Active Reading

This activity requires you to link your first impressions to formal aspects of the text register of the text – what sense do you get of Amir as a character? In terms of a tension in the opening chapter? The time shifts and references to 1975 prompt

Chapter Two Active Reading: Relationships

The first example has been worked through for you. Responses should make reference choices. Points to note include:

- the natural imagery used to describe Hassan's eyes
- the juxtaposition of this imagery with comparisons of his eyes to jewels
- the agency of the verbs – the repetition of 'I' reveals that Amir tells Hassan
- the contrast in Hassan's actions, e.g. 'Hassan would mumble'
- representations of Hassan's loyalty

Chapter Three Reader Response: Characterisation of Baba

This task requires detailed language analysis of the textual evidence provided. Responses should include:

- evaluation of the ways in which Baba is portrayed as a force of nature and that seem 'superhuman'
- how the writer's choice of verbs and adjectives reinforces this portrayal
- any negative aspects of the portrayal of Baba
- the use of pronouns to reinforce his desire to foster a close relationship – he

Chapter Four: Debate Prompt

You were asked to discuss how the incident in which Amir presents his story and but identifies a plot hole highlights the differences between Amir and Hassan. Your features such as differing degrees of formal literacy, before moving on to consider actually more 'skilled' in folk tales, as he has been immersed in them since childhood. sophisticated grasp of narrative structure which surpasses that of the literate Amir. In this situation, there is also the reinforcement of hierarchy and status – Hassan is the centre stage. Some may argue that this could be challenged – that Hassan is actually him compliments. It could be argued that the praise may be insincere and part of the same way, Amir is almost desperate in his attempts to entertain and impress. Amir is consciously aware of it at this point in the story.

Chapter Five: Characterisation (Assef)

When responding to the question about Hosseini's characterisation of Assef, you should consider of 'flat' and 'round' characters. Some may argue that Assef is a flat character in the one-dimensional archetypal villain. Responses should be supported by reference to the text, including consideration of:

- how the character is described (adjectives)
- the choice of verbs relating to how Assef acts and speaks
- how the character interacts with others
- what the character says
- what others say about him

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Model of Response to Active Reading: Pathetic Fallacy in Chapter Six

The question invites your own interpretation of the way in which Hosseini uses the weather to reflect Amir's feelings about both the season and his relationship with his father.

Your response may have included some of the following observations:

- The extract presents the narrator's love for winter and the reasons why. It is a personal narrative and recalls the features of a memoir.
- 'Winter.' This minor sentence conveys the dramatic impact of the season.
- The simple sentences and verb choices ('I smile.') reveal how happy winter makes Amir.
- Imagery helps the reader to visualise Amir's joy as a child. He builds upon a memory that is remembered: 'Winter to me was the end...', 'building of snowmen'. Winter is a significant part of the narrator's life.
- Linguistic devices are used to emphasise the beauty of the weather, as in the phrase 'smooth and seamless...'. There is an undertone which jars, evident in the alliteration 'smooth and seamless'.
- This passage makes use of minor and fragmentary sentences – 'And kites, of course, were running them.' This suggests the narrator is lovingly recalling the kites and snow as part of his narrative.
- The use of past participles reminds us that we are inhabiting a memory as Amir is 'loved'. The use of 'think' suggests there is a reflection on the significance of the experience. The experience seems to be linked to the strengthening of his bond with his father, as he goes to school in the cold weather.

There is a complex tangling of imagery in the final section. Winter, although cold and harsh, is also approachable and encourages Amir to participate in kite-running. The cold weather 'thaws' their relationship: 'As the trees froze and ice sheathed the roads, the children were a little.'

It is still not a close relationship. The comparison of father and son to 'spheres' suggests they are on their own planet or system and they do not interact, while the initially exciting image of Amir of the tenuous nature of his father's affection, as he recalls that 'Kites were the intersection between those spheres.'

Chapter Seven: Reader Response

This activity requires you to consolidate your own views on the character of Amir and the significance, if any, of the fragments of dreams and memories that come to Amir and Hassan. You should also consider whether you think this is an accurate recollection of the moment where Amir's opinion is the important factor here.

Chapter Eight: Interpretations

This activity requires you to select information from the text which supports the theme of conscience. There are many examples in the chapter. You may have selected details such as:

- what the character does or fails to do
- his inexplicable violence towards Hassan at the tree
- his lack of interest in his birthday

The second part of the task requires you to reach your own judgement about the reasons why Amir terminates his friendship with Hassan.

Chapter Nine: Debate Prompt

This task requires debate with another reader, essentially to consider whether Amir's actions are a result of a weakness or flaw in his own character, a result of the circumstances or a combination of both. Your personal opinion is the important factor here.

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Chapter Ten: Reader Response

This short task requires you to reflect upon your own understanding of how the relationship between Baba and Amir. It is worth considering what changes and what, for example, Baba is seen as honourable in his attempts to shame the soldier, but he is seen as weak to Amir that he is weak and incapable of a selfless act that could cost his life.

The task also asks for a consideration of the narrative function of reintroducing the character of Assef at this point. There is a bleak sense of justice when the reader discovers that one of those who suffered in a similar fashion. It also highlights the corruption of those who harm others. Assef's original justification of his violence was as a form of 'ethnic cleansing'. He humiliates and molests them in a crude attempt to maintain power.

Chapter Ten Active Reading: Making Thematic Links

The extracts from the text are selected from passages detailing the exodus from Afghanistan. At a moment of peril, the clearest happy memory in Amir's head is one of playing with Hassan. This reveals that powerlessness and oppression are a result not just of military domination but of a community. It is revealed that neighbours and even family members have turned against him, an ironic echo of Amir's betrayal of Hassan. The response to the jet flying overhead is a reflection of the powerlessness of the Afghan people.

Chapter Eleven: Reflection

This is a short reflection task which does not require a formal response. Write down your views, with evidence from the text. You could then use these as a revision aid.

Chapter Twelve: Reader Response

This task asks you to undertake a close examination of the language used to present Soraya. You should comment upon:

- how hyperbole conveys his romantic feelings, e.g. Soraya is the 'morning sun'
- the intensity of the adjectives used
- the use of minor sentences (units without verbs) – this gives the impression of a man trying to record his feelings
- the frequent use of Afghani terms

You may have an overall feeling that Amir is naive in his romantic idealisation of Soraya. The vocabulary linking to traditional Afghan culture reveal a conservatism in Amir – he positions this woman, a potential partner, in traditional terms.

The second part of the task asks for a personal response to the development of Soraya. Do you think she becomes a tragic figure or are more positive character traits revealed, as when he is in a state of shock?

Chapter Thirteen: Interpretation Task

This task requires you to present your individual interpretation of General Taheri's actions or kinship ties. Regardless of your position, you should attempt to link to the novel's themes. You could include the revelation of a blood tie between Amir and Hassan as being the cause of the Sohrab. Conversely, you could argue that the overwhelming desire to impress his father led to the betrayal of Hassan. You could look at Taheri's own treatment of his daughter, Soraya.

The second part of the task asks for a response to Amir's belief that the infertility of Soraya is a form of punishment for his earlier life choices. Your response may make reference to other contexts.

Chapter Fourteen: Narrative Structure

This is a short task on structure. You should have identified that the return to the city marks this as a turning point or epiphany for Amir. The reader can presume that the discovery of the Khan is an inciting incident which will take Amir, as the protagonist, on a quest for revenge.

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Chapter Fifteen: Wider Contexts

How have the political power struggles in Afghanistan affected the lives of those question draws on your work on the text as an example of political or social protest you will need to demonstrate a general overview of the context – that is, be prepared to believe the conflict may have affected lives in Kabul – and also consider how the particular at Rahim Khan's recollections and the cynical comments of Farid the d

Chapter Sixteen: Narrative Perspective

This activity requires a comparison of register between the passages 'voiced' by the voice of Amir. Answers should include reference to lexical choices (vocabulary) and a narrative is more measured and expansive. This is reflected in the use of complex dialect or specific references to Kabul should be noted.

Chapter Seventeen: How does the revelation of Baba's sin affect your understanding?

Does his attitude towards the sin of theft now seem hypocritical, or was it indicative

Chapter Seventeen Active Reading: Letters in the Narrative

This requires a close analysis of Hassan's letter. As in the previous activity, you analyse language use and stylistic features with Amir's narrative voice. You should consider conveyed – look in particular at his repeated use of respectful salutations (*Amir* or obeisance, a form of homage to his long-lost friend. As with Rahim Khan's narrative local dialect which evoke setting within the letter.

Chapter Seventeen: Reflections

This task is designed to enable you to develop your own independent interpretation of a set response, but you are encouraged to note your own reading of the ways in which by the writer.

Chapter Eighteen: Comparison Table

This task requires you to complete a table giving examples of the types of betrayal. You should have identified parallels – both Baba and Amir abuse their social position: service: Baba by sleeping with Sanaubar; Amir by deserting Hassan. But there are own principles, while Amir may be forgiven for committing a betrayal through ch

Chapter Nineteen: Reflection

This activity asks you to think about Amir's position as an outsider in his home country question is 'always'. As a privileged young boy raised in an affluent suburb of Kabul tensions between ethnic groups? There is a suggestion he has some idea – look at encounters with Assef. He is regretful when he reveals that Assef has correctly identified with Hassan. Farid's family are welcoming to Amir and their frank discussions promote responsibility for those he left behind.

Chapter Twenty: Reader Response

This task requires a response to the quotation: *'There are a lot of children in Afghanistan'*. This type of quotation may well be used in an examination to prompt an analysis of the novel. While looking at the immediate situation involving Sohrab and the Taliban for their own amusement, a response to the task should also consider wider context. The response could include other children in the novel – Hassan would be the obvious whose childhood was destroyed, but it could equally be argued that Amir's childhood even an argument that Assef is a product of his environment.

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Chapter Twenty-One: Extended Essay

This task requires an evaluation of the techniques used to convey the horror of the Ghazi stadium.

Your response should include reference to the aspects in the prompts. This should include:

- the ways in which the wilted pomegranate tree represents Amir's betrayal of Hassan and how the tree's presence suggests the slim possibility of atonement
- Amir's perspective as an outsider
- the cleric's manipulation of scripture – it is important to note that the reader is misled by Assef before Amir realises it (dramatic irony)
- the use of persuasive language reflecting the charismatic nature of the cleric
- the use of graphic language to intensify horror at the end of the passage

Chapter Twenty-Two: Reflection

Why do you think the author has brought Amir, Assef and Sohrab together in this chapter? Do you think you to consider the narrative design. Some readers feel that it is too much of a coincidence for Amir to rise to the rank of local cleric, and that Sohrab has been tracked down and deliberately killed as a humiliation as a final insult to Hassan's memory. However, if the text is read as an allegory it does need this pattern or narrative motif to enable Amir to gain atonement. Amir can at least save his son. Equally, he can finally stand up to Assef as he wishes he could. One question that remains is why Assef bears so much hatred towards Amir. It may be a result of an affront to traditional or masculine values; it may even be subconscious jealousy.

Chapter Twenty-Three Active Reading: Making Thematic Links

The fragmentary and disjointed nature of the narrative conveys Amir's physical and emotional pain as he regains consciousness in hospital. The return to a more structured style marks his recovery.

As a reader, you may have been puzzled by his apparent excitement about the scene. This is a moment of redemption for him. He has assisted Sohrab and has a physical mark on his chest.

Chapter Twenty-Four: Reader Response

This chapter has Sohrab as the central focus and Hosseini conveys a range of shifts in mood. In the days following the escape from Assef, he still presents a child's innocence and vulnerability to another person. He then experiences joy when Amir promises refuge in the United States, but despair when he overhears a call suggesting he may have to return to an orphanage. Sohrab is vulnerable and this news drives him to the suicide attempt. Your response to this chapter should evaluate the emotions and comment on the language used to convey the dramatic shifts in Sohrab's mood. You also evaluate the effect of such a condensed focus on emotion. If Sohrab's actions are seen as a way to serve to emphasise his fragility. As a reader, you may have concerns about Sohrab's relationship to despair, and may be critical of Amir, both in his lack of recognition of Sohrab's vulnerability and his careless promise to take him to the United States.

Chapter Twenty-Five: Extended Response

This requires references to both structure and narrative perspective. Hosseini uses a non-linear narrative frame. Amir relates an anecdote about spoiling the ending of a film for the sake of flitting across time by revealing that to an Afghan 'the ending was all that matters'. Amir anticipates the ending and Amir doubts his ability to bring resolution, claiming he would be. There is a sense of realism here – there will be no tidy 'happy ever after' ending. 'movie.' (p. 312). This may be a way of reducing expectation as he goes on to reveal that he is in the park. Before we reach this scene, Amir prepares for it by defending Sohrab from discrimination. Amir also realises that Baba maybe did consider Hassan a better son than Amir – painful – rather, it inspires Amir's actions in the park. He will be a good 'father' to Sohrab in Hassan's place – Amir is now the kite runner.

The task also asks for your personal response to Amir's journey. Do you feel he has been redeemed enough that there is the sliver of hope that Sohrab can be loved and nurtured in the United States?

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