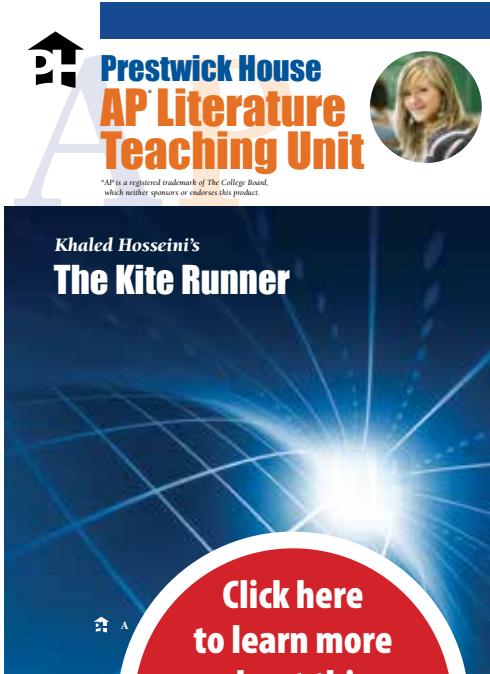




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Teaching Unit

The Kite Runner

by Khaled Hosseini

written by Kelli Kuntz



Prestwick House

Item No. 304195

The Kite Runner

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. explain the use of metaphor in setting tone and mood.
2. analyze the use of irony in creating tone and mood.
3. analyze the function of the flashback structure.
4. trace the development of a dynamic character.
5. analyze the significance of the novel within the context of Afghan history and politics.
6. trace the development of complex and intertwining themes found in the novel, including:
 - discrimination fosters hatred,
 - the past cannot be buried,
 - true friends make great sacrifices for each other,
 - guilt is a powerful enemy.
7. analyze the use of the first-person limited narrator.
8. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
9. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
10. offer a close reading of *The Kite Runner* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

Lecture Notes

AFGHAN SOCIETY

Afghanistan is located between the Middle East, south Asia, and central Asia, a geographical situation that has provided it with a diverse mix of religions, ethnicities, and cultural influences. The population has traditionally been organized into many tribal groups based on religion, language, ethnicity, location, and family relationships. The rugged terrain in Afghanistan has resulted in significant isolation of each community, creating strong bonds among the people in a given area, and strong—at times bitter—distrust and rivalry between people in neighboring areas. Peace has been difficult to establish in this region, which has been the site of continual invasions and occupations throughout its history. The one unifying element in Afghanistan is Islam, which is, ironically, also a source of violent division. While the majority of Afghans call themselves Muslim, the two main sects within the Muslim faith contribute to the violent division in the country.

The largest and most powerful ethnic group in Afghanistan are the Pashtuns, most of whom are Sunni Muslims. Pashtuns primarily speak the Pashto language, although some Pashtuns speak Dari. Both Pashto and Dari belong to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. Pashto and Dari are the official languages of Afghanistan. Zahir Shah (see timeline that follows) declared Pashto the National Language at the beginning of his reign in 1933, but Dari is used for business and government transactions. A Sunni is a member of one of the two major branches of Islam. Sunnite Muslims form the majority and see themselves as the “mainstream” and “traditional” sect of Islam. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir and Baba are Pashtuns.

A smaller and often persecuted group in Afghanistan are the Hazaras, who speak a dialect of Dari and live primarily in central Afghanistan. Hazaras are members of every Muslim religious sect in the country: Ismaili, Twelver, Shi'a, and Sunni. Hazaras are generally believed to be of Mongol descent, and many claim to be descended from Genghis Khan himself. The Hazaras are easily distinguished by their Asian facial features. They are often treated as subhuman, as the reader sees so often in *The Kite Runner*. Hassan and Ali are Hazaras, and the reader witnesses the racial prejudice to which they are subjected. Hosseini also describes the Taliban's program of “ethnic cleansing,” which is the cause of Hassan's murder.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUNNI AND SHI'A MUSLIMS

The division of Islam into the Sunni and the Shi'a sects is based on the beliefs of each regarding the proper successor to the prophet Muhammad. It represents a political disparity rather than a spiritual one. When Muhammad died, the question of who was to succeed him as Caliph, or leader of the Muslim community, caused a great split in the religion. Sunni Muslims believe that the Koran specifies that the new leader should be elected from among those who are capable of doing the job. This is historically what happened, and Muhammad's friend, Abu Bakr, was elected the first Caliph of Islam. The word “Sunni” comes from an Arabic word that means “one who follows the traditions of the Prophet.”

The Kite Runner

Chapter 1

1. How does the use of Chapter 1 to introduce the flashback establish the overall mood of the novel? How would it be different if the story were told without the flashback?

2. What does the reader know about the narrator's present life, and how do we know?

3. What mood does the image of the two kites create? How does Hosseini create this mood?

Chapter 2

1. What are the reader's first impressions of Hassan based on Hosseini's description of him?

2. Why have Amir's teachers not said very much about the Hazaras?

3. What is unusual about the relationship between Amir and Hassan?

Chapter 6

1. What are some details of imagery that set the mood for the beginning of Chapter 6? How do these details create a mood for the reader?

2. Amir describes Hassan as having two faces, one that he has known since childhood, and another that he feels he has seen before. What is Hosseini suggesting by having Amir make this observation?

3. What is the importance of the kite fight for Amir and Baba? How does Hosseini give it great value through his word choice in the text?

Chapter 11

1. How does the tone of the novel change at the beginning of this chapter now that Baba and Amir live in the United States? How does Hosseini create this change?

2. What does Amir mean when he says that “Kabul had become a city of ghosts” for him? How does he think living in America is going to be an improvement for him?

3. Compare and contrast Baba’s business life in Afghanistan with his business life in the United States. How has Baba changed? What qualities remain?

4. Baba says that “what happens in a few days, sometimes even a single day, can change the course of a whole life.” He is talking about Soraya Taheri, but the comment is more profound. Apply this wisdom to other characters in the novel. How could Baba be talking about Amir, Hassan, Rahim Khan, Kamal, Baba, or any other character in the novel?

Chapter 16

1. Has Hassan changed since leaving Baba's house as a child? What is different? What is the same? What is significant about Hosseini's description of Hassan?

2. What is the significance of Hassan's running away from his long-lost mother? Is he the kind of person who is in the habit of running from difficult situations?

3. What is the significance of Hassan's naming his son Sohrab? Look back to the references to this name in Hassan's youth.

4. How does Hosseini create suspense at the end of this chapter?

Chapter 21

1. Why does Hosseini include the brief flashback to Amir's childhood just as he and Farid are arriving at Baba's house? What is the significance of the memory about the turtle in relation to the reality of the "fallen splendor" of Baba's house?

2. What does Amir mean when he tells Farid that he does not "want to forget anymore" as he leaves to climb the hill he and Hassan had climbed as children? What are the implications of this statement for Amir?

3. Why does Hosseini include the scene in which Farid and Amir tell Mullah Nasruddin jokes just before they go to sleep? What is important about these jokes?

4. Why does Amir avoid answering Farid's question about why he has come back to Kabul for this particular boy?

5. Explain the irony of Amir's description of the Talib looking "like a baseball pitcher on the mound." What is the significance of this event for Amir?

5. Why does Hosseini include Amir's lesson about not revealing the end of a movie in America? What is the significance of this story placed here toward the end of the novel?

6. How does Hosseini provide certain evidence of a transformation in Amir during dinner with the general? What are the implications of this change for Amir?

7. Why does Hosseini conclude his novel with a kite fight? What is so appropriate about this decision?

8. Look back at Chapter 1. How has the story come full circle? How has Hosseini created "a way to be good again" for Amir?
