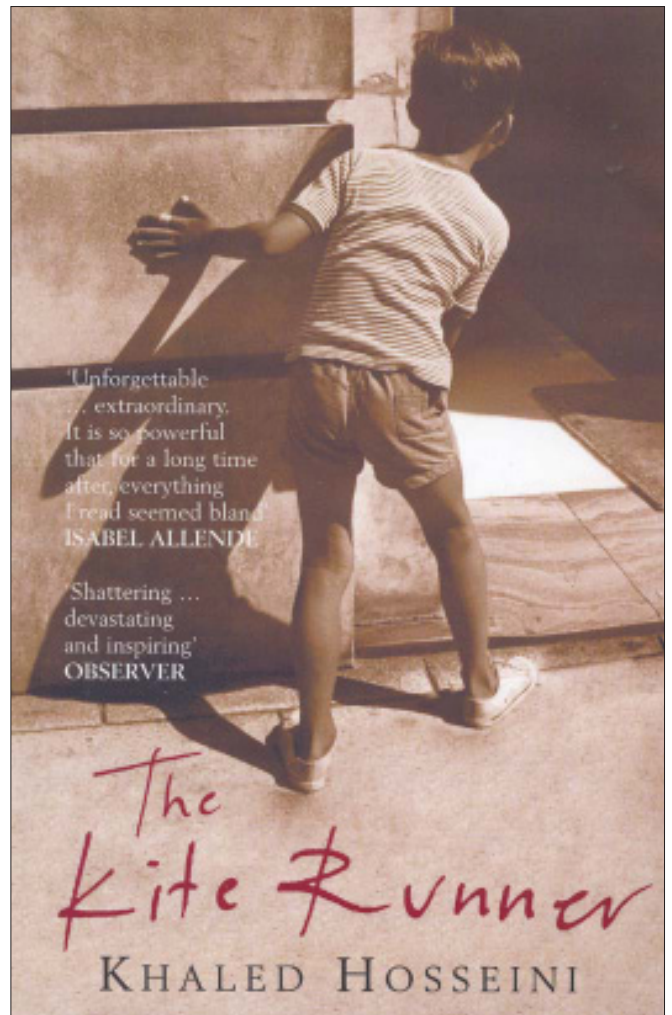


ALLEN&UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

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About *The Kite Runner* - in brief

One chilly Afghan winter's day in 1975 Amir witnesses a dreadful act that irrevocably changes both his life and the life of his dear friend, Hassan. It is not simply Amir's presence that scars him, it is his failure to act, a failure that will haunt him until he gathers his courage, confronts his demons and finds 'a way to be good again'.

About *The Kite Runner* - in detail

In *The Kite Runner* Khaled Hosseini explores the nature of friendship, of forgiveness and of redemption, set against the turbulent background of his native Afghanistan.

The son of a rich and popular merchant, Amir leads a privileged life, wanting only to please his beloved but demanding father, Baba, and to play with Hassan, the child of Ali, Baba's lifelong servant. Both Amir and Hassan are motherless. They spend almost all their time together, playing games and sharing stories under their favourite pomegranate tree. An encounter with Assef, the local bully, in which Hassan springs to Amir's defence has appalling consequences, destroying their friendship and driving Amir to desperate measures to rid himself of Hassan, measures which result in a puzzling reaction from his father. When Ali and Hassan decide to leave of their own accord, Amir's relief is short lived; he knows that his cowardice has been detected.

Baba and Hassan are soon in flight themselves when the Russians invade. They flee first to Pakistan, then to America where Baba's old life of influence and power is at an end. They make a new life for themselves, embracing the San Francisco Afghan community, one of whom Amir eventually marries. But Amir remains haunted by his failure to protect Hassan, unable to enjoy his success as a novelist and his marriage to Soraya, convinced that their inability to have a child and his father's death are punishments visited upon him.

Amir is rescued by a phone call from Baba's old friend, Rahim Khan, who offers him the chance of redemption. Once in Peshawar, where Rahim is dying, Amir learns that he is to find Hassan's lost son. In so doing, he must summon his courage and face not only his old enemy, but also the destruction that has been wrought upon his homeland. In return, he is rewarded with the truth about his relationship with Hassan and a greater understanding of his beloved Baba.

About Khaled Hosseini

Khaled Hosseini was born in 1965 in Kabul where his father was a diplomat and his mother taught Farsi and history. The family left Afghanistan in 1976 when Hosseini's father was posted to the Afghan Embassy in Paris. Following the 1978 coup and the subsequent Russian invasion, the Hosseinis emigrated to the United States, receiving political asylum in 1980. The family settled in San Jose, California where his father initially found work as a driving instructor, later becoming an Eligibility Officer dispensing welfare to needy families, many from the Afghan community. Hosseini is now a physician and lives with his wife and two children in Northern California.

The Kite Runner, Hosseini's first novel and, reputedly, the first to be written in English by an Afghan, met with great critical and popular acclaim when it was published in 2003.

Reviews

Publishers Weekly

'A stunning debut novel... a complete work of literature that succeeds in exploring the culture of a previously obscure nation that has become a pivot point in the global politics of the new millennium... It is rare that a book is at once so timely and of such high literary quality.'

Lesley Glaister

'Isn't this an amazing book? I want to give it to everybody... I was completely riveted, horrified and moved so much I had to put it down and sob at least twice. I do hope it does as well as it deserves to.'

Sunday Telegraph

'It seems strange to see anything other than journalistic non-fiction rising out of the ashes of Afghanistan given its politically charged nature, but here is the first Afghan novel written in English, and it's just beautiful.'

Sunday Canberra Times

'One of the sadly neglected strengths of literary fiction is how it can be used to reach behind the media headlines; embracing aspects of other cultures, and opening them up in ways a text book – no matter how well written – can rarely match. This is an extraordinarily sophisticated first novel. Highly recommended.'

Some suggested points for discussion



The novel begins 'I became what I am today at the age of twelve'. To what is Amir referring? Is his assertion entirely true? What other factors have helped form his character? How would you describe Amir?



Amir had never thought of Hassan as his friend, despite the evident bond between them, just as Baba did not think of Ali as his friend (page 22). What parallels can be drawn between Amir and Hassan's relationship, and Baba and Ali's? How would you describe the relationship between the two boys? What makes them so different in the way they behave with each other? What is it that makes Amir inflict small cruelties on Hassan? Had you already guessed at the true relationship between them? If so, at what point and why?



It is Amir's dearest wish to please his father. To what extent does he succeed in doing so and at what cost? What kind of man is Baba? How would you describe his relationship with Amir, and with Hassan? How does that relationship change and what prompts those changes?



Khaled Hosseini vividly describes Afghanistan, both the privileged world of Amir's childhood and the stricken country under the Taliban. How did his descriptions differ from ideas that you may already have had about Afghanistan? What cultural differences become evident in the American passages of the novel? How easy do the Afghans find it to settle in the US?



After Soraya tells Amir about her past, she says 'I'm so lucky to have found you. You're so different from every Afghan guy I've met' (page 157). What do you think of the reasons that Amir puts forward for this? Could there be others? How do Afghan women fare in America? Are they any better off than they were in Afghanistan before the Taliban seized power?



On the drive to Kabul Farid says to Amir 'You've always been a tourist here, you just didn't know it.' (page 204) What is Farid implying? What do you think of his implication?

Further reading

Fiction

Amber by Stephan Collishaw

By the Sea by Abdulrazak Gurnah

The Swallows of Kabul by Yasmina Khadra

The Fortress of Solitude by Jonathan Lethem

The Orchard on Fire by Shena Mackay

Fugitive Pieces by Anne Michaels

Non-fiction

The Bookseller of Kabul by Asne Seierstad

West of Kabul, East of New York by Tamim Ansary