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SUNDAY EXPRESS

**"ENORMOUSLY MOVING"**

NEW YORK POST



THE STAGE



METRO



DAILY TELEGRAPH

# The Kite Runner



ADAPTED BY

**MATTHEW SPANGLER**

BASED ON THE BEST-SELLING NOVEL BY

**KHALED HOSSEINI**

## EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

 UK PRODUCTIONS

Written by Allie Spencer and Erica Whittaker Wallis

# “For You, A Thousand Times Over”

## Resource Contents

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*\*These articles have been written by Erica Whittaker Wallis, an A Level student who with Nottingham Playhouse Learning and Participation as part of her Gold Arts Award. Acknowledgement of copyright-holders and publishers  
© Khaled Hosseini, 'The Kite Runner' 2003, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc*

### **Main Subject: English(English Literature) - Key Stage: KS5**

Focusing on key chapters or 'scenes' from Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*, helpful resource supports A-level students with their understanding of key themes, characters and significant structural, literary, linguistic and narrative elements.

Students could use this resource to support their independent reading or revision of the novel, or it could be used during class reading as a springboard for pair or group discussion tasks, or close textual analysis and annotation.



# The Kite Runner

## The Novel and the Play

### The Novel

*"While the novel is an easy read, the themes require plenty of attention and willingness to tackle multidimensional problems. The book can be read as a three-part novel. In the first part, Hosseini engages in nostalgic childhood recreation of a lost Afghanistan during the last days of the monarchy of Zahir Shah and the regime that overthrew him. The second part explores emigration during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the tragedies of a displaced and tired people living in cultural bubbles of the past; it describes the process of migration and character of the expatriate community. The last part explores the Taliban's Afghanistan. It deals with the horror humans can inflict on other humans and stresses the underlying tone of standing up to repression."*

Afghan History: kite flying, kite running and kite banning by Mir Hekmatullah Sadat  
(June 2004) [afghanmagazine.com](http://afghanmagazine.com)

### Play Summary

As Amir, a successful writer living with his wife in California, receives a phone call from his father's friend in Pakistan he is forced to re visit his past but also given a chance to redeem the wrongs of both himself and his father in 1970s Afghanistan.

Amir and Hassan are friends growing up in 1970s Afghanistan. Hassan is Amir's servant, son of Baba's servant, Ali. In a culture where the Hazaras are treated as inferior to Pashtuns, Hassan and Ali are victimised by members of the Pashtun community, particularly a boy called Assef and his friends. Hassan, one of the fastest kite runners in Kabul, protects Amir from trouble but when the time comes for Hassan to need protection Amir hides in an alleyway.

Haunted by his cowardice Amir makes life impossible for Ali and Hassan who eventually leave despite the pleading of Amir's father Baba.

With the Russian control of Afghanistan becoming unbearable, Baba and Amir leave Afghanistan in an empty fuel tanker and escape first to Pakistan and then to America where Amir graduates from high

school and marries Soraya. Baba dies shortly after their marriage. Amir and Soraya are unable to have children.

Rahim Khan summons Amir back to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Hassan and his wife have been killed by the Taliban leaving a child, Sohrab. As Amir learns that Hassan was actually his half-brother and that therefore Sohrab is his nephew, he fights both Assef and the authorities in order to rescue Sohrab and bring him back to the USA to live with himself and Soraya.

## Differences between the Play and the Novel

- 📖 Assef (100% Afghan) gives Amir a football in the play whereas in the novel Assef (50% German 50% Afghan) gives Amir a book about Hitler.
- 📖 Soraya's mother is dead in the play but in the novel she is alive.
- 📖 In the play Amir and Baba do the full escape to Pakistan in the fuel tanker whereas in the novel they start in a truck (this is when they are stopped by the Russians) then they spend time in a hideout before fleeing across the border in the tanker.
- 📖 The play focuses more on Afghanistan and Pakistan and less on Amir's life in the USA.
- 📖 The stoning at the football stadium is referenced in the play but is graphically described in the novel.



# "ENORMOUSLY MOVING"

NEW YORK POST



## What is a kite runner?

In Afghanistan kite flying festivals are a tradition. Kite fighting is very popular and the aim is to cut the kite's string – or manja – while in the air so that it falls. (The manja is coated with powdered glass) Kite runners run after the falling kites. Within afghan culture, the first person to pick up the fallen kite can claim it as his/her own. With kites continuing a long way after they have been cut, kite running can be very dangerous as the runner can be injured through running across dangerous terrain or not paying attention to surroundings and being knocked over by moving vehicles.

## Kite Runner Themes

### Guilt

1. the fact or state of having committed an offense, crime, violation, or wrong, especially against moral or penal law; culpability: He admitted his guilt. 2. a feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime, wrong, etc., whether real or imagined.

### Betrayal

1. the act of exposing or delivering someone to an enemy through treachery or disloyalty: This security leak was an inexcusable betrayal of an ally whose very existence is now threatened. 2. the act of disappointing a person's trust, hopes, or expectations: Imagine what a betrayal it is each time a victim finds out that her fellow citizens, and our legal system, are just not there for her.

### Atonement

1. satisfaction or reparation for a wrong or injury; amends. 2. (sometimes initial capital letter)Theology. the doctrine concerning the reconciliation of God and humankind, especially as accomplished through the life, suffering, and death of Christ.

### Personal redemption

Spiritual redemption refers to the concept of a human soul undergoing a transformation or 'being saved' due to being exposed to spiritual enlightenment or grace. It is a journey of overcoming sin and evil inclinations, to live life in accordance with the higher principles.

### Parenting

1. the rearing of children: The schedule allows her very little time for parenting. 2. the methods, techniques, etc., used or required in the rearing of children: a course in parenting.

### Courage

1. the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., without fear; bravery. 2. Obsolete. the heart as the source of emotion.

### Racism

A belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human racial groups determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to dominate others or that a particular racial group is inferior to the others.

### Child abuse

mistreatment of a child by a parent or guardian, including neglect, beating, and sexual molestation.

### Religion

1. a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. 2. a specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects.

### Murder

1. Law. the killing of another human being under conditions specifically covered in law. In the U.S., special statutory definitions include murder committed with malice aforethought, characterised by deliberation or premeditation or occurring during the commission of another serious crime, as robbery or arson (first-degree murder, or murder one ), and murder by intent but without deliberation or premeditation (second-degree murder, or murder two).





“An unexpected  
delight...”

MARK SHENTON  
LONDON THEATRE

## Central Characters

### Amir

The narrator and the protagonist of the story. Amir is the sensitive and intelligent son of a well-to-do businessman in Kabul, and he grows up with a sense of superiority. His best friend is Hassan, and he goes back and forth between acting as a loyal friend and attacking Hassan out of jealousy whenever Hassan receives Amir's father's affection. The play tells of Amir's attempt to redeem himself and rid himself of guilt after an event divides the friends forever. Amir is a Pashtun and a Shi'a Muslim.

### Hassan

Amir's best friend as well as a servant of Baba's. Great with a slingshot and an outstanding Kite Runner. Hassan proves himself a loyal friend to Amir repeatedly, defending Amir when he is attacked and always being ready to listen. He is a Hazara and a Sunni Muslim and consequently the victim of verbal, racial, physical and sexual abuse. He is regarded as the son of Ali.

### Baba

Father of Amir and a wealthy, well-respected businessman. He loves both Amir and Hassan although Amir feels that Baba shows favour to Hassan. During Amir's childhood Baba and Amir are not close, except for a short period after Amir wins the Kite fighting competition.

### Ali

Servant to Baba and acting father to Hassan. Ali was rescued and brought up by Baba's father. Poor and an ethnic Hazara, he suffers from partial paralysis of his face and walks with a limp caused by polio.

### Sohrab

Son of Hassan and Farzana. He becomes a central focus of the plot as the play progresses. Like his father, he is also an ethnic Hazara, great with a slingshot and a traumatized victim of abuse.

### Assef

The play's antagonist. A racist who wishes to rid Afghanistan of Hazaras. He enjoys inflicting violence and sexual abuse on those who are powerless. As an adult Assef becomes a leading figure within the Taliban.

### Rahim Khan

Friend of Baba and Amir. Father figure to Amir, giving him the attention he craves from his father. Rahim Khan later cares for Hassan and his family. It is Rahim Khan who calls Amir back to his homeland because "there is a way to be good again".

### Farid

Amir's driver. He becomes a valuable and loyal friend to Amir in Amir's search to find and rescue Sohrab.

### Soraya

Amir's wife. Soraya is steady, intelligent, and always there for Amir when he needs her.

### General Taheri

Soraya's father and a friend of Baba. General Taheri places great value on upholding Afghan traditions.

### Wali and Kamal

Friends of Assef. Kamal dies while escaping from Afghanistan in the same fuel tank as Amir.

### Raymond Andrews

The official at the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan who makes Amir realize the difficulties he will encounter if he attempts to adopt Sohrab.

### Omar Faisal

Official at the U.S. Embassy. Sympathetic to Amir's cause.



**“Director Giles Croft delivers  
a coup... An Enthralling Tale  
beautifully told”**

**THE TELEGRAPH**



## Matthew Spangler | Adapter The Kite Runner

**Hassan and Amir used to sit in the pomegranate tree and read stories. What was one of your favourite things you would do with friends as a child?**

We would take these epic hikes across the barren hills in the back of our neighbourhood. Pretending we were on some sort of voyage-quest, we'd make plans ahead of time, take provisions, and hike for miles and hours on end. We'd come back exhausted, our shoes full of stickers, and feeling a sense of triumph and achievement.

**What are the most important issues for you in The Kite Runner?**

I see it as a story about redemption told within the context of global politics and immigration.

**Why did you choose to adapt The Kite Runner?**

I teach courses at San Jose State University (California) on adapting literature for the stage. I also teach courses on immigration and theatre – how various immigrant experiences are represented through the literary and performing arts. So I was initially drawn to The Kite Runner as a story of immigration.

The scenes that make up the middle part of the novel, and that now open Act II, were the first scenes I thought about adapting for the stage: the escape from Afghanistan, arriving in California, Baba's argument with Mrs. Nguyen (herself, presumably, a Vietnamese immigrant), Amir wanting to be a writer against this father's wishes, the immigrant enclave at the San Jose flea market, Baba's refusal to be seen by a Russian doctor.

These scenes speak not just to an Afghan immigrant experience, but to other migrant



**“The Kite Runner Soars...  
Very moving - you would  
have to be made of stone  
not to be deeply affected...”**

**THE INDEPENDENT**



experiences as well. Then when I started thinking seriously about adapting the novel I realised how full it is with a wide range of complex themes and issues – not just those related to immigration. The Kite Runner is about class, a father and son relationship, two best friends, it's a love story, and most of all it's a story of redemption, in addition to being a story of immigration and global politics. I was inspired by the prospect of trying to create a play that would wrestle with all of these themes.

The Insight pack notes a few specific changes between the novel and the script, particularly the change in Assef's background and birthday gift. Also, there being no mother for Soraya. How much influence did Khaled Hosseini have on your changes? Why did you and/or Hosseini feel these changes were necessary?

Khaled and I met a number of times to discuss the play. We live in the same area – the "South Bay," as it's called, a metropolitan region at the south end of the San Francisco Bay, also known as "Silicon Valley." We first met at a Starbucks and I shared with him my ideas for a play. Later, he read drafts of the play and made suggestions. One of those was to change Assef from being half German/half Afghan, as he is in the book, to all Afghan. Khaled based the character on a bully who lived in his neighbourhood in Kabul when he was growing up there and who actually was half German and half Afghan. But people don't know this and Khaled feared that making Assef half German just read as trite shorthand for the bully. So he asked that we change that aspect of Assef's character for the play. But that change presented me with a problem. In the book, Assef gives Amir a biography of Hitler for his birthday. If Assef is Afghan, the gift doesn't make as much sense. So I started thinking: what could Assef give Amir that would be an equally nasty gift, that would say something about Assef's character and Amir's. A football, of course. Assef knows Amir is no good at sports, and so the gift is like a jab in the side, a reminder that Amir is inferior to Assef and always will be.



Assef adds insult to injury by passing the ball back and forth with Baba, like the father/son moment Amir always longs for. Adaptation constantly forces you, as the playwright, to replace one thing from the novel with another thing on stage. The trick is to preserve the same feeling as the book only with different materials. There are a number of these replacements throughout the play. Another is Hassan's lip, which Baba pays to have fixed in the novel, an act of generosity that shows Baba's love for Hassan. But the lip and fixing it wouldn't work very well on stage. So, in the play, Baba gives Hassan a cowboy hat. In the following scene, the hat serves to signify the alternating power relationships between the boys. First, Amir takes the hat from Hassan. Then Assef enters and takes the hat from Amir. And finally, Hassan takes the hat back from Assef. Like the soccer ball, the hat becomes a dramatic device for showing the relationship between the characters.

As for Soraya's mother, it's hard to introduce major characters in the second act of a play. Soraya and General Taheri, who are introduced in Act II, are about all I thought the play could handle. Sohrab, while he appears for the first time in Act II, isn't really a new character. In the structure of the play, Sohrab is Hassan reborn.

**Which scene in *The Kite Runner* presented you with the most challenges? Why?**

The Assef/Hassan rape scene. Whether to show it on stage or off stage; and whether or not to underscore the scene with narration. It's a very difficult scene.

The wedding scene between Amir and Soraya, too, because there is a lot of detail in this scene and it's important that the play and production are culturally accurate in the representation of an Afghan wedding.

## **Kitty Winter**

### **Movement Director**

#### **Who was your best friend in childhood and what was one of your favourite things you would do together?**

One of my very best childhood friends is still one of my closest friends as an adult; our lives have taken us in very different directions (she's a glamorous fashion buyer now) but underneath we're still the same silly kids. She had rather hidebound parents who wouldn't have a TV in the house, so we used to watch endless films at my house. We watched *Yellow Submarine* so many times that we could recite every line and we used to invent weird ways of watching it – I remember once hanging upside down off the edge of the sofa for the full duration of the film!

#### **When planning for a rehearsal what do you have to consider as a movement director?**

In a production like *The Kite Runner*, I'd mostly work on larger scenes with the full company, so my main considerations would be:

- ✍️ The action of the scene- if it has dancing or a specific physical activity, then I'd want to research that in some detail
- ✍️ The storytelling- how the scene fits into the arc of the show, particularly in an ensemble piece like *The Kite Runner*, so that I can make visual and physical connections between the characters that make sense and support the story. You wouldn't want Romeo dancing next to Tybalt in the Capulets' ball scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, for example.
- ✍️ The overall style or aesthetic of the piece- usually I'd have a pretty clear sense of the playing style that the director is going for, and as a supporting member of the creative team, I need to be aware of that and make sure that what I do with the actors fits into the overall feel or world of the play. Our director Giles Croft saw *The Kite Runner* as a play about memory, so I developed the idea that the cast are citizens of Amir's memory, waiting to be called into particular characters and moments.
- ✍️ The practical considerations- what the set is like, who needs to leave the stage earlier because they have a quick change, what the sightlines are. There's no point making something beautiful if nobody can see it!

#### **How is directing movement for TKR different to other shows you have done?**

Every show is different- that's one of the great excitements of being a freelance theatre practitioner! *The Kite Runner* is one of the larger shows I've worked on, both in terms of the size of the stage and the number of performers. That has a few challenges; making sure everyone's clear and happy with what I'm asking them to do, and planning more bodies moving through space than usual, but mostly it's a joy. I particularly love how open the set is- it gives so much potential for really dynamic movement, like in the kite tournament scene.

#### **What was the greatest challenge you faced last year in directing movement for *The Kite Runner* and how are the challenges different this year?**

My greatest challenge was actually of my own making- I was away in Japan for a big chunk of rehearsals! That made me have to be very efficient with staging some of the larger scenes; I planned them out with military precision, where I'd normally leave a bit of space and freedom to play in rehearsals.

This year I think the biggest challenge is that we have two new cast members joining an established ensemble; I'll need to remember that they don't already know the movement material and the shape of the physical sequences, and make sure I support them as much as possible.

**Which scene in The Kite Runner presents you with the most challenges? and Why?**

There are lots of big scenes in the show, all with their own challenges, but I think the one I've spent the most time on is the scene where Amir and Baba have just moved to America, and are being bombarded with the consumer culture of their new home. Getting the timing and actions right so that it's snappy and funny takes real focus and concentration on the part of the whole cast, and I almost needed to conduct it in rehearsals. Comedy's difficult!

**What's the difference between a movement director and a choreographer?**

A lot of movement directors are also choreographers (I do both, and trained in contemporary dance before starting to work in theatre) but the two roles are definitely different.

A choreographer makes dances- the word means 'dance writer', which is a more authorial or compositional role, and in the context of a play or theatre production, the choreographer will usually only be responsible for working on the dances.

A movement director has a much wider potential brief- we might coach the cast in a particular physical skill, help them create character body language, create stylised physical sequences to help tell the story, and we also fairly often create dance sequences too. A movement director's work, at its best, should be almost invisible, because there's a consistent and integrated movement vocabulary and style throughout the whole production. What excites you most at the beginning of this tour?

I'm hugely excited at the prospect of getting back in a rehearsal room with our brilliant cast- we had real fun last year. And of course it's exciting that the show will go to so many new places. I'm really proud to be part of this retelling of The Kite Runner, and I hope audiences will be as moved by it and enjoy it as much as we did!



## **Jonathan Girling**

### **Composer and Musical Director**

**Who was your best friend in childhood and what was one of your favourite things you would do together?**  
Guy. Exploring the local (then run-down) fort and generally getting up to mischief.

**What was the greatest challenge you faced last year in composing for *The Kite Runner* and how are the challenges different this year?**

Learning how to 'write' for tabla. Hanif helped me out a great deal. Challenges this year? Remembering what we did last time!

**Which scene in *The Kite Runner* presents you with the most challenges? and Why?**

Technically – the kite running scene. So many very carefully tailored pieces of music and sound stitched together over an entire sequence. Emotionally: Amir and his Baba's farewell in Act II. Timing the live off-stage singing. Lots of discussions with director, Giles, and writer, Matthew, about that one!

**Why did you choose to use the instruments you have?**

It was in the script! Tabla (a pair of hand drums from the Indian subcontinent, that is somewhat similar in shape to the bongos. Frequently played in folk music performances in India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Schwirrbogen and singing bowls – They were either suggested by the script, or the sound just started to grow in my imagination when reading the story. Very visual and very effective.

Singing – the voice is everything, both in their culture and ours. It does things to me that nothing else can.

**What excites you most at the beginning of this tour?**

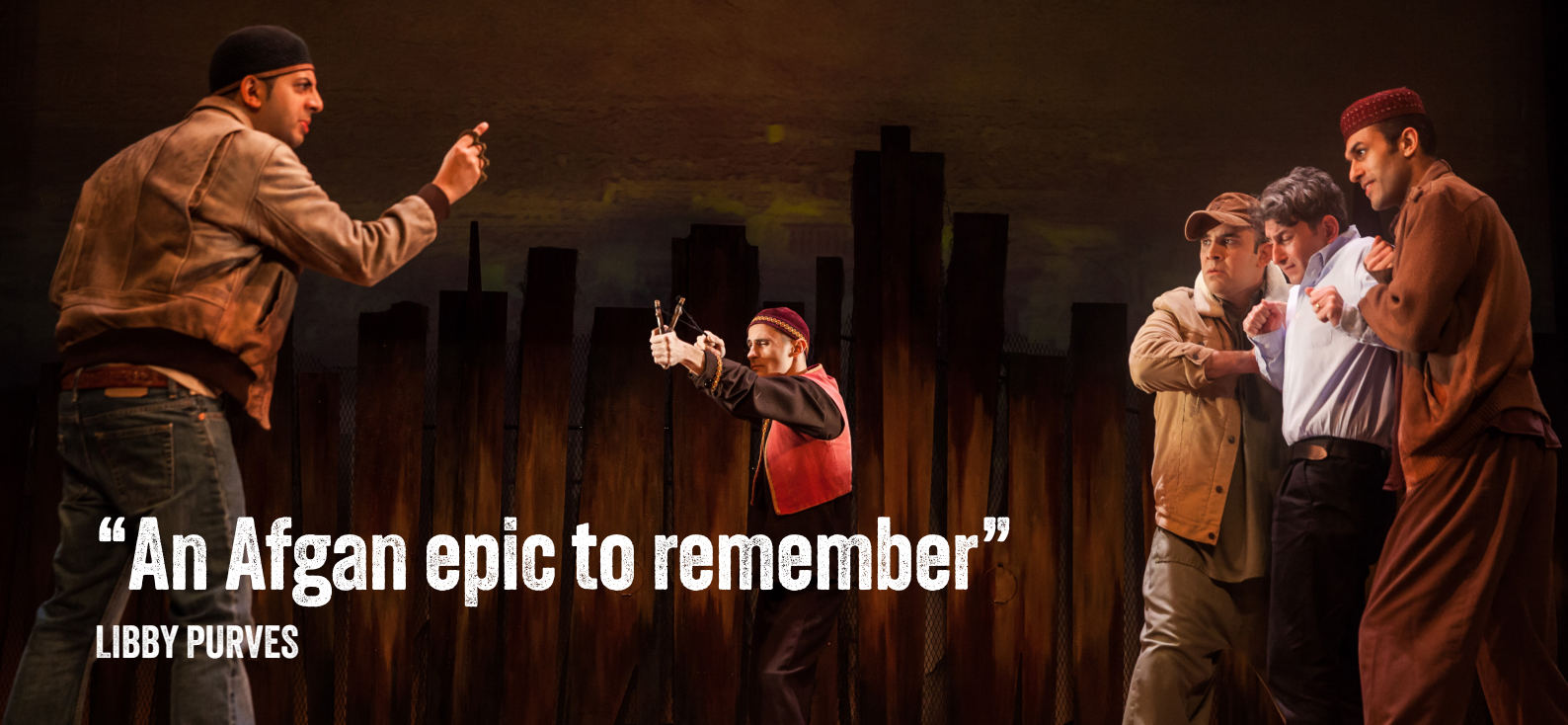
Doing it all again and bringing a fantastic production to more people in more places.



**“The best page-to-  
stage show since  
War Horse... a  
spellbinding  
production”**

**THE STAGE**





# “An Afgan epic to remember”

LIBBY PURVES

## The story of Rostam and Sohrab – Synopsis

Rostam, the son of Zal and Princess Rudabeh is a Persian hero. At his birth, Rostam is described as 'a lion cub'; he is a miracle baby who grows into a boy within five days and has the height and strength of a man within weeks. His courage and skill is first shown when, as a child, he is the only one who can stop a white elephant who is rampaging around the palace.

His adventures continue as he grows and Rostam soon gains a reputation for being a hero along with his horse Rakhsh whom only Rostam is able to tame. The accomplishments of Rostam include seven heroic trials that he undertook on his journey to rescue King Kay Kavus from demons.

One day, Rostam's faithful horse Rakhsh is captured by Turkish horsemen. Distraught, Rostam goes to King Samangan to ask for help. Whilst at the palace, Rostam meets the King's daughter Tahmina who has heard about Rostam's courageous reputation and fallen in love with him. When Rostam meets Tahmina he too falls in love with her and they are soon married. Tahmina helps to get back Rakhsh, however Rostam soon has to leave to carry out his heroic campaigns. Before he goes, he gives Tahmina a bracelet of gems and he tells her that if she ever has a child she should give it to them.

Before long, Tahmina gives birth to a son and calls him Sohrab. He soon grows into a strong young man and, like his father, gains a reputation as a hero. He is also given a horse who is the son of Rakhsh. One day, Sohrab asks Tahmina who his father is; she replies that he is the fierce champion Rostam and gives him the bracelet that Rostam had given to her. Several years pass and the King, learning of Sohrab's strength, sends him to a war he is raging (unbeknownst to Sohrab) against Rostam.

Rostam and Sohrab meet on the battlefield for the first time and they fight. Sohrab is winning, but Rostam tells him that a true hero never kills at the first strike and so Sohrab lets him go. They soon meet again but Sohrab is beginning to think that the man he is fighting may be his father and is reluctant to fight. Rostam takes his chance and stabs Sohrab in the heart killing him. As Sohrab is dying he shows Rostam the bracelet of jewels given to Tahmina years ago and explains that he was trying to find his father. Rostam suddenly realises that this is his son and he is overcome with grief. To mark his respect, Rostam holds a royal funeral for his son.





menistan

Uzbekistan

Tajikistan

China

Afghanistan

Pakistan

India

Arabian Sea

Mary

Dushanbe

Khorog

Termez

Mazar-e Sharif

Gonduz

Pol-e Khomri

Baltit

Mor Khun

Gilgit

Chilas

Skardu

Khyber Pass

Saidu

Muzaffarabad

Srinagar

Kushka

Herat

Kabul

Ghazni

Peshawar

Nowshera

Rawalpindi

Islamabad

Feroz Khan Noon Dam

Delaram

Gandahar

Bannu

Sargodha

Dera Ismail Khan

Faisalabad

Lahore

Zhob

Chaman

Quetta

Khost

Multan

Sahiwal

Bhatinda

Nok Kundi

Dalbandin

Kalat

Sibi

Bahawalpur

New Delhi

Sukkur

Khairpur

Jaisalmer

Jodhpur

Ajmer

Gwadar

Pasni

Bela

Mirpur Khas

Hyderabad

Kota

Karachi

Ratlam

Kandla

Ahmadabad

Rajkot

Vadodara

Bhusav

Surat

# Ethnic and Religious Groups in Afghanistan

## Pashtuns

Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and reigned as the dominant ethno-linguistic group for about 300 years, with nearly all rulers being Pashtun. Often characterised as a warrior and martial race, their history is spread amongst various countries of South, Central and Western Asia, centred around their traditional seat of power in medieval Afghanistan. Some Pashtuns believe that they are of higher ranking than other groups such as the Hazara people. Amir and Baba are Pashtuns.

## Hazāras

Hazāras are a Persian-speaking people who mainly live in central Afghanistan and western Pakistan. They are overwhelmingly Shiite Muslims and comprise the third largest ethnic group of Afghanistan, forming about 9% (according to other sources up to 18%) of the total population. It is widely and popularly believed that Hazaras have a Mongolian ancestry. Many Hazara people suffered from oppression by other groups, particularly the Taliban who targeted the Hazaras for mass murders. Hassan and Ali are Hazaras. (Source wikipedia)

## The difference between Sunnis and Shi'as

They both agree on the fundamentals of Islam and share the same Holy Book (The Qur'an), but there are differences mostly derived from their different historical experiences, political and social developments, as well as ethnic composition.

These differences originate from the question of who would succeed the Prophet Muhammad as leader of the emerging Muslim community after his death.

Muslims who believe that Abu Bakr should have been the Prophet's successor have come to be known as Sunni Muslims. Those who believe Ali should have been the Prophet's successor are now known as Shi'a Muslims. Sunni means 'one who follows the Sunnah' (what the Prophet said, did, agreed to or condemned). Shi'a is a contraction of the phrase 'Shiat Ali', meaning 'partisans of Ali'.

The use of the word "successor" should not be confused to mean that those leaders that came after the Prophet Muhammad were also prophets – both Shi'a and Sunni agree that Muhammad was the final prophet. (Source [bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam](http://bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam))

## The Tajik People

Tajik is a general designation for a wide range of Persian-speaking people of Iranian origin, with traditional homelands in present-day Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. Before the 20th century they were often called Sarts. Farid, the taxi driver, is a Tajik. (Source Wikipedia)



”Just the  
Ticket!”

METRO

## Taliban

*" To PHR's knowledge, no other regime in the world has methodically and violently forced half of its population into virtual house arrest, prohibiting them on pain of physical punishment."*

- Physicians for Human Rights, 1998

The Taliban (Pashto: "students"), alternative spelling Taleban, is an Islamic fundamentalist political movement in Afghanistan. It spread into Afghanistan and formed a government, ruling as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from September 1996 until December 2001, with Kandahar as the capital. However, it gained diplomatic recognition from only three states: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Mohammed Omar has been serving as the spiritual leader of the Taliban since 1994.

While in power, it enforced its strict interpretation of Sharia law, and was condemned internationally for its brutal treatment of women.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001 the Taliban were overthrown by the American-led invasion of Afghanistan.

The Taliban forbade women from being educated; girls were forced to leave schools and colleges. Those who wished to leave their home to go shopping had to be accompanied by a male relative, and were required to wear the burqa, a traditional dress covering the entire body except for a small screen to see out of. Those who appeared to disobey were publicly beaten. The only women allowed to work were those in the medical profession, as male medical practitioners were not allowed to treat females.

In February 1998, religious police forced all women off the streets of Kabul, and issued new regulations ordering people to blacken their windows, so that women would not be visible from the outside.

Amongst many other things, The Taliban prohibited kite flying. (Source Wikipedia)



## Time Line

Time	Significant world events affecting Afghanistan and the USA	Kite Runner events
1963	Ruled by Mohammad Zahir Shah. Daoud Khan resigns as Prime Minister.	Amir is born.
1973	17 July 1973 Mohammed Daoud Khan overthrows the monarchy and calls himself the first president of Afghanistan.	Amir and Hassan huddle together with their fathers as explosions take place all night. Ali tells them they are "hunting ducks".
1975	Gap extending between the quality of life in Kabul and other areas of Afghanistan that are poverty stricken. External help secured for the construction of oil refineries, fertilizer factories, and various agricultural projects . China and the Soviet Union contribute interest-free loans and technical aid.	Amir wins the kite fighting competition. Hassan is raped by Assef. Hassan and Ali leave Kabul.
27- 30 April 1978	Daoud Khan assassinated. Karaki takes control. Democratic republic of Afghanistan established.	Amir and Baba continue to live in Kabul.
5 December 1978	After two days of talks in Moscow, Taraki and Brezhnev sign a treaty called the Soviet-Afghan Friendship treaty, which commits their countries to a 20-year treaty of friendship and cooperation. Among other things, both nations pledge to continue "to develop co-operation in the military field on the basis of appropriate agreements."	
1979	The government calls on Russian troops to quell uprising and disturbances across Afghanistan.	
1980	Russian troops control Kabul. "soldiers patrolling the sidewalks and tanks rolling up and down the streets".	Baba and Amir escape to Pakistan in the tank of a fuel truck. They wait 6 months then secure visas to the USA.
1977 - 1981	Jimmy Carter is president of the USA.	Baba and Amir settle in California.
1981	Ronald Reagan becomes president of the USA.	Baba buys a car bumper sticker of Reagan.
1984	Flea Market	
1986	Amir marries Soraya. Baba dies.	
1989	End of the Cold War. Fall of the Berlin wall. Russians withdraw from Afghanistan.	Amir's first book is published.
1990	George H.W. Bush becomes president of the USA.	
1993	Bill Clinton becomes president of the USA.	
1994	Taliban rise to power and start to control areas of Afghanistan.	
1996	The Taliban take control of Kabul.	
June 2001	Taliban still in control of Afghanistan.	Amir goes to Pakistan to meet Rahim Khan and then to Afghanistan to rescue Sohrab.
August/ September 2001	George W Bush becomes President of the USA. September 11th terrorist attack on the Twin Towers, New York.	August: Amir and Sohrab arrive back in the USA.
October 2001	The invasion of Afghanistan and end of Taliban leadership.	Amir stands up to General Taheri. Amir, Soraya and Sohrab go kite flying.



## The Soviet invasion in Afghanistan 1979

The Russians invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and quickly took over the capital city of Kabul. The invasion took place during the cold war which lasted from 1945 to 1991. After the end of the Second World War, two superpowers began to emerge – America and Russia (each with their respective allies). Not-surprisingly, a sustained tension began to grow between these two political superpowers as they each struggled for the most global influence. To make matters worse, both forces were in possession of nuclear weapons, creating a serious threat for the rest of the world. Despite its name, the cold war did not actually include any combat, and thankfully, none of the nuclear weapons were used.



During the 1960's and 1970's, both superpowers were trying to expand their influences, create bigger empires and gain new allies in different places. This is one of the reasons why Russia decided to invade Afghanistan in 1979. At this time the Soviets were struggling financially, making it more important for them to build their empire and extend their political and land links.

***Perhaps this is one reason why the Russians were so intent on taking over Afghanistan.***

There were further reasons for the Russians seeing it as very important that they should take over Afghanistan. The Soviet had been supplying the country with aid since the 1950's, for example, they had helped develop roads, irrigation and some oil pipelines. Therefore, the Soviet and Afghanistan had a link going back for several years before the invasion. Furthermore, there had been a communist government instated in Afghanistan by the Russians in the 1970's, however, the Soviet believed that their power was waning, and they didn't trust their political authority. This is another reason why they decided to invade in 1979 – to help re-establish the power of the communist party.

During the years before the soviet invasion, whilst Afghanistan was under communist power, there was a great divide in the country between those who supported the party, and those who opposed it. Whereas there was moderate support in the capital, Kabul, for the

Russian-influenced communist party, there was much opposition in the more rural areas. Because Afghanistan is geographically a very divided country, with many mountains and jagged ranges, the rural people live more in smaller communities and tribes rather than as a collective. It was the people living in these small rural towns and villages who didn't understand or like the communist party who were ruling their country. They were confused and distrusting of western politics because they were used to their traditional Islamic values. These people didn't understand the new policies introduced such as women's rights and land distribution as they had never lived that way.

### ***This created a dislike for the communist party and the Soviet among rural communities.***

The process of the Russian invasion began in September 1979, the communist leader in Afghanistan, Nur Muhammad Taraki, was assassinated and a new leader Hafizullah Amin instated. The Russians did not trust this new leader, and observing that their communist influence in the country was under threat they decided to invade in December 1979. The Soviet stormed into Kabul with over 100,000 Russian soldiers and they quickly secured their power in the capital city. The Russians overthrew Hafizullah Amin and installed Babrak Karmal as the new president; this man was a puppet leader to the Soviets, meaning that Afghanistan was essentially under Russian power.

Despite the fact that the Soviets soon had control of Kabul, the people from the rural villages, who had never been happy about the communist influence in the country, put up much more of a fight. People living in rural areas began to form a fierce resistance called the Mujahidin. They proclaimed that they were fighting a 'Jihad' which means 'holy war' against the Christian and western values of the imposing Russians. This Jihad manifesto meant that the Afghans quickly gained support from the Islamic world. They also obtained support from the Americans, who were fiercely opposed to the Soviets because of the cold war. The Americans supplied the Mujahidin with weapons and money. In fact, most of the western world was in support of the Afghan rebels, and ironic twist of fate, as in later years, a lot of the people involved in the Mujahidin would go on to form the Taliban; using the weapons that America had supplied them with against them.



The destruction of these rural villages was made even worse by the fact that many of the locals were in support of the Mujahidin and would clothe and feed them. This resulted in the Russians demolishing the majority of Afghanistan.

### ***The war that broke out in Afghanistan was a brutal one.***

The Mujahidin used guerrilla tactics against the Russians; they would cause great destruction in rapid attacks, and then retreat off to the mountains where the Soviets would not be able to seek them out. There was no clear base for the Afghan rebels which made the constant search for them very difficult for the Russians. This aggressive form of warfare caused great destruction in Afghanistan. Because the Soviets knew not where to pinpoint their attacks on the Mujahidin, they simply annihilated large areas of the country. Whole towns and villages in rural Afghanistan were blown to pieces by the Russians.



<https://blogs.state.gov>

## Refugees in America

People have been fleeing Afghanistan since the soviet invasion in 1979; this situation has been deemed "the single largest refugee crisis in the world". Today, there are 3.7 million Afghan refugees in the world.

Many Afghan refugees fled to Pakistan or Iran at first, in order to escape the on-going conflict in their own country. However, although close to home and seemingly familiar, these countries did constitute an escape for asylum seekers. Like in Afghanistan, women still had few rights, and although not as bad as Afghanistan, there were strict regulations on behaviour and way of life. Therefore, Afghan refugees began to move further afield into the western hemisphere, including America.

### ***In the early 19th century, most of the Afghan refugees who emigrated to America were urban, middle class people.***

The second language in Afghanistan is English, so those who had been educated were able to speak it meaning they were more likely to find work in America. The Afghans who first escaped to America also needed enough money to be able to afford it, flights cost up to \$3,000 and, compared to Afghanistan, America is an expensive place to live.

However, as soviet troops invaded Afghanistan in the late 1970s, a wave of Afghan refugees flooded to America. During the soviet war, about 2000–4000 Afghans arrived in America every year. The refugees were no longer middle class, educated people, but citizens from all sorts of classes and places. Many refugees gained entry to America through family reunification, or illegal immigration.

Although there are Afghan people in every state in the U.S., most settled in large cities, for example, Washington D.C. and New York. 55% to 67% of refugees are estimated to live in the bay area of San Francisco due to an amenable climate and relaxed attitude regarding diversity.

Because a lot of Afghan refugees were granted visas to the U.S. as a result of family reunification, small communities of Afghans began to appear in the country. Families lived close together and supported each other within large social groups. Afghanistan has a strong culture, and these growing communities in America meant that the refugees were able to





somewhat preserve their way of living, making it easier for them to live in this new and alien place.

***It was difficult for many Afghans arriving in America. More and more people were arriving who were illiterate in their own language, let alone English.***


This made it very difficult for them to find a job or settle in to the American way of life meaning that many Afghan refugees often suffered from depression and felt like strangers in an unknown land.

Despite the fact that Afghans have been settling in America for decades, they are still treated with discrimination in some instances. This was not helped in the least by the Taliban 9/11 attacks on America in 2001. Around this time, several hate crimes were committed against Afghan-Americans which included an American individual going on a shooting rampage and shooting at a home owned by an Afghan, as well as vandals defacing an Afghan-owned restaurant with red paint.

In recent years, Afghans who had escaped their home country have begun to move back. Between 2002 and 2007, 3.69 million Afghan refugees were helped by the United Nations to return to Afghanistan, making it the largest assisted return operation in history. However, many Afghans found their arrival to their home country was not what they had been expecting. Afghanistan has been ravaged by war for over three decades and the country is in a state of chaos with basic needs such as healthcare hard to come by.

***One in three afghan children is undernourished and the country has the highest rate of stunted growth in the world among children under five.***

Although for many Afghan refugees life has not been easy, whether they be struggling to adapt to western life in America or striving to make their lives back to normal in a war-torn Afghanistan, there are some refugees who have made a success of living in America and have benefitted greatly from the system. Good education and social security has meant that some Afghan refugees have been able to go to university, get a good job and support their family, without the worry of the strict regime which would have been forced upon them in their home country. Saying this, the majority of Afghans feel it is vital to preserve their culture and traditional values however much they are integrated into the American way of life.



Many Afghans, including Khalad Hosseini, and the fictional Amir and his family live in northern California.

## Living under the Taliban

The Taliban are a radically Islamic movement who took the power in Afghanistan in 1995/1996. This political and military group was founded by Islamic students in Kandahar, Afghanistan and led by a man called Mohammed Omar. They hoped to put an end to the chaos that had enveloped their country since the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 as well as re-impose the strict, traditional Islamic values that had been lost once the Russians had been invaded.

In 1994 the Taliban began their rise to power when they 'freed' a convoy of 30 trucks who were travelling from Pakistan to Central Asia from a group of Afghan warlords who had sieged the mission. The Taliban then proceeded to execute the hijackers in the desert, demonstrating that they showed no mercy for wrong-doers. This stunt meant that the Taliban began to make a name for themselves in Afghanistan and they soon became perceived as 'fierce, honest, and devoutly Islamic' by the Afghan people.

With this growing reputation, the Taliban managed to take control of twelve of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, with their centre of power in the city of Kandahar.

### ***1996, the Taliban had captured Kabul (Afghanistan)***

This is what Ahmed Rashid, Pakistan-based reporter for over 20 years, said about the Taliban's rise to power: 'In southern Afghanistan, there was a law and order crisis. There was rampant warlordism, and the Taliban came in as a cleansing force to establish law and order and wipe out the warlords and impose Islam, which they did. And they were quite popular doing it, initially. Their spread is really related to the support they got from Pakistan, which increased their military capability. And then they took Kabul in 1996.'

When the Taliban first took over Afghanistan, they were supported by several countries that saw them putting an end to the disorder which had been left by the Soviet invasion. In the early stages of their power it seemed that things would finally begin to move forward for Afghanistan and their relations with the rest of the world. However it was not to be. It seemed that the Taliban would probably not have had their success without the guidance they received from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, and their party was essentially made up of inexperienced political students.

However, with this support, they managed to become a reckonable force in Afghanistan; furthermore, at the start of their time in power they had the backing of many Afghan people who saw this as a new start for their country.

This period of optimism did not last long. The Taliban imposed strict laws in the name of Islam; they readily executed criminals and introduced amputations and other punishments for law-breakers. Women's rights were seriously reduced to the point where they essentially had none, and people were not allowed to take part in any western civilisation-type behaviour, for example, television sets were banned from homes as they were seen as a symbol of western decadence.

Perhaps those who suffered most under the Taliban reign were women. There were many bans and restrictions on what they were allowed to do, including a ban on them having jobs outside the home, coming in contact with men except for their husbands (e.g. shopkeepers, doctors, tailors), having the right to wear the clothes they chose (they were forced to wear the full-length Burqa), makeup or nail varnish and having any say in any public forum or express their opinion.



***The punishments for not abiding to restrictions would consequence in severe punishment.***

If a woman was seen to be wearing nail varnish, she would often have her fingers chopped off; and if found guilty of committing adultery, a woman would almost certainly be stoned to death in a public place.

Women were not the only people made to suffer under the Taliban's power. Thousands of Hazaras, an ethnic minority of Mongol descent who formed 15% of Afghanistan's population, were massacred, on several occasions. In 1998, the Taliban invaded the city of Mazar-e-Sharif as part of a push to gain control of the whole country, it is also believed that the Taliban wished to take revenge on the city which they had failed to capture 15 months before hand – an attack in which the Taliban had lost up to 3,000 men. What ensued in 1998 was 'one of the single worst examples of the killings of civilians in Afghanistan's 20 year war'. Thousands of Hazaras were shot dead in front of their families, children were mutilated and women and girls raped. Those who were not executed, but taken prisoner, suffocated to death in the stifling lorries they were forced into.

***Although the worst, this was not the only instance of a mass execution of Hazaras by the Taliban.***

In 2000, 31 bodies were found in the Robatak Pass, 26 of these bodies were confirmed to be Hazaras. It appeared that the civilians had been detained by the Taliban for four months prior to their execution and many had been tortured.

Although the complete number of Hazaras killed is unknown, it seems that there were other gravesites near to that which were found.



Again, in 2001, hundreds of Hazaras were killed when the Taliban took over Yakaolang. Search parties were sent out by the Taliban to extract men from their homes who were then rounded up and shot. This mass brutality was seen by the Taliban as a cleansing process; they believed that it was their duty to purify their country by eradicating the Hazaras who were predominantly Sh'ia Muslims opposed to the Talib Sunni Muslims.

***Although it was arguably worst for women and Hazaras, life under the Taliban was radically restrictive for all.***

People were not allowed to access the internet or television, something that was seen as entirely western and un-Islamic. There were also strict dress codes to adhere to, men were forced to wear traditional Islamic dress and grow their beards long. Furthermore, boys were not allowed to be taught in school unless they were wearing a turban. The Taliban too imposed bans on many games they saw as unreligious, including the legendary kite flying. In essence, the people were expected to live strict, Muslim lives, pray at the mosque five times a day, and devote their lives to religion, without succumbing to the temptations of the west.

Of course, this immensely strict regime left many Afghans very bitter about the Taliban, and their support began to dwindle. When the religious extremists realized that they were losing their control of the country, they began to turn to brutality to try and scare the Afghan citizens into supporting them. Soon the country was once again a place of chaos and destruction. The Taliban would burn houses, destroy crops and kill civilians mercilessly. Many people fled the country, seeking refuge in neighbouring Pakistan and elsewhere as the people of Afghanistan once more saw their country fall to pieces.

The Taliban lost power in Afghanistan shortly after 9–11.

**Links to other websites and teaching materials:**

Teaching notes: [http://www-av.pps.k12.or.us/doc/n00o2o\\_tg.pdf](http://www-av.pps.k12.or.us/doc/n00o2o_tg.pdf)

The Secret Kite by Deborah Ellis: <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=361688>

Afghanistan Relief Organisation: <http://www.afghanrelief.org/>