

First impressions

Brainstorm the title. How does it shape your expectations about what you're going to read? If you've already read the novel, is the title appropriate?

Chapter 1

1. What is the significance of the past for the narrator?
2. What physical feature marks out Hassan?
3. Is it significant that Rahim Khan is mentioned 3 times but Baba only once and even then only after Rahim is mentioned?
4. Compare the opening and closing lines of the chapter.

Chapter 2

1. How does the narrator introduce Hassan?
2. Compare the second paragraph on p.5 and the fourth paragraph on p.9. What do these paragraphs suggest about the relationship each boy has with their father?
3. The boys' lives run parallel to each other, how are they similar and how different?
4. The themes of childhood and friendship are important in this chapter. Can you identify another theme the author wants us to notice?
5. What is the effect of only finding out the narrator's name at the end of this chapter? What is the significance of the revelation?

Chapter 3

1. Choose one quotation to describe Baba.
2. Is Amir's father a religious man? A moral man? Is there a difference between these two things?
3. In what ways does Hosseini encourage the reader to be critical of Baba in this chapter?
4. Rahim and Baba each view Amir in a different light. How do each of them see him, and based on what you have read so far, who do you agree with?

Chapter 4

1. What does the story about the death of Ali's parents show us about Afghan society?
2. How does Baba's relationship with Ali mirror Amir's with Hassan? What does Hosseini want us to think about this?
3. Amir says 'I never thought of me and Hassan as friends' (p.22). Does this mean that they were never friends, or does it suggest something else about their relationship?
4. Which denomination of Islam is Amir? Does Hassan belong to the same one?
5. Read the following extract from pages 24-5 'Sitting cross-legged, sunlight and shadows of pomegranate leaves dancing on his face... I would tell myself that was amends enough for a harmless prank.' What do we find out about the character of each boy from these events?
6. Hassan praises Amir's first short story as 'the best story you've read me in a long time'. What type of adjective is the word 'best'? Is this hyperbolic (exaggerated) or accurate praise?
7. How does Hosseini leave us in no doubt about the conflict Amir struggles with in regards to his relationship with his father?

Chapter 5

1. How has Afghanistan 'changed forever'?
2. Who does Baba call out to when he comes into the house? Do you think this is significant?
3. Why is Amir glad about the coup?
4. What does Hassan's question to Amir (p.32-33) show us?
5. Choose three quotations that describe Assef. What impression do they leave you with?
6. Is there such a thing as a 'true' Afghan? (p.35) What is the irony in Assef's speech?
7. What impact does Amir's thought that '*he's not my friend!... He's my servant!*' (p.36) have?
8. How do you think Ali feels about Hassan's birthday present from Baba? Explain your answer.
9. Why are we left with a sense of foreboding at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 6

1. Why is the opening sentence only a word long?
2. Does Amir enjoy the winter?
3. Why is kite fighting especially important to Amir?
4. What is it that Afghans cherish and what do they abhor?
5. What talent of Hassan's builds our anticipation about events to come?
6. What added understanding of the title do we gain from this chapter?
7. Amir is cruel to Hassan in this chapter but does anything in his story make us less critical of him?
8. Finish the quotation from p.51: 'He was so goddam pure, ...'

Chapter 7

1. The sky is described as 'a blameless blue' (p.53). What significance does this take on later in the chapter?
2. Hassan tells Amir "'You won, Amir agha! You won!'" What does Amir reply and why is this unexpected?
3. Why does Hosseini break the chapter with the description of a memory and a dream?
4. What is it called when two contrasting things are put together to encourage the reader to think? How is the technique used in this chapter?
5. How do Wali and Kamal react to the rape? Why is what Wali says important to our understanding of Assef?
6. Why is the description of the Eid sacrifice included here?
7. How much do you blame the 'hero' of this chapter for the way he acts when his friend is raped? Are there any mitigating factors?

Chapter 8

1. How has the relationship between Amir and Hassan changed?
2. A chasm develops between Amir and Hassan and between who else?
3. What is unexpected about Rahim Khan's reaction to the re-telling of the kite fighting triumph?
4. What does Amir ask his father? What does the question tell us about Amir, and the response tell us about his father?
5. What is an insomniac and why should it matter?
6. Why does Rahim Khan tell Amir the story about Homaira?
7. Consider how Hosseini ends this chapter. What is the significance of the final sentence?

Chapter 9

1. Why does Amir dismiss his birthday gifts? Does he dismiss Hassan and Ali's gift for the same reason?
2. What decision does Amir make in this chapter that has significant consequences?
3. What is the consequence?
4. Why is Baba's reaction to Ali and Hassan's decision so startling?
5. In what way are the final lines of the chapter poetic?

Chapter 10

1. How many years have passed since Amir's thirteenth birthday party?
2. How do you interpret Amir's 'car sickness' (p.96)?
3. How do you interpret Baba's actions in this chapter?
4. Why do you think that Amir 'was glad for darkness'? Have you noticed the increasing frequency of such references?
5. Do Amir's words 'one disappointing son and two suitcases' make you more or less sorry for him?

Chapter 11

1. Compare the reactions of Amir and Baba to life in America.
2. What is it that Amir cannot escape from?
3. What is Baba's greatest fear?
4. How is 'My Swap Meet Princess' introduced? (p.124)

Chapter 12

1. Why does the chapter begin with a memory of Hassan and Ali?
2. How does Hosseini get the reader to enjoy the courtship?
3. By Afghan standards Amir's approach is bold (p.128), do you find it so?
4. How is gender made an issue in this chapter?
5. Why are so many Afghan words used to describe the courtship (p.128-129). Which words are explained and which are not? Why do you think this has been done?
6. This chapter sees great joy and celebration, so why does it end so negatively?

Chapter 13

1. Is the novel unsympathetic to teaching or is this comment meant to reflect more on the general?
2. p.148: What do you notice about the sentence length in the description of the ceremony? Why do you think this technique has been used?
3. p.151: What simile is used to describe Baba's happiness? Why is this fitting?
4. p.154: How is Taheri described? Who does this contrast strongly with? Why do you think Hosseini offers this contrast?
5. How do the tone and ending of the chapter differ from the rest of the chapter? Why has this contrast been created?
6. Is this chapter well-balanced?

Chapter 14

1. What important revelation is made?
2. '*Come. There is a way to be good again*' (p.168). What does Rahim Khan's comment tell us about his understanding of Amir?
3. Why does Hosseini sometimes write in italics?
4. Explore the significance of '*For you, a thousand times over!*'

Chapter 15

1. How is Rahim Khan described (p.172) and what is wrong with him?
2. Why did Afghanistan welcome the Taliban at first? (p.174)
3. How does Hosseini describe the impact of the Taliban on Kabul?
4. 'The truth was no. The lie was yes. I settled for something in between. "I don't know"' (p.176). Does Amir's honesty make us more sympathetic towards him?

Chapter 16

1. Whose voice do we hear at the beginning of this chapter? Is it significant that the first news of Hassan comes from Rahim Khan?
2. What has happened to Ali?
3. Why does Hassan take such pains to return the house to its former glory?
4. What is the significance of Hassan's choice of name for his son? (See also p.90.)
5. The war may be over but what shocking revelations end the chapter? Does the order they are related in matter?

Chapter 17

1. What does Hassan's letter reveal about Afghanistan? Himself?
2. Why does Rahim Khan choose to tell Amir of Hassan's death after he read the letter, rather than before?
3. What simile does Amir use to describe Hassan's death (p.192)? Why is it effective?
4. "'I'm thirty-eight years old and I've just found out my whole life is one big fucking lie!'" (p.195) What has Amir just found out and how do you react to this revelation?

Chapter 18

1. 'like father, like son' (p.197). How far is this cliché true in relation to Amir and his Baba?
2. Why is there so much repetition of earlier events and conversations in this chapter?
3. This is a short chapter. Does this mean that it's less important than the others?

Chapter 19

1. "'You've *always* been a tourist here, you just didn't know it'" (p.204). How far is Farid's criticism true?
2. How does Hosseini encourage us to see Amir in a positive light?

Chapter 20

1. How does Hosseini get the reader to understand the tragedy of the situation?
2. Why is what Amir's mother said so prophetic? (p.219)
3. Is it acceptable to sacrifice one or two children for the greater good? If you were in the place of the orphanage manager what would you have done?
4. How do you expect the novel to end? If you've already finished the novel or seen the movie, how would you end it and why?

Chapter 21

1. What is the most shocking thing about this chapter?
2. Is Farid's humour (p.232-3) appropriate in the context of the executions that follow? What is Hosseini hoping to achieve here?
3. Why do the Taliban become the Talib?
4. How is the tension built up in the description of the executions on pages 235-7?
5. Why does Hosseini include the detail of the separate trucks? (p.237)

Chapter 22

1. Why are the events in this chapter so important in defining Amir's identity?
2. Amir is worried that he's going to 'render Soraya a *biwa*, a widow' (p240). Why does Hosseini use the Afghan word here?
3. Why is it important that Amir notices the track marks on the Talib's arms? (p.241)
4. What difference does it make that Assef is the man that Amir must negotiate with?
5. What hypocrisy does Amir notice? (p.245)
6. How does Amir translate Assef's phrase 'Taking out the garbage' (p.249)?
7. What do you notice about the sentence lengths in the description of the fight on page 252?
8. Who saves Amir? Is this surprising?

Chapter 23

1. Why does this chapter open with so many short sentences?
2. What physical scars does Amir bear from his fight with Assef? Which is most significant and why? (p.259)
3. What do you make of Rahim Khan's letter? Does it make you more or less sympathetic to any of the novel's protagonists?
4. Perhaps the most emotionally powerful words in the novel are present in this chapter. If they are, what is your bid?

Chapter 24

1. What is the significance of Amir's gift of \$2000 to Farid? Does it suggest that he always sees money as the solution and Farid was right to criticise his privileged upbringing or are you more sympathetic? Do you have a sense of what Hosseini wants us to think?
2. How does Hosseini suggest the damage that has been done to Sohrab?
3. What is one positive to come from what happened to Amir and Sohrab in that room with Assef?
4. Why does Hosseini end this chapter the way he does? Do the final lines catch you by surprise or is this juxtaposition now expected and a healthy balance to the usual romance found in novels?

Chapter 25

1. How does Hosseini get the reader to share Amir's desperation?
2. Sohrab doesn't die but doesn't escape unscathed. How does Hosseini suggest the psychological toll of his experience?
3. How does Hosseini show the reader that Amir has become the man his father wanted him to become?
4. This is a very individual story and tragedy but how does this chapter broaden out the perspective?
5. Is the conclusion to the novel a positive one? Does it end as you hoped? Would you have liked a different conclusion?
6. Does the title mean more to you than when you began the novel? Explain your response.

Final thoughts

1. What have you gained by reading this novel?
2. Some people think that novels are romantic and escapist popular fiction. Does *The Kite Runner* fall into these categories?
3. Have you recommended the novel to anyone else? Why or why not?