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Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Kite Runner

by Khaled Hosseini

written by Kelli Kuntz

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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:
 - a. discrimination fosters hatred,
 - b. the past cannot be buried,
 - c. true friends make great sacrifices for each other,
 - d. 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."

Shi'a Muslims believe that the new leader should come from Muhammad's family, specifically his cousin and son-in-law, Ali. Traditionally Shi'a Muslims have refused to recognize any authority in Muslim leaders. They follow Imams, believed to have been appointed by Muhammad himself. "Shi'a" means "a supportive party of people" in Arabic. The Shi'a Muslims are also called followers of "Ahl-al-Bayt," which means "People of the Household." While, at times throughout history, the two sects have peacefully co-existed, at other times, there have been intense rivalry, violence, and accusations of genocide levied by Shi'ites against Sunnis.

THE TALIBAN

The Taliban, based in a Pashtun region of Afghanistan, grew out of a student movement that desired to stabilize and purify the country after years of Soviet occupation and tribal infighting for control once the occupation was over. Once in power, the Taliban imposed strict enforcement of fundamentalist Islamic law, banning movies and music, and forcing women to leave school and hide themselves under burqas that left no skin visible. The Taliban also provided a sanctuary for Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda organization.

A Brief Timeline of Afghan History Relevant to *The Kite Runner*

Afghanistan has a long history of violence—domination by foreign conquerors and disputes among internal factions. By 1870, after the area had been invaded by many Arab conquerors, Islam had taken root. During the 19th century, Britain, hoping to protect its Indian empire from Russia, tried to annex Afghanistan, which resulted in three British-Afghan Wars (1838-42, 1878-80, 1919-21).

1933

Baba was born in 1933, the same year that Zahir Shah became the king of Afghanistan, following the assassination of his father. The new king ruled for forty years and brought a degree of stability and modernity to the country. The first modern university was founded in Afghanistan during this time and a new constitution was introduced in 1964, creating a modern democratic state with free elections, a parliament, civil rights, liberation for women, and universal suffrage.

July 17, 1973

At the beginning of Chapter 5, Ali, Amir, and Hassan are frightened by sudden gunfire. That gunfire represents the “bloodless coup” during which the king’s cousin, Daoud Khan, deposed Zahir Shah. Khan’s regime was called the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, and Khan abolished the monarchy, naming himself “president.” Earlier, Daoud Khan had been forced to resign as Prime Minister during Zahir Shah’s reign. Zahir Shah was in Italy for an eye surgery when Khan staged his coup. At first Daoud Khan promised further modernization of the country. He readily accepted Soviet assistance to strengthen the military in Afghanistan. After a rift in the party, Khan reversed his promises and ran a repressive regime, executing and arresting hundreds of opponents. Baba and his household would have felt the oppression of this regime through the restriction of their freedoms and a general feeling of fear in the population.

Summer 1978

In Chapter 8, which takes place in the summer of 1976, Amir turns 13 and says that it is “Afghanistan’s next to last summer of peace and anonymity.” In the summer of 1978, Daoud Khan was killed in a communist coup. One of the founding members of the Afghan Communist Party, Nur Mohammad Taraki, took control of the country as president. He declared independence from the USSR, which had been supplying the country with arms and playing an active role in its politics. Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, another communist leader, were rivals who fought one another for power.

October 1979

Taraki was secretly executed, and Amin became the new president. Amin was ruthless and has been accused of assassinating thousands of Afghans. The Soviets saw Amin as a threat to a peaceful communist government bordering Soviet Central Asia. Amin was assassinated in December of 1979, and the Soviet Army invaded Afghanistan. The Soviets set up a puppet government in Afghanistan. Lasting until 1989, the Soviet occupation was a disaster for Afghanistan. About a million Afghans were killed as the Soviets attempted to maintain control for its puppet government. Groups of Afghan Islamic fighters, or mujahideen, fought to force the Soviets out. Millions more fled the country. Baba and Amir are two of those who chose to leave Afghanistan during this time.

March 1981

In Chapter 10, Baba and Amir leave Afghanistan in March of 1981, crossing the border into Pakistan, to flee the violent Soviet occupation. By 1982, 2.8 million Afghans had fled to Pakistan. Afghan guerrillas gained control of the countryside, and Soviet troops controlled the cities.

Baba and Amir live in Fremont, California, in the 1980s

In 1984, the United Nations investigated human rights violations in Afghanistan.

In 1986, the mujahideen, tribal warriors resisting the Soviet occupation, were receiving arms from the United States, Britain, and China.

In 1986, Rahim Khan goes to Hazarajat to find Hassan (Chapter 16).

1996

By this time, Rahim Khan and Hassan and his family are living in Baba's house. At the end of Chapter 16, Rahim Khan wants to celebrate the Taliban victory because it puts an end to daily fighting. Hassan, however, is worried about the fate of the Hazaras under Taliban rule. A few weeks later, the Taliban bans kite fighting.

1998

As part of their campaign to purify Afghanistan, the Taliban pursued a policy of "ethnic cleansing" and massacred the Hazaras in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif. Hosseini reveals Hassan's murder in Chapter 17.

More than 1 million Afghans fled to Pakistan, where they suffered in refugee camps.

June 2001

Rahim Khan calls Amir in California. Hosseini begins his novel with this phone call in Chapter 1 and returns to the call in Chapter 14.

September 11, 2001

Hijackers crashed two commercial airplanes into the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and a third into the Pentagon outside Washington, D.C. A fourth, believed to be intended to crash into either the Capitol or the White House, was wrested from the hijackers' control by its passengers and crashed in a field in central Pennsylvania. Thousands of citizens of the United States and dozens of other nations were killed. U.S. officials said that Osama bin Laden, the Saudi exile believed to be hiding in Afghanistan, had planned the attack. United States President George W. Bush and several United States' allies send troops to Afghanistan with the goals of ending the Taliban's regime and destroying the Al Qaeda terrorist organization.

2002

In June, following the fall of the Taliban, the Afghan grand council elected U.S.-backed Hamid Karzai as interim leader. Karzai chose the members of his government, who served until 2004 when presidential elections were held. More than 10.5 million Afghans registered to vote. Karzai was elected with fifty-five percent of the vote. The novel ends in Chapter 25 with Amir and Sohrab at a picnic flying a kite, a clear symbol of hope for both their futures and the future of their homeland.

Narrative Techniques and Devices

LITERARY ALLUSIONS

Les Miserables

When Amir visits the American embassy in an effort to adopt Sohrab, Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* is alluded to twice. Amir says that he feels like Jean Valjean sitting across from Javert.

Translated from French, *Les Miserables* means "the miserable ones." The story follows the life of Jean Valjean, a peasant who has been released from prison, where he served nineteen years for stealing bread for his starving sister and an additional fourteen years for trying to escape. Out of habit, Valjean steals a silver coin from a boy before he realizes what he has done. The theft is reported to the police, and, although he searches for the boy to return the coin, Valjean has become a wanted man again. If caught, he will spend the rest of his life in prison. After six years, Valjean has taken on a new name, Monsieur Madeleine, and become a wealthy business owner and mayor of his town. His physical strength arouses the suspicion of Javert, the town's police inspector, who remembers that Valjean was very strong while in prison. The story continues with Valjean as protagonist and Javert as tireless antagonist. In the end, Valjean finds happiness, and Javert commits suicide after having been saved by Valjean during a student uprising.

When Amir says that he feels like Valjean sitting across from Javert, he is saying that he feels like a criminal facing his staunchest accuser. Raymond Andrews seems utterly indifferent to Amir's plight.

Shahnamah

This is the book that Amir reads to Hassan throughout their childhood and to Sohrab in the hospital. Written around 1,000 C.E., by the Persian poet Ferdowsi, it is considered a masterpiece. It tells the story of Iran, both mythical and historical, from the creation of the world to the Islamic conquest of Iran in the 7th century. Hassan's favorite story in the *Shahnamah* is "Rostam and Sohrab." Hassan named his son after the central character in this story.

Rostam's horse is stolen one day while he is hunting. The king of Samangan asks Rostam to stay with him while he looks for the horse. The king's daughter is overcome with desire for Rostam and sleeps with him. Rostam gives her a clasp to give to their child when he is born. The next day Rostam leaves.

The King's daughter names her son Sohrab. He is physically strong and talented. Sohrab wants to know who his father is and refuses to keep his mother's secret. Sohrab raises an army and declares war so that he can overthrow the king and have the throne for himself. In fighting to protect the king, Rostam kills Sohrab, not knowing that he has killed his son. When he discovers the clasp, he grieves and builds Sohrab a golden tomb.

This story of an illegitimate son is a parallel to Hassan, who does not know who his real father is. Hassan identifies with Sohrab and his desire to claim his rightful place as son to his great father, making the reader suspect that Hassan has some suspicion all along.

FIRST-PERSON CHARACTER NARRATOR

The Kite Runner is told from the first-person character point of view. Amir is the protagonist and the voice of the story. As a reader, it is important to remember two key facts when faced with a first-person narrator who is also the main character in the story:

- The narrator knows the end of the story even as he/she is telling it, and a good storyteller will provide hints throughout the story to foreshadow future events and, possibly, even the ending.
- The narrator can provide only a limited and subjective account of the events he/she is going to narrate. The adult Amir cannot fully know what his childhood friend Hassan may have been thinking and feeling. Even seemingly objective accounts of key events—Hassan’s attack, the fight with Assef—are told as the narrator-protagonist recalls them and colored by the narrator-protagonist’s psychological and emotional state.

FLASHBACK

The adult Amir begins his narration at a crucial point in the overall story and then flashes back to his childhood to provide years of exposition and important details that allow the reader to more fully appreciate the importance the event that opens the novel. The flashback ends in Chapter 14 when the narrative catches up to the moment of the phone call. Hosseini’s choice to provide the exposition in this way—rather than begin the story at its chronological beginning and run a simple narrative thread to the end or divide the one flashback into several smaller flashbacks interspersed throughout the narrative—helps to heighten the suspense. Hosseini begins the story in medias res, with the troubled, adult Amir receiving the telephone call that will redeem him. Then, Hosseini makes his reader wait in suspense for several chapters to learn what the phone call is about. The phone call at the beginning of the novel is a small event—not even a complete chapter—but this early suggestion of some horrible wrong in Amir’s past propels the reader into the story and casts a shadow on even the innocent, joyful scenes of childhood.

Symbolism in *The Kite Runner*

Kites

The novel begins and ends with kites flying in the air. Amir and Hassan spend much of their time flying kites and competing in kite fighting tournaments. The central conflict in the novel emerges on the night of their most successful kite fighting tournament when Hassan is raped while running the last kite for Amir. The kites represent their friendship and their childhood. After the rape, there is no more kite fighting, which is eventually banned by the Taliban. The innocence of their childhood is taken from them. Their friendship is shattered, so the kites disappear until Amir finds a way to redeem himself, “to be good again.”

Brown Corduroy Pants

The image of the corduroy pants haunts Amir for years. He sees the pants in a pile while standing in the alley, too afraid to intervene while Assef rapes Hassan. These pants are a reminder of what happened to Hassan and Amir’s cowardice. Amir carries his guilt over not intervening that day for years and is reminded every time he sees the image of the corduroy pants in his memory.

The Sheep

The sheep is sacrificed every year as a commemoration of Abraham’s obedience to God. Hassan and Sohrab are both compared to this sheep, Hassan in his resignation and willingness to sacrifice himself repeatedly for Amir; and Sohrab in that the sheep’s eyes are outlined with mascara, just as Sohrab’s are when he saves Amir from Assef.

The Pomegranate Tree

Hassan and Amir spend hours under the tree reading and playing. They carve their names into the tree as children, and it is one of the first places that Amir wants to visit when he returns to Kabul as an adult. Like the kites, the tree represents their friendship. As adults, both Amir and Hassan comment on its fruitless condition, a symbol of the life that has been drained from their friendship.

Practice Free Response Items

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 1

The physical description of a literary character often helps the reader understand that character's motivations and personality. In a well-organized essay, analyze Hosseini's description of one of his characters' faces and discuss how these descriptions contribute to the reader's understanding of that characters. Do not merely provide a character description.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 2

A character's search for redemption is a common theme in world literature. In a well-organized essay, analyze Hosseini's development of this theme in *The Kite Runner* and discuss how it controls the plot, the characters, and the structure of the novel. Avoid plot summary.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 3

The plots of many novels and plays rely on coincidence to tie up loose ends in the resolution. In a well-organized essay, analyze Hosseini's use of coincidence in *The Kite Runner*, and discuss the effectiveness of this strategy in bringing the novel to a satisfactory closure.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 4

Authors often provide elaborate details of foreign or historic cultures in order to establish setting and characterization. In a well-organized essay, analyze Hosseini's use of the details of the Afghan culture in *The Kite Runner* and the effect these details have on the setting, characterization, and overall meaning of the novel.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 5

Carefully read Chapter 1 of *The Kite Runner*, in which Hosseini establishes that a significant portion of the novel is going to be a flashback. Then write a well-reasoned and -supported essay in which you analyze the expectations this device sets for the reader and how Hosseini promises to fulfill those expectations.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 6

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 7 that begins, “A Memory: Did you know Hassan and you fed from the same breast,” and ends, “They shimmer in the afternoon light.” Then write a well-reasoned essay in which you explain why Hosseini places two memories and a dream immediately before the episode in which Hassan is raped. How do these passages help the reader understand Amir and the overall meaning of the novel?

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 7

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 7 that begins, “Wali and Kamal nodded. They looked relieved,” and ends, “I imagine the animal sees that its imminent demise is for a higher purpose. This is the look.” Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain how Hosseini creates a direct parallel between Hassan and the sheep and how this parallel develops character and conveys the significance of Hassan’s experience in the alley.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 8

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 20 that begins, “The man who let us in introduced himself as Zaman, the director of the orphanage,” and ends, “I saw he had put on his broken glasses.” Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze Hosseini’s use of irony in the description of the orphanage and the lives of the children. What effect is this device intended to have on both the character and the reader?

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE ITEM 9

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 21 that begins, “We find the little turtle behind tangles of sweetbrier in the yard,” and ends, “We are Hassan and Amir, famed adventurers and the world’s greatest explorers.” Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain how Hosseini creates irony in this passage and why this is significant to the work as a whole.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1-5

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 7 that begins with the narrator's saying, "After another thirty minutes, only four kites remained. And I was still flying," and ends with, "... seeing Baba on that roof, proud of me at last." Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

- The mood created by Hosseini's description of the crowd watching the kite fighting can best be described as
 - excited.
 - nervous.
 - cheerful.
 - fearful.
 - peaceful.
- When Amir says that he smells salvation and redemption he most likely means that
 - he will be able to forgive himself for being a coward.
 - his sins will be forgiven, and, if there is a God, he will be saved.
 - his father will forgive him for not being the son of his dreams if he wins.
 - Hassan will forgive him for his cruelty and will run the kite for him.
 - Ali will forgive him for being a coward and will let him play with Hassan.
- When Amir says that he has "endured too much, come too far," he means that he has endured
 - responsibility for Hassan as well as the tortures of Assef.
 - his father's disappointment as well as the pain of the glass string.
 - the boredom of the school year and then the very cold winter.
 - his grief over the loss of his mother and his frustrated writing career.
 - his own weakness as well as Ali's teasing.
- What mood does Hosseini create by using short sentences and sentence fragments as the kite fight comes to an end?
 - fearful
 - desperate
 - anticipatory
 - exhilarated
 - frustrated
- What is ironic about the simile comparing the crowd chanting in support of Amir to Romans chanting for gladiators at the end of this passage?
 - Amir has already cut himself with the glass string.
 - The Romans have nothing to do with 20th-century Afghanistan.
 - This is a simple kite fight that will not involve killing.
 - The crowd knows that Amir is considered weak by his father.
 - Amir already knows that he will win.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 6-10

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 7 that begins with the narrator's saying, "The next morning, as he brewed black tea for breakfast," and ends with, "I jerked the string twice, our usual signal, and Hassan tossed the kite." Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

6. Amir is having trouble sleeping because he is
 - A. sleeping in a bad bed.
 - B. having nightmares.
 - C. nervous about kite flying.
 - D. worried about the mullahs at school.
 - E. excited about his birthday.

7. The description of the "blameless" sky at the beginning of the passage is ironic on this day because
 - A. Amir will feel much guilt by evening.
 - B. Baba blames Amir for his mother's death.
 - C. Amir blames Hassan for Baba's indifference.
 - D. Baba feels guilty about fathering Hassan.
 - E. Hassan and Amir are blameless.

8. Amir tries not to look at his rooftop because he
 - A. needs to keep his concentration.
 - B. does not want Hassan to see his nerves.
 - C. is worried about a snowstorm.
 - D. feels distracted by the kites.
 - E. is worried about what Baba is thinking.

9. Who or what is the monster to which Hassan refers?
 - A. Baba
 - B. Amir's fear
 - C. Hassan's confidence
 - D. Amir
 - E. Assef

10. The simile describing Hassan holding "the kite high over his head, like an Olympic athlete showing his gold medal" is ironic because Hassan is
 - A. going to be beaten badly today.
 - B. not a talented athlete.
 - C. not good at flying kites.
 - D. very fearful.
 - E. thinking that Amir will fail.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 11-15

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 8 that begins with the narrator's saying, "I turned thirteen that summer of 1976," and ends with, "It was a biography of Hitler. I threw it amid a tangle of weeds." Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

11. Amir feels bitter about his birthday party because he
 - A. is angry at Assef.
 - B. does not like all of the fuss and preparation.
 - C. is shy in front of so many people.
 - D. is angry that Hassan is at the party.
 - E. knows that the people came for Baba.

12. When Hosseini describes Assef as "looming over both [his parents]" and "their son frightened them" the reader is to conclude that Assef is
 - A. tall.
 - B. powerful.
 - C. cruel.
 - D. intelligent.
 - E. angry.

13. Assef goes out of his way to tell Baba that he plays center forward because "you get to score more that way," making the reader think that Assef is
 - A. talented.
 - B. a team player.
 - C. depressed.
 - D. arrogant.
 - E. a team leader.

14. What is ironic about Baba's calling Amir's tormentor Assef jan?
 - A. Assef jan is not his name.
 - B. Baba does not like Assef.
 - C. The two are not related.
 - D. Baba does not say Amir jan.
 - E. Baba knows all about Assef.

15. What does Hosseini most likely foreshadow when he alludes to the life of Hitler through Assef's gift to Amir?
 - A. the upheaval of Amir's life
 - B. the arrival of Hassan's mother
 - C. Amir's trip back to Afghanistan
 - D. the death of Baba
 - E. Amir's frustration

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 16-20

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 10 that begins with the narrator's saying, "We pulled up to the checkpoint at Mahipar twenty minutes later," and ends with, ". . .the young woman's husband suddenly stood and did something I'd seen many others do before him: He kissed Baba's hand." Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

16. The Russian soldier singing an old Afghan wedding song is ironic in this situation because he is
 - A. about to attempt a rape.
 - B. Russian.
 - C. not married.
 - D. afraid of the second Russian officer.
 - E. a professional.

17. When the Russian soldier is described as having a "face like a bulldog's," the reader is most likely to conclude that he is
 - A. funny.
 - B. cute.
 - C. mean.
 - D. playful.
 - E. attractive.

18. As Baba, Amir, and the others wait to cross the border, Hosseini describes the "bone-colored moon" that "hung in the sky." What tone does this create?
 - A. peaceful
 - B. sorrowful
 - C. playful
 - D. fearful
 - E. restful

19. Baba is described as eclipsing the moonlight when he stands to defend the young wife, making the reader conclude that he is
 - A. heroic.
 - B. angry.
 - C. tall.
 - D. intimidating.
 - E. mean.

20. When the young woman's husband kisses Baba's hand, Amir says that he has seen this happen many times, making the reader conclude that Baba
 - A. frightens people.
 - B. inspires gratitude.
 - C. is related to royalty.
 - D. makes people ashamed.
 - E. demands respect.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 21-25

Carefully read the passage from Chapter 24 that begins with the narrator's saying, "The lawn outside the American embassy in Islamabad was neatly mowed..." and ends with, "Suicide,' she whispered." Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

21. The purpose of the description of the secretary at the American embassy and Hassan's conversation with her is most likely to
 - A. provide hope for a future in America.
 - B. make Amir and Sohrab nervous.
 - C. highlight the perceived flaws of the Afghan culture.
 - D. remind Amir of home.
 - E. make Sohrab miss his mother.

22. When Amir describes shaking Raymond's hand as "squeezing a sparrow" the reader is most likely to conclude that Raymond is
 - A. beautiful.
 - B. musical.
 - C. fragile.
 - D. flighty.
 - E. happy.

23. Hosseini's multiple allusions to Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* in this passage make the reader conclude that Amir
 - A. feels as desperate as Jean Valjean.
 - B. feels like a criminal like Jean Valjean.
 - C. dislikes Raymond Andrews.
 - D. is running from Raymond Andrews.
 - E. is miserable like Raymond Andrews.

24. When Amir wonders whether Andrews had "ever tried those little hands of his at poker," he is most likely saying that Andrews is
 - A. a trickster.
 - B. dishonest.
 - C. a gambler.
 - D. expressionless.
 - E. intelligent.

25. The surprising revelation about Raymond's daughter at the end of this passage changes the reader's and Amir's perception of him by making the reader
 - A. dislike him even more.
 - B. understand his strangeness.
 - C. frustrated with him.
 - D. think it was his own fault.
 - E. think he is even more bird-like.

Multiple Choice Answers and Explanations

1. The crowd is quite caught up in the action of the kites. While they do seem to be celebrating and enjoying the event, the “tension in the air” indicates that they are not simply cheerful (C) or peaceful (E). They are chanting and cheering, showing more investment in the outcome than simple cheer or peace. There is tension in the air, but the crowd is also “stomping their feet, clapping, whistling, and chanting.” These are not signs of nervousness (B) or fear (D). **They are an excited (A) crowd of spectators chanting in support of the final two players. The answer therefore is (A).**
2. **Amir is most concerned with his father’s opinion of him. He sees a win in this kite fight as the opportunity he needs to win his father’s favor. (C) is the answer because for Amir a kind word from his father would save him and redeem him. It is Baba on the roof who Amir is trying not to think about as he works his kite. The final few lines of the passage indicated that Amir is not at this time concerned with his own forgiveness (A), Hassan’s (D), or Ali’s (E). “Then I saw Baba on our roof. He was standing on the edge, pumping both of his fists. Hollering and clapping. And that right there was the single greatest moment of my twelve years of life, seeing Baba on that roof, proud of me at last.” Amir is also not thinking about his salvation in a religious sense (B). His only concern for God in this passage is that He might help Amir win the fight.**
3. **Again, Amir is most concerned with his father’s favorable opinion. He has endured his father’s disappointment and much shame at not being the son his father would like him to be. Additionally, Amir has been standing in the cold all day, staring at the sky, and slicing his hands on the glass string. He has endured his father’s dissatisfaction as well as the physical pain of the competition. The answer is (B). Amir does not consider it a trial to put up with Hassan (A). He has endured the boredom of school but enjoys the winter (C). Amir has not grieved his mother tremendously, having been so young when she died. Her death is not nearly as tragic to him as his father’s desire for him to be different (D). Amir does not feel that his own weaknesses are as difficult to bear as his relationship with his father. He also does not suffer much teasing from Ali (E).**
4. At the end of the kite fight Amir is anything but fearful (A), desperate (B), or frustrated (E). Amir’s opposition is described as “trying desperately to maneuver out of the jam...” while Amir says only that “...I didn’t let go. I held position.” **He is in control of the situation, and the short sentences and fragments create a breathless excitement as he is on the verge of winning. The reader is held at bay for a short time as each movement is calmly and concisely described. We anxiously anticipate the outcome. Therefore, anticipation (C) is the answer. The exhilaration comes a few lines after the passage ends when Amir does win the competition.**

5. **The violence of the Roman gladiators seems out of place in a kite fight. The two are hardly comparable, making (C) the answer because the parallel to the violence of the gladiators is so unexpected.** Amir has cut himself all day (A), but this has nothing to do with the Roman gladiators and thus cannot be the answer. The Romans gladiators are not so out of place when describing the violence of 20th-century Afghanistan (B). Amir actually goes to an arena and witnesses a violent stoning later in the novel that is not unlike something one might expect of the gladiators of Rome. The crowd in general has no idea of Amir's relationship with his father (D), so this cannot be the answer. Amir is certain that he will win and is not really paying attention to the chanting, but this makes it more unnecessary than ironic (E).
6. **Amir is nervous about kite flying. He snaps at Hassan and feels bad about it but says that "Hassan understood I was just nervous." He is worried that he will fail and disappoint Baba. The answer is (C).** There is no description of Amir's bed, and based on the wealth of the family, it seems reasonable to conclude that he has a very comfortable bed (A). It is Hassan who describes a dream about the monster in the lake and not Amir (B). Amir does describe himself as being "caught between Baba and the mullahs at school," but he feels free to make up his own mind about God and is not losing sleep over the matter. He is not even in school during this icy season (D). There has not yet been any mention of Amir's birthday. It does happen soon after this passage in the novel, but it does not seem to be on his mind yet (E).
7. **The irony is that the terrible rape of Hassan and the cowardice of Amir will both occur under that same sky as Amir's victory. By evening Amir will be filled with a horrific guilt that will follow him for many years to come. He will blame himself for the destruction of Hassan's happiness and many of the events that will tear life as he knows it to pieces. The answer is (A).** Baba clearly is frustrated with Amir, but the reader is never certain that he blames Amir for the death of his mother. Also, this event is far removed from the events of this day (B). Amir may be jealous of Hassan and the Baba's obvious love for him, but he does not seem to blame Hassan. He is grateful to Hassan for his encouragement as they prepare for the kite fighting (C). Baba does feel guilty about fathering Hassan and then having him grow up as a servant, but this does not come up until much later in the novel. There is no reason to assume that Baba's guilt has anything to do with the "blameless sky" (D). There would be no irony if Hassan and Amir were blameless. We may forgive Amir his cowardice due to his young age, but the fact remains that he bears some responsibility for not stepping in to help his friend in need. Amir is not blameless today (E).

8. Amir says that “Baba was on the roof, watching me. I felt his glare on me like the heat of a blistering sun. This would be a failure on a grand scale, even for me.” Amir is focused on his fear of failure and what Baba will think of him if he does fail. The answer is (E). Amir does need to keep his concentration, but the above quotation shows that his real reason for avoiding looking at the roof is Baba (A). Hassan knows that Amir is nervous. He has done what he can to calm Amir, so there is no reason for Amir to try to hide anything from Hassan at this point (B). There is no mention of a snowstorm. The streets do glisten “with fresh snow,” but the sky is a “blameless blue,” no reason to think there will be snow (C). Amir is not distracted by the kites. They are where he *should* be focusing his attention (D).
9. As Amir and Hassan work through Amir’s nerves, Hassan reminds Amir that there is “no monster, just a beautiful day.” Amir is nervous because he does not want to fail and disappoint Baba, making it clear that the monster is Amir’s own fear of failure. The answer is (B). Baba is cheering for Amir and Hassan. He has done everything that he can do to help them succeed. He is not a monster (A). Hassan’s confidence saves the day and gives Amir the courage to compete. He is not a monster for Amir (C). Amir may be his own monster, but more specifically, it is his fear rather than himself in general (D). Assef is certainly a monster, but he does not play a role in this passage and only becomes important later in the day. Amir’s nerves come from his own fear (E).
10. The irony of Hassan holding the kite like an Olympic athlete is that he will be so badly beaten today. The joy of his life will be destroyed. What will happen to him only a few hours from this moment will haunt him for the rest of his life. He seems like such a confident champion right now, but that will be torn away from him today. The answer is (A). Amir describes Hassan as a natural athlete while they are chasing a kite and talks about his skill as a kite fighter. Hassan is skilled in both areas (B and C). Far from fearful, it is Hassan’s confidence that they would succeed that helps Amir. Hassan shows no fear through the entire competition and does everything he can to give Amir courage and to cheer his efforts and show Amir that he believes they can win (D and E).
11. Early in the passage, Amir comments that he does not know most of the invited guests. He then realizes that “they weren’t really coming for me. It was my birthday, but I knew who the real star of the show was.” Amir is talking about Baba as the star of the show. Thus, the answer is (E). Amir’s anger at Assef certainly makes him grumpy, but that has nothing to do with the party. Amir is even shocked to see Assef at the party when he and his parents arrive (A). Amir stands in awe of the party preparation, talking about the many people Baba hires to get ready, but this extravagance does not make him bitter (B). Amir is a little overwhelmed by the number of people, but he does not choose to escape the party until he has encountered Assef. He is feeling bitter about the guest list and his father’s popularity with so many people long before Assef arrives (C). Amir is angry that Hassan has to serve his tormentors at the party and is perhaps a little uncomfortable with Hassan’s presence. Again, his bitterness surfaces before he encounters Hassan (D).

12. **Assef comes to the party “as if he was the parent, and they [his parents] his children.” He seems in control and jokes confidently with Baba, while his parents are small and seem nervous and frightened by their own son. Clearly, Assef is very powerful. The answer is (B).** Assef is tall, as he is described as looming over his parents, but there is more to see here. He is not just taller. He makes them afraid and is “looming,” implying much more than simple height (A). The reader knows that Assef is cruel based on his treatment of Amir and Hassan, but the description in this passage does not necessarily imply cruelty, just power (C). There is nothing here to imply intelligence in Assef except that he does have “wit to joke with an adult.” The descriptions show his control over his parents rather than real intelligence (D). Assef is anything but angry in this passage. He seems very proud of himself and pleased with his actions. He seems happy to show off for Baba and to continue to make Amir uncomfortable (E).
13. **Assef is an incredibly arrogant character. He wants to be the center of attention and in control at all times. The reader can see this quality in Assef’s actions and words throughout the novel. Certainly his desire to be the team member who gets to score displays this quality clearly. The answer is (D).** Assef’s desire to score does not show his talent (A) and actually implies that he is not a team player but rather a player who thinks primarily about himself (B). Assef seems proud of his accomplishments, bragging to Baba and joking with him. He is not depressed by any means (C). Again, Assef’s desire to be the person who gets to score does not mean that he is a team leader. It may actually imply the opposite (E).
14. **To add “jan” to the end of a name makes it a term of endearment. Baba does this for Assef but not his own son. The irony is that Baba shows more tenderness when addressing the son of a friend than his own son Amir. The answer is (D).** To call call him Assef jan is perfectly acceptable and appropriate (A). Rahim Khan calls Amir Amir jan, proving that one does not have to be related to use the term (C). Baba seems to be impressed with Assef. The narrator describes him as “the embodiment of every parent’s dream” (B). Baba does not know all about Assef. The terrible things that he has done both to Amir and Hassan are kept a secret from him (E).
15. **The gift of Hitler’s biography is a terrible hint of what is to come. Just as Hitler’s vision for humanity caused horrendous and unprecedented human suffering, Assef’s actions will create complete upheaval in Amir’s life. Assef’s rape of Hassan creates the tension that leads to Hassan’s departure. When Amir runs into Assef years later, Amir ends up in the hospital fighting for his life, making his rescue of Sohrab much more difficult. The answer is (A).** Hassan’s mother is a positive development in his life, making it unlikely to be foreshadowed by Hitler (B). Assef and Amir do encounter one another when Amir returns to Afghanistan, but Hitler’s biography foreshadows more than just the trip (C). Baba’s death is a sad event, but not related to the war or Assef in any way. He is old and sick and ready to die (D). Amir certainly shows frustration when he opens Assef’s gift, but a reference to such a very dark time with so much violence and chaos foreshadows something much more significant than simple frustration (E).

16. **The Russian soldier sings a sweet, romantic wedding song moments before demanding the right to rape a young wife. The irony is the sweet romance placed right before the cruelty of the man's actions. The answer is (A).** The soldier is Russian and is singing an Afghan wedding song, but that is not irony because it is not necessarily unexpected or surprising (B). The text does not indicate the marital status of the soldier (C). The Russian soldier shows no fear in this passage. At the end Amir hears him singing the wedding song again, high on some drug (D). The text does not describe the soldier aside from calling him a Russian soldier. If the Russian army would call him a professional, he certainly does not act like one. The second Russian officer is far more professional than the soldier (E).
17. **The Russian soldier is high and is cruel in his treatment of those trying to cross the border. He takes advantage of his power. The best answer is that he is mean (C).** The soldier does not display any humor during the passage. No one finds him funny because his cruelty creates a very serious situation (A). The soldier's appearance is not described beyond this simile and the fact that he has a "cigarette dangling from the side of his mouth." His character, immoral behavior, and abuse make it very unlikely that we are to picture him as being cute, playful, or attractive (B, D, and E).
18. **It is unusual to describe the moon as "bone-colored." Remember that these people are afraid for their lives as they cross the border, and the purity of a young wife is being threatened. The bone-colored moon may bring to mind the potential death of the characters, representing their fears. The answer is (D).** In addition to analysis of the unusual description, the best way to answer this question is to look at the context. There is nothing peaceful, playful, or restful about this passage. The men are "curt" in their conversations. The Russian soldier shouts at the other men, making them "flinch." There is tension in the air, making (A), (C), and (E) incorrect answers. The young woman does cry in this passage, but she is fearful of what will happen rather than sorrowful about something what has happened. The entire passage is about determining how much damage the Russian soldier will do before allowing them to cross the border. There is no grief yet, only fear (B).
19. **Baba is a tall man. Amir describes him as having legs like tree trunks, but in this context it seems to mean more than just height. To eclipse the moonlight seems to give Baba more than natural stature and strength. He seems to have power over even the moon. Baba is not just tall (C), he is larger than life in this passage. His courage makes him a hero to his son and to the other passengers; he is idealized in this passage. The answer is (A).** Baba is angry, but this does not seem to have anything to do with eclipsing the moonlight. His anger does not make him tall or effect his relationship to the moonlight in any way (B). Baba is not able to intimidate the soldier in this passage. He is threatening and demanding that the soldier behave honorably, but the soldier proceeds undaunted and would shoot Baba without fear if the second Russian soldier did not intervene (D). Baba is anything but mean in this passage. He sees the fear in the young woman and her husband and reacts to protect them. Baba is the voice of the weak and defenseless in this passage (E).

20. **People kiss Baba's hand in gratitude. Amir returns to this idea later in the novel at Baba's funeral as the mourners pause to tell Amir all that Baba had done for them. He is a gruff but very generous man who seems to attempt to do the right thing in every situation. The answer is (B).** Baba may frighten people. He is a powerful man, but certainly this man is not frightened. Baba has just saved his wife. This kiss is filled with gratitude and implies that the same is true every time Baba's hand is kissed (A). There is a photo in the family of Baba's father with a king, but there is no relation (C). Baba might use shame to protect people or to make people do what he thinks is right. He does ask the Russian soldier where his shame is, but the question has little effect on the soldier. Again, the husband is filled with gratitude, not shame. The kiss implies only a grateful heart (D). Baba does command respect due to his courageous actions and goodness, but he does not demand it except maybe from the soldier who seems to respect no one. People kiss Baba because they respect him of their own free will, not because he demands that they do (E).
21. **The secretary at the American embassy is dressed like an American woman, "first woman I'd seen in weeks dressed in something other than a burqa or a shalwar-kameez." She is friendly, happy, and polite. Most important, she mistakes Sohrab for Amir's son. She represents what they are hoping for, a peaceful and happy life together. She gives them hope in America. The answer is (A).** Amir and Sohrab are both nervous, but the secretary does not create or foster this feeling. Amir actually reminds Sohrab to relax, "these people are friendly" (B). The secretary certainly does highlight cultural differences. She is dressed like an American woman and is working outside the home, but she does not imply any judgment and neither does Amir in his descriptions (C). If the secretary reminds Amir of home or Sohrab of his mother they do not say anything about it. The narrator makes no reference either to Amir's home or Sohrab's mother. They both seem quite focused on the meeting before them and the hopes that they have for their future together (D and E).
22. **Raymond Andrews is described as a "short fellow with small hands." The reader learns later that he is grieving the death of his daughter, so he does seem pretty fragile in size and stature as well as emotionally. The answer is (C).** We have no reason to believe that Andrews is beautiful. He is described as being well kept with "nails perfectly trimmed," but there is no description that would make us think he is a beauty (A). Andrews does not sing during the passage. He is described as speaking in a "deep baritone," but a handshake has nothing to do with his singing voice (B). Andrews seems quite grounded and focused on the business before him and observant. Far from flighty, Andrews seems to be a very serious man (D). There is no happiness in Andrews. He is not described as smiling or seeming to take much joy in anything. The most obvious reason for his seriousness is the revelation that his daughter has committed suicide. He is described as a bird only to show size and fragility. This is a grieving man (E).

23. **Amir does feel desperate and has gone to the authorities to help him save Sohrab. Like Jean Valjean, he does not expect to receive much help from the authorities. The answer is (A).** Amir compares himself to Jean Valjean sitting across the desk from Javert, but then he reminds himself that this man is here to help him. Amir does not indicate that he feels criminal, only worried and in need of significant assistance (B). Amir says that he does not like the way that Raymond Andrews “barely gave Sohrab a glance” and the way he does not look at Amir when speaking to him, but he does not say anything about disliking Andrews in any other way (C). Amir has contacted Andrews in the hope that he can assist with the adoption of Sohrab. He is not running away from Andrews and leaves the office only when the meeting is clearly over (D). Andrews seems undoubtedly miserable, but Amir still has hope and is excited about the possibility of adopting Sohrab. He is not miserable and does not compare himself to Andrews in this way (E).
24. **“He turned to me and nodded. I tried to read his face and couldn’t. I wondered if he’d ever tried those little hands at poker.” Amir is saying that Andrews would be a great gambler because it is so difficult to see what he is thinking. His face does not convey any of his thoughts. He is expressionless. The answer is (D).** There is no evidence to indicate that Andrews is trying to trick Amir or lie to him, and Amir does not accuse him of doing so. On the contrary, Andrews seems to be quite forthright during the conversation, telling Amir the truth of how difficult the adoption will be even though it will be a painful truth to hear (A and B). Hosseini talks about gambling here only to display the lack of expression in Andrews’s face. There is no other reference to gambling and no indication that Andrews may be a gambler (C). Andrews does seem to be reasonably intelligent. He knows the law and communicates clearly and effectively, but this has nothing to do with the comment about playing poker. A great poker player must have an expressionless face, and that is the point of Amir’s comment (E).
25. **The frustration and dislike that Amir and the reader feel for Andrews are lessened, if not completely dispelled, at the end of the passage when we learn that Andrews’s daughter committed suicide. Suddenly we are willing to be forgiving of his strangeness, his emotionless behavior, his obsession with the tomato plants, and his fragility. We can understand him and feel sympathy for him. The answer is (B).** As discussed above, the strength of our dislike and frustration are lessened with the surprising and tragic revelation at the end of the passage. We no longer feel dislike or frustration (A and C). Andrews makes a comment that might mean that he bears some blame for his daughter’s suicide. He says to Amir that “It’s a dangerous business, making promises to kids,” as if he has some experience in this area. The comment seems ominous, but this is just a guess, and there is no solid evidence that we are to blame Andrews for his daughter’s suicide. In any case, the comments from the secretary do not point in this direction, and she certainly shows nothing but sympathy for Andrews (D). The reader may find Andrews more emotionally fragile when we discover his sad loss, but we do not link this back to the sparrow comment from earlier in the passage. There are no more bird descriptions at the end of the passage (E).

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?

Beginning the story in the present informs the reader that, even the scenes from the narrator's childhood, are being narrated by an adult who has already "survived" whatever occurred in his childhood. Also, however, beginning the narration in the "present" with the telephone call establishes a level of suspense that would not be present if the narrator had chosen to begin his story at the "beginning," with his childhood in Afghanistan.

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

The reader knows that the narrator lives in San Francisco and that he seems outwardly healthy. We know this because he is able to take a walk in a park in San Francisco. Perhaps the most important thing we know is that Amir is haunted by his past. He says that he has been "peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years." He has been called to Pakistan to find "a way to make things good again."

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

The kites create a happy and hopeful mood. Hosseini uses the words "dance" and "floating side by side" to describe the kites. He compares them to "a pair of eyes looking down on the city," and as Amir watches them, he is reminded of his friend Hassan, who says, "For you, a thousand times over." The kites represent the friendship between Amir and Hassan.

Chapter 2

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

Hassan is a well-behaved child, not wanting to disobey or upset his father, but he is also a generous friend, never denying Amir if he really asked for something. Hassan is also loyal, never telling his father that it is really Amir who gets them into trouble. Hassan has a perfect face. He is described as a Chinese doll except for his harelip, where the "doll maker's instrument may have slipped, or perhaps he has simply grown tired and careless."

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

There is strong racial prejudice against the Hazaras in Afghanistan. They are of Mongol descent and look a little like Chinese people. Also, many are Shi'a Muslims while the Pashtuns, like Amir, are Sunni. When Amir shows his teacher a full chapter on Hazara history, the teacher snickers and claims that the Shi'a are good at "passing themselves as martyrs." This racial prejudice has made the Hazaras so marginal in the society that the teacher does not see any need to teach their history in any depth.

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

Amir and Hassan have grown up as best friends, almost brothers even though there is an obvious class and racial difference. They have done everything together, but Hassan then acts as Amir's servant.

There is an emphasis placed on the brotherhood that exists "between people who have fed from the same breast, a kinship that not even time could break."

Chapter 3

1. How does Hosseini use hyperbole in his descriptions of Baba? What can the reader conclude about Baba based on these descriptions?

Baba is described as if he were legendary. Not only does local lore have it that Baba once wrestled a bear, but everyone believes the story. The words used to describe Baba make him seem larger than life. His nickname is Mr. Hurricane. Amir says that Baba is a force of nature, a "towering specimen, hands that looked capable of uprooting a willow tree, and a black glare that would 'drop the devil to his knees begging for mercy.'" It is impossible to ignore Baba, and attention shifts to "him like sunflowers turning to the sun." This exaggerated description of Baba gives him his strength and power in the reader's mind. The hyperbole makes the reader assume that Baba is a well-respected and capable man. He is described as someone to be admired.

2. Why does Amir lie about Hassan's health when Baba wants to take them to Ghangha Lake? What is the significance of this lie in terms of developing the reader's understanding of Amir?

Amir is jealous of Baba's regard for Hassan and would like to spend the day alone with Baba so that he does not have to share the attention with Hassan. Amir remembers the time that Hassan was able to skip his rock more times than Amir, and he envies the pat on the back that Hassan received from Baba. He wants to keep all of the pats from Baba to himself. This action does not show Amir in a positive light. In this light, the reader sees Amir's weaknesses: his jealousy, selfishness, his insecurity about his father's love.

3. What does Baba mean when he says that Amir has “confused what you’re learning in school with actual education”? What are the implications of this statement?

Baba is not a conformist. He does not believe in God and only tolerates the religious notions of the people around him. The Mullahs who teach Amir in school teach from a strict religious perspective, and Baba is encouraging Amir to learn from other sources. He invalidates what Amir learns in school and says that his education will come from life outside of school, foreshadowing the hard lesson that Amir will learn in an alley in Kabul.

Chapter 4

1. What does the pomegranate tree symbolize to Amir and Hassan? How does Hosseini create this symbol?

The tree represents the friendship between Amir and Hassan. The two boys claim it as their own and often climb it, eat its fruit, and sit under it to share stories. The tree is the site of many of their childhood adventures. They even carve into it, “Amir and Hassan, the sultans of Kabul.” The tree is part of their imaginary kingdom.

2. What is ironic about Hassan’s ability to solve riddles? What is the implication of this irony?

Amir is the one with the education and the ability to read, yet Hassan has a much better natural ability to solve riddles, a sad irony for Amir, who stops sharing riddles with Hassan so that he will not be bested by Hassan any more. The implication is that Hassan is intuitive and clever despite his lack of education. We see this throughout the novel in Hassan’s ability to know what Amir is thinking and feeling, to know just what to say and do and to always be able to see things from Amir’s perspective.

3. How and why does Hosseini create in Amir a complicated protagonist, someone with whom the reader can sympathize while despising at the same time?

The reader sympathizes with Amir’s struggles with Baba, who is very hard on him. We feel for Amir as he listens to Baba telling Rahim Khan about his disappointment in Amir, but Amir’s treatment of Hassan complicates the reader’s sympathies. Amir ridicules Hassan for his illiteracy, gives Hassan incorrect information, and tries to make up for his cruelty by giving Hassan an old shirt or a broken toy. This complex protagonist sets up the conflict in the novel. Amir has two sides, and he knows it. He is jealous and selfish, but he feels guilty about his selfish actions. The novel centers around this conflict as Amir tries to reconcile these conflicting emotions in himself.

4. Why does time slow down for Amir when he shows his story to Baba? How does Hosseini create this effect?

Amir is waiting for Baba to be enthusiastic about his writing and at least offer to read it. Baba is clearly not interested in reading Amir's story and offers nothing. Their relationship hangs in the balance for a brief time that seems like an eternity to Amir. Rahim Khan comes to the rescue and shows sincere interest in Amir's writing. The scene while Amir is waiting is very dramatic. Hosseini slows time by using words like "plodding" and "eternity." He says that the "air grew heavy, damp, and almost solid." Amir says that he "was breathing bricks." These language choices make the time seem to slow to a crawl, increasing the tension as Amir waits.

Chapter 5

1. How does Hosseini's description of Assef let the reader know immediately that he is the antagonist?

Assef is closely associated with his brass knuckles and is described with words like "savagery," "relentless," and "sociopath." The light in his eyes is "not entirely sane," and he "grin[s] as he pummel[s] that poor kid unconscious." Assef mocks Amir mercilessly, and the reader hates him from the first description. Hosseini makes it immediately clear that Assef represents hatred and evil in this novel.

2. What does Assef foreshadow when he talks about his admiration for Hitler?

Assef's admiration for Hitler disturbingly foreshadows Assef's own path in life as well as the violent future of Afghanistan and the ethnic cleansing of the Hazaras.

3. How does Hassan's harelip foster Amir's jealousy of him? Explain this irony.

The irony is that Amir is jealous of Hassan's harelip, a birth defect, because Baba shows his affection for Hassan by paying a doctor to fix the lip as a birthday gift to Hassan. Amir wishes that he had been born with "some kind of scar that would beget Baba's sympathy." Amir says that Hassan had not done anything to earn Baba's affections, and Amir is jealous of the freedom with which Baba shows his affection.

4. What is suggested by the affection that Baba shows to Hassan?

Baba has a reason for loving Hassan more than the master of a household would normally love a servant. Some kind of closer relationship between Baba and Hassan is suggested.

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?

The mood at the beginning of Chapter 6 is great joy. Like an American student enjoying the first day of summer break, Amir is overjoyed by the onset of winter because it is the end of his school year. The schools are closed for the icy season. The details of imagery are ironic. Amir describes the snow as being so white that it burns his eyes and the air as so chilly that he hugs himself against the chill, yet the description is filled with anticipation. Despite these less than pleasant details, Amir says that he is smiling and calling for Hassan to come out and see the snow. He describes the sky as seamless and blue. Even though it is snowy and cold, Amir's reaction helps the reader catch his excitement. The second paragraph confirms Amir's joy with a list of all of the activities that he will get to do with Hassan all winter.

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?

Hosseini has provided many hints since the beginning of the novel that there is more to Amir and Hassan's relationship than the reader currently knows. The reader cannot yet really know what it is that Amir finds so "familiar" in Hassan, but this is another element of Hosseini's building to a surprise revelation at some key point in the story.

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?

Kite fighting is the one thing that Amir and Baba have in common. Amir likes to read poetry and write stories. Baba likes soccer and other sports. Amir is quiet and fearful. Baba is loud and fearless. Their interests overlap only with kite fighting. Amir sees kite fighting as a way to make Baba proud and to form the strong bond that he desires. Baba says casually that he thinks Amir will win the tournament this year, and Amir can think of nothing else. Amir feels that winning the kite fight would show Baba that "his son was worthy." He says that his "life as a ghost in this house would finally be over." Amir imagines what life would be like if he could earn Baba's respect and pins all of his hopes on the kite fighting tournament.

Chapter 7

1. What is the importance of Hassan's dream? Why does Hosseini include it at this point in the plot? How does the dream affect other events in this chapter?

Hassan's dream is designed to eliminate fear. If there is no monster, then there is no reason to be afraid and every reason to jump in and swim. Hassan knows that Amir is nervous about the kite fight and is sure to tell him about the dream to alleviate his fears of failing and disappointing Baba. The dream gives Amir the confidence that he needs to win the tournament but is also ironic because there is something to fear in Assef.

2. How does Hosseini set the mood for the kite fight when it is down to just two kites? What details provide the mixture of excitement and anxiety?

The spectators are excited and make the atmosphere like something we might find at a football game. People are "stomping their feet, clapping, whistling, chanting . . ." Music plays in the background, and the smell of food drifts on the air. The excitement is clear, but Hosseini also says that "the tension in the air was as taut as the glass string." Amir is using glass string to fly his kite. There would be significant tension there between the wind pulling the kite up, and Amir holding the kite back. This description of the tension in the kite string makes Amir's anxiety clear.

3. Explain why this is much more than a kite fight to Amir? What details from the text make this clear, and how do they do this?

Amir's nervous anxiety before the kite fight indicates the importance he places on the tournament. Additionally, during the fight, Amir senses his victory and says that he smells salvation and redemption. He says that winning will allow him to "become someone who was looked at, not seen, listened to, not heard." He says that he will "cut loose my pain, my longing." To Amir, this kite fight represents his only hope to build a bond with Baba.

4. Amir encounters racism repeatedly as he looks for Hassan, who is running the last kite. Why does Hosseini include these exchanges?

Amir is about to witness Hassan's rape and will have to decide whether he will have the courage to step in and save Hassan. This racism gives him social permission to turn his back on Hassan. Additionally, Hassan will be raped in part due to his race. Assef will have no problem abusing and humiliating anyone, especially a Hazara. The racism reminds the reader of the hate and prejudice that Hassan faces every day. Hosseini prepares the reader for the rape with this background of racism.

5. What is the purpose of the memories and the dream included in this chapter as Amir peeks into the alley? How does Hosseini use this exposition to prepare the reader for Hassan's rape?

The first memory is in stark contrast to the racism that Amir has just witnessed. It reminds Amir of the brotherhood between him and Hassan, forming the outline of an inner conflict between Amir's desire to act and his fear of retaliation. The second memory is a childhood event that foreshadows Hassan's rape. When the fortune-teller returns Hassan's money so that he will not have to tell Hassan's fortune, the reader knows that there must be something terrible in Hassan's future. In the dream, Amir sees himself lost in a terrible snowstorm. It is Hassan who saves him and brings him back to the innocent joy of the kites. These scenes represent the conflicting emotions that Amir will have as he watches Assef rape Hassan. They provide the emotional background.

6. Why is Amir's memory of the sheep important? Explain the effect that Hosseini creates by revealing this bit of exposition at this moment in the plot.

Hassan is directly compared to the sacrificial lamb. His innocence and his resignation both parallel the lamb who is slaughtered to celebrate the day that "Ibrahim almost sacrificed his own son for God." Amir does not save either the sheep or Hassan, and he is haunted by both events. The quick flash to the memory of the sheep provides Amir's immediate reaction to the rape. Amir thinks that the sheep may know that it is dying for a "higher purpose," and he chooses to sacrifice Hassan so that he can go unscathed to his father and show him the last kite. Ironically Hassan is sacrificed so that Amir can make Baba proud.

7. Why does Amir run instead of helping Hassan? Point to the many details in the text that try to make sense of this decision. What does this action reveal about Amir?

Amir says that he runs because he is a coward, afraid of getting hurt. He says that he runs because Hassan is "the price [Amir] had to pay, the lamb [Amir] had to slay, to win Baba. Amir even briefly thinks about the fact that Hassan is "just a Hazara." This action again reveals weaknesses in Amir. In a very unflattering portrayal, the reader sees Amir's cowardice and selfishness.

8. How does this scene reveal the primary conflict of the novel that first appears in Chapter 1 before the flashback?

In Chapter 1, Amir talks about wanting to be good again. This scene is the beginning of his not being good. Amir's guilt follows him all the way to San Francisco and haunts him for years. Amir has traded Hassan for Baba's affection, creating the primary conflict between Amir and his own guilt.

Chapter 8

1. The image of Hassan's brown corduroy pants haunts Amir for years after the day of the kite fight. What does this image symbolize? What is its purpose?

The image of the corduroy pants symbolizes Amir's guilt. He is haunted by this symbol to show that he is never able to move beyond his guilt. It tarnishes every event in his life.

2. Why does Hassan's friendship and loyalty bother Amir so much?

Amir will feel better if someone punishes him for his cowardice and cruelty. He is frustrated by the fact that Hassan does not blame him and remains loyal no matter what because he is looking for some relief from his guilt. If Hassan would show some anger, Amir might find that relief.

3. Why does Amir not enjoy the lavish birthday party thrown in his honor? Point to specific details from the text.

Amir is unable to enjoy his birthday in part because Baba has been cool and distant since Amir suggested getting new servants in an effort to take the reminder of his guilt out of his daily life. Amir says that he "kissed hundreds of cheeks, hugged total strangers." Amir's "face ached from the strain of [Amir's] plastered smile." Amir feels that the guests are there for Baba and not him. The event feels artificial to Amir because there are so many guests who are strangers to him. Additionally, Assef is at the party, another reminder of Amir's guilt. Hassan is forced to wait on the very person who raped him. The evening is filled with guilty memories for Amir.

4. Why does Rahim Khan tell Amir the story of how he was almost married? What does this story foreshadow?

Rahim Khan knows what happened in the alley. He is trying to help Amir forgive himself. He wants to bring some peace to Amir. The story foreshadows Amir's tricking Baba and making it necessary for Ali and Hassan to leave.

Chapter 9

1. What does Amir mean when he says that all of his gifts are “blood money”?

Amir feels that Baba organized the party for him only because he won the tournament. Amir has the last kite and the glory that goes with it only through the sacrifice of Hassan. The gifts are simply reminders of his guilt, payment that he receives for his success through Hassan's sacrifice.

2. What does Amir mean when he says that he “was the monster in the lake”? Where have we seen this phrase before? What is the significance of Amir's use of this phrase in terms of understanding his character and how he feels about himself?

Hassan talks about his dream before the kite fight telling Amir that there is no need to fear because there is no monster in the lake. Now Amir accuses himself of being that metaphorical monster. He takes all of the blame for Hassan's rape. Through the use of this phrase the reader knows the brooding and depression that Amir is experiencing. We know that he is carrying the full weight of the guilt for Hassan's suffering.

3. Why do Ali and Hassan leave Baba's house even though Baba forgives Hassan and begs Ali to stay? What does this scene tell the reader about Hassan?

This scene displays Hassan's intuitive understanding of Amir and their relationship and of his willingness to sacrifice himself for Amir. Amir has set it up to look as though Hassan is a thief. Hassan will not deny the charge because Amir's trick would be revealed, and Baba would never forgive Amir. At the same time, life in Baba's house has become unbearable for Hassan because Amir is now more cruel and never friendly. Ali and Hassan have to leave for Hassan's sake.

4. Why is it important that it rains the day that Ali and Hassan leave Baba's house? How is this technique related to Romanticism in literature?

The rain is specifically described as being unusual. “In Kabul, it rarely rained in the summer.” Hosseini follows this sentence with a full paragraph about how dry and hot it is in the summer. But it rains the day Ali and Hassan leave Baba's house as if the weather is sympathetic. This is a common narrative technique in Romantic literature. Nature sympathizes with the emotions of the characters and behaves accordingly. The rain in this scene stands out in the dry summer of Kabul as the tears that Amir does not cry.

Chapter 10

1. How does Hosseini highlight Amir's cowardice in the scene with the Russian soldier?

Hosseini directly compares Baba's courage with Amir's cowardice when Baba is willing to risk his life to save a stranger from being raped. The reader and Amir cannot help but remember that Amir was unwilling to risk much less to save his own friend from a similar fate. The two are foil characters, set side by side in this scene to highlight their tremendous differences.

2. How do Hosseini's word choice and sentence structure convey Amir's fear as he climbs into the fuel tank?

Hosseini uses a sentence consisting of a single word twice in this passage. "Panic." He piles verbs together in a list to show the futility of Amir's attempts to breathe. "collapse, tighten, squeeze..." Hosseini describes drinking through a straw. Twice he uses capital letters to write the word "NOW." He very effectively uses word choice and sentence structure to convey Amir's fear.

3. Explain the tragic irony of Kamal's death. What qualities do Amir and Kamal have in common?

The reader can conclude, based on what Kamal's father tells Baba, that Assef had raped Kamal as well. The irony is that Kamal was one of the boys who held Hassan down for Assef, and then later he faced the same torture, weakening him and making it less likely that he would survive the smuggling trip into Pakistan. Looking back on the event of Hassan's rape, it is clear that Kamal is an unwilling participant. He does not like what Assef is doing, but is too weak or afraid to say anything. Amir and Kamal both witness the rape, neither raises a finger to save Hassan, and both share great blame. The reader does not know whether Kamal ever felt the guilt that Amir does, but he clearly suffered because of his friendship with Assef.

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?

There is humor and lightness in the tone now that Baba and Amir have left Afghanistan. Baba's political perspective provides much of the humor, and the story is told through the eyes of an amused Amir. Hosseini describes Baba's meeting some Afghans in the park and driving "them crazy with his politics." Baba calls Jimmy Carter a "big-toothed cretin" and scoffs at the boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. Baba says, "Brezhnev is massacring Afghans and all that peanut eater can say is I won't come swim in your pool." Baba hangs a picture of Ronald Reagan on the wall in their home out of respect for this "hard man."

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?

Amir means that, in Kabul, he was surrounded by guilty memories of Hassan. He cannot escape the constant reminders that haunt him there like ghosts. In America, he is more anonymous. He marvels at the size of the country, the endless traffic, the cities, and the mountains. He feels that he can walk away from the sins of his past in America. He can start fresh and set down his guilty burden.

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?

Baba was a successful businessman in Kabul. His work would be considered white collar, and he was well known and well respected. In America he is a manager at a gas station. Amir describes Baba's hands: "...his nails chipped and black with engine oil, his knuckles scraped, the smells of the gas station—dust, sweat, and gasoline—on his clothes." Baba is more depressed now than he was in Kabul. He misses his home, his community, his social life. But his relationship with Amir has dramatically improved. The old tension has evaporated, and they have grown close. Baba's strength and sense of right and wrong have not changed. He is still as generous and gregarious as he always was.

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?

Each of these characters has been changed forever by the events of a single day. Amir is forever changed through his inaction and Hassan and Kamal through torture. Rahim Khan is changed by the world's prejudice against the woman he loves, which forces her to leave. Baba is forever forced to carry the guilt he earns when he fathers an illegitimate son. Baba knows well that what happens in a single day can change everything. This is one of the themes of this novel.

Chapter 12

1. How does Hosseini use details of exposition to link Amir's life in Afghanistan with his life in the United States? What is the importance of doing so?

Hosseini begins to tell the reader about Amir's love for Soraya by telling us about yelda, the longest night of the year, when there is a sense of waiting for the light. The transition to talking about Soraya is that Amir feels that every night is yelda because he is always waiting for Soraya's light. The link back to Amir's memories of observing the traditions of yelda as a child increases the intensity of the darkness of the long night, making the reader understand the depth of Amir's love for Soraya. This is also one way that Hosseini reminds the reader that Amir can never really escape his past.

2. Hosseini contrasts Afghanistan and the United States again with a discussion of gender politics. What is the significance of this discussion in understanding Amir?

Through Hosseini's explanation of gender politics in Afghanistan the reader understands that Amir is not a traditionalist. He sees the double standard and does not approve. Amir will not hold Soraya's past against her.

3. What is the significance of Soraya's story about teaching Ziba to read?

In light of Soraya's generosity in teaching Ziba to read, we see character flaws in Amir again. He remembers reading to Hassan and mocking him for his ignorance. It did not occur to Amir that he could teach Hassan to read, and he held Hassan back through the power of his own literacy. Again, Hosseini complicates the protagonist. We want Amir to find happiness and peace, but we cannot totally forgive him for his cruelty to Hassan.

4. The last time Hosseini described rain was when Ali and Hassan left Baba's house. What is the significance of the rain in this chapter?

Baba has been diagnosed with advanced, inoperable cancer, and the rain is first mentioned as Amir and Baba leave the doctor's office. This time Amir does cry and again the rain is described repeatedly. Everything is wet, and it is pouring. Like the time Ali and Hassan leave Baba's house, nature is sympathizing with the troubles of humanity. Another sad time for Baba and Amir, another rainstorm.

5. What is the effect of Soraya telling her story? How does the reader view both Soraya and Amir differently in light of her story?

Soraya avoids the guilt that would come from lying to her future husband by sharing the story of her past. Her courage again highlights Amir's cowardice. He does not have the courage to share the story of Hassan and adds another layer to his guilt. The reader is surprised by the details of Soraya's past. There have been hints, but her brazen disregard for her parents is out of character for the Soraya we know. There is not a significant change in the way that we view Amir. We just see again and in stronger light how cowardly he is and how his guilt cripples him.

Chapter 13

1. Explain the irony of the wedding song that Amir recognizes from his past.

Amir remembers this song from the night the Russian soldier was singing it as he walked to their truck to demand the right to rape a young woman as payment for their passage over the Pakistan border. Amir was certain that Baba would be killed that night. It is not a happy memory. Now Amir hears the song again on his own wedding day. Baba is there to celebrate with him, and it is a day of joy. The irony is that these two days, one so terrible and one joyful, are connected for Amir by this song.

2. How does Amir's past come back to him during his wedding? What is the significance of these fleeting thoughts for Amir and for the primary conflict of the novel?

Even on his wedding day, Amir is thinking of Hassan, wondering whether he is married and who his wife might be. These fleeting thoughts are important because they continue the stranglehold that Amir's guilt holds on his every thought, word, and deed. Amir cannot escape his guilt even on this day of joy.

3. Like Amir, Soraya has mistakes from her past, but she is not a complicated character like Amir. How and why does Hosseini create this difference?

Soraya is not the protagonist. She acts as a foil for Amir so that the reader has a deeper understanding of Amir's guilt. Soraya represents the courage that Amir lacks and highlights his cowardice by her contrast.

4. What is the significance of Amir's catching Soraya reading his stories to Baba? Compare this scene to the scene in Chapter 4 when Baba is unwilling to read the stories.

Baba has never wanted to read Amir's stories before to the extent that he almost flatly rejected Amir. The fact that he wants to hear the stories now indicates that he is more interested in Amir's talents and interests than wanting only to mold Amir into a copy of himself. This scene shows the great change in their relationship. They have a much stronger bond and enjoy one another in a way that they did not when they lived in Kabul. In Chapter 4, Baba clearly did not want to read Amir's story. Now it is Baba who is embarrassed to be reading the stories. Even though Amir is overcome with emotion, this scene is much lighter than the one in Chapter 4. The reader feels that Baba has healed a wound by showing interest in Amir's writing.

5. How does Hosseini use word choice to create peace for the reader when describing Baba's death?

Baba dies quietly, the opposite of the way he lived. He asks Amir and Soraya to kiss him as they help him to bed. He says that there is "no pain tonight." His death is one short sentence. "Baba never woke up." The reader does not have long to dwell on sorrow but moves right to the details of the Afghan funeral. Baba's final evening is pleasant and without pain. There is no reason to feel anything but peace.

6. Like Amir, the reader learns little about the general until after Amir and Soraya are married. Compare the general and Baba. What is the significance of some of the surprising differences?

Like Baba, General Taheri is a proud man, but their pride could not be more different. Baba took pride in supporting himself and earning his own living. He would not accept food stamps or welfare and was willing to work at a gas station to support his family. The general is not willing to “degrade” himself with “work unsuitable for a man of his stature,” and chooses instead to keep his family on welfare to support them. This difference makes the reader have even deeper respect for Baba.

7. When Amir finds success as an author, and again when he and Soraya are unable to have children, Amir’s mind wanders back to his past. What is the significance of Amir thinking back to Hassan and Rahim Khan?

Amir’s memories are very different on these occasions. Upon the successful publication of his book, Amir remembers his first fans, Rahim Khan and Hassan. They are partially responsible for giving Amir the encouragement that he needed to pursue his talents and his dream. Amir revels in his happiness but wonders whether he deserves it. This question of deserving happiness surfaces again when Soraya discovers her infertility. This time Amir feels that “it was meant not to be,” meaning that he is paying for his sins and does not deserve the joy of having children. Again, the memories of his guilt taint Amir’s present experience. He cannot have joy without thinking that he does not deserve it and cannot have sorrow without thinking that this must be his punishment.

8. Chapter 13 contains three important events in Amir’s life: Amir’s wedding, Baba’s death, and the discovery of Soraya’s infertility. Why would Hosseini choose to include these three events in a single chapter? What is the significance of placing so many domestic plot events together at this point in the plot?

This chapter is full of Afghan ceremony and tradition. The reader witnesses a wedding, a funeral, and the playing out of various cultural and familial values. We see cultural events that link Amir to his community, to Afghanistan, and to Hassan even though they have lost contact completely. Amir may have embraced America, but he is still an Afghan. This mix of cultures is important in understanding Amir. The chapter also depicts the cycle of life. Baba dies, but Amir gets married with hopes of having a family. The cycle cannot be completed due to infertility. In Amir’s mind it is his guilt that causes this breakdown of the normal cycle of life, highlighting again the agonizing guilt he carries.

Chapter 14

1. Structurally, what is the significance of this chapter? What is different as a result of this structural change? What is the same?

This chapter marks the end of the flashback that began in Chapter 1. In one sense, the entire novel to this point has been exposition—the necessary backstory to add power and emotional impact to what is to come. On the other hand, much of the backstory has also contributed to the rising action, and Rahim Khan’s phone call is simply another rise in the plotline.

2. What is the significance of Rahim Khan’s call to Amir? How is this event a turning point in the plot?

With Rahim Khan’s call, Amir’s two worlds collide again. He has been able to hide his guilt in the river of America for many years. Now he will have to return to Pakistan to face the man who, he now knows, has always known the guilt that Amir carries. Finally, Amir will have to face that guilt and do something about it. After years of hiding, Amir must seize this opportunity to lay his past to rest.

3. What is the significance of Amir’s dreaming of Hassan running through the snow to catch the last kite?

This moment is the last time that Amir saw Hassan truly happy. He returns to this now that he is given an opportunity to atone for his sin. He is anticipating the relief that he will feel. Additionally, Hassan is “yelling over his shoulder: For you, a thousand times over!” Amir is reminded of the friendship, the generosity of Hassan and his own desire to return that kindness. This dream is in preparation for what is to come when Amir meets Rahim Khan in Pakistan.

Chapter 15

1. How does the tone of the writing change now that Amir is in Pakistan? Comment specifically on how Hosseini creates this change by looking at his sentence structure.

The tone is very chaotic and busy. Hosseini uses long sentences with lists and lists of detail. These details pile on top of one another to form the image, the smell, the noise, and the busy atmosphere of a chaotic city scene.

2. What is the significance of Rahim Khan’s story about the soccer game?

Amir has been sheltered from the changes that have occurred in Kabul since he was last there. Rahim Khan’s story of being beaten at a soccer game for cheering too loudly makes these changes more real and horrifying to Amir. This story is preparation for Amir as he goes back to Kabul.

3. This chapter concludes with a return to thoughts of Hassan. How does Amir feel about this conversation? What does he fear?

Amir is uncomfortable with the conversation about Hassan. He says that the “thorny old barbs of guilt bore into me once more.” The guilt and thoughts of Hassan make Amir physically uncomfortable as well. The room feels hot and stuffy to him suddenly. Amir fears facing the guilt he has been trying to flee for years.

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?

Hassan looks the same and has the same sense of loyalty. The only significant change in him is that he is more self-assured, more confident. He has always been strong but obedient. Now he is strong enough to refuse Rahim Khan’s request and then strong enough to change his mind when he has learned of Baba’s death. Hassan’s refusal to move into Baba’s house and his insistence on living in the hut where he grew up is another sign of his more adult self-determination and confidence. Hassan is portrayed again in this passage as a good and loyal person. His interest in Amir displays his lack of a grudge. Hassan has found peace with the past in a way that Amir has not.

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?

Running away is out of character for Hassan. The fact that he runs away from the mother who has finally returned to him displays the depth of his sorrow over the years that she was away and the hurt he must have carried due to her abandonment. Hassan runs at first, but true to his character, he returns and offers his mother a home and a family. Hassan’s generosity and ability to forgive are again revealed in this scene.

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

Sohrab is an allusion to “Shahnamah, the tenth-century epic of ancient Persian heroes,” more specifically to the story of “Rostam and Sohrab.” In this story Rostam kills his “valiant nemesis, Sohrab, in battle, only to discover that Sohrab is his long-lost son.” This story has some striking similarities to the story of Amir, who wounds his friend and servant Hassan only to discover years later that they are brothers. Reading the story with Amir is a happy memory for Hassan, who names his son after a wounded hero, a parallel to himself.

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

This chapter concludes with the celebration as the Taliban enter Kabul. Everyone is excited, but Hosseini creates tension and suspense through Hassan, who is nervous about his own fate at the hands of the Taliban. The last lines of the chapter indicate that the Taliban have banned kite fighting, a great source of joy for the people of Kabul, and have massacred the Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif. The reader cannot help but wonder whether the Hazaras in Kabul are next. This line is an ominous foreshadowing of Hassan's violent death.

Chapter 17

1. What does the murder of Hassan do to the plot development of the primary conflict between Amir and his own guilt?

Amir's guilt does not go to the grave with Hassan. He simply realizes that he has lost his chance to apologize to Hassan and atone for his sins. The guilt will now continue to haunt Amir for the rest of his life. It seems that this conflict will never be resolved.

2. How does Hosseini make Hassan's murder all too real, making it more painful for the reader? Comment on specific narrative techniques.

Hosseini weaves Rahim Khan's story of Hassan's murder with Amir's reaction. The pause between each new detail of the murder increases the suspense, and Amir's horrified "No" at each new detail echoes the reader's horror. In the next paragraph Amir's mind goes back to a happy memory from Hassan's childhood and then replays the murder in his mind. The reader witnesses the murder twice, once in the context of Amir's horror, and a second time in his grieving mind. These techniques make the murder more real and more painful.

3. What does the revelation of Hassan's parentage do to the conflict between Amir and his guilt?

Amir's guilt and grief intensifies with the knowledge that Hassan is his brother. Not only did he stand by and watch as his brother was tortured, but he is no longer able to ask for forgiveness. The news from Rahim Khan changes everything for Amir.

4. Why might the reader have suspected this before Amir? Discuss some of the clues that reveal Hassan's true father long before Rahim Khan tells Amir.

Baba was always particularly generous to Hassan, fixing his harelip, including him in all of their activities, making sure that he and Amir always had the same kites and other gifts. Amir's jealousy stems from the fact that Baba treated Hassan as more of a son than a servant. There was always great emphasis placed on the fact that Hassan and Amir had the same nursing woman and the brotherly bond that exists between the two for that reason. Amir even sees Baba's face in Hassan's one night when they are out running kites.

5. Why have Baba, Ali, and Rahim Khan lied to Hassan and Amir all these years? Is this consistent with their personalities? What makes this lie so important?

Baba, Ali, and Rahim Khan are some of the most honest men Amir has ever known. To lie is out of character for all three men. They felt, however, that they had to lie to preserve the honor and dignity of Baba and Ali. Rahim Khan told Amir on the night of his 13th birthday that the world always wins, and this is an example of that philosophy. The social pressure on them would have been too great had anyone known about Baba's sin and Ali's disgrace. They hid their secrets to protect themselves from the harmful gossip of the community and to protect the futures of their children. The lie also makes these men more human to Amir and to the reader. We see their faults more clearly and see that Amir does not look like such a terrible person in contrast, just another flawed human being.

Chapter 18

1. How does Amir's new understanding of Hassan change his image of Baba? How significant is the impact of this revelation on Amir?

Baba becomes less superhuman in Amir's eyes when Amir learns of Baba's indiscretion and deception. Amir begins to understand why Baba always showed so much affection to Hassan and why Baba may have acted out his frustration and guilt on Amir. An understanding of Baba's great secret helps Amir forgive some of the hurts of his childhood. The impact on Amir is significant because this news changes his understanding of his relationship with his father as well as with his brother.

2. After a lifetime of feeling that he did not resemble his father, what similarities does Amir discover as he reflects on Rahim Khan's news? What is significant about these similarities?

Amir finally sees that Baba has carried a great guilt throughout his life, just as Amir has. Amir says that he and Baba had both "betrayed the people who would have given their lives for us." Amir feels that he has been called to Kabul to atone for his own sins as well as his father's.

3. Why does Amir decide to go to Kabul? Is this consistent with his actions throughout the novel? What are the implications of this decision in terms of understanding the development of the novel's protagonist?

Amir says that he feels that his life has "been a cycle of lies, betrayals, and secrets." He decides to go to Kabul to end the cycle. This shows tremendous growth on Amir's part. This is the most courageous decision that Amir has made in his entire life. He has been changed by the revelation of his father's lies and his brother's existence and murder. He has found the courage to do what he should have done years ago.

Chapter 19

1. Why is Farid so cold and rude to Amir? How does Hosseini show the reader the source of Farid's anger through his subtle word choice?

Farid is surly when he dismisses "fancy medicine" that Amir might use for his carsickness. Farid's self-satisfied look lets the reader know that he dislikes Amir because he has made assumptions about Amir's wealth and disdain for Afghanistan. Farid assumes that Amir has come to sell his property in Afghanistan and take the money back to the United States. His anger comes from this assumption.

2. What new qualities does the reader see in Amir as he decides to leave for Kabul earlier than Rahim Khan recommends? How is he changing?

Amir's self-awareness anticipates that fear will catch up with him and make it more difficult to go to Kabul and complete his mission. Amir now has the strength to resist the easy way out, a plane ride back to the United States where he can try to forget for the rest of his life. Amir knows that he has to go and tell the truth and face any consequences.

3. What does Farid mean when he says to Amir, "You've always been a tourist here, you just didn't know it"? In what ways is this statement true? In what ways is it false?

Farid says that Amir has always been a tourist because he did not experience the poverty of the average Afghan. In that respect Farid is correct. Amir grew up in comparative wealth, but Farid's assumption that Amir is only in Afghanistan for money from the sale of his property is incorrect. Farid does not know about the tremendous task before Amir.

4. How is Amir's profession a source of embarrassment for him in Wahid's home? How is his profession perceived differently in Afghanistan than it is in the United States? How did the reader see this same conflict played out in Baba before he died?

Wahid and his family are people who are in survival mode. They have little use for fictional stories, only news stories primarily concerned with letting the world know what is going on in Afghanistan. To the Afghans, Amir's job seems frivolous. This is different in America, where people do not have to worry about basic survival. This is an interesting parallel to Baba's initial reactions to Amir's love of writing. Much like the Afghans, Baba did not see the value in Amir's stories until later in life when he was living in the United States.

5. What is the significance of Amir's dream?

This dream is another manifestation of Amir's guilt. He feels responsible for Hassan's death. He considers the possibility that Baba would have brought Ali and Hassan with them to America had they still been living with the family. Amir is overwhelmed by his guilty conscience.

6. Amir leaves money under a mattress for Wahid's family, something he had done for Hassan years ago. How is it different this time? What changes do we see in Amir based on this action?

This time Amir is being generous and not trying to trick anyone or cause trouble. In this action the reader sees that Amir has conquered his selfishness, a defining characteristic of the young Amir. Now he is able to see beyond his own needs and give selflessly to another who is in need.

Chapter 20

1. What is the importance of the lengthy description of changes that Amir finds on his way to Kabul and in the city itself?

Amir says that "returning to Kabul was like running into an old, forgotten friend and seeing that life hadn't been good to him, that he'd become homeless and destitute." The description of Kabul makes it clear to Amir and the reader that Amir's childhood homeland has been destroyed, and that his mission to find Sohrab will not be easy. This description sets an anxious tone and creates suspense for the reader.

2. Explain the significance of Amir's meeting the old beggar who happened to know his mother. How does this meeting affect Amir?

The scene with the beggar is shocking. He humanizes the destruction that Amir sees in the streets and the buildings of Kabul. This beggar was a professor. The fact that he is well educated and once lived a comfortable life brings the tragedy of Kabul to life for the reader. Amir is overjoyed to learn something about his mother. The beggar is at once disheartening for Amir and a source of precious and happy details about the mother he never knew.

3. Why is the man at the orphanage so suspicious of Amir and Farid? What does his suspicion suggest about the life that he is leading in Kabul?

The tone of fear set by the description of Kabul makes it easy to understand the man's suspicion. He thinks it is safer to avoid becoming involved in whatever Amir and Farid are asking. The man is afraid of the Taliban. This is another example of the oppression under which the Afghans are living—an oppression that Amir and his father managed to escape.

4. What is the effect of the irony in Zaman's description of the children in the orphanage and his financial situation?

There is much that is ironic at the orphanage. Not all of the children are orphans. Many have lost their fathers and are at the orphanage because Taliban law does not allow their mothers to work, and thus, the mothers cannot support them. Also, when asked for money for the orphanage, the Taliban "twirl their rosaries" and say that there is no money. They pretend to be righteous but are not willing to give to needy children. The effect of these ironies is a hatred of the Taliban. They have created an impossible situation for families, condemning women and children to live in poverty when they could support themselves if given the freedom to do so.

5. How does Amir's experience at the orphanage create a tone of fear and suspense?

Zaman's description of the Taliban's treatment of the children in the orphanage is so shocking that Amir and Farid fear for the safety of the children. The Taliban seem to have total control over Zaman, who is powerless to save those that the Taliban chooses to take. The suspense comes from the fact that Zaman keeps saying that it may be too late for Sohrab. It is what is not said in this scene that is so frightening. There is no mention of what happens to the children who are taken. The reader is left to conclude that they are sold into slavery of one kind or another. Farid's violent reaction adds to the fear felt by the reader and the characters.

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?

The memory of the turtle is filled with childhood joy, imagined fame and power: "Hassan and Amir, famed adventurers and the world's greatest explorers." In this memory Hassan and Amir are on top of the world. The reality of Amir's situation is a stark contrast. There is no childhood joy or power. Amir is witnessing the destruction of the home of his childhood and is the underdog in every sense against the Taliban. The memory highlights the somber situation facing Amir and his total lack of power. His greatest asset is his newly discovered courage.

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?

Amir wants a clean slate. He has spent his life running from awful memories, trying to suppress them and flinching when they resurface. Amir wants to tell the truth. The implication is that he is emboldened by his fearlessness. Amir does not feel that he has to hide from his past anymore and finds strength in that freedom.

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?

The jokes show that not everything has changed in Afghanistan and also display the growing bond between Amir and Farid. Amir has a partner on his journey now, one who believes in their mission and will be there to help.

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

Farid's question shows the prejudice against the Hazaras that is still strong in Kabul. Amir is disturbed by the question and feels that it is evidence that Afghanistan is a hopeless place. The question sobers the mood significantly and tempers Amir's optimism.

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?

Baseball is a game of fun and celebration. It is not violent or frightening. The Talib on the mound is going to throw stones at people until they are dead. The crowds are cheering like at a baseball game, and the man is pitching stones in the same way that a pitcher would throw baseballs. That is where the similarities end, and the troubling irony begins. This is the man who has Sohrab. Amir will meet with him, and he should be petrified. Amazingly, Amir still has the courage to face this man and save Hassan's son.

Chapter 22

1. How does Hosseini create fear for Amir in the first few pages of this chapter?

Hosseini begins the chapter by emphasizing how totally alone Amir is. Farid is going to wait in the car, and Baba is thousands of miles away in a cemetery in California. Hosseini specifically mentions the guns that the men are carrying a few times and describes Amir's sweaty hands and fidgeting. Amir says that he is "waiting for a man I had seen murder two people that same day." He calls his own mission "insanity." All of these details create a fearful mood.

2. What is implied by the comparison of Sohrab to the Monkey Man of Amir's childhood?

The implication of the comparison between Sohrab and the Monkey Man is that the Talib is treating Sohrab like an animal for his amusement. Sohrab receives no decent human respect and is not valued any more than a monkey would be.

3. How does Hosseini structure the narrative to maximize the shock when Amir and the reader finally discover the identity of the Talib?

Assef allows the conversation to go on for quite a while before revealing his identity. He tells the story of killing all of the Hazaras, threatens to arrest Amir for moving to America, and brings in Sohrab and has him dance for them. Then from out of nowhere, he asks Amir about Ali by using a nickname that Assef had used to mock Ali as a child. The question hits Amir "like a hammer between the eyes." Somehow Amir had not recognized Assef, and there had been no description of him that would tell the reader his identity. Hosseini forces us to wait until a small allusion to Assef's childhood reveals the terrible truth.

4. How has Assef changed since the reader last encountered him? What is the significance of the story that he tells Amir?

Assef is himself as a child multiplied by ten. He is angrier, more violent, more demented, more hateful than he was at Amir's birthday party. He is also using drugs now. Clearly high during this scene, his behavior is a bit erratic.

5. Why does Amir feel at peace while being beaten by Assef? How is this a turning point for Amir?

Amir feels the relief that he has been seeking for decades. He tried to get Hassan to punish him as a child and hoped that someone would discover his sin so that he would not have to hide it anymore. Instead, Amir spent years suffering mental and emotional torment. Now, Assef gives him the beating that he feels he deserves.

Chapter 23

1. How and why does Hosseini create confusion in the first several pages of this chapter?

Hosseini uses parts of sentences and partial descriptions of people and events. He does not track time clearly, skipping from idea to sensation to character description without a logical sequence. Hosseini does this to mimic the confusion of Amir as he recovers in the hospital. Hosseini also creates the sense of missing something by placing several blank lines between paragraphs on these pages as if Amir has faded back into unconsciousness in the white space.

2. What is the significance of Amir's dream of fighting the bear? Why is this important in terms of the primary conflict of the novel?

The dream is a symbol of Amir's success. He has battled his fear and has won. Amir thinks that it is Baba wrestling the bear at the beginning of the dream but realizes as the dream progresses that it is himself. Amir has discovered Baba's courage and strength in himself and can now wrestle the bear that Baba is said to have wrestled years ago. The conflict can dissolve now because Amir has atoned for his own sins and those of his father and does not carry his guilt anymore.

3. What does Amir mean when he tells Farid that both he and Assef got what they deserved?

Amir feels that he and Assef share the blame for the rape of Hassan. Assef was punished for his sin by Hassan's son, and Assef punished Amir.

4. What does the man wrapped in a brown blanket foreshadow? What is strange about his behavior?

The man wrapped in the blanket enters the room, ignores the nurse, and stares at Amir before leaving. He foreshadows trouble ahead for Amir. The reader assumes that Assef's friends will be coming to take revenge on Amir for Assef's injury.

5. How does Rahim Khan's letter create more guilt for Amir? Why is this important for development of the conflict between Amir and his guilt?

Rahim Khan's letter reverses some of the relief that Amir is feeling. He explains that Baba made a terrible mistake but spent his life doing good in an effort to make up for it. Baba gave to the poor, helped friends in need, and built the orphanage in an effort to assuage his guilt and do penance. Amir's guilt returns because he realizes that he has never tried to make it right. He took out his guilt on the people he had betrayed and then tried to forget about it. His continual denial prevented any good from ever coming from his wrong.

6. What is the importance of Amir's dream of Assef claiming to be his twin? Why would Hosseini include this dream in the story of Amir's recovery?

The dream about Assef is a look into the mind of Amir. He feels that he is just as guilty as Assef. The idea that they are the same as Assef says in the dream emphasizes the extent of Amir's guilty suffering. To be the same as Assef is to be the representation of hatred and evil. This dream provides an interesting comparison between the protagonist and the antagonist in the novel, the good and the evil. Yet Amir feels that he is evil like Assef. This dream motivates Amir to make sure that Sohrab is safe.

7. What has Rahim Khan really done by telling Amir that the Caldwells will take Sohrab when he knows that no such family exists? How can Amir really be good again?

Rahim Khan has tricked Amir. He knew that Amir would end up adopting Sohrab because that is what it will take to truly atone for the sins, stop the cycle of lies, and be good again.

Chapter 24

1. How is Hassan's life being repeated in Sohrab? What is significant about Sohrab's troubles for Amir's quest to be good again?

Like Hassan, Sohrab has lost his parents and has been raped by Assef. Sohrab has been forced to leave Baba's house and now his fate rests in Amir's hands. The many parallels between Sohrab's life and his father's create the perfect opportunity for Amir to right the wrongs and save the innocent as he should have done as a child. Like Hassan, Sohrab will save Amir from himself.

2. What is significant about Hosseini's narrative technique while weaving Sohrab's questions about San Francisco and the Mullahs on television together? Why not tell the two stories individually?

This scene presents a contrast between life in Afghanistan and life in the United States. The Mullahs are arguing about the likelihood of a boy going to hell for wearing his pants too low. Amir is painting a verbal picture of San Francisco for Sohrab. The weaving of the two together shows the desirability of the United States. Hosseini has chosen to focus on a particularly extreme segment of the Afghan population to make the United States look like the clear choice for Sohrab and to provide hope for a future free from this kind of extremism.

3. Why does Hosseini describe the secretary at the American embassy in such detail? What is her significance to the story?

The secretary is the first woman dressed in something other than a burqa or shalwar-kameez that Amir had seen in weeks. She represents the freedom of the west, a life without fear or hardship. Sohrab is treated to her kindness and responds with the only English he knows. This scene is a glimpse into a happier future for both Amir and Sohrab.

4. Why does Hosseini allude to *Les Miserables* in the scene at the American embassy? What is the effect of this allusion on the plot?

*Like Jean Valjean, Amir is a desperate man. He has gone to the authorities for help but feels like the criminal Valjean, who will receive no help, only harassment. The allusion to *Les Miserables* creates a sense of hopelessness and tragedy for Amir. It seems that no one will help Amir save Sohrab.*

5. What is the significance of the secretary telling Amir about Raymond's daughter's suicide? What does this detail tell the reader about Raymond? What does it foreshadow?

The surprising revelation that Raymond's daughter had committed suicide forces the reader to reevaluate negative judgments of Raymond. He has faced great tragedy in his life and is clearly profoundly affected by it. We are much more willing to forgive his emotionless dealing with Amir and his strange behavior during their meeting. Raymond had clearly promised something to his daughter and warns Amir that doing so is dangerous. The suicide reference foreshadows Sohrab's suicide attempt at the end of the chapter.

6. Explain the perceived difference in culture that Omar is referring to when he says, "If America taught me anything, it's that quitting is right up there with pissing in the Girl Scouts' lemonade jar." What is the significance of this statement in this novel?

It seems that it is generally accepted in the novel that people in Afghanistan just accept their fate and try to make the best of it. America seems to be the symbol of optimism, hope, and endless determination. Omar's statement sheds a little light on that cultural stereotype and indicates that he will not give up his quest to help Amir. The message is directed at Amir as well. He should persevere.

7. What is significant about the tragic irony displayed in placing Soraya's phone call and Amir's terrible discovery back to back at the end of this chapter?

Just as Amir is learning from Soraya that he and Sohrab will be able to go to the United States through Soraya's work, Sohrab is taking his own life. Just as everything is going well, Amir and Sohrab encounter tragedy again. This is the climax of the Sohrab plotline. Amir has discovered how much he would like to help the boy and has found a way to do it, but Sohrab has given up all hope.

Chapter 25

1. How does Amir's reference to his panic when he and Baba were riding in the fuel truck shed light on the scene in the hospital?

The trip to Pakistan as Baba and Amir were escaping Afghanistan is one of the most fearful events of Amir's life. He has never had another occurrence of panic like that until today. His reference back to his most fearful memories tells the reader just how panicked he is as he brings Sohrab to the hospital. Amir's description of his feeling creates the moment of great tension, making the climax for this plotline work.

2. Amir realizes that he has not prayed in more than fifteen years but does so in the hospital. What are the implications of this sudden change in Amir?

Amir gives up the notion that he might have the power to make this right. He turns to a higher power for help in his moment of greatest need. This is another radical change for Amir who, like Baba, has simply tolerated religion. Amir gives up the responsibility for everything by turning to religion. This change will affect the way he sees the world and carries guilt for the rest of his life.

3. How does Hosseini use word choice and sentence structure to create suspense as the reader and Amir wait for him to finally reveal Sohrab's fate to the reader?

Again Hosseini makes us wait a long time to discover the outcome at the hospital. Amir describes his panic, his prayer, his sleeping on the floor at the hospital. It takes more than five hours for Amir to hear any news about Sohrab. He sits there, visualizing Sohrab in the tub with his wrists bleeding all over. Hosseini requires patience, increasing our suspense.

4. How does Amir's childhood relationship with Hassan color Amir's conversation with Sohrab in the hospital? Explain the significance of Amir's memories as he speaks with Sohrab.

Amir says that Sohrab resembles Hassan on the day that Hassan and Ali left Baba's house. The look of dejection and grief lives on in Sohrab. Additionally, Sohrab is skeptical of Amir, giving his silence in return for his questions, not believing what Amir is saying. Amir feels that he deserves this treatment and remembers times when he was skeptical of Hassan, treating him as less than loyal, less than a good friend. Amir feels that this is all part of his punishment.

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?

The novel is coming to a close, but the ending for Sohrab is unclear. Hosseini is telling the reader that he does not know what will happen to Sohrab, that we will just have to live with the ambiguity of life.

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?

For the first time, Amir stands up to an authority figure. He tells the truth and does not allow the general to force him into hiding again. He also stands up for Sohrab in a way that he never stood up for Hassan when they were children. Amir has grown tremendously. He is filled with conviction, courage, and a desire to live a life of truth. These are all good signs for Amir's future happiness.

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

The novel began with kites flying and centers around an event that happened the night of Amir's greatest kite fight. The kites represent the friendship between Amir and Hassan, and Amir has renewed that friendship at the end by saving Hassan's son.

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?

The novel begins with a hope to be good again and ends with a sliver of hope from Sohrab. The novel begins and ends in a park in San Francisco. Amir remembers the people of his past in the beginning of the novel and is looking to the future by the end. Amir has embrace "a way to be good again" by the end of the novel by atoning for the sins of his father and himself and by coming out from the darkness of secrecy. Amir has discovered himself in his quest to redeem his past.

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 3

1. How does Hosseini use hyperbole in his descriptions of Baba? What can the reader conclude about Baba based on these descriptions?

2. Why does Amir lie about Hassan’s health when Baba wants to take them to Ghangha Lake? What is the significance of this lie in terms of developing the reader’s understanding of Amir?

3. What does Baba mean when he says that Amir has “confused what you’re learning in school with actual education”? What are the implications of this statement?

Chapter 4

1. What does the pomegranate tree symbolize to Amir and Hassan? How does Hosseini create this symbol?

2. What is ironic about Hassan's ability to solve riddles? What is the implication of this irony?

3. How and why does Hosseini create in Amir a complicated protagonist, someone with whom the reader can sympathize while despising at the same time?

4. Why does time slow down for Amir when he shows his story to Baba? How does Hosseini create this effect?

Chapter 5

1. How does Hosseini's description of Assef let the reader know immediately that he is the antagonist?

2. What does Assef foreshadow when he talks about his admiration for Hitler?

3. How does Hassan's harelip foster Amir's jealousy of him? Explain this irony.

4. What is suggested by the affection that Baba shows to 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 7

1. What is the importance of Hassan’s dream? Why does Hosseini include it at this point in the plot? How does the dream affect other events in this chapter?

2. How does Hosseini set the mood for the kite fight when it is down to just two kites? What details provide the mixture of excitement and anxiety?

3. Explain why this is much more than a kite fight to Amir? What details from the text make this clear, and how do they do this?

4. Amir encounters racism repeatedly as he looks for Hassan, who is running the last kite. Why does Hosseini include these exchanges?

5. What is the purpose of the memories and the dream included in this chapter as Amir peeks into the alley? How does Hosseini use this exposition to prepare the reader for Hassan's rape?

6. Why is Amir's memory of the sheep important? Explain the effect that Hosseini creates by revealing this bit of exposition at this moment in the plot.

7. Why does Amir run instead of helping Hassan? Point to the many details in the text that try to make sense of this decision. What does this action reveal about Amir?

8. How does this scene reveal the primary conflict of the novel that first appears in Chapter 1 before the flashback?

Chapter 8

1. The image of Hassan’s brown corduroy pants haunts Amir for years after the day of the kite fight. What does this image symbolize? What is its purpose?

2. Why does Hassan’s friendship and loyalty bother Amir so much?

3. Why does Amir not enjoy the lavish birthday party thrown in his honor? Point to specific details from the text.

4. Why does Rahim Khan tell Amir the story of how he was almost married? What does this story foreshadow?

Chapter 9

1. What does Amir mean when he says that all of his gifts are “blood money”?

2. What does Amir mean when he says that he “was the monster in the lake”? Where have we seen this phrase before? What is the significance of Amir’s use of this phrase in terms of understanding his character and how he feels about himself?

3. Why do Ali and Hassan leave Baba’s house even though Baba forgives Hassan and begs Ali to stay? What does this scene tell the reader about Hassan?

4. Why is it important that it rains the day that Ali and Hassan leave Baba’s house? How is this technique related to Romanticism in literature?

Chapter 10

1. How does Hosseini highlight Amir’s cowardice in the scene with the Russian soldier?

2. How do Hosseini’s word choice and sentence structure convey Amir’s fear as he climbs into the fuel tank?

3. Explain the tragic irony of Kamal’s death. What qualities do Amir and Kamal have in common?

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 12

1. How does Hosseini use details of exposition to link Amir's life in Afghanistan with his life in the United States? What is the importance of doing so?

2. Hosseini contrasts Afghanistan and the United States again with a discussion of gender politics. What is the significance of this discussion in understanding Amir?

3. What is the significance of Soraya's story about teaching Ziba to read?

4. The last time Hosseini described rain was when Ali and Hassan left Baba's house. What is the significance of the rain in this chapter?

5. What is the effect of Soraya telling her story? How does the reader view both Soraya and Amir differently in light of her story?

Chapter 13

1. Explain the irony of the wedding song that Amir recognizes from his past.

2. How does Amir’s past come back to him during his wedding? What is the significance of these fleeting thoughts for Amir and for the primary conflict of the novel?

3. Like Amir, Soraya has mistakes from her past, but she is not a complicated character like Amir. How and why does Hosseini create this difference?

4. What is the significance of Amir’s catching Soraya reading his stories to Baba? Compare this scene to the scene in Chapter 4 when Baba is unwilling to read the stories.

5. How does Hosseini use word choice to create peace for the reader when describing Baba's death?

6. Like Amir, the reader learns little about the general until after Amir and Soraya are married. Compare the general and Baba. What is the significance of some of the surprising differences?

7. When Amir finds success as an author, and again when he and Soraya are unable to have children, Amir's mind wanders back to his past. What is the significance of Amir thinking back to Hassan and Rahim Khan?

8. Chapter 13 contains three important events in Amir's life: Amir's wedding, Baba's death, and the discovery of Soraya's infertility. Why would Hosseini choose to include these three events in a single chapter? What is the significance of placing so many domestic plot events together at this point in the plot?

Chapter 14

1. Structurally, what is the significance of this chapter? What is different as a result of this structural change? What is the same?

2. What is the significance of Rahim Khan's call to Amir? How is this event a turning point in the plot?

3. What is the significance of Amir's dreaming of Hassan running through the snow to catch the last kite?

Chapter 15

1. How does the tone of the writing change now that Amir is in Pakistan? Comment specifically on how Hosseini creates this change by looking at his sentence structure.

2. What is the significance of Rahim Khan’s story about the soccer game?

3. This chapter concludes with a return to thoughts of Hassan. How does Amir feel about this conversation? What does he fear?

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 17

1. What does the murder of Hassan do to the plot development of the primary conflict between Amir and his own guilt?

2. How does Hosseini make Hassan's murder all too real, making it more painful for the reader? Comment on specific narrative techniques.

3. What does the revelation of Hassan's parentage do to the conflict between Amir and his guilt?

4. Why might the reader have suspected this before Amir? Discuss some of the clues that reveal Hassan's true father long before Rahim Khan tells Amir.

5. Why have Baba, Ali, and Rahim Khan lied to Hassan and Amir all these years? Is this consistent with their personalities? What makes this lie so important?

Chapter 18

1. How does Amir’s new understanding of Hassan change his image of Baba? How significant is the impact of this revelation on Amir?

2. After a lifetime of feeling that he did not resemble his father, what similarities does Amir discover as he reflects on Rahim Khan’s news? What is significant about these similarities?

3. Why does Amir decide to go to Kabul? Is this consistent with his actions throughout the novel? What are the implications of this decision in terms of understanding the development of the novel’s protagonist?

Chapter 19

1. Why is Farid so cold and rude to Amir? How does Hosseini show the reader the source of Farid’s anger through his subtle word choice?

2. What new qualities does the reader see in Amir as he decides to leave for Kabul earlier than Rahim Khan recommends? How is he changing?

3. What does Farid mean when he says to Amir, “You’ve always been a tourist here, you just didn’t know it”? In what ways is this statement true? In what ways is it false?

4. How is Amir’s profession a source of embarrassment for him in Wahid’s home? How is his profession perceived differently in Afghanistan than it is in the United States? How did the reader see this same conflict played out in Baba before he died?

5. What is the significance of Amir’s dream?

6. Amir leaves money under a mattress for Wahid’s family, something he had done for Hassan years ago. How is it different this time? What changes do we see in Amir based on this action?

Chapter 20

1. What is the importance of the lengthy description of changes that Amir finds on his way to Kabul and in the city itself?

2. Explain the significance of Amir's meeting the old beggar who happened to know his mother. How does this meeting affect Amir?

3. Why is the man at the orphanage so suspicious of Amir and Farid? What does his suspicion suggest about the life that he is leading in Kabul?

4. What is the effect of the irony in Zaman's description of the children in the orphanage and his financial situation?

5. How does Amir's experience at the orphanage create a tone of fear and suspense?

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?

Chapter 22

1. How does Hosseini create fear for Amir in the first few pages of this chapter?

2. What is implied by the comparison of Sohrab to the Monkey Man of Amir's childhood?

3. How does Hosseini structure the narrative to maximize the shock when Amir and the reader finally discover the identity of the Talib?

4. How has Assef changed since the reader last encountered him? What is the significance of the story that he tells Amir?

5. Why does Amir feel at peace while being beaten by Assef? How is this a turning point for Amir?

Chapter 23

1. How and why does Hosseini create confusion in the first several pages of this chapter?

2. What is the significance of Amir’s dream of fighting the bear? Why is this important in terms of the primary conflict of the novel?

3. What does Amir mean when he tells Farid that both he and Assef got what they deserved?

4. What does the man wrapped in a brown blanket foreshadow? What is strange about his behavior?

5. How does Rahim Khan's letter create more guilt for Amir? Why is this important for development of the conflict between Amir and his guilt?

6. What is the importance of Amir's dream of Assef claiming to be his twin? Why would Hosseini include this dream in the story of Amir's recovery?

7. What has Rahim Khan really done by telling Amir that the Caldwells will take Sohrab when he knows that no such family exists? How can Amir really be good again?

Chapter 24

1. How is Hassan's life being repeated in Sohrab? What is significant about Sohrab's troubles for Amir's quest to be good again?

2. What is significant about Hosseini's narrative technique while weaving Sohrab's questions about San Francisco and the Mullahs on television together? Why not tell the two stories individually?

3. Why does Hosseini describe the secretary at the American embassy in such detail? What is her significance to the story?

4. Why does Hosseini allude to *Les Miserables* in the scene at the American embassy? What is the effect of this allusion on the plot?

5. What is the significance of the secretary telling Amir about Raymond's daughter's suicide? What does this detail tell the reader about Raymond? What does it foreshadow?

6. Explain the perceived difference in culture that Omar is referring to when he says, "If America taught me anything, it's that quitting is right up there with pissing in the Girl Scouts' lemonade jar." What is the significance of this statement in this novel?

7. What is significant about the tragic irony displayed in placing Soraya's phone call and Amir's terrible discovery back to back at the end of this chapter?

Chapter 25

1. How does Amir’s reference to his panic when he and Baba were riding in the fuel truck shed light on the scene in the hospital?

2. Amir realizes that he has not prayed in more than fifteen years but does so in the hospital. What are the implications of this sudden change in Amir?

3. How does Hosseini use word choice and sentence structure to create suspense as the reader and Amir wait for him to finally reveal Sohrab’s fate to the reader?

4. How does Amir’s childhood relationship with Hassan color Amir’s conversation with Sohrab in the hospital? Explain the significance of Amir’s memories as he speaks with Sohrab.

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?

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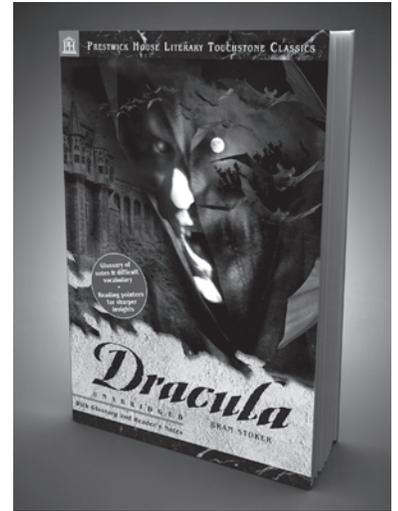
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