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**CHECK
THE BOOK**

E. L. Konigsburg's *The View from Saturday* (1996) is another novel which uses **flashback** to tell the story and has interjections from other narrators in the first person. Although aimed at a much younger audience than *The Kite Runner*, it has a similar moral about kindness and friendship versus cruelty and selfishness.

**CHECK
THE FILM**

In the novel we are never provided with a second name for Amir or the rest of his family. However, in order to provide copies of Amir's novel as props in the film, Khaled Hosseini was asked to invent a surname for the character, making him Amir Qadiri. Qadiri is the name of an Islamic religious order.

AMIR

Amir is the main character and the **narrator** of the story. The whole story is told by him during a period between December 2001 and March 2002 but covers events in Amir's life from his childhood in the early 1970s up to his present. Unlike other characters, we are never given a description of Amir, so our picture of him must be inferred from his voice.

The young Amir lives in an Afghanistan which has been at relative peace for decades and is a stable environment, different from the country of the early twenty-first century. This allows Amir to present himself as a happy and settled child who enjoys his life and his friendship with Hassan, the Hazara boy who is also his servant.

Quite near the beginning of the novel he tells us '**I never thought of Hassan and me as friends**' (p. 22), suggesting that he felt distanced from Hassan, probably due to their different ethnicity and statuses in life. However, this is an early sign that we cannot always rely on the things Amir chooses to tell us because it is clear from the tales he relates that Hassan was indeed his closest friend. The desire to distance himself from the boy is a result of his childhood jealousy and also of his later guilt colouring earlier events.

The major influence in Amir's life is, of course, Hassan himself. Although they are only friends for the first thirteen years of Amir's life, it is clear that this is the defining relationship in his life. This can be inferred from the fact that the novel itself is named after Hassan, but also from the way in which every event that Amir relates ties back to the other boy, either in terms of their great friendship, or in terms of Amir's guilt over his betrayal of that friendship, such as on his wedding day when he wonders if Hassan has married and '**whose face he had seen in the mirror under the veil**' (p. 149). Even at such an intimate moment, his thoughts turn to Hassan.

Amir tells us himself in the opening line of the novel that the person he is was formed on the day in the alley in 1975. Although we don't find out for another five chapters what this event was, everything we are told, both before and after the revelation, is tinged with the emotions of anger, guilt and sorrow emerging from it.

However, as well as being a burden, his feelings about Hassan are also a positive force in Amir's life. His desire to write is formed by his time spent reading stories to Hassan. His later success as a writer can be seen to emerge from a desire to assuage his guilt by doing something which he knows Hassan would enjoy and approve of, thanks to the stories they shared as children. Also, his marriage to Soraya and his yearning for children can be seen as his way of recreating the situation of his own childhood but this time with the chance to make up for his past mistakes. This idea is even more powerfully emphasised when the story moves to modern-day Kabul at the end of the novel. When Rahim Khan asks Amir to save Sohrab, Amir is really being given a second chance to save his friend.

One blot on Amir's early life is the lack of love and respect which he feels he gets from his father. The first half of the novel concerns the tensions which Amir feels in his life between wanting to be his own man and the desire to be the man his father wants him to be. This is also a central factor, so he tells us, in his decision not to help Hassan during the attack in the alley.

After Baba's death, although he no longer features as a character in the events being related, he is still a presence in Amir's life, and Amir's decision to revisit Kabul and to retrieve Sohrab can be seen as his attempt to finally reconcile his feelings for his father. By standing up to Assef and literally fighting for possession of Sohrab, who is Baba's grandson, Amir finds a way to become the man his father wanted him to be. This is demonstrated further upon his return to the USA when he becomes involved in building a hospital in Afghanistan in a direct reflection of his father building the orphanage.

Another main strand of Amir's life, and one which runs contrary to his father's wishes, is his interest in stories and writing. This is an inherited trait from his mother who was a teacher of literature. It also provides an escape, first from the perceived lack of love from his father, and later from having to acknowledge the problems in his life and in his homeland. Writing is seen as a retreat and it is telling that, upon his return to Afghanistan, he admits that he is not currently writing about the country. Instead he has written most recently about '**a university professor who joins a clan of gypsies**

CONTEXT

'The setting in 1970s Kabul, the house where Amir lived, the films that he watches, of course the kite flying, the love of storytelling – all of that is from my own childhood. The story line is fictional' (Khaled Hosseini, interview with Erika Milvy on www.salon.com).

World events

Khaled Hosseini's life

Literary events

1914–18 First World War
 1919 Treaty of Versailles establishes the grounds of peace after the First World War and Afghanistan is granted a measure of independence
 1921 Afghanistan achieves full independence under King Amanullah Khan

 1929 King Amanullah Khan is forced to abdicate by Habibullah Kalakani, who assumes power. He, in turn, is deposed nine months later by Mohammed Nadir Khan
 1933 Mohammed Nadir Khan is assassinated and is succeeded by his son Mohammad Zahir Shah

1740 Publication of *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson
 1813 *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen
 1860–1 *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens
 1871–2 *Middlemarch* by George Eliot
 1917 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' by Wilfred Owen

 1922 *Ulysses* by James Joyce
 1924 *A Passage to India* by E. M. Forster
 1927 *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf

World events

Khaled Hosseini's life

Literary events

1939 Outbreak of Second World War
 1945 End of Second World War; dropping of atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in Japan
 1945–91 Cold War

 1973 Prime Minister Mohammad Sardar Daoud Khan, the king's cousin and brother-in-law, seizes power in a military coup

 1978 The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) overthrows Daoud Khan's government
 1979–89 Russian troops occupy Afghanistan lending aid to the government against the Mujahedin

1965 (4 March) Born in Kabul, Afghanistan
 1970 Family moves to Tehran, Iran

 1973 Family moves back to Kabul

 1976 Family moves to Paris

 1980 Family seeks political asylum in the USA and settles in San Jose, California

1955 *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov

 1969 *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles

 1978 *Orientalism* by Edward Said

 1981 *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie