

CONTENTS

PART ONE: INTRODUCING *THE KITE RUNNER*

How to study <i>The Kite Runner</i>	5
<i>The Kite Runner</i> in context	6

PART TWO: STUDYING *THE KITE RUNNER*

Synopsis	10
Chapter 1	12
Chapter 2	14
Chapter 3	16
Extended commentary, pp. 12–14	18
Chapter 4	20
Chapter 5	22
Chapter 6	24
Chapter 7	26
Extended commentary, pp. 67–9	28
Chapter 8	30
Chapter 9	32
Chapter 10	34
Chapter 11	36
Chapter 12	38
Chapter 13	40
Chapter 14	42
Chapter 15	43
Chapter 16	44
Chapter 17	46
Chapter 18	48
Chapter 19	50
Extended commentary, pp. 203–4	52
Chapter 20	54
Chapter 21	56
Chapter 22	58
Chapter 23	60
Chapter 24	61
Chapter 25	62

PART THREE: CHARACTERS AND THEMES

Characters	
Amir	64
Hassan	66
Baba	68
Ali	70
Rahim Khan	70
Soraya	71
Assef	72
Sohrab	72
Sofia and Sanaubar	73

Themes	
Fathers and sons	74
Redemption	75
Religion and ethnicity	76
Storytelling	77
History	78

PART FOUR: STRUCTURE, FORM AND LANGUAGE

Structure	79
Form	80
Genre	80
Narrative techniques	80
Language	82

PART FIVE: CONTEXTS AND CRITICAL DEBATES

Historical background	83
Literary background	85
Critical debates	86

PART SIX: GRADE BOOSTER

Assessment focus	90
Targeting a high grade	91
How to write high-quality responses	92
Close reading of specific extracts	94
Responding to a general question about the whole text	95
Questions with statements, quotations or viewpoints	96
Comparing <i>The Kite Runner</i> with other texts	98
Using critical interpretations and perspectives	100
Annotated sample answers	102
Working through a task	106
Further questions	107

ESSENTIAL STUDY TOOLS

Further reading	108
Literary terms	110
Timeline	112
Revision focus task answers	114
Mark scheme	120

CHARACTERS

AMIR



WHO IS AMIR?

- Amir is the main character and the **narrator** of the story.
- Amir comes from a family who are part of the Pashtun, the ethnic group which has the most power and influence in Afghanistan.
- As an adult, Amir becomes a writer.

THE NARRATOR

The whole story is told by Amir 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 comes from his voice.

A PEACEFUL BEGINNING

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.

STUDY FOCUS: AN UNRELIABLE NARRATOR

In many modern novels, we are presented with a narrator whose own emotional involvement in the story means we cannot always trust what they say. Near the beginning of the novel Amir 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.

A DEFINING FRIENDSHIP

The major influence in Amir's life is Hassan. 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.

THE SOURCE OF IDENTITY

Amir tells us himself in the opening line of the novel that the person he is now 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 grows from 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.

SEARCHING FOR LOVE

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.

A LONG SHADOW

Although Baba no longer features as a character in the events being related after his death, 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 just as his father had built the orphanage.

THE STORYTELLER

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 after he finds his wife in bed with one of his students' (p. 206). Thinking about this book in the context of his current location he continues, 'But suddenly I was embarrassed by it. I hoped Wahid wouldn't ask what it was about' (p. 206).

The Kite Runner can be seen as Amir's attempt to write a book about Afghanistan, and in doing so to place himself back in context. Amir makes his life into a **narrative** in an attempt to make sense of his actions and to understand his anxieties. This arrangement of the events of his life into a coherent story can be seen as an act of **catharsis**.

REVISION FOCUS: TASK 17

How far do you agree with the following statements?

- Amir's search for redemption is also a search for the lost love of his mother.
- Amir could not truly become a man while Baba was still alive.

Try writing opening paragraphs for essays based on these discussion points. Set out your arguments clearly.

CHECK THE FILM

A03

In the novel we are never provided with a second name for Amir or the rest of his family. However, in the film, he is named Amir Qadiri. Qadiri is the name of an Islamic religious order.

CONTEXT

A04

'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).

HOW TO WRITE HIGH-QUALITY RESPONSES

EXAMINER'S TIP

Make sure you know how many marks are available for each **AO** in the task you are set. This can help you divide up your time or decide how much attention to give each aspect.

The quality of your writing – how you express your ideas – is vital for getting a higher grade, and **AO1** and **AO2** are specifically about how you respond.

FIVE KEY AREAS

The quality of your responses can be broken down into five key areas.

1. THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR ANSWER/ESSAY

- First, get **straight to the point in your opening paragraph**. Use a sharp, direct first sentence that deals with a key aspect and then follow up with evidence or detailed reference.
- **Put forward an argument or point of view** (you won't **always** be able to challenge or take issue with the essay question, but generally, if you can, you are more likely to write in an interesting way).
- **Signpost your ideas** with connectives and references which help the essay flow.
- **Don't repeat points already made**, not even in the conclusion, unless you have something new to add.

TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

A01

Let's imagine you have been asked a question about the role of the attack in the alley in *The Kite Runner*. Here's an example of an opening paragraph that gets straight to the point:

Amir's guilt over his refusal to help Hassan during the attack in the alley weighs heavily on him for the rest of his life and acts as a central motif, linking to the wider action of the novel.

Immediate focus on task and key words, leading to an example from the text

2. USE OF TITLES, NAMES, ETC.

This is a simple, but important, tip to stay on the right side of the examiners.

- Make sure that you spell correctly the titles of the texts, chapters, authors and so on. Present them correctly too, with double quotation marks and capitals as appropriate. For example, "*The Kite Runner*".
- Use the **full title**, unless there is a good reason not to (e.g. it's very long).
- Use the term 'text' rather than 'book' or 'story'. If you use the word 'story', the examiner may think you mean the plot or action rather than the 'text' as a whole.

3. EFFECTIVE QUOTATIONS

Do not 'bolt on' quotations to the points you make. You will get some marks for including them, but examiners will not find your writing very fluent.

The best quotations are:

- Relevant
- Not too long
- Integrated into your argument/sentence

EXAMINER'S TIP

Answer the question set, not the question you'd like to have been asked. Examiners say that often students will be set a question on one character (for example, Amir) but end up writing almost as much about another (such as Hassan or Baba). Or they write about one aspect of the question (for example, 'atonement') but ignore another (such as 'friendship'). **Stick to the question**, and answer **all parts of it**.

TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

A01

Here is an example of a quotation successfully embedded in a sentence:

When Rahim Khan tells Amir that 'there is a way to be good again' he is finally providing Amir with the chance to atone for his actions as a child.

Remember, quotations can be a well-selected set of three or four single words – such as 'frigid', 'crumbling', 'frozen' and 'deserted' all taken from the first paragraph on page one, painting a bleak and lifeless mood for the opening of the text – or phrases embedded in a sentence to build a picture or explanation, or they can be longer ones that are explored and picked apart.

4. TECHNIQUES AND TERMINOLOGY

By all means mention literary terms, techniques, conventions, critical theories or people (for example, **irony**, **foreshadowing**, **postmodernism** or **post-colonialism**) but make sure that you:

- Understand what they mean
- Are able to link them to what you're saying
- Spell them correctly.

5. GENERAL WRITING SKILLS

Try to write in a way that sounds professional and uses standard English. This does not mean that your writing will lack personality – just that it will be authoritative.

- Avoid colloquial or everyday expressions such as 'got', 'all right', 'OK' and so on.
- Use terms such as 'convey', 'suggest', 'imply', 'infer' to explain the writer's methods.
- Use 'we' when referring to the audience/reader.
- Avoid assertions and generalisations; don't just state a general point of view (*Amir's narration cannot be taken at face value because it is flawed*), but analyse closely with clear evidence and textual detail.

EXAMINER'S TIP

Something examiners often pick up is that students confuse 'narrator' and 'author'. Don't assume that the 'narrator' in *The Kite Runner* is Khaled Hosseini.

TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

A01

Note the professional approach in this example:

Hosseini crafts a text in which events from Amir's childhood are reflected in the events that occur later in his life. The way in which the narrative structure repeats earlier events in new ways brings the reader full circle ...